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(see page 83, #1 for more information)

Big Game Draws in Western States

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JOURNAL



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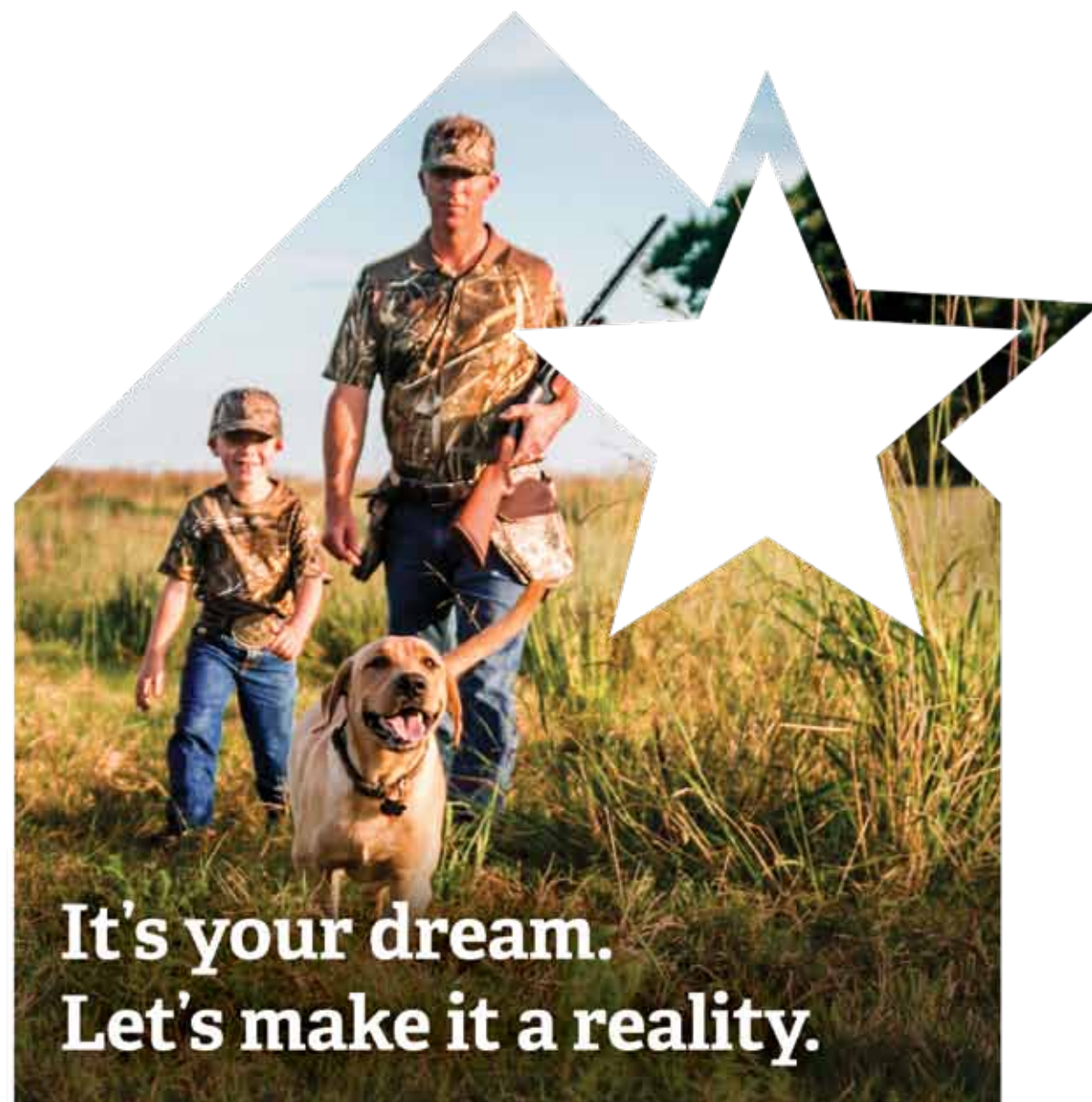
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What's Wrong With The 270? | Chasing Whites

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"Pole Dancers"
For more information on "Pole Dancers" and other fine works of art or commissions available by Mark Ray, visit www.markrayarts.com, email markraystudio@gmail.com, follow on Facebook or call (252) 646-8220.

Editor’s Insight | Bill L. Olson

STUBBORN RESISTANCE

As this is written, Texans are huddled around fireplaces, snuggled up with a blanket, and some even wearing long pants and jackets. Texas Parks & Wildlife has issued a closure for the next few days on coastal deep holes and canals so gamefish, specifically spotted sea trout, are not over-harvested while stunned or congregated by frigid temperatures.

Yes it is cold along the coast. It is really cold in the Panhandle and all points in between. It looks like winter has made its annual few days’ “visit” to the Lone Star State, so just ignore people in far northern parts with their jealous chuckles at our reaction to what they would call “nice weather” this time of year.

As is the case each month, inspiration was being sought for this column. Usually it comes fairly easy, but the cold was stifling my thoughts. Then my own stubborn resistance resulted in an audible chuckle.

I think of myself as part “bear.” This is partly due to my size plus years ago some young Mexican men teasingly nicknamed me “Oso Grande” — Big Bear.

Don’t put me in that class of bruins from up in the high country that hibernate — sleeping — through the harshest part of winter. Instead think more of a Texas bear that enjoys the few frosty days while still remaining active. Many of us resist the colder periods by continuing to act as if things are normal in Texas — knowing full well better days are ahead.

Fortunately our chill-downs are short-lived, and in a few days warmer weather will once again return. I am thankful we don’t have to live through temperatures that fall many degrees below zero and stay at those brutal levels for weeks on end.

Instead, we realize the second month of the year is just a short transition toward Texas’ spring and better days outdoors. During the cool crisp days of winter, calling predators – coyotes, gray fox, plus bobcats — were my focus in mid-January. That will once again be a pursuit, along with hunting wild hogs, this month. It is a great option for everyone with plenty of opportunities.

Just before Christmas, two longtime buddies and I had a chance to catch a break in the weather and experience some great sight-casting to schools of redfish on the middle coast. With colder temperatures producing super clear water it served as an appetizer for a return trip in the spring. Based on extended weather forecasts from AccuWeather as well as projections from the “Old Famer’s Almanac” spring could show early – as soon as this cold snap settles.

It should also set the stage for those that want to wade fish, grinding it out looking for one bite of a lifetime. It has happened before and the prospects for it occurring again are primed.

Freshwater anglers will also begin to get their game faces on. Little or no boat traffic combined with light fishing pressure could provide the scenario to catch that elusive lunker bass. Others will pursue the more cold-tolerant striped bass or even look to chase white bass up creeks and rivers. As mentioned, there are a lot of options.

For those cabin-bound it’s a perfect time to plan for the future. It might be during a time when our weather starts to sizzle this summer. It might be to trout filled creeks and rivers in the High Country. Maybe it could well be to a northern part of our continent where the word remote still truly means isolated, and pristine waters await with challenging unfamiliar big tugs.

So the reality of stubborn resistance is simply a mindset — to not accept less than favorable moments but look forward to those that make memories.

Until next month: Pursue all of your outdoor activities in a safe and ethical manner.

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FOUNDER/PUBLISHER/EDITOR
Bill L. Olson

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Adala Ruhge

CONTRIBUTING OUTDOORS EDITORS
Tom Claycomb III
Harold Gunn
Brian Hughes
Mike Holmes
John Jefferson
Kerry O’Day
Bill L. Olson, Jr.
Nate Skinner
Robert Sloan
Mark Sosin
Matt Williams
Danno Wise

WHITETAIL DEER EDITOR
Bob Zaiglin

ART/PRODUCTION EDITOR
Sunni Gonzales

ADVERTISING SALES
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Volume 27, Number 2





TOJ Notebook

Toyota ShareLunker Debuts Mobile App, Website

With the launch of the new year-round participation season, the Toyota ShareLunker Program debuted a new website and mobile app to facilitate entries and provide anglers with news and updates.

“Catching an eight pound or larger bass is no easy feat, so we made it as simple as possible for anglers to be rewarded for their achievement with the Toyota ShareLunker Program,” said Kyle Brookshear, Toyota ShareLunker Program coordinator. “With our new mobile app, anyone can enter their lunker bass from their smartphone or tablet right from their favorite fishing spot.”

The Toyota ShareLunker app is now available for free download from the Apple App Store and Google Play.

Anglers also have the option of entering their catch at the end of their fishing trip on the new Toyota ShareLunker website, texassharelunker.com. The digital entry form allows anglers to quickly submit photos of the fish being properly measured, weighed and held.

The mobile app and website entry forms include simple instructions for anglers who would like to provide a sample of fish scales from their lunker bass to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department researchers for genetic analysis.

“By entering the information and providing scale samples from catches of eight pound and larger lunker bass, anglers can provide TPWD with important data that our fisheries biologists and hatcheries staff can use to make the bass fishing in Texas even better,” Brookshear said.

But the bread and butter of the program is still the selective breeding and stocking the offspring of the state’s biggest fish.

Anglers who catch a largemouth bass over 13 pounds Jan. 1 through March 31 can choose to loan it to the program for spawning during the peak season. These special fish are entered by calling the program directly – any time of day – at (903) 681-0550.

TPWD hatcheries staff will attempt to spawn all 13-pound lunker bass

loaned through March 31. Some of the offspring will be stocked back to the source locations for all ShareLunker entries for the year, and others will be used as brood stock for statewide largemouth bass stockings.

Lunker bass entries of every size over 8 pounds or 24 inches will receive an exciting prize package and anglers can enter as many fish as they want during the participation season Jan. 1 through Dec. 31.

Each angler who enters an 8 pound or 24 inches and larger lunker bass on the mobile app or website will receive a Toyota ShareLunker Catch Kit containing branded merchandise and fishing tackle items and an entry into the year-end ShareLunker Prize Drawing for a \$5,000 shopping spree and an annual fishing license.

Anglers will also receive a vehicle decal to display their recognition category – Lunker Class for bass at least eight pounds or 24 inches, Lunker Elite Class for bass 10 to 12.99 pounds, and Lunker Legend

Cover Art

Artist Mark Ray let his passion for coastal fishing inspire a career as a self-taught marine wildlife artist. Offshore billfish and other pelagics, as well as inshore species like speckled trout and redfish are some of the subject matter Ray has painted.

His “Pole Dancers” is a perfect piece of art for the cover of the February issue of Texas Outdoors Journal. Many coastal anglers this month will grind out days in pursuit of trophy speckled trout. However, sheepshead are beginning to make a move toward spawning areas around the Texas’ jetties, or stage near pier pilings and anything that would grown barnacles that these “convict fish” will feed.

The great thing about pursuing sheepshead, now and on into spring, is their abundance and size available. The opportunity to catch a double digit sheepshead is a very real possibility this time of year. Plus the added bonus is they provide excellent tablefare.

For more information on “Pole Dancers” and other fine works of art or commissions available by Mark Ray, visit www.markrayarts.com, email markraystudio@gmail.com, follow on Facebook or call (252) 646-8220. **T&J**



“Pole Dancers”

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Northern pike caught on Milton Lake

Class for bass at least 13 pounds.

Lunker Legacy Class anglers who loan a lunker bass over 13 pounds to TPWD during the spawning window will receive the same prizes as the other categories as well as a Lunker Legacy Class vehicle decal, VIP access to awards programing at the Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest, a replica of their fish, and an entry into the Legacy Class Prize Drawing for a \$5,000 shopping spree and an annual fishing license at the end of the spawning period March 31.

After spawning at the TFFC, the 13 pound and larger lunker bass will be returned to the angler, who will have the option of releasing them back to the lake or donating them to the Toyota ShareLunker program for display at the TFFC.

To view the full list of prizes and official rules and entry information, visit texassharelunker.com.

For program updates, photos and to keep up with Texas lunker catches, join the ShareLunker community online at www.facebook.com/sharelunkerprogram. **T★J**

Firearms and Ammunition Industry Economic Impact Report 2017

The National Shooting Sports Foundation has released a report detailing the significant economic impact the firearms and ammunition industry has on the nation's and each state's economy.

The economic growth America's firearms and ammunition industry has experienced over the years has been nothing short of remarkable.

Over the past couple of years, the industry's growth has been driven by an unprecedented number of Americans choosing to exercise their fundamental right to keep and bear arms and purchase

a firearm and ammunition.

NSSF, representing manufacturers and sportsmen around the nation, takes great pride in supporting wildlife conservation efforts. Noted in the economic impact report are the significant taxes paid by member companies to federal and state governments and the Pittman-Robertson excise tax the industry pays on the products it sells — this tax is the major source of wildlife conservation funding in America.

During difficult economic times and high unemployment rates nationally, our industry has grown and created about 30,000 new, well-paying jobs over the past three years.

Our industry is proud to be one of the bright spots in this economy.

United States companies that manufacture, distribute, and sell sporting firearms, ammunition and supplies are an important part of the country's economy. Manufacturers of firearms, ammunition, and supplies, along with companies that sell and distribute these products, provide well paying jobs in America and pay significant amounts in tax to the state and Federal governments.

Companies in the United States that manufacture, distribute and sell firearms, ammunition and hunting equipment employ as many as 141,500 people in the country and generate an additional 159,623 jobs in supplier and ancillary industries.

These include jobs in companies supplying goods and services to manufacturers, distributors and retailers, as well as those that depend on sales to workers in the firearms and ammunition industry.

These are good jobs, paying an average of \$50,423 in wages and benefits. And today every job is important. In

fact, workers in the United States face an unemployment rate of about 5 percent. This means that there are already nearly 8 million people trying to find jobs in the nation and collecting unemployment benefits.

Not only does the manufacture and sale of firearms, ammunition, shooting and hunting supplies create good jobs in the United States but the industry also contributes to the economy as a whole. In fact, in 2016 the firearms and ammunition industry was responsible for as much as \$51.3 billion in total economic activity in the country.

The broader economic impact flows throughout the economy, generating business for firms seemingly unrelated to firearms. Real people, with real jobs, working in industries as varied as banking, retail, accounting, metal working, even in printing, all depend on the firearms and ammunition industry for their livelihood.

The firearms and ammunition industry generates sizable tax revenues. In the United States the industry and its employees pay over \$6.5 billion in federal and state taxes including property, income and sales-based levies.

In Texas the firearms and ammunition industry plus its suppliers generated a combined total of 23,070 jobs. This resulted in wages totaling \$1,164,392.200 for an average wage and benefits of \$50,472 per year. It also contributed \$81,806,700 in Excise Tax.

Texas leads the country in Total Economic Output, dollars. Texas is followed by California, Minnesota, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New York and Ohio.

Texas also lead the country as the Top Job producing state. The Lone Star State was followed in this category by California, Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Minnesota, North Carolina, Missouri, Illinois and Michigan.

The Top Ten States in Excise Tax Revenue was lead by Texas, and followed by California, Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Michigan, North Carolina, Washington and Tennessee.

Growth trends also showed favorably for Texas holding the Number Eight spot of the Top Ten States in Growth in Jobs. It held the Number Seven position of the Top Ten States in Growth in Excise Tax. **T★J**

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American Fisheries Remain Strong Economic Driver

Commercial and recreational fisheries remain a strong contributor to the United States economy, according to the annual Fisheries of the United States report recently released by NOAA.

Saltwater recreational fishing remains one of America's favorite pastimes and a key contributor to the national economy with 9.6 million anglers making nearly 63 million trips in 2016, catching more than 371 million fish (61 percent of which are released alive), and in 2015, contributing \$36 billion to the national economy. By weight, striped bass remains the top harvested catch among saltwater anglers, followed by dolphinfish, bluefish, yellow-fin tuna, spotted seatrout, and summer flounder.

Also in 2016, U.S. commercial fishermen landed 9.6 billion pounds of seafood (down 1.5 percent from 2015) valued at \$5.3 billion (up 2.1 percent from 2015). The highest value commercial species were lobster (\$723 million), crabs (\$704 million), scallops (\$488 million), shrimp (\$483 million), salmon (\$420 million),

and Alaska walleye pollock (\$417 million).

By volume, the nation's largest commercial fishery remains Alaska walleye pollock, which showed near record landings of 3.4 billion pounds (up 3 percent from 2015), representing 35 percent of total U.S. commercial and recreational seafood landings.

In 2016, the U.S. imported 5.8 billion pounds of seafood (up 1 percent compared to 2015) worth \$19.5 billion (up 3.5 percent).

However, a significant portion of this imported seafood is caught by American fishermen, exported overseas for processing, and then reimported to the United States.

Shrimp and salmon are two of the top three imported species and much of that is farm-raised. The U.S. ranks 16th in total aquaculture production around the world far behind China, Indonesia and India. In 2015, 1.4 billion pounds of aquaculture production was reported in the U.S.

The report also shows that the average American ate 14.9 pounds of fish and

shellfish in 2016, a decrease from 15.5 pounds the year before.

U.S. dietary guidelines recommend 8 to 12 ounces of a variety of seafood species per week, or 26 to 39 pounds per person per year. **T★J**

Whooping Crane Festival Registration Now Open

Registration is open for the annual Whooping Crane Festival scheduled for February 22-25, 2018 in Port Aransas, Texas. The festival is open to birders, photographers, families, and anyone who loves the outdoors and nature-related activities.

World renowned crane expert, Dr. George Archibald, Co-Founder of the International Crane Foundation, will be one of the featured speakers, along with representatives from Operation Migration, Wood Buffalo National Park, the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and more. Festival attendees will have the opportunity to take guided boat tours to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge to view the world's last naturally-occurring population of Whooping Cranes on their

wintering grounds.

Additional festival activities include birding and nature boat and bus tours, interactive workshops and seminars, a painting and wine tasting class, and a free nature-related trade show.

For more information and online

registration, visit www.whoopingcranefestival.org.

Online registration closes at 12:00 p.m. CT on February 19. Onsite registration will open on February 22 at 1:00 p.m. at the Port Aransas Civic Center and run daily through the festival. **T★J**



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

On a gray winter day a pair of whooping cranes and a juvenile feed in St. Charles Bay.

Goose Island State Park Partially Reopens Jan. 1 After Harvey

Four months after Harvey struck the coast of Texas, Goose Island State Park reopened part of the site to day use visitors. On Jan. 1, a portion of the island reopened for park goers to recreate and once again enjoy.

"Park staff and volunteers worked tirelessly with contractors to clean up and repair the park so we can welcome visitors back to the island," said Robbie Merritt, superintendent of Goose Island State Park.

Gates are open at 8 a.m. and close at 10:00 PM daily. Visitors will have access to the boat ramp, day use picnic area and the west end of the island to fish, picnic and birdwatch.

The east end of the island, the fishing pier and the wooded camping areas will remain closed until repairs are completed. All overnight camping at the park also remains closed until further notice.

For reopening statuses of all parks impacted by Harvey, you can visit the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department website. **T★J**

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COLD WATER, HOT BITE



It's a simple matter of finding deep water areas to find good concentrations of fish.

Story and photography by Danno Wise

During February, trophy trout is pretty much the only topic of conversation among coastal fishermen. Although late winter is a great time to target big fish, it can also be a great time to catch numbers of really solid speckled trout.

The reason for this is pretty simple – when the water turns cold, fish congregate. Often they are tightly concentrated in relatively few spots. As a result, winter can actually be the best time to find a pile of trout in the 18 to 24 inch range packed tightly into a small area. Anglers finding these areas of densely concentrated trout can experience some of the fastest action of the year. Where they will be found will be determined by the prevailing weather conditions.

This can also be some of the simplest fishing around – especially when winter tides combine to push most of the water out of the bays. In those situations, it is usually a simple matter of finding the remaining deep water areas in order to find good concentrations of fish, essentially it makes an anglers job of locating fish far easier.

Deep Holes and Channels

During the coldest periods of winter, trout will leave the shallows and bury themselves in the deepest water they can locate. Depending on the bay, this deep water may be found in shipping channels or boating lanes, natural 'holes' in the bay, port areas or holes and canals created during oil and gas exploration. Regardless of what feature is responsible for the deep



Small baits like the D.O.A. TerrorEyz are especially effective when fish are finicky and holding in deeper water.

water, if it is accessible, the fish will find it. When the weather is at its coldest, the fish will be holding low in the water column. As the weather (and water) warms, fish will move progressively higher in the water column, suspending at the most comfortable depth they can find.

Rivers

In several areas of the Texas coast, the rivers that dump into the bays or Gulf are well known winter hotspots. The reason fish are found in these rivers during winter is they offer deeper water than many other areas of inshore coastal waters. As long as these rivers stay salty there will be a good amount of fish found in

them once the water temperatures drop. More often that not, once these fish move into the rivers, they will remain there until either the water warms in the spring or the salinity level drops. This makes rivers some of the most consistent spots to find fish in the winter.

Deep Flats and Mid-Bay Structure

In most Texas bays, this means the middle or center of the bay will be most productive, as that is where the deepest water is usually found. Some bays – particularly along the Upper and Middle Coasts — feature deep structure such as reefs or platforms. Others, such as those down south, feature deep grass flats covered with potholes. In either case, the majority of deep water in Texas bays (not including channels) will be found in open, unprotected water. So, these areas can be productive, but are often “blown out” due to high winds. But, if conditions allow, they can be very good during periods of cold weather.

Winter isn't consistently cold on any portion of the Texas coast. And, when the weather warms, things can change in a hurry.



When fish are found concentrated in winter holes anglers can cast into the same spot repeatedly and consistently hook up with quality fish.



Outdoor writer David Sikes unhooks a speck caught beneath a popping cork.

Drops

As time passes following a front and the water warms, the fish will move up out of the deeper water and begin once again feeding on the flats. However, fish don't immediately move from shallow to deep — they usually stop somewhere in between. Most often, fish will find a thermocline, and suspend there. Or, they move a little higher in the water column as the water warms. During periods of time such as these, fishing along ledges and drops — those transition areas between deep and shallow water — can be very productive. The key is locating the depth at which the fish are holding.

Shallow Flats

Unlike other times of the year, fish are not on the shallow flats every day during winter. However, when there is a stretch of warm days, the fish will move into the shallow

water to feed. The key is timing - hitting the area during a period of rising water temperatures - and location - finding shallow water within a short swim of deeper water. It also helps to find shallow water areas with mucky, muddy bottoms. (the mud will retain heat longer, making the water temperature in these areas slightly higher).

While shallow water fishing is not an everyday proposition in winter, giving the right conditions, anglers can find surprisingly good shallow water activity during winter. However, they need to key on the shallow flats adjacent to deep water, because unless there is an elongated warm spell, fish will not stray too far from the safety of deep water.

What To Throw

Big baits

There are a couple of things that make big baits effective during late winter. For one, at this time of year most of the prey items are preparing to spawn. Shrimp, pinfish, mullet and other forage species are getting set to release their eggs. This means that the bait found in bays right now is large enough to carry eggs.

The other part of the equation is that speckled trout are looking to take in as many calories as possible during late winter as they prepare for their own spawning activities. However, size alone is not enough. Regardless of how big and juicy a bait looks, a fish will only hit it if they are reasonably sure they can catch it with little effort.

Small baits

Not to completely contradict the theory above, but there are times when big baits just won't draw strikes. Often this is during post-frontal conditions when fish become extremely finicky and sulk on the bottom. During these times it is good to throw a small bait that drops fast.

Bait Presentations

Dead-sticking

Dead-sticking involves doing nothing more than keeping the line taut enough to detect a strike. For many anglers, it is hard to accept that fish will strike a lure retrieved in this fashion. However, this 'do-nothing retrieve' is often the most productive when fish are hunkered down following a cool front.

D.O.A. Shrimp have a natural-looking descent and are one of the lures best suited for dead-sticking. Soft-plastic jerkbaits are also very effective when dead-sticked.

However, virtually any soft-plastic can be retrieved in this manner.

Although slow-sinking and suspending baits are most commonly used, over clean bottom anglers can use standard weighted jigs and allow the bait to drag across the bottom as the boat drifts.

Twitch-and-pause

This is the same retrieve typically used with floater/divers and soft-plastics. However, the cadence is much slower in winter.

When fishing floater/divers, the pause should be extended beyond what it would normally be during summer and fall. The colder the water, the longer the pause should be. During periods of extreme cold, it is almost difficult to pause too long.

The pause should also be longer when using soft-plastics. Of course, the longer the pause, the farther a lure will fall. To prevent the bait from falling out of the strike zone during an extending pause, it is helpful to use a lighter jig head. Instead of using the short, sharp twitch typically employed during warm weather, try an elongated lifting sweep of the rod. This will cause the bait to rise high enough in the water column to offset the longer period of descent.

Slow-sinking and suspending plugs should also be worked with this slow, twitch-and-pause retrieve.

Slow Rolling

This technique was developed by bass fishermen fishing spinnerbaits. However, slow rolling can also be applied to a number of saltwater baits. Typically, slow rolling involves presenting a traditional 'power' bait, such as a paddletail soft-plastic jig, in a finesse fashion. Slow-rolling involves reeling just fast enough to cause the bait to stay at a certain depth. It can be used to 'wake' a bait just below the water's surface or can be used to keep soft-plastics on or near the bottom.

If the bottom is clean and free of debris, dragging a bait slowly across the bay floor can trigger strikes from finicky fish. In as much, slow rolling can be used in virtually any depth of water.

Vertical jigging

Vertical jigging is a pretty straightforward technique. In its simplest form, vertical jigging involves letting a lure fall straight down over the side of the boat to a pre-determined depth. Then, the rod is lifted and dropped or 'jigged' up and

down to impart action to the lure or bait.

The depth of the 'retrieve' is controlled by how much line is let out. Most of the time, it is easiest to drop the bait all the way to the bottom then crank up a couple turns before beginning the jigging motion. Repeat this process, starting the 'retrieve' a foot or two higher in the water column each time until it is determined at what depth the fish are holding.

Popping corks

When fish are feeding in the upper three to four feet of the water column, lures and baits can be pinned beneath popping corks. This is a simple way to keep them at the desired depth. However, as is the case with all retrieves in winter, it is usually necessary to slow down. Often it is best to let the cork sit for a few seconds between pops.

Dog Walking

Topwater fishermen should use the same movement, just much slower and sloppier. Again, the key to drawing strikes during winter

is usually to make the lure look slow and wounded. A lot of times it also helps to pause the bait during the retrieve and let it lie motionless on the water's surface for a bit before continuing the retrieve.★★



Capt. Andy Salinas showing off a quality winter speck caught on a soft plastic rigged on a jig head.

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What is Wrong with the 270 Caliber?

Recently I was looking for a special load in the new Nosler Handloading book for a recommended 270 Weatherby load. After looking over all the data for the 270 caliber, I noticed that there are only three different calibers in the 270 family of ammunition. There is the 270 Winchester, the 270 Weatherby and the 270 Winchester Short Mag. These are the only three calibers and two of them are from Winchester.

If perusing the 30 caliber listings there are nearly 30 different calibers and the same holds true for 7mm's. The 22 caliber ammo has more than 15 listings. So why isn't there more for the 270's? Why was there never a 270-08 or a 270-300 Weatherby? Plus of the trio of 270 caliber variations available when it comes to performance they are almost identical any way.

Last week I decided to go to the range and shoot three different 270 caliber rifles. One rifle was a custom rifle in 270 Winchester, the second was a 270 Weatherby factory rifle and the last was a 270 WSM again a custom made gun. Now you may wonder why we have three different calibers of rifles that do the same thing and are the same size. Well, I was surprised to find there is quite a bit of difference between these three calibers and the 270 WSM is in a class of its own.

All three shoot the same .277 diameter bullet. All three will shoot 130 to 150 grain bullet very well, and all three will do fine work on deer sized animals.

However, there are some big differences — let me explain.

The old 270 Winchester has been around since 1923. It was first chambered in the Winchester model 54 bolt action rifle. The cartridge is nothing more than a 30-06 case necked down to accept the 270 bullet. For the shooter looking for a caliber which was flatter shooting and had less recoil than the 30-06, the 270 Winchester was the caliber.

The 270 Winchester will push a 130 grain bullet out of the barrel at 3000 feet per second. For me, 3000 feet per second is the magic number. I don't care if you are talking 22 caliber, 30 caliber, or 338 caliber; if you can get 3000 feet per second then you will have a flat shooting gun which will work for ranges out to 600 yards.

The 270 Winchester is a very versatile caliber capable of taking most North American game. Jack O'Connor is credited for making the 270 famous. Jack used the 270 Winchester on nearly all of his North American game hunts from pronghorn antelope to elk, the 270 makes a fine choice.

My favorite load for the 270 Winchester is a 130 grain Sierra Boat-Tail bullet loaded with 53 grains of Accurate Arms



The small family of 270's: left to right: 270 Winchester, 270 Weatherby & 270 WSM.

4350 powder.

Roy Weatherby never could leave a caliber alone. He had to improve it in some way.

In the 1940's, Weatherby came out with a family of cartridges based on the 300 H&H blown out and necked up or down. The 270 Weatherby had a shortened case body so it could work in a standard length action.

The 270 Weatherby is faster than the 270 Winchester, by as much as 200 feet per second for the same bullet weight. To me it makes more sense to use a heavier bullet and load it to the same 3000 feet per second velocity that the 270 Winchester shoots at. The Weatherby will do 3000 fps with a 150 grain bullet but I find it easier to get the velocity with a 140 grain bullet.

Many shooters don't like the Weatherby calibers because of the long throat in the chamber. I have never had a problem making one of these rifles perform to better than hunting accuracy.

Weatherby says the 270 is one of its best selling calibers. I don't see many of the 270 Weatherby's these days but I do see more 300 or 30-378 Weatherby's. The 270 Weatherby makes a better North

What's Wrong With 270?

| CALIBER | BULLET | MUZZLE VEL. | 500 YD DROP | 500 YD ENERGY |
|---------|--------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| 270 Win | 130 sp | 3011 FPS | -38.7 inches | 1158 FP |
| 270 Wby | 140 sp | 3021 FPS | -38.6 inches | 1325 FP |
| 270 WSM | 150 sp | 3001 FPS | -35.8 inches | 1484 FP |

One problem with the 270 caliber is there are no high B C bullets made.

American deer caliber than some of the bigger Weatherby rounds, especially if you are recoil sensitive. The 270 Weatherby can be built on any standard action. You don't need the super magnum action of the MKV, the Vanguard action or Remington 700 action works just fine. My favorite load for the 270 Weatherby is 140 grain Hornady SST bullet loaded with 67 grains of IMR 4831 powder. If you want to try something fun, load a 110 grain Barnes XBT bullet with 69 grains of IMR 4350. This load will shoot well over 3400 fps and makes a good long range varmint load.

The newest 270 caliber on the market is the 270 Winchester Short Mag. (WSM). Now I don't believe in all of the short Magnum hype but the 270 WSM really does work.

Of all of the WSM's that I build and shoot, the 270 out performs the others in velocity and accuracy. I find the best bullet for the 270 WSM is the 150 grainer. I can easily shoot 3000 feet per second with a 150 grain Barnes Triple Shock bullet. This makes the 270 WSM perform up to and in some cases better than the bigger 7mm Rem Mag.

One thing that I find interesting is that the WSM out performs the Weatherby with less powder and a shorter barrel. The way it out performs the bigger Weatherby is by running higher pressure. By running higher pressure you have a more efficient burn of the powder. You also have brass that wears out quicker and you need to use hot magnum primers. If you get two reloads out of a piece of 270 WSM brass you are doing good.

One of the best things about the 270 WSM is that it can be built on a short action. The shorter action will weigh about 6 ounces less. The bolt throw is about 3/4 of an inch less so reload and lock time should be less.

One problem with the short fat 270 WSM is feeding. Some guns just don't feed well. You have to take extra care in

loading to make sure you don't get jams during a fast feed. One last problem with the WSM is that it will hold fewer rounds in the magazine box. Even with these few problems I like the 270 WSM. In fact I think the 270 WSM is the best of the three 270's I have talked about here.

My favorite load for the WSM is 150 grain Nosler Partition loaded with 58 grains of Accurate Arms 4350 powder.

If you can get a big game bullet to leave the barrel of your rifle at 3000 feet per second you will have a caliber that will shoot flat enough to make 600 or even 800 yard shots. You will also have enough energy to be able to push a bullet through both shoulders of most North American game. I don't care if it is a 150

grain 270, a 180 grain 300, or a 225 grain 338 Ultra, all of these bullets have nearly the same drop out to 600 yards and all have enough energy to do the job. The other important thing about long range shooting is you need a caliber that will stay supersonic past the maximum range you want to shoot. The 270 WSM stays supersonic way past 1000 yards which makes it perfect for long range shooting.

It doesn't matter which 270 you pick, you won't go wrong with any of them. You don't need a .300 Mag to hunt North American big game. In fact, the 270 will handle most any game animal around the world. I still wonder why no one ever made a smaller 270 caliber like the 7mm-08 or the 257 Roberts. 🌟🌟

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LAKE WHITNEY'S *Miraculous Recovery*

Once left for dead, this popular reservoir is once again alive and teeming with fish, fun and opportunity.

Story by Brian Hughes
Photography Courtesy Randy Routh

Back in the 1950s Texas went through an ambitious period of reservoir building across the state. More than 40 new lakes were created during the decade and Lake Whitney was one of the first. Although construction began in 1947, it was 1951 when the lake was actually impounded. Construction on the dam's power plant continued into 1953.

The primary purpose of the lake was flood control and water storage, but the lake would also provide recreational opportunities for people from hundreds of miles in every direction. With a surface area of more than 23,500 acres, Whitney has over 200 miles of shoreline.

As with many lakes, Whitney became a part of the landscape and was somewhat taken for granted. Folks just assumed it would always be there, ready to give them all the fishing and water play they desired. All of that changed in 2001.

That was the year the Golden Alga made its presence known. From 2001 through 2007 yearly outbreaks of the alga would decimate fish populations of all species. TPWD biologists scrambled to find a "cure," a way to stop, or at least mitigate, the damage, but there were no answers. Fish populations were at their lowest ever recorded. Recreational anglers and many guides on Whitney began to look elsewhere for their fishing opportunities.

In 2008 there was a positive trend as the alga outbreak seemed to subside. Promising results were seen in TPWD water sample surveys. These showed the presence of some alga, but it was not

shown to be toxic. And then in 2009 the drought began.

All of this was witnessed by John Tibbs Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Inland Fisheries District Supervisor for the Waco District.

"When I first got here 19 years ago, the lake was a great place for fishermen to go. Striper populations were excellent, so much so that there were many guides working the lake on a full-time basis. In addition we had a fantastic population of smallmouth bass, very good largemouth fishing, and great whites and catfish as well."

Then came the alga kills. "Guides left, anglers stopped coming, and local businesses saw a decline in revenue as well," said Tibbs.

The drought was both a blessing and a curse. "We saw the alga decline along with the water level. As the alga outbreaks subsided, the fish population began to recover, especially the striper and bass," he said. "In addition,

during the drought terrestrial vegetation, grasses, bushes, tress and such, all began to grow.

This was along the new, lower shoreline. When the water returned, the new vegetation was inundated and offered cover for predator and prey alike. This made for a very healthy fishery."

Indeed the water did return. In 2014



Lake Whitney is now seeing stripers in the 30 inch-plus class (opposite page) plus an abundance of good age classes of solid fish (above).



Striper are the gamefish that is leading the recovery of Lake Whitney and attracting a new group of anglers.



Once recognized as a prized largemouth bass fishery, Whitney is making a comeback with some hefty sized bass being caught.

and 2015, rains brought severe flooding to the area. Many parks and facilities sustained damage that is still evident in some places today. Once again blessings and curse occurred almost simultaneously.

While damaging much man-made infrastructure, Mother Nature was also taking care of the lake. Flood waters helped “cleanse” the lake of the alga, and filled the lake to historic high levels. This combined with the vegetation growth during low water levels provided the fish with everything needed for a population

explosion.

As John pointed out, “Recruitment (survival) and growth rates were off the charts, as well as condition of the fish. We saw surveys well above normal.” (Note: “condition” in this case is the actual weight of a fish as compared to a known standard, i.e. a 14 inch fish is generally going to weigh in at a certain standard. Whitney’s fish were consistently higher than the standard). “Now we’ve seen two years of normal cycles giving us a very healthy fishery with potential for even

better years ahead.”

Net surveys and electrofishing show historic highs for catfish, striped bass up to 30 inches, largemouth and white bass, (surveys have never shown more in the historic period, which goes back to the 80’s).

Tibbs believes these are the “Golden Years” of Lake Whitney as far as fishing is concerned, “The guides are back and catching fish like crazy, even anglers of limited experience are having success. If you ever thought about coming to Whitney, now is the time.”

About the only negative in the Whitney saga is the smallmouth bass. Once a premiere smallmouth fishery, Whitney held most of the Top 10 spots in the Texas record books for smallmouth bass. Now there are a few left, but not a viable population.

Tibbs has always been very much in favor of re-establishing the smallies



Veteran Whitney guide Randy Routh of Team Redneck Guide Service shows off a solid striper that is providing the action to attract anglers back to this recovering reservoir.



The smile tells the tale of having bragging rights to the Junior Angler Lake Record striper caught by Barrett Turner.

in Whitney. However, he cautions, “The alga outbreaks killed all of the brood fish smallmouth in the hatchery. Combined with the fact that production of smallmouth is very difficult and expensive, requiring both much more space and actual brood fish than say, largemouth bass, it will be a long process.”

There were two stockings of 73,000 and 135,000 smallmouth stocked into Whitney post-alga, but that pales compared to a “normal” stocking, “Just before the outbreaks in 2000 we stocked 589,000 fingerlings, which is about the norm.”

There is some good news though. The hatcheries are in better shape, and smallmouth production is on the agenda. Additionally, Lake Belton in great shape and showing recruitment for smallies.

Recruitment is the natural reproduction of the species, basically meaning that Belton can produce smallmouth on its own and doesn’t require stockings to maintain the population. Therefore the stockers allocated there can be dedicated to Whitney, which must have stocking to continue the population. If all goes according to plan there could possibly be catchable smallmouth in three to five years.

Lake Whitney was in the news in 2014 and 2015 when one of the many bluffs for which the lake is known crumbled off and put a house into the lake.

Apparently an after effect of the flooding, a sheer limestone bluff slowly separated from the main land mass. When it became obvious the home on the bluff would be lost, it was set on fire in what

could be considered a controlled burn. Once the house was gone, the cliff held on against the forces of nature for about a year until the second round of flooding in 2015 finally separated the cliff and gently slid it into the lake. Still visible today, the bluff poses very little danger to anglers. Those considering diving the bluff are warned that it should be considered hazardous to be under the rocks as they

sit now.

Randy Routh of Team Redneck Guide Service has a little more invested in the lake than most fishermen and guides, “My grandfather, father and uncles all worked in construction on the Whitney Dam,” he told us, “I wasn’t around yet, but I remember conversations by the fire as they regaled us with stories of the days spent working ‘til dark, when they would come home and work the farm at night.”

Earliest memories include fishing the sand bass run up the river, being on his grandfather’s ranch for the summers and fishing from the bank, “I’ve always fished the lake, and my wife, (a runner up at the Miss Lake Whitney Beauty Pageant in 1975), was also from the area.”

As time passed, Routh was able to acquire the Lake Whitney Views, a local newspaper and was suddenly in the publishing business. “We wanted to have a part of the history of the lake as we had both grown up here. Plus my wife had been in the paper game with the Ft. Worth Star Telegram. It seemed like a natural fit.”

Striper fishing got into his blood early on, “I had caught a sand bass and was reeling it in when a striper hit. It took all

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my line, and my heart.” He has spent the rest of his life chasing stripers.

His career in guiding started in 1997 when he bought a center console boat. His wife said it wasn’t in the budget and he’d have to get a second job. So he went to Walmart, got a guides license and called her back to say, “I have a second job.”

When it comes to winter striper fishing on Whitney, Routh said, “February will see cold water temperatures. You’ll want to slow down your presentation. If you think you’re fishing slow enough, slow down some more.”

He’ll use slabs, spoons and assassins with a dead-sticking approach. Another popular tactic is strolling. “Make a long cast with an umbrella rig, or an assassin type bait on a lead head, he explained. “Use the trolling motor to cruise structure at a medium to slow speed. The softer bite will require a pretty quick hookset to avoid losing the fish.”

On warmer days look to the backs of the creeks. “The shad will migrate to the backs of the creeks looking for warmer water, and the stripers will follow,” he stated. “They’ll corral the bait and a feeding frenzy occurs.” He advises a swimbait type bait, with a steady, medium retrieve speed.

You can watch the birds to see how deep they go to get bait. If they begin their dive from high in the sky their dive will be deeper, a shallow entry indicates shallower bait.

Bass fishing will be entirely dependent



The future looks bright for Lake Whitney, not only from the fish available, but also from the next generation of anglers fishing it.



Part of the limestone bluff that separated from the main bank can still be seen above the surface of Lake Whitney. The crumbling bluff resulted in a beautiful home being destroyed by a “control burn” when it became apparent it too would fall into the lake.

on the weather. If there are some warm days, bass will begin to move into the creeks as well. “Traps and spinnerbaits will cover water, locating active fish. Once you connect with a fish, slow down and work the area thoroughly with jigs and Texas rigged craws or lizards.

Colors will also be dictated by weather as early rains will muddy the water, calling for darker colors like black/blue or brighter colors like chartreuse and bubble gum. Clear waters will call for natural colors such as watermelon, pumpkin or green pumpkin and shad colors.

Sand bass will be headed up the river to spawn. Small ‘Traps in chrome/ blue, chrome/black, firetiger and red will work, as will various casting spoons.

Small spinners such as the Rooster Tail, Mepps Aglia, and the Blue Fox will catch plenty of fish, and of course, live minnows will account for more than a few full stringers.

As the US Army Corps of Engineers website states, volunteers make activities like the annual Whitney Lake Kid Fish, Lake shore Clean-Up, Earth Day Celebration



If you ever thought about coming to Whitney, now is the time.

Lake Whitney History

Uncle Gus’ Marina opened in May 1952, and is the longest marina in continual operation on the lake. Joe Shaffner bought the land for the marina before the lake was even begun, and operated a resort on the site. Once the lake and marina was established, he provided several services including boat rentals and cabins for guests. Boat rentals were 50 cents a day, and cabins went for two dollars a day.

In 1956 Shaffner added an elevator to lower boats down to the water from the bluff.



Left: Times certainly have changed over the years. When was the last time an angler went fishing while wearing a tie?

Right: Some things never change over the years. Though the swimwear may change, the water is a magnet that attracts sunbathers and anglers alike - then and today.

property. These planned additions include a restaurant, a marina store with the only available gasoline on the lake, plus a bait and tackle shop with live bait. Other projects include a revamp of the courtesy dock, new lights on the “crappie dock”, and 96 new boat slips. In addition they are working with the Corps of Engineers to try and open a ramp that has been closed for some years. Yes, the future of Lake Whitney looks very bright indeed.★



Left: The boat, tackle and clothing may have changed over the years, but money bets this angler was after some of the catfish that was a part of the original attraction on Lake Whitney.

Right: Randy Routh has a little more invested in the lake than most fishermen and guides, he said, “My grandfather, father and uncles all worked in construction on the Whitney Dam.” The Lake Whitney Views covered the breaking area story in an early edition.





Backyard Bonanzas

Many years ago, a friend taught me a lesson that remains etched in my memory. While other boats kicked up roostertails and disappeared behind a wall of spray on their way to some distant, secret rendezvous with fish, we never reached planing speed.

Instead, Dan slowly weaved his way through the myriad of moorings in the harbor, maneuvered the boat into position, and dropped anchor in what appeared to be an unlikely haven for anything of size.

Action came within minutes in Dan's home waters. Fishing (and catching) remained steady throughout the tide, but we didn't hold in one spot. Instead, we kept changing locations, because according to Dan, the fish moved to different areas in the harbor as the flow of water changed.

By the way, I fished with a skipper 1,000 miles from Dan's harbor and he moved every couple of minutes even if I caught a fish in the current spot.

A neighbor called and asked me to stop by. He was a largemouth bass fisherman



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Fishing nearshore structure can also reward the offshore angler. Instead of making long runs to the blue water, check out water temperatures, depth and contours that may hold gamefish.

and he wanted to show me five bass he had just caught that were swimming in his bathtub.

The smallest one had to weigh at least six pounds. Sam only owned a rowboat

and a pair of oars.

While overpowered bass boats streaked for the horizon, Sam was limited to the area about a quarter mile from the launch ramp.

All of us fall into the trap of traveling long distances to find fish. For some reason, we tend to believe that the water beneath the boat is barren of any form of marine life until we arrive at the honey hole.

Anglers find it easier to return to the same places rather than ferret out new fishing grounds closer to home. Provided an ample source of food exists, fish adapt readily to the habitat. Crowded harbors or nearby destinations may lack the charm of remote waters, but they often hold an abundance of gamesters including some of trophy proportions.

Finding fish in your backyard starts with desire, determination, and the confidence that you will succeed in your mission.

Plan a systematic approach tailored to cover the waterfront. Consider such factors as tides, food sources, structure in

its broadest sense, and water temperature. Fish are creatures of habit.

Once you locate them in a particular spot under a given set of conditions, look for them to return whenever the same factors occur.

One way to start centers on searching for various types of structure. Drop-offs from shallow to deeper water deserve your attention. Channel edges as well as depressions in the bottom are worth a try. The juncture of feeder streams, rivers, bay arms off the main body of water, or where two channels or a pair of currents meet hold fish. Tide and tidal currents play an important role in finding where fish will be.

Keep in mind that they change as the stage of the tide changes. You're also searching for points and pockets. Any point brushed by flowing water becomes a premier ambush spot. Baitfish often try to hold in pockets, making these attractive to predators.

Try working from shallow to deep and then deep to shallow. Fish thrive along edges. If the bottom changes from sand to rock or rock to grass, work those edges. Rocks, reefs, humps, or any other irregular features spell fish in capital letters. Certainly bridges, pilings, buoys, docks, and other structure sticking above the surface should catch your eye.

The best time to study an area is when a new or full moon occurs and creates spring low tides.

At the lowest stage of the tide, you will easily see the main channels, deeper sloughs, and even some of the other forms of structure.

If you stay through a tide cycle, you can monitor the flow of water and that can prove critical.

Water temperature ranks as a vital ingredient, but is frequently overlooked by most anglers. Every species has its preferences in terms of comfort as well as its limits since fish are cold-blooded. If the water is too cold or too warm, they are not going to be there. Fish can sense temperature in fractions of a degree, so even slight variations may mean fish or no fish.

Remember that temperature is a form of structure. Variations can also form an edge and fish might be on the cooler or warmer side.

Fish search out the right mix of all these factors in determining where they

will be. As you analyze the various parts to this puzzle, try putting several together at one time until you find fish. If you can verify fish are present in a given location, trial and error should help you come up with the right technique to catch them. Don't overlook natural bait as your first choice, even if you would rather work artificials.

Natural bait should be the freshest available and changed frequently.

Once you start catching fish, you have the option of switching to any method you prefer.

Backyards may not be the most glamorous places to fish as far as scenery is concerned, but they are easy to reach and often extremely productive. As you learn your way around, these spots close to home allow you to get in a couple of hours of fishing when you don't have time for a full day and long runs to distant spots. And, when the weather turns marginal in open water, you have a haven you can enjoy.

That's when you will agree that it's worth the effort to find these hidden honey holes. **T★J**

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PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Crowded harbors or nearby destinations may lack the charm of remote waters, but they often hold an abundance of gamefish including some of trophy proportions.



Big Game Draws in Western States

As a kid, hunting in Texas was pretty simple. I went to Gibson's and bought a hunting and fishing license that had my deer and turkey tags attached.

Years later I moved to Colorado and discovered things were different. They had an actual rulebook, places called hunting units and all kinds of "weird stuff" I was not familiar with.

I met a guy at church right when I moved there whom everyone called the Regulation Book scribe. He helped everyone fill out their draw applications.

If every western state has a 120 page Big Game Rule Book, that doesn't even include the moose, bighorn and mountain goat rules, then it is impossible to cover applying for non-resident tags in all of the Western mountain states in this one article.

Plus there are variables — what is covered isn't necessarily set in stone either. As this is written, several states are still finalizing the 2018 rules and regulations, but here's some of the basics.

In Idaho the hunting zones are made up of units. Some zones may have as many as nine units or as few as one. For instance,



The author had to do a lot of scouting and studying topo maps to find this Idaho antelope buck.

the Selway Zone is made up of Units 16A, 17, 19 and 20. This works nicely because if deer numbers are down in a certain area and fewer tags are allocated for say in Unit

16A. Plus it breaks the deer hunts down differently than for elk.

The way a unit is defined geographically can also get a little confusing. Wyoming has overlapping units. By this I mean an elk unit may be defined as a particular 5-mile area, however, the moose unit may be a 15-mile area with different boundaries. Online there is a tab labeled "Hunt Planner" to cover this.

In Colorado there are three seasons in which to hunt elk. Many of the tags are available to buy over the counter with no application needed. However, all mule deer hunts are draw only. Before proceeding further, most know the term "over-the-counter" means a tag that can be purchased at an outdoor store. Of course these units will be more heavily hunted.

If you want a little solitude with a chance to see more game and bigger bucks/bulls then you need to put in for a draw hunt.

Putting in for drawn permits

for specific big game species can quickly get confusing. Every one of the western states has a different application deadline.

Non-residents apply for elk in Wyoming in January but antelope and deer applications are not due until May 31. If it's been a good year for antelope then they'll have some "leftover tags" not issued through the drawing.

Eons ago, when I lived in northern Colorado, there were some years you could get up to five doe antelope tags for \$25 each. The leftover tags become available right after the first draw and is only open for five days. Then they have a 3rd draw. Idaho has a 1st drawing, 2nd draw, and then first come, first served on any leftover tags.

As mentioned, Wyoming's elk application period is in January, Idaho's is May 1-June 5th, but all of the western states vary on dates. The good thing today is you can get the regulations online as opposed to having to request the booklet from the appropriate state game agency, wait for it to be mailed and then apply. In fact, Colorado now only accepts online applications.

Sometime there are terms used that mean almost the same thing. For example what is the difference between a draw hunt or controlled hunt? Basically both describe a hunting opportunity that has limited tags available based on a recent species population survey.

The most commonly used term is a draw that defines a zone for a game animal and has a limited number of tags available. A drawing is held to distribute the tags to the lucky winners.

Some of the states have a preference point system. Most hunters like this.

In Idaho there are no preference points. A hunter could put in a moose tag for 20 years before getting drawn. On the other hand I put in and got a tag the first time entered. It's a random draw all based on luck.

Some states set up the preference point system to increase the chance of being drawn as more drawings are entered over time. For example so let's say you've put in for five years in a specific unit for a certain game animal.

If you are not drawn in the first few year you know your chances of being drawn increases each year as more preference points are accumulated. Some are almost so specific that a hunter knows that after

five preference points are accrued, being drawn is almost guaranteed. (This is the type of program Texas has modeled its

drawn hunt program after.)

I like the preference point system to some degree but if you're new it can seem



The author loves hunting in the mountains and carries a survival pack and GPS. This area is in the Breaks of the Hell's Canyon. The Hell's Canyon is out in front probably 5-10 miles. It is reportedly the deepest canyon in North America and tough country to hunt. When hunting country this rugged you'd better be in shape and prepared.



Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management or topo maps by MyTopoMaps are a good place to begin researching areas for access, terrain features and better understanding hunting units in western states.

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hopeless to ever draw a tag if you know it takes nine “points” to get a tag in your coveted zone.

When I become boss, I’ll allocate 85 percent of the tags will be awarded by

preference points while 15 percent will be given out randomly. My idea is that way even a newbie has a chance of drawing a tag.

So why would you go through all

Professional Licensing Programs

In western mountain states there are so many options and ever-changing variables that most non-resident hunters struggle with the application process alone. When it comes to being on top of opportunities for trophy elk, mule deer, moose and other game or the availability of licenses most non-resident hunters simply miss out.

This is a lesson I learned decades ago. Then I met George Taulman, owner of United States Outfitters based in Taos New Mexico. Taulman had built a reputation for hunting premier private land in New Mexico and several other western states.

In New Mexico big game tags are issued to the landowners, and landowners then sell them to outfitters or individuals. USO has built a reputation on having some of the premier private land big game hunts in the country.

In 1991 Taulman launched United States Outfitter’s Professional Licensing Service that not only tracked game population and harvest trends, but also cataloged where the largest trophies for various big game species were being taken. The Service also took the hassle out of the application process.

As a Texas hunter looking to hunt trophy big game animals I enrolled in USO’s Professional Licensing Service. In order to

participate in the Service and get a portfolio of applications started, a the one-time consulting fee of \$120 per application is paid plus any fee for Bonus/Preference Point, any non-refundable License Fee, and the non-refundable Application Fee. United States Outfitters will provide information and recommendations, based on the extensive research and expertise they have acquired over the years as one of the leaders in the outfitting industry.

In 1994 Taulman filed out for me an application for a once-in-a-lifetime Colorado Shiras (Wyoming) moose permit that had just been made available to non-residents. With little competition for this newly available opportunity I got lucky and drew a tag.

The short story is because of United States Outfitters Professional Licensing Service I harvested what was then the third largest moose taken in Colorado — an animal that put my name in the All Time Boone & Crockett Record Book for the first time. It paid off then and is where I look for assistance with big game hunting opportunities today.

For more information on United States Outfitters, Professional License Service or Private Land Hunts visit, www.huntuso.com or call (800) 845-9929. — Bill L. Olson ★



the hassle of applying for limited draw areas? If you are looking for Mister BIG it is because they are trophy units. The possibility of seeing huge bucks and bulls is greater because the pressure is less and big trophies come from old animals. Beside seeing more animals fewer hunters will be encountered.

With changing times there is a disclaimer. Just because an area has few tags available may not mean it is a trophy unit. It may have limited tags because wolves moved into an area and devastated the herd.

In the old days cow elk tags were available over the counter in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area, but today that is no longer true thanks to the reintroduction of wolves.

Wolves are not the only culprit. Tags may also be limited due to a bad winter kill or forest fires. Remember tags are used to manage the herds.

There are also different dates for different types of hunting disciplines (archery, blackpower and center-fire rifle). Colorado’s blackpowder season is perfectly timed for elk. The blackpowder wapiti hunt occurs in the middle of September right when the elk are bugling and chasing cows. It’s an exciting hunt with usually lots of activity before elk are spooked by the invading army of rifle hunters.

Then of course you have the archery seasons. I love bowhunting elk. How could anyone not as it kicks off the big game season? Elk are bugling, the weather is usually nice, the aspens are changing colors to a beautiful gold and the world is momentarily perfect.

Wyoming’s game department does something that is pretty smart. When we’d hunt antelope there most of the landowners would let us hunt. That’s because each hunter’s tag has a coupon on it. After harvesting an antelope you give the tag-coupon to the rancher.

The rancher gets something like \$19 for letting you hunt. It’s a win-win-win. The hunter is happy because he gets to hunt, Wyoming Game & Fish Department is happy because they sell more tags, and the rancher is happy because he can make a little extra cash while thinning the game animal herd competing with his livestock.

Wyoming is also unique in that it allows predator hunting without having to purchase a license.

My buddies and I prairie dog hunted up there, which of course brings in a lot of revenue for the state with us eating out, staying in motels, buy gas and supplies, etc.

They’re pretty smart. It’s similar to Louisiana charging a very minimal fee for a fishing license when fishing with a guide. They know a lot of money pours into the state and provides a lot of diverse economic benefits.

When hunting out west remember these states require hunters to wear hunter orange. They also require you to have a Hunter’s Safety card. In Colorado it is for everyone born before 1948.

Due to the immense amount of public land available many people go to their hunting spots on 4-wheelers. Due to adverse impacts to the terrain and environment stringent rules are starting to be put in place. Make sure you check the local rules for your particular unit or you can get in trouble.

There are rules as to the size of the caliber for which species is being hunted. For instance, Colorado requires a .24 cal or larger for big game like mule deer and elk.

Most states allow a .45 cal as the minimum blackpowder caliber on mule deer, cougar etc. However, for moose, elk, bighorn and bears it has to be at least .50 caliber. Then there are also rules on what bullets are allowed on blackpowder hunts and broadheads specifications for archery hunts.

It is easy to get lost...permanently so buy good topographic maps, and no don’t just rely on your GPS. Learn to use a compass and how to read a topo map. It will help with pre-hunt logistics, planning and scouting.

A Forest Service map will help with general area navigation. A map from MyTopoMaps is the ultimate. It can be made as detailed as one would like.

How do you know where to hunt? Scout, scout, scout.

But how do you scout if you live 12 hours or more away? That’s why a lot of people hire guides. For some it takes a few years of hunting an area to learn it. Others will escape Texas heat on a family vacations in the summer which can also serve as a scouting trip.

There is a lot more to hunting this big country out west. More details will come in the future. ★★



Special specie hunts for moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat will usually involve putting in for a draw hunt.

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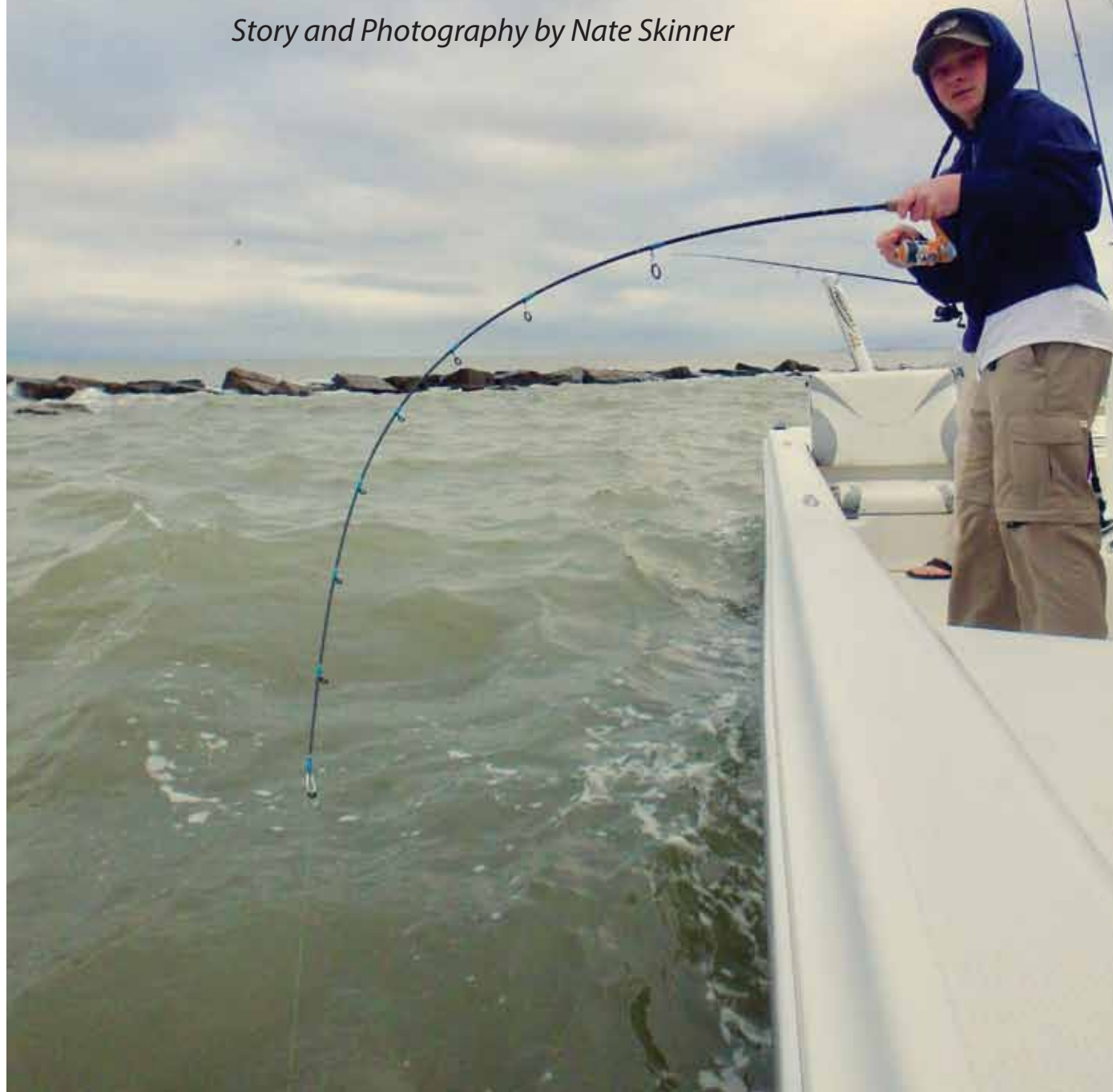
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SCRAPPY TUGS

Along the GRANITE

Sheepshead, black drum, and sand trout provide plenty of action when other species become difficult to catch.

Story and Photography by Nate Skinner



Perhaps the best part about fishing the Texas coast is there is always something to catch. As long as conditions allow anglers to safely navigate bay waters, they can pretty much bet on being able to find one species or another willing to bite. This becomes even more true for those prepared to diversify and employ a variety of tactics and strategies to discover hungry fish.

Possessing the right attitude is also key. Negativity never produces success. Optimistic anglers, confident that the fishery will provide, will excel during adverse scenarios which is what can be expected during the second month of the year.

The anglers that seem to best exhibit an eternally optimistic attitude are children. Youngsters smitten with the outdoors tend to always be willing to try to find a tug at the end of their lines, no matter the situation. It's like they are born with the innate knowledge that our coastal estuaries always offer some sort of action for those eager to put forth the effort.

I was reminded of the enthusiasm, imagination and innocence that a young angler possesses last winter, when Captain Ryan Battistoni asked if I wanted to tag along on a trip with some of his clients. The Galveston Bay guide and owner of Battistoni's Guide Service called me on a Sunday afternoon after a decent cold front had hit early that morning.

The wind had been steadily dying all day, but air temperatures had dropped tremendously, high pressure was setting in and bay waters were sure to be churned into an off-colored mixture.

My immediate response to Battistoni's invite was, "You want to go fishing tomorrow?"

The pro chuckled at the hesitant sound of my question.

"Yes, come join us tomorrow," he insisted. "It's going to be good."

Battistoni then explained that he was taking a father and son out to the jetties to target sheepshead, black drum, and just about anything else that would be biting along the granite. The idea of fishing for another species besides trout and reds hadn't even crossed my mind until he brought it up. I was definitely intrigued.

The next morning I found myself bundled up, bouncing live shrimp along the rocks of the Galveston



The father-son duo of Jeff (left) and Isaiah Bulman (right) had a ball catching sheepshead on a cool February day at the Galveston Jetties with Capt. Ryan Battistoni.

Jetties, ready to set the hook on anything that might produce a tug. It reminded me of how I originally fell in love with the sport of fishing as a kid. The goal was to have fun and catch fish — any kind of fish — it didn't matter.

The father-son duo had a blast as we landed plenty of hefty sheepshead along with a few sand trout, black drum, and a couple of stingrays. The young angler never complained, never tired, and had a rod in his hand from start to finish. It was the kind of trip that would make anyone realize that these moments were what fishing was all about. For a cool day in February, we knocked it out of the park.

The pattern I experienced while fishing with Battistoni and his clients holds true along all upper coast jetties from now through mid April. From Sabine Pass to Freeport, these granite structures attract hoards of fish. They represent great locations for anglers to find a bite during the transition period from late winter to early spring, when patterning speckled trout and redfish can be difficult.



During the annual sheepshead spawn quality sized sow fish in the eight to 10 pound range can be caught.



Sheepshead provide some beautiful, firm fillets.

Trout and reds will still be lurking around the jetties over the next few weeks and months, but the action for other species will be much more consistent. Anglers can count on sheepshead, black drum, and sand trout to produce a sporting fight as well as some tasty fillets.

During February, sheepshead will provide the majority of the fast action found along the jetties. This is due to their migration offshore to spawn. According to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Galveston Bay Ecosystem Leader, Glen Sutton, this spawning period usually continues through mid spring.

"After spawning, sheepshead return inshore," he informed. "This shoreward migration typically begins in mid to late March and often lasts through the end of April."

Sutton claims that the jetties present sheepshead with the ideal feeding grounds while they are concentrated in the nearshore waters of the Gulf.

"The rocks of jetties are home to various crabs, barnacles and other crustaceans which make up most of the sheepshead's diet," he explained.

"Since many of these small creatures are found living on the submerged rocks, sheepshead will be found feeding extremely close to these structures."

The sheepshead found along the

jetties this time of year are there to spawn. Typically there are dense concentrations of larger females present. This gives anglers a chance at landing some giant sow convict fish that could reach double digits in weight.

Capt. Greg Verm of Fishing Galveston, TX Charters, claims the jetties are his number one hotspot for sheepshead in February.

"February usually represents the peak of the spawn for sheepshead in the Galveston area," stated Verm. "Every year we land our largest sheepshead during this month. We regularly see fish up to eight pounds caught by our clients, with a few tipping the scales to 10 pounds or more."

The tactics Verm uses to target the striped-convict fish along the Galveston jetties are pretty simple. He prefers to free-line live shrimp while keeping the bait as close to the rocks as possible.

Another strategy he employs is to use a small split shot weight above an 18 inch leader tied to a number one J-hook.

"I like a J-hook instead of a treble hook because it is less likely to get hung up in the rocks," he explained. "Using the lightest weight possible is also important.



Another option for winter anglers is the beginning of the annual black drum run. This can afford anglers the opportunity to catch the largest fish of their careers.

It allows the bait to sink slowly to the bottom in the midst of the current. A light weight also allows the angler to have better sensitivity between the end of the rod and the bait. The shrimp can then be slowly bounced or walked down the edge of the rocks, keeping it in the strike zone longer rather than having it plunge immediately to the bottom."

Black drum begin their annual spawn during February and it continues into the spring through mid April. Sutton states that these fish free spawn during this time period, meaning the females release eggs to be fertilized by males. Much of this reproductive activity takes places along channels and passes connecting bay waters with the Gulf of Mexico. This makes upper coast jetties prime locations for anglers to tangle with these hard pulling brutes.

Anglers can expect to find swarms of large female drum lurking along the depths out away from the rocks where they will be releasing their eggs. Smaller, "puppy" sized drum are typically found feeding right up against the granite along with sheepshead.

When the spawn is in full force by

mid March, it's fairly common for anglers to boat several drum weighing 30 pounds or more in an outing. Many refer to the peak of this action as the "Drum Run." With so many monster females stacked up in one area, this season represents a time when just about anyone can go out and potentially catch the largest fish of their life.

The smaller, puppy sized drum can be targeted just like sheepshead, with a free lined live shrimp worked up against the rocks. When pursuing the larger brutes, anglers should use fresh cracked crab on a bottom rig sporting a heavy weight to keep the bait along the depths where the females are lurking.



Capt. Ryan Battistoni provides encouraging instructional words and support as this young angler battles another scrappy fish.






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During the winter months sand trout are readily available around Texas upper coast jetties. When cooked fresh or shortly after being caught sand trout provide excellent table fare.

If all else fails, anglers are almost guaranteed to find a few sand trout willing to bite during the second month of the year. Sand trout frequent areas of deep water adjacent to or near channels and passes leading to the Gulf of Mexico throughout the winter and early spring, which means they are most certainly thriving along the granite.

It doesn't take much to coax a sand trout into feeding. Trade the live shrimp in for some fresh dead shrimp, and then peel the bait before placing it on the hook. Free line it with a small split shot, allow it to fall down the edge of the rocks, and wait for a thump.

Most of the time sand trout are found in schools, and where one is caught

there are certainly plenty more around. They make outstanding fresh fillets for anyone looking to have a fish fry in the near future. Their delicate meat is quite soft and loses its table fair if it is frozen for long periods of time.

The best times to fish the jetties will occur during periods of tidal movement, regardless of whether it is incoming or outgoing. Plan to move up and down the length of the rocks, targeting varying depths until aggressive fish are located.

Areas containing wash outs, eddies, and water flowing through the rocks are prime hotspots. A little trial and error will reveal where the fastest action can be found. Conditions may be less than desirable this month, but

anglers can count on encountering hard tugs from a few scrappy species along the granite.★★



Anglers will line up along Texas' upper coast jetties for the opportunity to catch quality sized sheephead like this.

Sight Casting for Drum and Sheepshead

On sunny days during late winter when shallow flats begin to heat up, black drum and sheepshead can also be found scouring over grass beds and shell reefs in search of prey. Some of the most exceptional areas to encounter these schools in shallow water lie along the middle and lower coast.

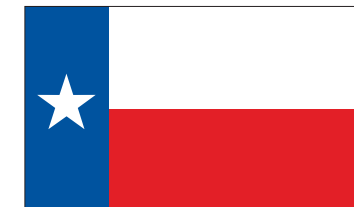
In these situations, sheepshead and drum can be sight casted to with both conventional and fly tackle. When using conventional tackle, a freshly peeled dead shrimp and a precise cast are the perfect combination for a hook up.

As far as fly tackle is concerned, flies imitating small shrimp and crabs seem to draw the most strikes. I've got a buddy that is absolutely ate up with fly fishing, and he claims that many inshore

fly anglers refer to the sheepshead as the "Texas Permit." The convict fish is a highly sought after trophy for those fishing the salt with a fly rod. ★



The author's friend, Nick Dancsak, with a sheephead he caught on the fly. Dancsak refers to sheepshead as the Texas Permit.



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Lake Roundup

CENTRAL TEXAS

By John Jefferson

The December 7 snow shocked me, as well as any fishermen on the water late the day it started falling. It probably had no effect on the fish, unless some thought for a bite or two that it might be chum of some sort. But it did foretell what December fishing might be like for the rest of the month: cold, damp, and not too stimulating.

Some of that carried over into January, and we can almost always expect an arctic blast or two in February. But there will also be some great fishing days, this month. Don't let the snowbound canoe picture keep you in front of the fireplace. Check the weather reports and get out on the water on the milder days. And don't get caught as the next front hits. We tragically lost a trotline fisherman that way a few years ago.

The new Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Toyota ShareLunker competition rules went into effect in January, but weren't formulated in time for the January edition of *TOJ*.

Space prohibits setting out the entire rules, which are probably listed elsewhere in this issue, but in brief, four new classes of Lunker entrants are now permitted: Lunker Legacy Class, Legend Class, Elite Class and Lunker Class.

Lunker Legacy Class more closely resembles the former ShareLunker rules, and is the only class for loaning lunkers weighing 13-pounds or more for spawning. Catch date requirements are



PHOTO BY JOHN JEFFERSON

Members of the Guadalupe River Chapter of Trout Unlimited stocked a 9.5-mile stretch of the river with trophy-size rainbow trout twice, and brown trout once in late 2017. Special regulations apply; see text.

Jan. 1 – March 31. A *livewell* of prizes is awarded about March 31, including entry into a drawing for a \$5,000 shopping spree and an annual fishing license, plus entry into a similar drawing with other class entrants at year's end.

Lunker Legend Class is for 13-pound bass caught all year, but not loaned for spawning, and includes prizes and entry into year-end drawing for the \$5,000 shopping spree and an annual fishing license.

Lunker Elite Class awards bass weighing between 10 and 12.99 pounds caught all year, and includes prizes and drawing entry.

Lunker Class awards bass weighing eight or more pounds, or over 24-inches, caught all year. It includes prizes and entry into the drawing.

But the best news for all big bass catchers is that anglers will now be able to quickly enter their catch on their smartphone using the new Toyota ShareLunker mobile app, which will be available for free download in the iTunes app store and on Google play or online on the new Toyota ShareLunker website, texassharelunker.com. Check the rules.

Bass fishing has been spotty up until now, and at press time, there had been no largemouths entered in this year's ShareLunker competition. Some have said that fishermen may be losing interest in it. Right; and they also have given up on girls, happy hour, and the Dallas Cowboys. Uh, maybe including the Cowboys in that list is a little out of place, this year.

Anyway, fishermen shunning the ShareLunker competition and the chance of winning an annual fishing license some clothing and equipment and the publicity of catching a 13-pound or more bass is about as likely as snow in August.

Word from the fishing hot-stove league tells us that through December and early January, the brave or deranged souls that ventured out caught their bass on crankbaits and drop shots. In case you're too young to *comprende* the reference to the *hot stove league*, that was the mythical place where baseball men were said to congregate during the cold months to talk about who the Yankees had traded for and how the Dodgers were going to fare with that new black second baseman. It was a time when baseball was the national pastime, and before TV, cell phones, iPads,

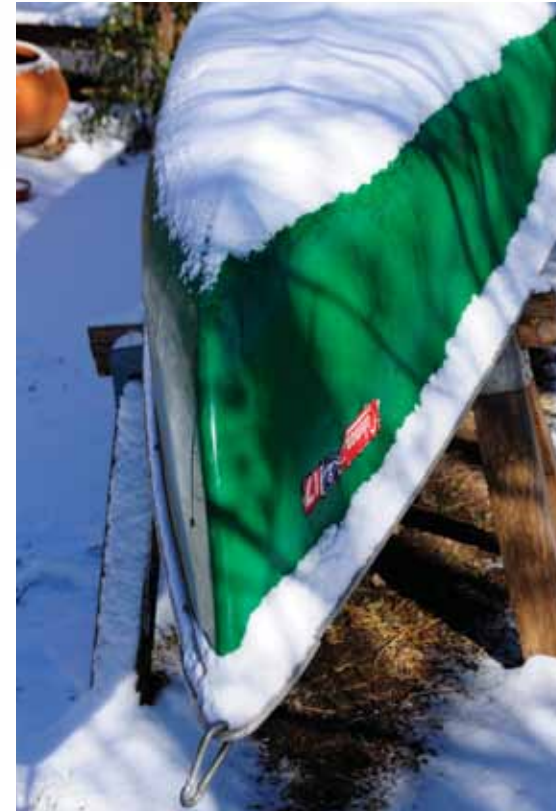


PHOTO BY JOHN JEFFERSON

Not today! Blustery winter weather discourages many would-be fishermen, but it's often a productive time to fish for striped bass, white bass, and trout on the Guadalupe River.

fishing lakes in Texas, monofilament and braided line and other modern diversions captured our interest.

Back in the December 2015 issue of *TOJ*, in his Bassology column, Matt Williams, *TOJ*'s Freshwater and East Texas Editor broke the story on a new bait with a funny sounding name that made his "Must Try Topwaters" list. This column followed up with its preview of this bait back in late summer of 2017. Now Allen Christenson, in his column in another publication, added to the list of successful winter baits the improbable Whopper Plopper, a topwater crankbait/buzzbait. Others are beginning to sing its praises, as well. Christenson, fishing on **Lake Travis**, was doubtful of a topwater crank with a buzzbait tail after his first experiment. He rightfully expected bass to be in deep water. Just before leaving the lake one day in mid-December, though, he gave it one more chance and landed a beauty of a black bass.

Jay McBride, in the fishing department at McBride's Guns, says the W-P is still selling well, but he still has a few left. It had become the number two best selling

lure in America. I expect its popularity will warm up like the weather over the next few months.

The Lower Colorado River Authority began lowering **Inks Lake** on Jan. 2, for a six-week drawdown to allow property owners to maintain docks and other shoreline property. It also will aid in curbing nuisance aquatic vegetation. The lake will be lowered about eight feet and will be refilled Feb. 10 -13.

A permit is not required for dock repairs, but all work must comply with LCRA's Safety Standards and must be registered with LCRA before commencing work. Registration forms and information are available by calling (512) 578-2324. Burning debris in the lakebed is not allowed.

LCRA says it has no plans to lower Lake Austin in 2018.

The cold and occasionally nasty weather is a reminder that it's time to fish for rainbow

and brown trout in the **Guadalupe River** in the Canyon Dam tailrace, west of New Braunfels. TPW annually stocks that stretch of river – and over 150 other sites. Many trout are stocked in Neighborhood Fishin' lakes, Community Fishing Lakes, and other public waters throughout Texas. Stocking of 305,525 catchable size trout will continue through February. To find a stocking site near you and when stocking will occur, check tpwd.texas.gov/fishboat/fish/management/stocking/trout_stocking.phtml.

In the Guadalupe, some bank fishing is possible. Wading is practical in many places. Excellent tips on trout fishing by my friend, TPWD Inland Fisheries biologist, Marcos De Jesus, are included at the site, above. This is an easy and effective way of introducing kids to fishing. Trout anglers will need the \$5 Freshwater Fishing Stamp, which is included in all freshwater license packages. Anglers under 17 years of age are not required to have a license nor purchase a stamp.

If you are after larger trout, the Guadalupe River Chapter of Trout Unlimited (GRTU) has stocked a 9.5 mile stretch of the Guadalupe River with trout up to 20 inches long. Special regulations apply to this part of the river. For details, see page 37 in the TPW Outdoor Annual, available free where licenses are sold or download the Outdoor Annual free app.

There are several guides that work the trout fishery by boat, using inflatable rafts that are comfortable to fish from, and can be horsed through the rocks. Gruene Outfitters (830) 625-4440 in Gruene keeps a list of river guides, as does Living Waters Fly Fishing (512) 828-3474 in Round Rock. Most cater to fly fishers, but also welcome spinning gear users.

If you want to learn more about trout and fly fishing, GRTU is conducting its annual TroutFest Feb. 16-18 at Lazy L&L Campgrounds on River Road, west of New Braunfels. Learning has never been as much fun!

White bass are starting their annual spring spawning run up creeks and river channels. It'll last into early March. With more water in the lakes and abundant shad, the whites are plentiful. Minnows and shad are their favorite food, but they fall for small jigs and anything that resembles a shad or minnow. **TAJ**



THE VIEW FROM ABOVE



The unique thing about flying surveys over Texas rangeland is the rich diversity of wildlife that shows up.

Story and Photography by Bob Zaiglin

As the South Texas horizon erupts into a brilliant orange glow, my mind races as I begin to anticipate what caliber of bucks I will see over the next few hours while I glide comfortably over the thorn scrub in the front seat of a helicopter piloted by a friend of many years, Dusty Holt. It's mid-October, and the peak of my activity as a wildlife biologist flying three to four ranches a week, attempting to come up with an estimate of deer inhabiting them.

Conducting an aerial game survey for most landowners is one of their annual highlights, but for a biologist, the helicopter is simply another technique in their repertoire of management tools that facilitates a unique numeric image of a deer herd. It's also a job, particularly if a substantial amount of one's time is spent conducting such surveys. This is particularly true when excessively high temperatures occur reducing deer movement and the cockpit heats up as the windshield intensifies the sun's bright rays like a magnifying glass.

The unique thing about flying over Texas rangeland is the rich diversity of wildlife that shows up when least expected. From the petite blackbuck antelope to the magnificent lacquer-black-coated scimitar horned sable antelope, one never knows what they may see next.



Virtually extinct in their native Africa, the majestic scimitar-horned Oryx is truly a sight to behold.sighting.

It's this anticipation of what will show up along with that next trophy whitetail that makes this survey method such a unique and enjoyable tool when it comes to surveying wildlife populations.

Long considered the most popular population survey method in South Texas, the helicopter, like any other technique,

has its advantages and disadvantages.

One of its major disadvantages is cost. At \$650.00 per hour, one can expect to cover approximately 1,200 acres, which equates to \$0.54 per acre. If one observes one deer per 20 acres (60 deer), each observation breaks down to around \$0.11 per observation, thus it's critical that an experienced observer is on board.

An aerial survey is at best only an assessment, not a census, the difference being that a census is a total count, while a survey is simply a rough estimate of the population.

The number of deer observed is often dependent on weather conditions. When elevated temperatures exist, deer become reluctant to run from the craft, thus an increased number of deer go unobserved. Based on research, as many as 50 percent of the deer on a ranch can go undetected, which can have a significant impact on the harvest recommendation.

After conducting helicopter game surveys on the same ranches for 10 years or more, I have found that in most cases 70 to at times 80 percent of the deer are accounted for, particularly on areas occupied by low-growing brush. It's when the brush is extremely thick and a virtually impenetrable over-story of mesquite and oak exists, that visibility becomes limited. In such situations, it's more effective to conduct the technique in late winter



With antlers extending at times to their hindquarters, a mature bull elk is always a relished sighting.

when a substantial amount of leaves are jettisoned, increasing visibility.

As for seeing all the largest racked bucks on a ranch, it just doesn't happen. The principal reason why this occurs lies in the fact that those bucks generally supporting trophy caliber racks are six years of age or older, thus they have for five or six years experienced what to them must be some sort of avian predator and

have learned to evade being observed. It's amazing how often I have returned after completing a survey to show a landowner or their guests a particular buck and fail to relocate the animal.

The same is true when returning to a ranch several weeks following a survey to capture a buck to be used in a permitted DMP pen. Even with the aid of a GPS waypoint on the buck's former position,



Although considered a problematic occupant throughout Texas, an old boar equipped with a substantial set of tusks is considered by many as a trophy animal.

I seldom relocate the animal. The fact is, older bucks are inherently reticent and hesitate to run from the aircraft.

For example, a few years back I was conducting a DMP capture on a McMullen County ranch I had surveyed on the same day. I spotted a buck on the flight that I intended to capture, but never found him, that is until that evening after the capture was over and he exited a maze of brush near our staging area where all 31 deer captured that day were dropped off and worked. We flew over that buck 31 times as we transported captured deer to our drop-off point and he held tight, apparently bedded down.

One may not see all the deer that inhabit a ranch being surveyed, but it represents several advantages that make the helicopter a valuable tool. First, it represents a rapid means of data collection, facilitating a precise estimate of fawn survival and the sex ratio of the deer herd, which is critical to making a harvest recommendation. When it comes to making a buck harvest recommendation based on population statistics obtained from an aerial survey, one can assume that it is conservative, and when it comes to managing for quality deer, nothing is more important than a conservative buck harvest.

The aerial survey also represents an exceptional view of the entire ranch. I use it as an educational platform, pointing out the various brush species important to deer as well as those species like whitebrush that are of little importance to the animals and could be mechanically manipulated to augment the development of plants more valuable to not only deer, but all wildlife.

It's also an efficient method of ascertaining tank levels and/or functional water troughs.

Although whitetail deer are of principal concern, a variety of hoofstock, predators, and birds inhabit the Texas landscape, and getting a chance to see some of them, especially those rare species, is always entertaining.

It's particularly interesting when surveying portions of Kinney and southern Edwards Counties where many of the exotics introduced in this region have escaped and roam freely across this oftentimes rugged terrain. I have seen some incredibly large aoudad sheep that prefer the rocky outcrops characteristic

of the region. And although these sheep are often problematic when it comes to providing feed for deer, there is something unique about watching an old, heavy-horned ram negotiate its way effortlessly up steep bluffs and over rocky terrain, with their long mane extending down their front legs shuffling back and forth as they run from the aircraft.

The sighting of a majestic elk always seems to take me by surprise. With beams extending out over and sometimes touching their hindquarters, they are without a doubt a unique inhabitant.

The feral hog continues to expand its range across Texas. Considered a menace and rightly so, particularly when one considers its damage to Texas rangelands. To see an old survivor in inhospitable terrain, particularly a well-tusked boar, is always a unique sighting.

Then there is the beautiful, cotton-white scimitar-horned Oryx that can at times take one's breath away. Once widespread across North Africa, Oryx were declared extinct in their homeland back in 2000. Today more exist in Texas than all of Africa.

These white-coated animals with a chestnut-brown chest, equipped with long, thin-pointed horns that curve slightly backward with a body size comparable to an elk, are always fascinating to see. Characteristically a gregarious species, they are seldom seen alone. Observing a herd of these animals on a slope inundated by post oak and mesquite, gilded by the early morning sunlight, is a sight to behold.

The opportunity to see an array of hoofstock is always fascinating, but more importantly, they must be managed as well. They represent competition to whitetail deer, which remains the reigning king when it comes to Texas ranchers.

All surveys generally have one objective, and that is to facilitate the management of all occupants of a property, but it's always rewarding to witness the fruits of one's efforts, which is the observation of an outstanding whitetail.

One of my management objectives is to have one trophy caliber buck exist per 1,000 acres; that is, I should or at least expect to see at least one trophy buck per 1,000 acres surveyed. If this is not the case, the numbers and age of deer observed on the survey is used to determine what must be done to accomplish the objective.

For example, if few bucks are calibrated as mature, the problem may be an excessive harvest of bucks, thus a reduction in the antlered harvest is recommended in order to increase the number of males reaching those older age classes when the largest racks develop. Based on my experience, at least 45 percent of the bucks observed must be in the mature age class of five

or more years of age before a herd can demonstrate its genetic potential.

Information obtained from an aerial survey is vital to management, and getting the opportunity to see some of those outstanding products of management, particularly to the landowner who pays the tab is important, plus if they are big enough, the bill is never a concern. **T&J**



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February means winter is in its final month and the search for sow specks is in full swing along the Texas coast. Quite often, however, the coldest, wettest weather of the year occurs in February and there's no real reason to believe this year will be any different. So, anglers should be prepared for some uncomfortable days on the water and some days when the weather is simply too bad to fish – meaning there will be a few more cancelled days in February than in most other months.

No matter how cold and nasty it gets in February, it's a safe bet there will be plenty of fishermen wading over mud bottom and seeking sow specks. However, speckled trout won't be the only game in town.

Anglers in bays up and down the coast can still experience good redfish action in February. The main adjustment for fishermen looking for reds in February has to do with time of day. Unlike summer, when an early start is a prerequisite to catching tailing reds, most of February's flats activity will take place in the middle of the day.

Additionally, black drum activity should be good along the Lower and Middle Texas coast during the second month. From the mid-point on the coast down to the Lower Laguna Madre, mangrove snapper action should also heat up as the water cools down. For those anglers looking to head south, snook action will be hot in the deep waters of the ports of Brownsville and Port Isabel.

Along the beachfront, whiting and sand trout will be common catches. Surf fishermen on the southern edge of Texas can expect to catch plenty of pompano during February as well.

All in all, February should be a good month for Texas coastal fishermen – despite the weather. About the only real negative would be a 'killer freeze.' Aside from that, there's really no reason the Texas coast shouldn't have excellent fishing in February. So, even if you have to bundle up, it's worth making a trek to the bay for the opportunity to catch the trout of a lifetime. **T★J**



In the Port Isabel/South Padre Island area, fishermen will have several different options this month. Anglers hoping to tangle with trophy trout will do best fishing along the west side and along the spoil islands along the ICW. Topwater plugs and big soft-plastics will be the key for big trout.

There will also be good numbers of trout found in the deeper holes and channels on the west side as well as in the ICW and the deep holes on the south end of the bay. The South Bay channels will be holding good numbers of black drum, redfish and trout. Freelined shrimp tend to produce the best catches in this area.

One of the better options for anglers in February – especially in inclement weather

— is the Brownsville Ship Channel. The Ship Channel is generally fishable under almost any weather conditions and yields good numbers of snook, mangrove snapper, trout, redfish, flounder, black drum and sheepshead.

According to Capt Steve Ellis, who guides out of Port Mansfield's Get-A-Way Adventures Lodge, February is prime time to be looking for trophy trout.

"We'll have some really big trout caught in February," said Ellis. "The key is finding the muddy bottom areas where the big trout hang. Those big trout like to feed shallow, but they won't get too far away from deep water."

"Some of the best spots are those small flats on the inside of the spoil islands running along the ICW. Those flats heat up quick and are close to deep water. So, those big fish will come out of the deep water and feed in the shallows. If you see bait anywhere on those flats, it's worth stopping."

"Later in the day, the fish will move up a little further on the flats. But, they will never get too far away from the deep water. Big topwaters and slow-sinking plugs are usually the best baits for big trout. If the fish are real finicky, we'll throw plastics."



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Fishing the Brownsville Ship Channel shoreline that is littered with concrete and rip rap is a good place to catch a variety of fish in February.

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PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Linesiders are stacked up in lower coast channels and deeper holes during late winter.

of the day. We can actually have some pretty good sight-casting days in February.”

Corpus Christi and Baffin Bay guide Capt. Justin Cooper of Laguna Adventures says anglers can choose to go after quality or quantity in February.

“In February I will be fishing two completely different ways,” said Cooper. “I will either be fishing for the large winter trout or to fill the cooler with as much fish as possible depending on what my customers want.

“In the search for the winter trout I will be wade fishing Baffin Bay and the southern shore of King Ranch, sticking to grass areas three feet or so deep that have deep water nearby. I like using paddle tails because you will get a little more action with a very slow retrieve. Many times a six-inch drop off is

all you need to hold fish. The littlest difference in the bottom gives you the best chances of catching a large winter trout. I encourage everyone to get out of the boat

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PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

A paddle tail soft plastic is a good bait to slow roll along shorelines or over shallow mud/grass flats for redfish.

and wade fish it's a whole new world.

“If we are fishing to fill the cooler we will be searching for drum in feet of water over muddy bottom in areas protected from the winds. We will fish with a bottom rig using a 1/2 oz. bullet weight Carolina style. We'll be fishing with live or dead shrimp and we always keep casting in the same area.

Once the shrimp scent gets in the water the drum will continue to come to it.” ★★



In the Aransas area, the vast majority of anglers will be heading to Nueces Bay during February. Nueces's combination of mud and shell bottom makes for an attractive winter home for speckled trout and redfish. Both of these species will be found in abundance around the reefs and over the muddy bottom flats at the back of the bay.

Waders can do particularly well in the back end throwing topwaters, slow-sinking plugs or soft-plastics. Around the reefs, live shrimp or soft-plastics will be the best bet.

The reefs in Aransas Bay and the deep wells in Corpus Christi Bay are also good options during February. Additionally, the old Navy base in Ingleside generally yields good numbers of black drum - including lots of oversize fish - during February. Traditionally, shrimp and sea lice are the best bets for Navy base drum.

Rockport area anglers should expect good catches of both specks and reds over the next few weeks - provided they can find some good, muddy bottom with some scattered shell. Of course, lots of areas in St. Charles Bay, Copano Bay and Espiritu Santo Bay fit this description. And, any of them can get hot in February.

Once fishermen find the key ingredients of mud, shell, mullet and three to five feet of water, they should find plenty of willing speckled trout. Soft-plastics and live shrimp will be the ticket to numbers of keeper specks.

Up a bit shallower, but over the same bottom composition, anglers can expect to find sow specks and redfish. Big topwaters and slow-sinking plugs will be the baits of choice to trophy trout, while soft-plastics and finger mullet will account for most of the reds.

Seadrift guide Capt. Nathan Beabout of N&M Sportsman Adventures says, “For those of us who guide here in the Seadrift area, February is when we start to get a little more excited about trophy trout. This month starts our big trout movement. In the months prior, some big fish have been caught. But from now until May is when we see them on a more regular basis.

“I have heard it time and time again, ‘we didn't know fishing could still be good during the winter.’ I am here to tell you, it can be some of the best days ever experienced. Just like last year, we are not experiencing a true winter. Yes, we do get cold fronts. But in two to three days tops, they are gone and we warm back up.

“February can host many days of great conditions as well. A lot of times we'll have 50 to 70 degree days with cloudy to partly cloudy skies and with a 10 to 15 mile per hour wind. What more could you ask for?

But, the days do not always have to be sunny and bright to have a good day. Some



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Sometimes discovering the right depth to find fish in the winter is just a few inches difference. The only way to determine this difference is to get out and wade fish, feeling the bottom with your feet.

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PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Out of Seadrift, find the right combination of bait and bottom composition and anglers will have the opportunity to sight cast to redfish.

of my best days during this month will be on the chillier side with no sun. Days like this are when we see most of our trophy trout action. These fish go on an aggressive feed, because they are preparing for the

next couple days when they are going to lay around and conserve energy.

"After a cold front pushes through, we can be left with days of little or no water in our bays. During these times,

many main lakes and outside shoreline spots can hold big schools of reds. Some of these fish can be hard to get close to or tough to catch. But just keep working these different areas and you can run across schools that are aggressive.

"Either wading or sight casting from the tower is a fun way to approach these fish. From the tower, if conditions are right, with low winds and sunny skies, more ground can be covered and many single cruising reds can be picked off.

"The biggest thing to keep in mind fishing in the month of February is always try to locate lots of bait and dirty streaks in the water. Also, because our tides can fluctuate so much during this month, do not be afraid to try new areas - especially if that new area has the key ingredients to hold fish.

"Whichever activity you choose during this month, remember, fishing should hold the same pattern as previous months because of similar weather patterns. Just be sure to know your tides for the day or given area you are trying to fish.

"Stay courteous and mindful of others around you. Everyone out there is simply trying to enjoy this great resource we have." ★★



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

In February there are the unexpected big tugs that come while sight casting to redfish — like this big black drum.

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CHASING WHITES

Statewide fishing forecast, hot spots and tactics for the white bass run.

Story and Photography by Matt Williams

You can have those Broadway musicals and other black tie affairs. When it comes to stage productions, I'd much rather punch my ticket to a lazy Texas river system during the height of the white bass spawning run.

Trust me. You won't see any shiny shoes or starched shirts in these arenas. What you will see are boatloads of smiling faces plus plenty of ball caps and knee-high rubber boots. You might even see a toboggan or two. That's because curtain time usually falls on one of nature's greatest shows while it's still chilly outside,

long before the spring green-up.

In a round-about way, the white bass spawning run is to freshwater fishing crowds what the September dove season is for Texas hunters. For many casual anglers it marks the first opportunity of the year to wet a hook, ultimately bringing an end to nasty dose of cabin fever that has been building for the past few months.

I'm thankful to not be a member of the casual crowd. Fishing is a game that never ends in this corner. I fish for whatever is biting 12 months a year. Come February, I always make a point to set aside a day or

two to get in on the white bass run.

When it comes to fun fishing, this is one game that drips with good opportunity. I say that for several reasons.

For starters, white bass are aggressive by nature and tend to travel in large groups. Where you find one, there are likely to be others. Possibly hundreds.

The nomadic sport fish are abundant in major reservoirs around the state and they spend most of the year roaming in open water, away from the bank. Like other fish, white bass spawn during the spring. But they don't go to the bank and

build nests to do it.

When conditions are right, swarms of white bass will point their noses into the current and begin finning their way upstream in rivers and creeks that feed major reservoirs. Many won't stop for miles.

The males are the first ones to make the journey, then the females. There is not much organization once the actual spawning process gets underway. Nor is there a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship established among the fish.

A female white bass may be in the company of several males when she releases her eggs. The males react by spewing milt that fertilizes the eggs, which in turn drift slowly downstream until they attach to a log, rock or some other underwater obstruction.

The eggs generally hatch within a few days and the juveniles continue the journey back to the lake proper. Those that survive the trip will grow to become the next generation of white bass for anglers to catch.

That's your biology lesson for the day. Now let's get to the good stuff, like the best places go cash in on the spring spawning run and what to expect once you get there in terms of access points and fishing quality.

I looked to several Texas Parks Wildlife Department inland fisheries biologists representing various regions of the state for input. Here's what they had to say:

Tyler South (Post Oak)

Hotspots: Rick Ott oversees more than a dozen reservoirs around the Post Oak region but ranks the Neches River above Lake Palestine as the top spot for the fastest action once the spring spawning run gets underway in February and March.

Best Access Points: "The Chandler River Park (where SH 31 crosses the Neches River) is the best access point for bank anglers, boat anglers and kayak anglers," Ott said. "This location is also a designated Paddling Trail with signage. A large parking lot is available and there is a foot path below the SH 31 Bridge to give anglers access to the river both above and below the bridge without having to cross the highway."

Bank Access: Ott says Chandler River Park offers several miles of bank access downstream and for about a half mile upstream.

What to Expect: The boat ramp at Chandler Park can accommodate bass boats, but it is much easier to get around in jon boats and kayaks due to downed trees, logs and brush. Ott says anglers can expect to find good numbers of males in the 10-14 inch range and females up to around 17 inches.

Best Tactics: Ott says jigs rigged with slip bobbers and small spinners are the top producers.

Dallas/Ft. Worth

Hotspots: Biologist Rafe Brock pointed out that there aren't many fishable river sections in the DFW area due to the extensive levee system and the amount of reservoirs in the area.

"However the Clear Fork of the Trinity south of Lake Benbrook at the Hwy 377 crossing, along with Denton Creek at the 377 crossing just north of Roanoke, and the Elm Fork Greenbelt on the north side of Lake Lewisville are good river sites to catch white bass in the spring," he said. "The main key is flowing water. The more water you have running in the river or entering the reservoir the bigger the spawning run will be. Also the more water the better the success of the spawn which results in abundant populations."

Best Access Points: Brock said access available at the Highway 377 and Elm Fork Greenbelt crossings listed above.

Bank Access: Brock says bank access can be found at the Highway 377 and Elm Fork Greenbelt crossings but pointed



Sabine River guide Kathy Wheatley shows off a big white bass caught while fishing her home waters.



Casting small Rat-L-Traps, crank baits and Roadrunners to the edge of sandbars and then working it back toward the deeper waters of the Sabine River is a good way to tie into a big white bass.

out that traversing the shoreline can be difficult in places.

What To Expect: Brock says DFW river/creek fishing is limited primarily to jon boats and kayaks. Anglers can expect to find good numbers of fish up to 14 inches. “With the past two years of above average rainfall, these populations should be very good for the next couple of years in most of the larger DFW reservoirs,” he said.

Best Tactics: Brock says small spinners, Rat-L-Traps, Roadrunners and live minnows rule. “The best place to locate fish are pools below sand bars or other obstructions such as log jams that impede the fish from going up stream,” he said.

Central Texas, Hill Country

Hotspots: Biologist Marcus De Jesús ranks the Colorado River above Lake Buchanan as the best in the region, provided there has been ample rainfall to promote some current. “It’s considered one of the prime runs in the state when flows are good,” he said. “Canyon Lake and Granger Lake also have some decent runs.”

Best Access Points: The biologist says one of the best access points on the Colorado is Colorado Bend State Park, which flanks a prime spawning area. Anglers can also access the bottleneck just above Buchanan by using the Burnet County Boat Ramp.

Bank Access: “Colorado Bend State Park offers tons of shoreline/wade fishing opportunities,” De Jesús said. “There’s also a park called ‘The Steps’ along the

San Gabriel River above Granger Lake that provides adequate bank access, but very little bank access available on Canyon Lake.”

What To Expect: De Jesús says larger boats can be useful above Buchanan and at Canyon, when river flows are sufficient. However, small jon boats a much better choice for navigating around stumps in skinny water. Anglers can expect to catch good numbers of fish in the 12-15 inch range, although 16-17 inches are not uncommon.

Best Tactics: “Once the fish start



When chasing white bass on one of Texas rivers, particularly in southeast Texas a jon boat is the best craft to maneuver in shallow water and around stumps or wood debris.

moving upriver, trolling with crankbaits is a popular method to locate them,” De Jesús said. “If you catch one or two chances are that there’s a school in the area to target casting moving baits from a still boat. Once the fish reach their spawning sites, they stack in shallow waters, over gravel or sand beds, where they may be easiest to catch. Sometimes the bite shuts down when the sun gets high. Some anglers use Clouser minnows on a fly rod to finesse these finicky fish.”

Central Texas

Hotspots: “The two best white bass runs in my district for numbers of fish and access are the Nolan River above Lake Whitney and the North and

Middle Bosque Rivers above Lake Waco, says biologist John Tibbs. “Another good one is the Leon River above Lake Belton. A wild-card spot is on the Navasota River immediately below Fort Parker State Park Lake.”

Best Access Points: Tibbs says the Nolan River can be accessed by boat at Kimball Bend Boat Ramp and also from shore off FM 933 in the vicinity of the Rock Creek Bridge. The North and Middle Bosque Rivers are best accessed by boat at Reynolds Creek, Airport Park, or Flat Rock Ramps for the North Bosque, and

Midway or Twin Bridges boat ramp for the Middle Bosque. The Leon River can be accessed by boat from Leona Park Ramp.

Bank Fishing: Baylor Camp Rd. for the North Bosque and Barrett Road Corp of Engineers access for the Middle Bosque. The Leon River can be fished from shore at Iron Bridge Park (small boats can also access here). The Navasota below Fort Parker State Park Lake is accessed from shore off State Highway 14.

What To Expect: “All but the Navasota can be accessed with larger boats, but smaller jon-boats are fine too,” Tibbs said. “Small jon-boats, canoes and kayaks can be launched at all of the shore accesses with the exception of the Nolan River access, where parking is distant from the river.

Kayaks are extremely popular at the Barrett Road access on the Middle Bosque River, and during the run, expect a large crowd and very limited parking. The Navasota River generally has the largest fish on average, but good fish can be caught in all of the areas mentioned.”

Best Tactics: “Fish in our area also stack up in the upper ends of the impounded reservoir, generally in the river channel

itself, but the run usually starts in February,” Tibbs said. “Knowledgeable anglers will often stop short of where everyone is congregated catching small males and look for big females making their way up. Trolling is an excellent approach, particularly early in the run. By the time most anglers have heard that the white bass are running, the larger females are done and heading back to the lake.”

Northeast Texas

Hotspots: Sabine River at the Black Shoals. “This in an area of the river downstream of Highway 59 between Marshall and Carthage, where a natural coal outcropping can limit the upstream movement of white bass as long as

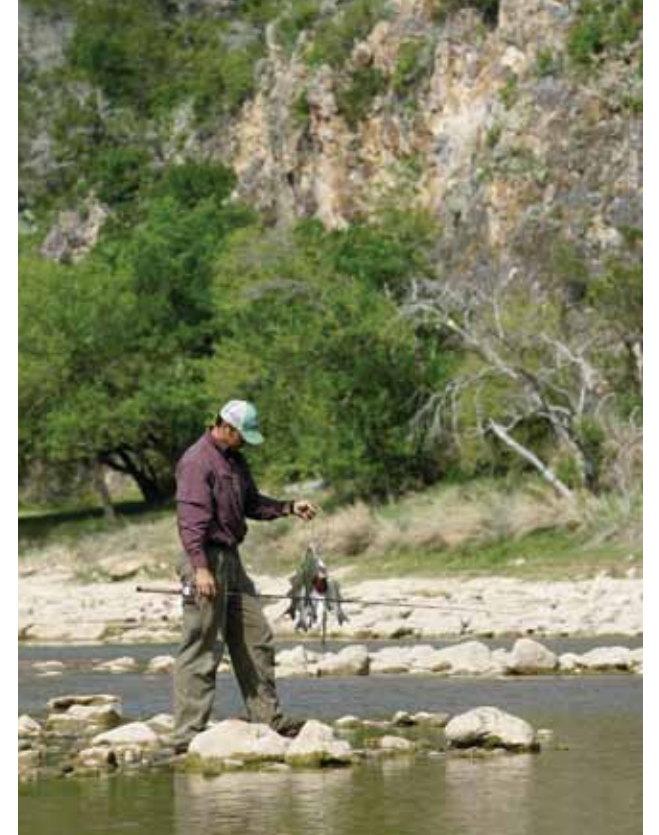


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This white bass inhaled this small crank bait. During the winter run anglers should work their lures slowly in the cold waters.

the river isn't too high," biologist Tim Bister said."

Best Access Points: FM 1794 public boat ramp.

Bank Fishing: No access.

What To Expect: Bister says the best fishing is about two miles above the public ramp. "There are several areas with rocks

to be careful of on the way upstream," he said. "This stretch of the river is more suited for jon boats."

The biologist said anglers can expect to catch a lot of small males early in run, but once the females make their moves the number fish caught upwards of 15 inches is sure to go up.



A small crawfish pattern crank bait and a Roadrunner are two lure options white bass anglers use statewide.

Best Tactics: "Probably one of the best tactics to locate fish is to look for eddies in the river," Bister said.

"These eddies will be created by obstructions that reduce water flow. Rocks, fallen trees, and collapsed river banks can all create areas that fish can rest out of the higher current in the river, which make for likely targets to fish as anglers make their way up river."

Southeast Texas

Hotspots: Eastern Texas is home to three of the best white bass rivers in the state — the Sabine above Toledo Bend, the Angelina above Sam Rayburn and the Trinity above Lake Livingston.

"The Sabine is top-notch," biologist Todd Driscoll said. "It produces good numbers and lots of big fish." According to TPWD records, the Sabine produce a 4.04 pounder in 2010.

Best Access Points:

* **Sabine:** Public ramps are available at the Logansport bridge near Joaquin, Yellow Dog County Park, McFadden Park and FM 2517. There also is a private fee ramp at River Ridge fishing campground off FM 699 north of Tenaha.

* **Angelina:** Public ramps are available at Marions Ferry, Kingtown and Shawnee Landing. Primitive ramps can be found at the old tram off Saints Rest Rd on FM 1275 and at the US 59 crossing between Lufkin and Nacogdoches.

* **Trinity:** Numerous public ramps are available near the river's bottleneck of Highway 190, but the meat of the run takes place much farther north in the vicinity of the SH 21 and SH 7 crossings. Public launching is available at the Highway 21 crossing.

Lock-N-Dam Marina just north of the

Highway 7 crossing has a trolly launch for boats 16 feet or less with outboards up to HP. It costs \$20.00.

Bank Access: Bank access along the Trinity is available at the Highway 21 crossing and at the Lock-N-Dam (for \$2 fee). Angelina anglers can fish from shore at Shawnee Landing, the old tram and around Kingtown. Public ramps and parks provide the best access on the Sabine.

What To Expect: Bass rigs can be used on all three rivers, but jon boats are the best way to go by far, especially when river flows are low or when fishing around the brush cluttered upper reaches of the Angelina.

It's not just a numbers game, either. Fish upwards of two pounds are caught with frequency during the height of the spring spawning run on all three rivers, but the Sabine probably has the overall edge in terms of size.

Best Tactics: Small spinners, Roadrunners, shallow running cranks and Rat-L-Traps are hard to beat. When water temps are cold it is important to use a super slow retrieve. Should the bite get slow, try tipping a Roadrunner with

a minnow or crawfish. Live crawfish also can be deadly at times.

South Texas

Hotspots:

* **Nueces River:** Greg Binion, area biologist says the stretch of river that lies upstream from Lake Corpus Christi to several river miles past the town of George West is consistently good. "I have found a good date to key on is Valentine's Day for peak of this run, he said. "Of course, good fishing can be had on either side of this date and the peak may vary a couple weeks on either side."

* **Lake Texana:** "This is a less known fishery, so may be a good location for folks looking to find a little more solace and escape the bigger crowds that the Nueces often draws," Binion said. "Areas to key on are Mustang Creek and the Navidad and Lavaca arms. Good reports come out of Mustang Creek regularly."

* **Frio River/Choke Canyon:** "The Frio and upper portion of Choke Canyon have provided some of the best white bass angling I have observed in the 10 years I have worked this area," Binion said. "However, low water conditions

have resulted in inconsistent white bass angling conditions and success over the last five years. Good catches can still be had, but it is more of a high risk-high reward proposition relative to the Nueces River opportunities."

Best Access Points: Nueces, Highway 59 Bridge in George West; Texana, public ramps; Frio River, Highway 99 bridge.

Bank Access: Binion says the best bank access for the Nueces is at the Highway 59 Bridge; Highway 99 Bridge on the Frio.

What To Expect: The biologist says Nueces and Frio anglers anglers can expect to catch good numbers of quality fish up to 16 inches. Most of these areas can be accessed with jon boats and larger vessels, alike. Anglers should use caution when motoring due to abundant timber and woody debris.

Best Tactics: Binion says small crankbaits, Rat-L-Traps, and tandem jig set-ups are the most effective. He advises fan casting the timber edges until isolated groups of fish are located.

Trolling is another highly effective tactic and a good way to cover a lot of water, he said. ★★



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Get Shorty

If wading through the Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA) and the National Firearms Act (NFA) and all things administered by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) is enough to give the Supreme Court a headache, what about the rest of us? The NFA regulates firearms capable of fully automatic fire, suppressors, and short-barrel rifles and shotguns.

With short-barrel firearms both barrel and overall length are part of the equation. It is legal for citizens who can pass the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) to purchase such firearms, but the paperwork piles up, the process is lengthy, and a \$200.00 transfer tax must be paid to the Treasury Department on top of the retail price of the firearm.

For those that have dreamed of having a “sawed-off” shotgun to repel highwaymen and protect the virtuous without jumping

through bureaucratic hoops, help has arrived thanks to America’s oldest family run firearms manufacturer, O. F. Mossberg & Sons reading the fine print and going through all of the above initials.

Before getting to what Mossberg hath wrought let us quote part of the “It’s O.K.” letter from the ATF to Mossberg...

“Certain firearms, having attributes similar to your sample, have been previously classified by our Branch, such as the weapon described below:

- Utilizes a shotgun-type receiver that has never has a shoulder stock attached.
- Fitted with a “bird’s head” grip in lieu of a shoulder stock.
- Pump action.
- 12 gauge, 14-inch smooth-bore barrel.
- Overall length exceeding 26 inches.

The weapon, as described above, is a “firearm” subject to GCA provisions; however, it is not a “firearm” as defined by the NFA.” Ah, loopholes!

This weapon is the Mossberg 590 Shockwave pump-action shotgun and available in 12 and 20 gauge versions. Both have cylinder bore heavy walled 14-inch barrels with 3-inch chambers, a bead front sight (useless), and a matte blue finish. The 12 gauge weighs 5.25 pounds and the 20 weighs 4.9 pounds.

The Shockwave features reliable dual action bars for chambering and extraction, a hard anodized aluminum receiver, black polymer trigger guard, sliding tang mounted safety, and from Shockwave Technologies a ribbed black polymer forend with Raptor Strap Kit and smooth black polymer Raptor Bird’s Head grip. Both the magazine cap and the grip are fitted with sling studs for various carry options. A single sling attached to the grip allows for over the shoulder or across the chest carry for convenient varmint or snake protection.

Magazine capacity varies based on shell choice. The Shockwave’s capacity is 5+1 when loading 2 3/4” shell 3” shells drops the capacity to 4+1.

Aguila Ammunition has some dandy Mini Shells that are 1 3/4 long and



The Mossberg “Shockwave” 12 gauge shooting OO buckshot was devastating at seven yards.

increases the capacity to 8+1, but to make these feed reliably you need to add an accessory called the OPSol Mini-Clip for only around \$15. It is a rubber block that is pressed in to the grip end of the receiver to take up the space. Push it out when going back to standard length shells.

It is worth the extra effort because the Minishells greatly reduce recoil while providing surprising performance. This short shell in their buckshot loading carries seven pellets of #4 buckshot and four pellets of #1 buckshot for a total of 1 oz. of lead shot leaving the muzzle at 1200 feet-per-second. Also, they are very reasonably priced.

The handy compact size of the Mossberg Shockwave makes it desirable for home/office protection, vehicle carry, varmint disposal, back country backup and more. But, practice is the operative word and recoil is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The only way to shoot a Shockwave is from the hip. We are not taking “Shorty” to the skeet field. Though the barrel has a brass bead on the front do not attempt to hold this gun up to your cheek or in

front of your face for sighting because you are asking for expensive reconstructive surgery. Do not place it against your pelvis like the “Rifleman” and touch it off though your orthopedic surgeon will thank you. Remember the times you have fired shotguns from your shoulder and went “Ouch!”

Although the forend strap has been touted to keep your hand away from the muzzle it is of great benefit in holding the muzzle down. When you touch off a Shockwave most of the recoil goes up not back.

Proper procedure for me is based on my short arms. While shooting I pushed the grip in to my right side “love handle” for an anchor. Folks with longer arms should lock their elbow in to their side. Point shooting with this shotgun at nominal self defense range out to 7 yards is easy with practice.

Now, let us remember recoil. My example is in the included photo of my 12 gauge pattern on a silhouette target fired at the Athena Gun Club in Houston. I was using what I found in my stash which was Hevi-Shot 2 3/4 inch shells sending downrange heavier than lead 00 buckshot. This is 9 pellets at .33 caliber each which is devastating on target.

My outstanding head shot was not based on my sharpshooting ability, but the fact that my center of mass hold combined with the whopping recoil of the Hevi-Shot load pulled the barrel upward. I still got the desired results, but not intentionally.

I refocused on the second shot and put nine pellets where I intended. Though the Mossberg Shockwave 12 gauge is rated for 3-inch shells I am not one to yell “Watch this” before I touch one off. You are on your own in that endeavor.

The 20 gauge Shockwave is much easier to control and with a strong arm and the right ammunition you could hold it straight out in front of you and cut loose. My test target shows two rounds that put 40 pellets of 20 gauge #3 buckshot (.25 caliber each) in the boiler room. That’s entertainment.

The Mossberg Shockwave is a versatile, portable tool when loaded with ammunition appropriate for the mission. Think #8 shot for snakes, slugs for big carnivores, buckshot when carried in your vehicle and #4 shot as home/office protection. Remember in the home the bigger the shot the more penetration

through the sheetrock.

There is already a growing aftermarket for accessories such as receiver mounted shell holders, over the shoulder scabbards and more. Those are just a Google or Amazon search away.

The Mossberg 590 Shockwave is now available at retailers in the reasonable

\$400 range. A word of warning — Do Not acquire one of these tools and think you are being cute by changing out the Shockwave grip for a pistol grip or shoulder stock. Should you do so, you will open yourself up for a ton of grief from all of the alphabetized agencies mentioned at the beginning of this article. **T★J**



Top to Bottom: A Mossberg 500 with 15-inch barrel, Mossberg 590 “Shockwave” with 14” barrel, and Ithaca “Stakeout” with 13” barrel. Top and bottom models need NFA paperwork and \$200 transfer tax.

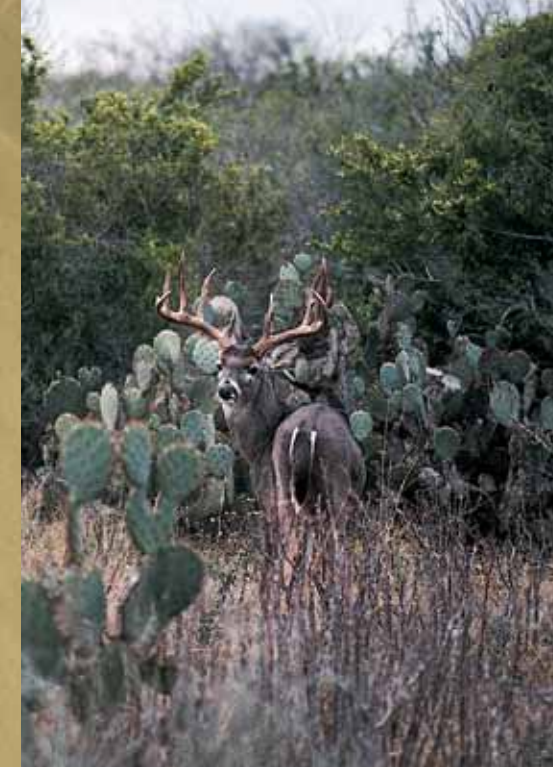


Two rounds of 20 gauge #3 buckshot from the “Shockwave” deposited 40 pellets center mass at seven yards. The author commented the key was controlling muzzle rise to stay on target. The 12 gauge had more recoil in higher hits, while the 20 gauge, with less recoil was easier to keep on target.

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Changing the Limit

It's never a bad idea to check the daily bag and size limits when you visit a Texas bass lake for the first time, particularly if you plan to keep a few fish for the freezer or hope to catch a trophy to mount. That's because the limits that govern black bass can vary significantly from one lake to the next.

A fish that is perfectly legal to toss in the livewell at one impoundment lake may not be legal on another lake just a few miles down the road.

Currently, close to 80 percent of Texas public reservoirs 500 acres or larger in size are managed by the statewide five fish, 14-inch length limit. The Texas Parks Wildlife Department implemented the 5-14 regulation in 1986, replacing a much more lenient 10 fish, 10 inch daily limit that had been in place for years. The change, which came at a time when you could still buy a fishing license for \$8, marked the movement from what fisheries scientists call a maximum sustained yield to an optimum sustained yield fisheries management philosophy.

While most Texas lakes fall under

the statewide regulation, more than two dozen (30) lakes have "special limits" that are designed to suit bass populations at individual lakes or to help meet specific management goals.

Among them are higher minimum length limits, varied slot limits and total catch and release. The earliest of these special limits was an experimental three-fish, 16 inch minimum length limit put in place in 1979 on lakes Nacogdoches and Fayette County.

The restrictive regulation was implemented following a severe overharvest of bass that decimated the population shortly after 2,200-acre Nacogdoches opened to the public, and to help prevent the same thing from happening at Fayette County.

Not long thereafter, first experimental slot limit of 14-18 inches went into effect at lakes Monticello and Calveras. TPWD as since established three other slot limit variations within its toolbox of special limits. Among them are a 14-21, 14-24 and 16-24.

Changes Coming



If inland fisheries managers have their way, the number of Texas lakes managed by those slot limits and other special limits could be significantly reduced by this time year.

If inland fisheries managers have their way, the number of Texas lakes managed by those slot limits and other special limits could be significantly reduced by this time next year.

The reason? In a nutshell, biologists are looking for ways to streamline bass regulations to make them less confusing and enforceable without hampering the management goals on individual lakes.

TPWD fisheries managers briefed the TPW Commission on the possible changes last November that could impact largemouth bass regulations on more than a dozen Texas lakes.

The department is currently asking for public input on the possible changes before Commission votes to accept or amend them during its annual regulatory hearing that is slated next month in Austin.

"Largemouth bass are one of the first species we started managing in the state, and we've done a great job managing our bass fisheries through time," said Dave Terre, TPWD Chief of Inland Fisheries Management and Research. "Our process has been to use different kinds of regulations for bass to accomplish specific management goals. With these potential changes, we still hope to attain the same management goals, but we are trying to reduce the number and kinds of special regulations with the goal of making them less complicated, more easily understood and enforceable."

Managers of those 12 lakes currently under special limits could be placed under the statewide 5-14 rule and another half dozen could see a revised special limit that is better suited to the current bass population dynamics found in those reservoirs.

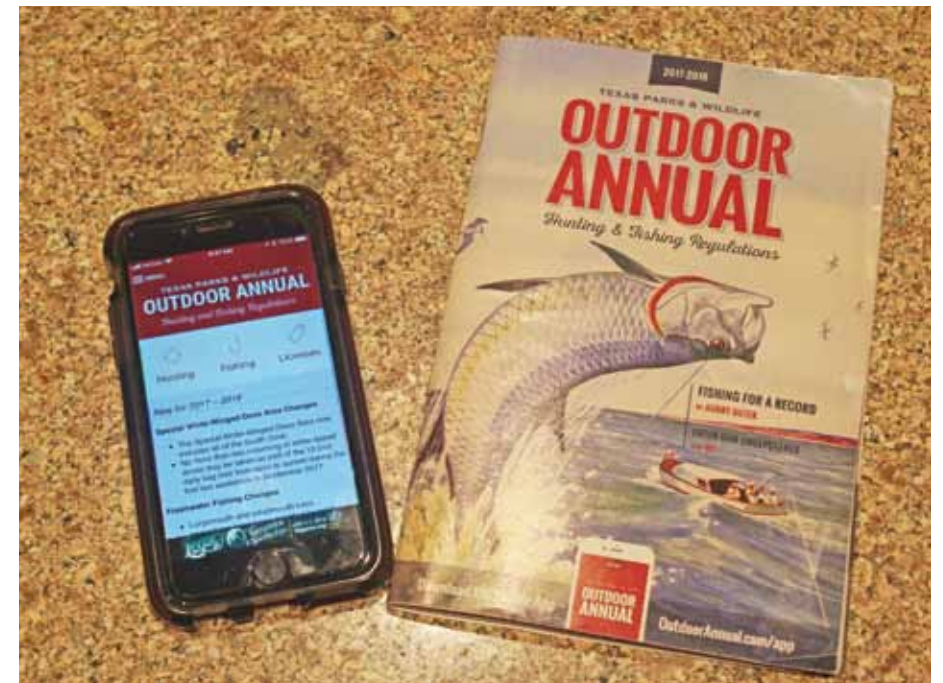
East Texas lakes that could revert to the 5-14 regulation include Ratcliff, Bryan, Cooper, Madisonville, San Augustine and Old Mount Pleasant.

In north and central Texas, lakes Granbury, Possum Kingdom, Bridgeport, Burk-Crenshaw, Georgetown and Sweetwater also are being considered for the statewide regulation of five fish, 14 inches.

Five of the six lakes where special limits could be revised also are located in East Texas.

On Fayette County, Gibbons Creek and Monticello, fisheries managers are considering changing the current 14-24 inch slot limit to a 16-24 inch slot. At Purts Creek and Raven - both state park impoundments - a five-fish, 16-inch maximum length limit is being considered over the current catch and release only rule. Bass longer than 24 inches caught from any of the six lakes would be eligible for submission to the Toyota ShareLunker program.

The final three lakes on the list for a possible change include Lake Grapevine, Davy Crockett near Bonham and Bellwood near Tyler. On Grapevine, officials are considering no minimum length limit with a bag limit of five fish, of which only two can be less than 18 inches. Both Bellwood and Davy Crockett



Proposed changes on minimum size and bag limits on some lakes may result in a more standardized set of bass regulations. This could result in less time referring to the Outdoor Annual or app to assure legal limits.

are being considered for the five fish, 16 inch maximum regulation, which allows anglers to retain five fish daily under 16 inches.

Anglers are encouraged to voice their opinions on the possible changes by contacting Terre at 512-389-4855 or dave.terre@tpwd.texas.gov. **T★J**

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UPPER COAST



Matagorda guide Capt. Tommy Countz says most Matagorda area anglers will be spending the month of February in East Matagorda Bay chasing trout.

“In February I usually spend most of my time in East Bay,” Countz said. “We will be drifting scattered shell and looking for streaks of dirty water in the clear water. We will be throwing Norton Sand Eels, particularly the bright colors like Margarita and Electric Chicken, and MirroLure Lil’ Johns.

“On the other hand, if you want big trout, you have to pay your dues. You



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

When water temperatures really dip and water become super clear, slowly fish a paddle tail soft plastic right along the bottom. The slow retrieve combined with the vibration from the paddle tail will attract gamefish in the area.

have to wade through a lot of mud and make a lot of casts. But, there are a lot of big fish in East Matagorda and if you can find bait, you will probably find some big trout. So, if we are looking for big trout, we’ll be wading the shorelines and throwing topwaters and slow-sinking baits.

“Your odds of catching big fish are definitely best on the shorelines, but we regularly catch good fish when we are drifting the deeper shell as well. It is not uncommon to catch multiple 24 to 27 inch fish drifting. Six or seven-pound fish are commonly taken over the deep shell in February.

“The other options we have in February is the Colorado River and the Diversion Channel. We have been doing real well in the river. When the fish are up there, we either drift and kind of troll our lures

while drifting or anchor up and cast into the deep holes. It is also possible to get into some redfish while fishing for trout up there. As long as it stays salty, there will be fish there. And, the colder it gets, the better the fishing is up the river.

“Even though almost everybody is fishing for trout, my favorite thing to do in February is wait until after a front has blown all the water out and the water level is super low.

“About the second day after a front – when the wind has started to die down, but the water hasn’t jumped back up – I will wade the guts along the south shore of West Matagorda Bay for redfish. I will be throwing Black Magic Norton Sand Eel Jrs on 1/8 ounce Lazerlock jig heads. Once you find a red under these conditions, you can usually catch all you want – sometimes it’s a fish on every cast.”

Matagorda guide Capt. Kendall Kersh of Pure Salt Adventures says he’ll be seeking sow specks this month.

“February is usually one of the coldest months of the year and trophy trout fishing is our main focus,” said Kersh. “We will be focusing on wading the shallow flats adjacent to deep water during the

warmest part of the day. Big trout will move up on these flats when the sun is out or the air temp gets higher than the water temperature. Lures with slow presentations like Corkys and MirroLures are usually the best producers for these lathargic fish.

“When it’s really cold and the weather shows no signs of warming we also stay in the boat to drift deep structure. Deep water with a mud and shell mix usually is best. We throw ¼-ounce lead heads with Down South Lures retrieved slowly along the bottom.”

Sargent guide Capt. Trey Prye of Captain Trey’s Trophy Charters will still be chasing trophy trout in East Matagorda Bay in February.

“In February, I’ll be fishing East Matagorda Bay, looking for big trout,” said Prye. “I’ll be keying in on mud and shell, drains, bait – especially mullet since they are primarily on only a mullet diet that time of year. I’ll be throwing Corkies and tails. Usually I’ll be throwing Morning Glory/chartreuse or pumpkinseed/chartreuse. If we have a warming trend, I’ll be hitting the flats for a topwater bite. But, if it stays cold, we’ll keep throwing plastics and slow-sinkers. I expect to catch some really big trout in East Bay during February.”

Freeport guide Capt. Mike Segall of Reel Threel Charters says February is a bit



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. GREG VERM

Larger trophy trout will also be holding around the Galveston jetties, deeper bay well pads and along the Intracoastal Waterway.

of everything as far as fishing goes.

“In February, I do a little inshore and a little offshore fishing,” said Segall. “For the most part, I’ll be fishing in the bay in February. I’ll still be doing some state water snapper fishing and, if we have the right conditions, we’ll make some tuna trips. But, because of the weather in February, we’ll be fishing inshore most of the time.

“I’ll be making some trips down to East Matagorda Bay and fishing the reefs. I’ll also be fishing around Oyster Creek

and Bastrop Bay. If it gets really cold and the Brazos River has good water, we’ll also have some good trout fishing in there. A lot of these areas hold good concentrations of trout in the winter, so we can usually pick up our fish pretty quick. Usually in the river, if you find one fish, you’ll find a stack of them.

“Again, I’ll be doing both inshore and offshore, but it really depends on the weather. On bad weather days, it will be mostly inshore. But, if the weather breaks we will head offshore. We can have some



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. TOMMY COUNTZ

There are several options for anglers out of Matagorda. One of the most productive is to drift the mid-bay reefs of East Matagorda Bay for trophy speckled trout.

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PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. GREG VERM

Kids don't mind the colder weather, particularly when they are catching redfish from the Galveston marsh.

really good tuna trips this time of year if we get the right weather.”

Galveston guide Capt. Greg Verm says anglers in the Galveston Bay complex will have plenty of options during February.

“February will be the start of the black drum run along the jetties,” said Verm. “Sheepshead will also be making their way to spawn along the rocks. And, we will also still be doing our nighttime flounder gigging trips. We do really well on flounder once the water comes back in following a front during February.

“Redfish and trout in the bay and marsh are usually pretty solid in February as well. We

usually catch good numbers of specks and reds fishing live shrimp and finger mullet. But, you need to find some stained or off-color water for this. During the winter, a lot of the water is crystal clear. But, you will always do better fishing is slightly stained or off-color water. So, we'll actually look for off-color water during February.”

Sabine Lake guide Capt. Randy Foreman says fishermen can catch plenty of redfish and speckled trout on this Texas/Louisiana border during February.

“I'll still be on the north end of the lake looking for trout in February,” said Foreman. “I'll mostly be fishing in four to seven feet of water. But, on warm days, you can find those fish in two to four feet of water.

“I'll be using Down South Lures Southern Shad for the most part. I'll also be using mostly dark colors and rigging them on a light jig head.

“The main thing is, I'll be fishing over mud. I'll still be fishing the shell and mussel pads, but you've got to find the spots where the shell is mixed with mud. I won't catch a fish in February if I'm not over mud, because that's where the mullet will be. You find the mullet and you'll find the fish. There will also be a lot of redfish along the shorelines. I'll be fishing the deeper parts of the Louisiana shoreline for redfish in February. Really, what you want to do is fish each and every front. When the front causes the water to drop, the bait moves out. When that happens, you can whack those redfish right along the deep drops of the shoreline.” **T&J**

LOUISIANA COAST



Big trout will be the focus of most fishermen on Big Lake in February. Wading while throwing big topwaters or slow-sinking plugs will be the ticket to sow trout on Lake Calcasieu over the next few weeks. Most of the biggest fish will be



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. RANDY FOREMAN

Great fall fishing awaits anglers on Sabine Lake. Lots of options available from the ICW on the north end to the Louisiana shoreline and southward to Blue Buck Point to the south.

caught along the shorelines over muddy bottom. Traditionally the north end of the lake has yielded the most big fish during winter and early spring.

Anglers looking for numbers rather than a few big fish should stick to the mid-lake reefs and channel edges. Soft-plastics and live bait will produce more numbers than plugs during the cold periods.

February will be a mixed bag for Venice area anglers. Offshore fishermen

can still find some tuna over the mud lumps. But, caution is urged so be sure and monitor the weather. Although the lumps are only about 15 miles offshore, winter weather can make the right rough - or outright dangerous. But, fishermen who pick their days wisely can certainly get into some good action for late winter tuna around the mud lumps.

Inshore action will primary be concentrated on the west side of the Mississippi River. Trout will be holding in the deeper holes along the west side, where they can be targeted with soft-plastic jigs and lipless crankbaits. Hot spots include the Buras Canal and Taylor's Point.

Redfish will also be holding in the river. At times the reds will be mixed in with the trout, but most

often they will be found along stretches of rocky rip-rap shoreline. **T&J**

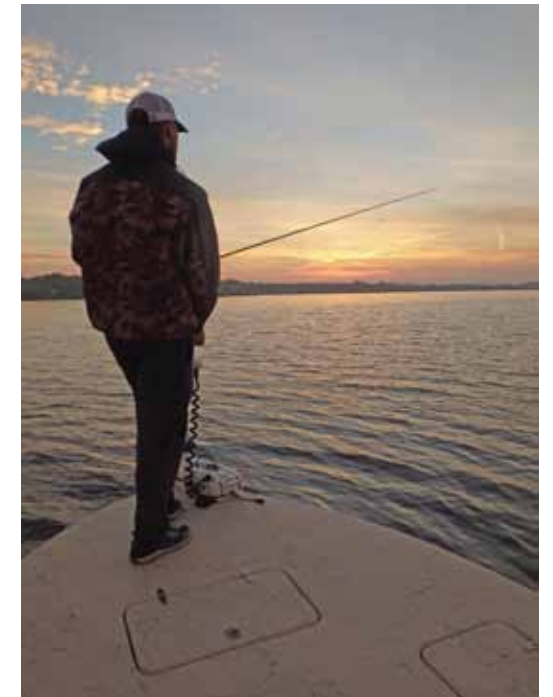


PHOTO BY NATE SKINNER

When north winds blow and tides drop out it is a good time to fish the deeper holes, shell and channels on Big Lake in southwest Louisiana.

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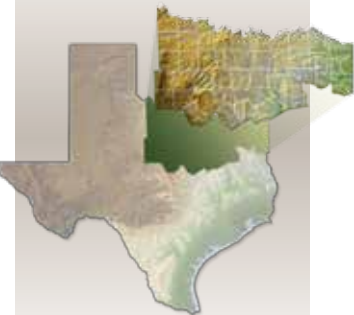
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Lake Roundup

NORTH TEXAS



By Brian Hughes

February really kicks off the big bass season in Texas. Yes, there will always be some big bass caught in November and December, plus March is THE big bass month according to the statistics. A combination of factors makes February the number two month as far as the numbers of really big fish that are caught.

The end of the month tends to see some milder weather. Although winter is by no means past, February can see moderating trends by the last couple of weeks of the month.

With warmer weather, bass begin to move towards the shallows and their spawning areas. Holding on a break line, bass will feed in anticipation of the spawning period to come. This makes them vulnerable to the fisherman. That is another of the factors in the February

big bass equation.

More fishermen begin to hit the water as temperatures moderate. More anglers mean more baits in the water, and more baits in the water means more fish caught. And more fish caught will yield more big bass. Many of these fish will be caught by hardcore fishermen that will fish in any kind of weather — including conditions that would keep many off the lake. Those rough days can produce fewer, but better fish, if one is willing to tough it out.

Here is what will be happening during the second month of the year on the water.

TEXOMA —Texoma is a good place to start because it is such a god fishery in February. While it is the northern-most lake for this forecast region it does have a great population of striped bass and smallmouth bass, so the lake will see plenty of action early in February, as well as later in the month.

Even though the water temps at Texoma will still be rather cold, these species in particular are used to cold water, and it doesn't bother them nearly as much as largemouth bass. In February bigger stripers will be moving up the river to spawn.

Dan Barnett, longtime guide on Texoma said, "These fish don't try to spawn until they are five years old or better, so these are the big double-digit fish we all want to catch." One successful tactic for these bigger fish is to follow the birds upriver and throw a white Hyper

Stryper with a pure white grub/worm type trailer. You can also use a five inch Assassin type swim bait in glow color for these 10-15 pound fish.

"Another way to catch these big fish is to fish shallow humps in the back of creeks in 15 foot of water. A white jig with real bucktail fur, and six inch white worm or grub as a trailer is a winning approach."

Something that came on the scene a few years ago is still working on Texoma stripers and will catch multiple big fish. "The Alabama rig hit the scene and took off up here," says Barnett. "We started making our own, and I call mine the Dan-O-Bama rig," he joked. "We had to have a bigger stronger bait for these stripers because they would destroy the commercially available products. When you get two fish over 15 pounds on one bait it is really hard on your gear." These are also rigged with swim baits in the five inch range, and white and/or glow in color.

As always, the live bait fishermen will have some success on the main lake drifting the flats and points for smaller fish, what they call "box-fish," that is keeper sized fish to take home.

Although it has been about 13 years since it was caught, the memory of "Splash" still lives strong in the hearts and minds of Texoma catfish anglers. A blue catfish, "Splash" was caught in 2004 at Texoma and weighed in at an impressive 121.5 pounds, a world record at the time.

Dan sends anglers to the main channel and the deep holes along there for big cats. "A three or four inch gizzard shad on a line will get their attention. You'll have to use your electronics and 'look for the hooks', as I like to say," Barnett advised, "Find the deepest pools in the creeks and use your electronics to scan the pools for fish. Then just drop cut shad or live bait (gizzard shad) down to the fish."

Smallmouth bass are a relatively under-targeted species at Texoma. A few tournament anglers and others in the know will look for these fish, but for the most part are overlooked by the average angler.

If people knew how many, and how

big, the smallies are at Texoma, they'd be focusing on them more often. Smallmouth bass will be in the pre-spawn mode and you should remember that they are not the same as the largemouth bass.

Spawning in colder, deeper water, they look for gravelly areas to lay their eggs. Pre-spawn smallmouth will be where the larger rocks play out into a gravel bank, staging around the larger rocks in 15 -20 feet, waiting to move in for the spawn. You can use jigging spoons from ½ to ¾ ounce in chrome/shad colors and you might catch not only these pre-spawn smallmouth, but spotted bass and largemouth as well.

Crankbaits fished among the rocks along the banks will find fish roaming about looking for a meal. Use a bait that dives 8-15 feet deep and work it into the rocks, making sure to bang it into the rocks to get their attention.

There are several other baits that will work on these smallies, from early in the month through the end of March. A ½ ounce jig sporting a #11 Uncle Josh Spring Craw pork rind is one option. You can also Texas rig a Zoom 4" lizard on a ¼ oz. weight, and six pound Fluorocarbon, or braid in 10 pound test with a two pound diameter.

FORK — This is the month that Lake Fork begins to shine. With over 250 bass entered into the ShareLunker program, Fork has a well-deserved reputation as the big bass producer. Starting in February anglers will be on the verge of catching their biggest fish ever on every cast.

February bass will be staging in the creeks, on points in 8-15 feet, in areas like Glade Creek, Burch Creek and Little Caney creek. A hard body suspending jerkbait like a Smithwick Rogue in Tennessee Shad will get their attention. Other options include the 'trap style baits in various shades of red and orange. Chartreuse and shad colors will also produce.

On the second day of warming after a front has passed, you'll see some bass movement to the shallows. Usually fish will move up along the creek channels and points in the afternoons. Although the first clear day after a front is tough, it just gets better after that, and this can be some of the best fishing all year.

A lack of grass will see a lot of fish relating to timber. This type of area is not very jerkbait friendly so a spinnerbait would be a better choice. White/chartreuse

with one silver (nickel) and one gold blade is a great choice.

When water temps creep into the 50s, usually by mid-February, try to find the staging areas. Start halfway back in creeks, looking for leftover grass, or even some new grass. You're looking for water five to six feet deep, with grass six to eight inches off the bottom. In order to find this grass you'll need to be mobile and keep looking up and down the creek. And once you find these conditions, work the area thoroughly.

If you're a swimbait fan try a 4 ½ to 5" swimbait with a one-eighth or one-quarter ounce weighted hook. Work it faster than you might think for a reaction bite.

For jig fishermen February is a dream month. Start pitching a ¾ jig in 5-10 foot of water at the stumps. Black/blue, pumpkin perch, white on white, and pumpkin neon colors are good choices. Start shallow in two to six feet and hit every stump that looks big enough to hide a big bass. Then, as the day goes on, and the sun gets higher in the sky, move out to the trees in 8-10 feet of water.

By late afternoon you'll want to make your way back shallow. The last hour of the day can be very productive as the fish know it's getting dark and they need to go ahead and find a meal. Anglers can also fish deeper with a drop-shot or Carolina rig and 4-5 foot leader, one ounce weight, and a full sized fluke. Rip it off the bottom and let it drop back in a natural motion.

Crappie at Fork will still be by the dam early in the month. Later in the month they will move to the stumps in the creeks around 12-18 feet deep.

Remember that through the end of February your first 25 crappie must be kept, regardless of the length. Look for the armada at the dam and join in, or go to the bridges. All of the bridges will hold crappie. Minnows or jigs are the choices here.

WHITNEY — With the current striper population Whitney is another lake that should be fantastic to fish in February. Add the sand bass population, the largemouths plus good catfishing, and Whitney truly has something for everyone.

Veteran guide Randy Routh has a little experience on the lake and provided his thoughts on February fishing. "The secret to February stripers will be creeks, creeks and more creeks," he suggested. "By mid-

month, the sun will shine on the water that is also protected from the wind, and cause rapid warming. This continues every day the sun is out.

"As the days get longer, the water warms more and more. The fish are very well aware of this and will show up in the backs of the creeks to bask in the warm temperatures while they last. Even the stripers will be drawn to this occurrence. At first this may only last a couple of hours each day. You'll want to take advantage of this by being in the creeks in the afternoons.

"For stripers, a 3/4 oz. bucktail jigs with a 6" worm trailer is my choice. I'll throw it pretty shallow to start and work my way through the water column until I connect. After that, it's just a matter of repeating the pattern in the other creeks."

While Whitney is pretty much a two-color lake, chartreuse and white, Routh says, "Occasionally we'll use something with the hologram-type stickers on it to reflect the light."

Early in the month Randy recommends trying the mouths of Little Rocky and Big Rocky creeks for stripers, using three-quarter to one ounce horsehead jigs in chartreuse and/or white. Use the strolling technique and fish at about 30 feet.

You may also want to try the flats between Harbor Master and the state park. "I like to use the Wild-Eyed Shad along there with kind of a dead sticking method, letting the wind, and motion of the boat, do most of the work."

Although February can be blustery, cold and inhospitable, it can also bring some of the best fishing of the year. So bundle up, have another hot chocolate, and get out there and go fishin'. 🌟🌟

EAST TEXAS



By Matt Williams



Lake Fork is primed to once again produce some monster largemouth bass. Look for bass to stage around points and in creeks in water 8-15 feet deep.

NACOGDOCHES - It's crunch time on Lake Nacogdoches. If you're looking for a place where you can catch good numbers of quality bass and stand a good chance of getting a big bite this is one lake you might want to check out in the next 30 days.

The fish won't be piled up on spawning beds just yet. Instead, they'll be staging at mid-range depths waiting for things to get right so they can make their move. It's hard to so say what the water clarity will be because this report was written around Christmas. Big rains can muddy things up in a hurry around here. So just keep that in mind.

Moving baits worked in water ranging 2-10 feet deep will be hard to beat right now. The best places to fish will be flats adjacent to secondary and major channel breaks. Places where a flat or point meets with a channel swing and underwater sloughs that provide a change on water depth can be particularly good.

There is lots of hydrilla and pad stubble in the lake right now, and that's what the fish will be relating to. The vegetation will be in a dormant stage a few feet beneath the surface. Moving baits that can be used to cover the upper water column just above the grass will get you bit.

Among some of the best lures to have handy now are a Rat-L-Trap, Chatterbait, square bill crankbait, swim jig, spinnerbait and swim bait. Suspending jerk baits also can be deadly around some of the deeper grass flats, especially if there is some wind to put some chop on the surface and the water is relatively clear.

Lake Nac is fed by several creeks. The best ones are Yellow Bank, Big Loco and Little Loco. Yellow Bank feeds the first pocket north of the power lines on the lake's west side. Big Loco and Little Loco feed the lake's extreme northern reaches. Big Loco enters on east side and Little Loco on west side. The two creeks join in the middle of the big flat just north of the Hayter camp house.

PALESTINE - The upper reaches of Lake Palestine always comes alive with big, lunker bass during early spring. February also is a good time to get in on some fast white bass action well beyond the Neches River bottleneck northward towards Chandler. That's when the annual spawning run occurs.

In a normal year droves white bass will begin their annual trek upstream

sometime early the month. By mid-to-late February the spawning run should be going full steam.

It's nothing out of the ordinary to catch a 25 fish, 10-inch limit in short order once you get in the right area. Some of the best fishing always takes place just north and south of the Highway 31 boat ramp near Chandler, and you don't necessarily need a boat to get in on the action. There is plenty of bank access available in the vicinity of the ramp.

Crankbaits, Roadrunners and other small spinners are the orders of the day in these fish-filled waters. Just be sure to bring several of each. There is lots of brush and stumps that you can see beneath the surface; you are almost sure to lose a bait every now and then.

As for big largemouths, Palestine almost always erupts with some 25-pound-plus tournament sacks this time of year. The lake's northern reaches is always best for big fish early in the year. The water is shallower up there so it naturally warms up quicker.

Some of the better areas to check out are Cade's Lake, Old Folks Playground, Kickapoo Creek the flats off the Neches channel. The fish like to gather in around underwater drainages on the flats.

Assorted baits will work up there, but it's hard to beat the moving variety. Bladed jigs, swim jigs, spinnerbaits and square bill crankbaits are among the best. If the fish want something a little more subtle try tempting them with a Senko or jig/craw combo.

CONROE - Like other East Texas impoundments, Lake Conroe water temperatures will be heating up during February. That means some of the biggest bass in the lake will setting up around pre-spawn staging areas where they will lay in wait for water temperatures to get right.

Conroe has produced solid fish year-round, but February has a rich history of kicking out the big girls. Most are reeled in around pre-spawn staging areas situated at mid-range depths.

Fishing guide Butch Terpe has been chasing Conroe bass for years now and he reeled in fish better than 12 pounds. According to Terpe, the best places to look for heavyweight pre-spawners in February is in the mouths of major and secondary creeks. Creeks act as travel routes between deep water and shallow, and they are heavily traveled by bass that are inching

their way towards skinny water to spawn.

Terpe says the fish will often set up camp around brush piles and other cover that they come across along the way. They also like to gather around bridge rip-rap, support pilings around deeper docks. A well placed cast any of those potential staging areas in the vicinity of places like April Plaza, Little Lake Creek, Lewis Creek and the FM 1097 bridge crossing could result in a hook-up with the fish of a lifetime.

The guide says any number baits will work this month, but he is especially fond of the Chatterbait, spinnerbait and square bill crankbait. It's important to fish as tight to the target cover or structure as possible to trigger strikes.

Terpe added that February typically gives up some pretty decent channel catfish action in relation to baited holes in about 20 feet of water. The quality can be good, too, with consistently good numbers of two to three pounders showing up in angler creels. Best baits are punch baits, cheese baits and night crawlers.

SAM RAYBURN - The stage is set for the some world-class bass fishing action the 114,000 acre reservoir east of Lufkin. Following several banner spawns the lake is chock full of bass in the four to seven pound range and the hydrilla has bounced back in a very big way.

Translation: Don't be surprised to see multiple limits pushing 30-pound mark brought to tournament weigh-ins over the next few weeks. The lake is poised to be that good.

"It's scary to think what might be caught there this year," said fishing guide Stephen Johnston. "From a big fish standpoint it's almost as good as it was before the bass virus/fish kill in 2000. It's full of 'em."

As earlier mentioned, the hydrilla beds are going to be a major player on 'Rayburn this spring. Grass can be found up down the lake, but the majority of the best stuff is south of the Highway 147 bridge. Just about every creek has it, and the green stuff is growing out to depths of about 12 feet.

Just about all the best patterns are going to be grass related unless we get some big rains that put three or more feet of water the bushes. If that happens, flipping the willows and buck brush with creatures and jigs is sure to be a major player. A high water situation also would

create a distinct inside grass line for pre-spawners to gravitate to.

Otherwise, anglers would be wise to keep baits like a Rat-L-Trap, Chatterbait, suspending jerkbait, square bill crankbait and swim bait handy throughout the month.

It'll be hard to beat a soft jerk bait like a Senko or Fluke, as well. Should the inside grass line scenario materialize it would be a good idea to test the edge with a Carolina-rigged lizard.

February also is prime time to check out the white bass spawning run up the Angelina River. Areas in close proximity to Kingtown and Marions Ferry will hold lots of fish early on. As the month progress the fish will move farther upstream and set up around isolated spots as far north as the U.S. 59 bridge between Nacogdoches and Lufkin.

LIVINGSTON - If you're planning a trip to Lake Livingston this month, one thing you should be sure to check on ahead of time is river flows.

The 90,000-acre reservoir is fed by the Trinity River, a huge watershed that extends all the way up the Dallas/Ft. Worth area and beyond. Big rains above the lake will send walls of nasty, muddy water trucking downstream and turn Livingston into a sloppy mess.

The best fishing here always occurs when water levels are stable and the water is relatively clear. If things turn off muddy it might be a good idea to look elsewhere for a place to wet a hook. This holds especially true if you're a bass angler looking for a big bite.

"High muddy water really hurts the fishing in Livingston," said veteran guide Randy Dearman. "If it does get muddy it always starts clearing up first in the backs of the creeks. That's where you should start looking first. Pockets and inlets that are protected from river inflows also will be worth looking at if we've had a bunch of rain."

If water levels have been stable for a while, Dearman says things should be setting up nicely for some good pre-spawn fishing. The fishing is generally best at the lake's northern areas because that's where water temperatures will warm up the quickest. However, Dearman pointed out that the whole lake can be good provided you target the right type of water.

According to Dearman, creek channels are where you should always look first.

"Bass use creeks as highways to move towards backwater flats and other places where they will spawn," Dearman said. "There should be lots of fish staging along creeks in early to mid-February. They like to set up around channel swings and places with brush, lay downs or stumps right along the edges. Those are the types of places you should look for. I like to do my fishing during warming trends whenever possible. That's when it seems like the fish are most active."

Dearman says any number of any number baits can be productive during early spring, but he tends to favor moving lures like spinnerbaits, bladed jigs and square bill cranks more than anything else. Those baits are designed to penetrate shallow-to-mid-range depths, which is where most of the fish are going to be.

Another hot topic on Livingston this time of year is the spring white bass run up the Trinity. The fishing can be good from the bottleneck north to the Lock and Dam at the State Highway 7 crossing and beyond. The bite is always at its best when river flows are normal and the water is pretty and green. Floods aren't conducive to good white bass fishing because it scatters the fish, muddies the water and makes navigation difficult due to the increased current.

TOLEDO BEND - Toledo Bend is a massive water body with a sprawling coverage area spanning more than 186,000 acres in multiple counties in Texas and Louisiana. It's best known for its top ranked bass fishing, but come February anglers flock to the river channel that feeds it to get in on what is arguably one of the best white bass spawning runs in the South.

What makes the white bass run on the Sabine so good are sheer numbers of over-sized fish that are caught here. Two pounders are the norm and big females weighing upwards of three pounds aren't uncommon. The water body record of 4.04 pounds was caught during the 2010 spring spawning run. The action can get started as early as New Years Day, but it is usually February before things start really heating up. The best bite always occurs when the river is moving along at leisurely clip,

not at flood stage. Year-in and year-out the hottest stretch of water is from the Logansport bridge north to the highway bridge crossing at Deadwood.

February's black bass prospects could be a pretty shaky ground if we don't get some rain. The water level was more than four feet below normal leading up to the Christmas rush and there still wasn't much grass in the lake to speak of. That means there will be very little cover other than stumps, lay downs and brush in the shallows to hold fish.

It's basically the same scenario that existed at the same time this report was written last year. If things don't change, bass anglers will probably have the best results probing around points, drains, drops and ditches in five to eight feet of water.

There also could be some fish holding on drops offs in 15-18 feet to be caught on deep cranks and Carolina rigs. If the weather turns off really cold, jigging spoons worked on deep structure and timberlines could produce some decent numbers around schools marked on the depth finder.

Things could change dramatically if we get some rain to flood the bushes. Texas rigs, Chatterbaits, Senkos, jigs and swim jigs should be major players were that to happen. 🌟🌟



PHOTO COURTESY RICHARD JUE

Look for big bass like this one caught by Richard Jue to set up this month around pre-spawn staging areas.

Ins & Outs of DRAINS

*How and when to fish these travel corridors
for more specks, reds and flounder.*

*Story and Photography
by Robert Sloan*

Every bay on the Texas coast has drains and most are like fish magnets. Here's the deal. A drain is a mini canal that empties into a bay or backwater estuary lake. On an incoming tide the water moves in with a rich mixture of baitfish and crabs. Predator fish like reds, trout and flounder won't be far behind. And when the tide falls everything moves back out into the

bay. It happens every day on every bay and if you're in the right spot at the right time it's easy to tap into some rod bending action.

The absolute best place to fish a drain is at the mouth where it feeds into an open bay system. A good example is on the Louisiana side of Sabine Lake at a place the locals call the Gator Hole.

This is a small estuary lake with two

bayous feeding into it at the back end. The mouth is about 30 yards wide. Past the opening it expands into a marsh lake that's about 400 yards long. At the very back end there is a bayou and several small feeder "creeks". On an incoming tide the whole thing is flooded. With that water will be mullet, shrimp, crabs, mud minnows and of course reds, trout and flounder. It's the way the food chain works. When the tide

turns everything is funneled back into the bay.

On one particular morning I was with guide Skip James and we were anchored at the mouth of the Gator Hole. We got there at about 8:00 a.m. The tide wasn't going to turn and move out for another hour or so. We fished for a while and caught a couple of small flounder. Then the tide went completely dead, but within a few minutes



Besides speckled trout and redfish, flounder will gang up around the points of drains, particularly on an out-going tide.

turned and started to fall. That's when everything changed. Within minutes we started catching trout – big trout.

We were fishing MirrOlure She Dogs in pink/silver. That's a slow sinking mullet-imitation lure that's about 4 inches long. The mouth of the Gator Hole was full of mullet, and trout were all over them. We caught easy limits, a few reds and then went to work on catching flounder.

James was an ace at finding and catching flounder. We moved over to a point on the east side of the opening. It was an extended point of hard mud that went from about a foot of water to six feet deep. We tied on chartreuse Assassins and tipped them with dime-sized pieces of peeled shrimp. Within a few minutes we were getting solid thumps from flounder.

We ended up with one of the best boxes of fish I've ever seen. And they were all caught in that one drain on a falling tide.

"If you've got good tidal movement you can't go wrong by fishing a drain," says Matagorda guide Charlie Paradoski. "You can fish a drain on an incoming tide and catch fish. But the falling tide is the ticket."

Paradoski says the deeper drains are his go-to hot spots.

"Trout and reds will move into the deeper drains on just about any tide," he says. "There will be more water movement and more bait. But the trick is to fish along the bottom with soft plastics, or slow sinking mullet-like lures. An Assassin

rigged on a ¼ ounce jig head is good when the water is clear and has a good amount of movement. That's when the trout will be most active.

"When I'm fishing a drain on a slow-moving tide, and with only about two to three feet of water to work with, I'll usually go with a Corky Devil," he confessed. "That's a lure that'll fall faster than a Corky Fat Boy, but not as fast as a ¼ ounce jig. It's a good mullet imitation. It can be twitched and has the right amount of sinking action at the mouth of a drain. A pink Corky Devil is tough to beat in most situations."

The mouth of a drain can be tricky to fish. Most offer deeper water at the mouth that gradually gets shallower as it moves into the bay.

A good example is a drain on the south shoreline of East Galveston bay. It's got a small opening, about 10 yards wide. But just as it enters the bay it flairs out to about 30 yards wide, and maintains a depth of about four to six feet into the bay for about 25 yards. It's perfect for wading. You can slowly work your way along the shallow edges of the drain.

Wading is usually the best way to fish the drains. That way you can slow down, and work it with a variety of lures from top to bottom. But you have to be careful. What you don't want to do is step off into the deeper water, especially if you have waders on. Many anglers have gotten themselves into a serious bind that way.



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Trout will be found on the outside of drains, but will also move up into the channel on an incoming tide. These two anglers are fishing the outside of a point as well as the inside of a drain.

Another benefit of wading the drains is that you can feel them out, and from then on you know exactly how to fish them.

On Sabine Lake, just around the corner from Blue Buck Point is the mouth of Big Four Bayou. It's about 40 yards wide. As soon as it enters the lake it goes from eight feet to about four feet deep. It's the perfect place for flounder to stack up, and they do on just about every falling tide.

The drill is simple. You can anchor on either side and fan cast lures or live baits to the center of the drain. I was at this particular spot one day with guide Jerry Norris. We were on the way back to the Sabine Pass Marina when he slowed the boat and idled over to the mouth of the bayou.

"The tide just started to fall," he said. "This place can load up with flounder in

a hurry."

We fished about 45 minutes and boxed several big flounder. All were caught on Bass Assassins in red shad or LSU color patterns.

On East Matagorda Bay there are several drains feeding into the main body of water along the east shoreline. These particular drains act as the connection from the bay to backwater estuary lakes.

"All those drains are good on falling tides," says Paradoski. "They are especially good for reds and trout. I don't care what time of day it is, when the tide is falling the mouths of those drains can be loaded with fish.

"When I pull up and see mullet jumping all over the place at a drain I know it's going to be holding fish. I'll start out with a topwater lure, then switch over to a Corky Devil.

"Some drains are better than others," he explained. "Over the years I've found that the deeper drains that get shallow

Use A Popping Cork

One sure fire way to catch trout, reds and flounder on just about any given day is to fish live baits under a popping cork. Live shrimp are usually best, but a fresh caught finger mullet is tough to beat, as well.

The depth at the mouth of most drains is about three to five feet. That's perfect water for working a popping cork. Remember that the best time to fish a drain is on an outgoing tide when the fish are feeding on shrimp and mullet.

One very good tactic is to set up and fish a popping cork and live bait so that it drifts directly down the middle of the drain with the tide. Keep in mind that trout and reds will be moving around in the current. The ticket to getting more bites is to cover a lot of water. The slushing noise of the cork will get the attention of fish.

Another tactic is to rig up with a double drop rig under a popping cork. I've done best by fishing a soft plastic jig on bottom, with a live shrimp above it.

To catch more flounder at the mouth of a drain you can fish live baits on a Carolina rig. Usually the best weight will be about ¼ ounce. You're not fishing all that deep, and you want the rig to be washed along bottom with the current to cover a lot of water. ★



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Even small drains that have water flowing through them can hold fish. In the winter, these isolated drains may hold a trophy fish.

when they hit the bay are the best. Some have mud bottoms while others are hard sand. The mouth of a drain that's got a mix of mud and shell is definitely a fish magnet."

Some of the best drains along the Texas coast can be found along Matagorda Island and on down to Rockport. A lot of the anglers I know specifically fish those drains. There are lots of them. And on any

given day, or night, you can move from one drain to another. Sooner or later you'll hit the right one.

The thing about fishing drains is that you'll figure out which of them are

good and when they hold fish. It's a way of fishing that is productive year-round along the entire Texas coast. Once you figure them out you'll have hot spots that are good for years to come. ★★

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Wade fishing allow anglers to slow down and feel the bottom with their feet. Catch the tide right and a solid stringer of speckled trout and redfish can be brought back to the boat.

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Lake Roundup

SOUTH TEXAS

By Danno Wise

February is typically the final month of consistently cold weather in Texas. And, it's not uncommon for the second month of the year to see some of the coldest temperatures and nastiest days of the season.

Despite the blustery weather, seasoned bass anglers know February is also the time to be out on the water – no matter how miserable the day may be. Lakes across South Texas will see bass entering the spawning cycle and heavy, egg-laden largemouth bass will be common catches throughout the month of February.

Other species will also be getting more active during February. White bass will be preparing to run and hybrids and stripers will be schooling on lakes across South Texas. Crappie will also be preparing to head into creeks and bayous to spawn.

Although February offers some of the worst winter weather, spring is definitely on the horizon. As a result, fishing will be improving even if the weather is not.

COLETO CREEK – The black bass spawn should be going full bore on Coletto Creek during February.

“Our bass will be spawning in February,” said bass pro Dennis Lala. “The big fish will be moving up shallow, where they’ll be more vulnerable. There will be some big fish caught out of Coletto during February.”

“The lake has been in good shape water-wise. Those spawning fish will be right up along the shoreline. This is the time of year when I like to start out

throwing a spinnerbait right up against the bank and dragging back. If they’re laying along the bank, they’ll usually nail a spinnerbait.

“Just about any model spinnerbait will work, so long as it’s white and chartreuse. My favorite model is a double-willowleaf blade model with gold blades. I like throwing pretty heavy spinnerbaits – 3/8 or ½ ounce versions – during February. Some guys will be throwing jigs and Texas-rigged craws and lizards and catching fish, too. But I like throwing a spinnerbait because I can cover more water with it.

“I’ll also throw a lot of Berkley Jerkshads this time of year. In fact, if I’m not using a spinnerbait, that’s what I’ll be throwing. I’ll fish it in the same areas as the spinnerbait. I prefer to throw it weightless when I’m fishing right up against the bank. When I’m fishing down the points, I’ll fish it on a light Carolina-rig.

“Really the whole lake will have spawning fish during February, but the majority of the activity will be up the creeks and rivers. Between the two bridges going up the Coletto Creek arm is where most of the spawning bass will be found. But, any of the little creeks off of Coletto Creek will likely have fish.

“There will be a lot of fish near the discharge, especially if it’s cold. And, it won’t just be black bass up there. There are a lot of big hybrids up there this time of year. Most of those fish will be caught on either minnows or Tony Aceta spoons fished under popping corks.

“There are also a lot big yellow cats up there. A lot of guys will throw out a couple of rods rigged with shrimp on bottom for catfish out of the back of the boat, then actively fishing for hybrids from the front of the boat.”

MEDINA — The clear, deep waters of Lake Medina offer South Texas anglers a little different challenge than other area bodies of water. In February, most successful fishermen on Medina will still be employing vertical fishing tactics – at least early on, as the spawn on this lake tends to start a little later than it does on other South Texas lakes.

“The first couple of weeks of February,

we’ll be in a real winter pattern,” explained Jim Gallagher of Jim’s ReBait Tackle. “That’s good in a way, in that it’s predictable. But, you have to fish real slow and real deep. And, a lot of South Texas bass fishermen just don’t have the patience for that style of fishing.

“Jigging spoons are probably the number one lure for vertical fishing on this lake. That’s partly because most of our fishermen know how to use them. Drop-shotting and other tactics typically used on clear lakes out west will work also. But, again, not as many Texas anglers are comfortable using those techniques.”

“There will be a lot of people throwing deep-diving crankbaits. You can do pretty well with them – especially along the channel edges. And, that is a style of fishing more people are comfortable with. Plus, if we get a few days of warm weather, the fish will start moving up a little bit where they’ll be easier to catch on crankbaits.

“Over the second half of February, we’ll see are fish start moving into a pre-spawn and spawning pattern. But, the spawn is a little different on this lake. We really have two types of spawning fish on Medina. The smaller fish will spawn in shallow water, like they do on most South Texas lakes. Those bigger fish will actually spawn in about 15 feet of water. Since we have clear water, the sunlight gets down that deep, no problem. So, they’ll build their beds right on the ledges.

“There will be pretty good action for white bass and hybrids. There will be a lot of schools working around the lake. They won’t be running yet, but they’ll be schooling up and getting ready to go.”

CHOKO CANYON — In February, much of Choke Canyon’s bass population will be beginning to spawn. Although there will be some spawning activity on the main lake, most of the spawning fish will be located in the river. So, anglers should concentrate their efforts up the rivers and creeks that feed into Choke Canyon. However, with the low water levels Choke is currently experiencing, fish will be a little more limited in how far they will be able to move up the river and creeks.



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In any event, the best way to locate spawning fish will be to focus on shallow, muddy shorelines. While working along the shallow shorelines, a 3/8 ounce white and chartreuse spinnerbait is the best way to cover water. When working flooded brush along the shorelines, a jig or Texas-rigged lizards is a good choice.

Black bass won't be the only species headed upriver from Choke Canyon this month. Anglers headed up the rivers and creeks are also likely to encounter crappie and white bass in February. Crappie will holding tight to brush along the shorelines, while white bass will be pushing their way to the headwaters for their annual spawn.

FALCON — In February, big bass will be the primary focus of fishermen heading to Falcon Lake, as lunker largemouth will be a definite possibility over the next few weeks on this border impoundment. Big baits will be the key to catching not only big bass, but bass in general on Falcon in February. Big, double-leaf spinnerbaits, large crankbaits, huge jigs and jumbo soft-plastics will be the top choices for fishermen looking for double-digit bass on Falcon.

Even smaller three to five pound fish will be feeding on large prey items this month, so anglers are wise to upsize their offerings regardless of whether they are looking for trophy fish or numbers of average size bass.

As is the case on most South Texas lakes, Falcon's spawn will take place over the course of several weeks. The usual pattern has fish on the upper end of the lake and in the river spawning first. Later in the month, fish on the middle and lower portions of the lake will also begin spawning.

Given this progression of spawning activity, at any give time in February, it will be possible to find pre-spawn, spawning and post-spawn bass somewhere on Falcon.

Spawning fish on Falcon will be found in three to five feet of water, regardless of whether they are on the upper, middle or lower portion of the lake.

The back reaches of coves and creeks are the most productive areas. Many bedding fish will be way back behind Falcon's flooded brush line. Since many of these big fish will be found in dense cover, anglers are well-advised to go heavy with their tackle. **T★J**

WEST TEXAS



By TOJ Staff

AMISTAD — Look for bass to be starting to stage for the spawn near the mouths of creeks and river channels. Spinnerbaits, crankbaits and crankbaits are good options to cover water. Once fish are found try a Texas rig or jig to thoroughly fish an area. Striped bass will be in the deep water in front of the dam. After several bright, warm days look for these big fish to push bait to the surface.

Catfish remain deep this time of year in water in excess of 50 feet.

O.H. IVIE — After the big chill to start the New Year anglers should look for black bass having their bellies on the bottom. Water temperatures dropped well into the lower 40s and bass will be relating to structure. The good news is there is more water in the lake than a year earlier and almost 10 feet of additional water inundating even more structure. Use electronics to find structure then slowly and methodically fish all around the structure. As the middle and later part of the month arrives look for bass to begin to make a move toward the mouths of creeks and river channels. After bright warm days some fish may look to moving up, however most of this activity will be from the smaller males looking for a place to build a bed. Females will remain in the nearby deeper water.

BROWNWOOD — As of early January the water temperature in this popular lake was a few degrees colder than it was the entire month of February 2017. The lake was also about three feet lower. Depending up the weather black bass should be relating to woody structure at various depths. If there is string of bright warm days the fish could be a bit more shallow. If the weather continues on the frosty side, then look for bass to snuggled up to deeper structure. Texas rigs and jigs are

good options to fish the structure. Jigging spoons are another option.

Crappie fishing will be a bit slow, but fish can still be caught. Look for vertical wood structured around creek and river channels. Also around bridges and brush piles off of boat docks. **T★J**

HIGH PLAINS



By TOJ Staff

COLEMAN — The big New Year's chill dropped water temperatures to levels not seen since February 2016. Black bass fishing typically is just fair this time of year, but some good fish can be caught around woody structure on the backside of a cold front. Crappie fishing should be pretty good and consistent. Look for papermouths around brush piles and deep vertical woody structure. Look for catfish to be deep unless some runoff from rains occurs.

ALAN HENRY — Reports on black bass fishing is rather spotty this time of year. This is more of a function of fewer anglers being on the water. Black bass will be relating to deep rocky structure. If several days of bright warm weather occur, then look for bass relating to rocky slide areas warmed by the sun. Catfishing should be good around the mouths of creeks.

OTHER OPTIONS: **Lake Meredith** the conservation pool of this lake was at 47.5 feet low. That is a level not seen since 2007. The lake was once almost 100 feet low is a huge improvement.

The report for black bass was just fair at the start of the New Year. The report also indicated bream and catfish were being caught in good numbers.

Anglers should remember that TPWD began restocking walleye in mid-October 2016. On a bright sunny day that report alone is enough to entice anglers to check out fishing activity on this recovering lake. The limit on walleye is five per day with only two fish less than 16 inches. **T★J**



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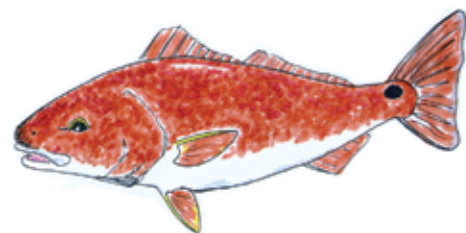
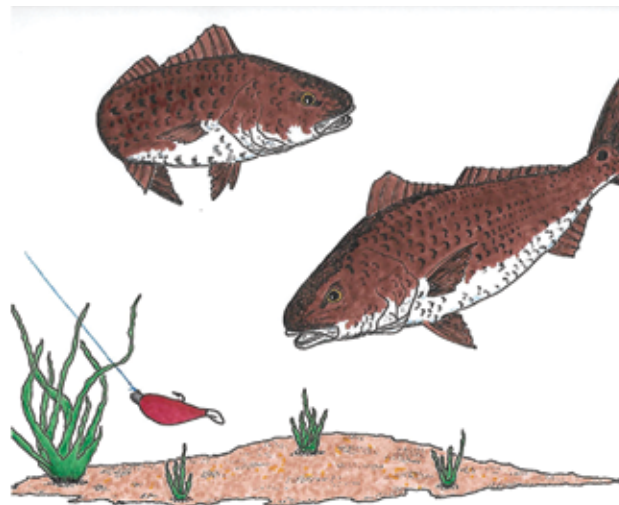
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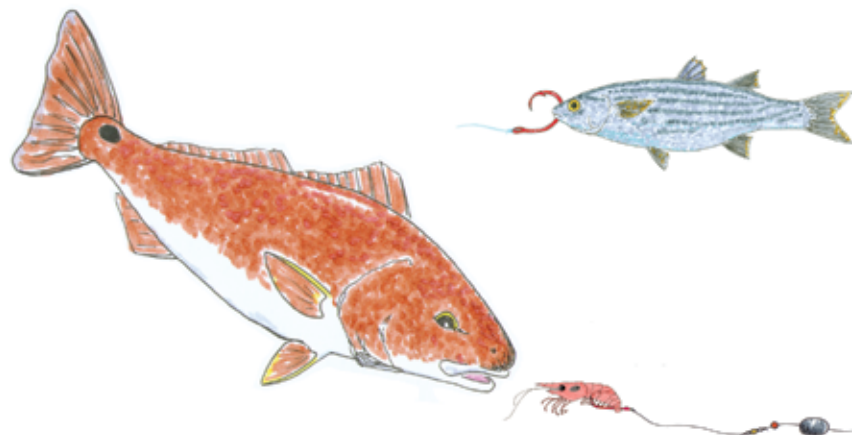
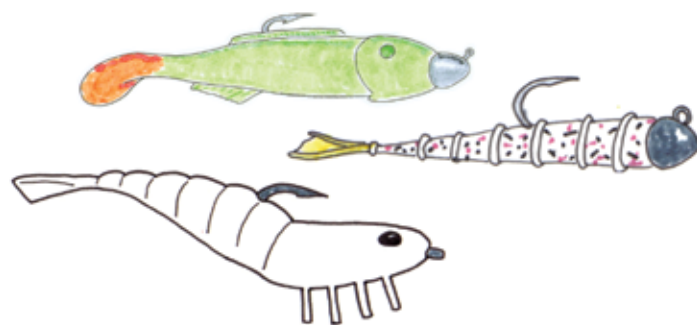
Late Winter Redfish Patterns

The focus for most coastal fishermen in February is on speckled trout. However, There is a good deal of outstanding late winter redfish action happening along the Texas coast during the year's second month as well. And, like their speckled counterparts, redfish will be found both on shallow flats and in deeper holes and channels during late winter, depending on the prevailing conditions.



Although they will retreat into deeper holes and channels during periods of extreme cold, redfish are much harder than trout and will generally find their way back onto the shallow flats sooner than specks. However, unless it has been warm for several days, they will still be found on the flats adjacent to deep water. And, like trout, they tend to prefer flats with muddy bottoms during winter, making the flats between spoil islands and channels ideal spots to look for late winter reds.

During late winter, soft-plastics tend to be more effective on reds than spoons. A variety of 3.5- to 4-inch paddletail plastic jigs and the traditional "Texas tout" will produce good catches of cold water reds. Depending on water depth, baits should be rigged on 1/16- to 3/8-ounce heads. Slow-sinking plastics, such as the DOA Shrimp, are also good choices.



However, there are times during winter -- especially on days when bay waters are muddy following a frontal passage -- that natural baits will be more effective. Rigging live shrimp or live mullet on a Carolina-rig is a good way to target reds in potholes. When reds are cruising through channels, a three-way bottom rig is a better choice, as it will keep the bait stationary in strong current.

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Getting Bedded Bass' Attention



Almost every lake in Texas has a population of spawning bass in February. The key to catching these big female fish is getting their attention away from their assigned duty of being an active part in the reproductive cycle. This can be done a variety of ways, although anglers may need to try more than one method in order to be successful on any given day.

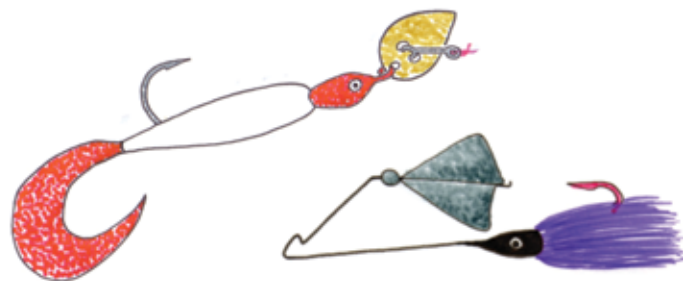
One of the most common ways to get bedding bass to eat is to throw a Texas rigged lizard into the nest. The lizard represents a natural predator to a bass, as they can destroy a nest of eggs. Often times, the fish will attempt to remove the bait from the bed by picking it up and moving it a safe distance away, rather than eating it. This can make the hookset tricky.



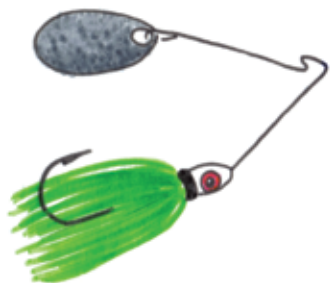
Anglers will try to accomplish the same thing by pitching or flipping jigs into beds and letting them sit until the bass notices them. If they go ignored, usually just a "jiggle" is enough to get a nearby bass' attention. However, again, it may not result in a predation strike as much as a lift and move on the bass' part.



Another option is for fisherman to infuriate bass into striking. This is usually accomplished by throwing swim jigs or, if the weather is warm enough, buzzbaits or frogs. The idea here is to annoy the fish into striking. Often, repeated casts are necessary in order to accomplish this.



If bass are at least semi-aggressive, spinnerbaits are good choices for covering vast amounts of water. It is usually best to throw spinnerbaits right up against the bank and slow-roll them back to the boat. Anglers can work long stretches of shoreline in this manner, prospecting for any bedding bass.



Another effective tactic is digging crankbaits into the bottom. To do this, anglers should choose a crankbait that is designed to run much deeper than the water being fished, then crank it down until the elongated bill begins digging into the bottom. If an obstruction is hit, the retrieve can be paused, allowing the bait to float above the object before the retrieve is started again.



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Hunting the Tail End of Quail Season



Once February rolls around hunters know the last of the traditional fall/winter hunting seasons are about to close. For upland bird hunters the end of the statewide quail season on February 25 is almost as traumatic as was the closure of the whitetail season for deer hunters.

The good thing is there are those final 25 days available in the Lone Star State to bust brush out in West Texas chasing blue or scaled quail. Those same days can be spent watching a good brace of pointers work — sniffing out coveys of bobwhite quail plus feel that “rush” when they flush from cover.

As the season draws to its end hunters need to remember a few things. First quail numbers have recovered in recent years, but those numbers can decrease just as quickly as they rose. The birds left in the field, that have survived the weather elements, predation and hunting pressure are the broodstock from which next year’s coveys will come.

This time of year the size of coveys will be smaller due to mortality for a variety of reasons. Plus the biggest thrill is to hear the whirl of wings taking flight. The contribution hunters can make to help assure the best prospects for next season is to just hunt coveys only. Don’t put pressure on singles that escape unless they are visibly wounded birds. Instead let them covey back up. While the number of shooting opportunities may be fewer it is a good feeling to know the end of year pressure from hunters has been reduced.

Hunters should also be mindful that February can be a time with warming weather. This means everything will be out soaking up some sunshine and warmth as they shake off the chill of winter — especially cold blooded critters like snakes — rattlesnakes in particular.

Hunters should be on the look out for rattlesnakes as they hunt. They should also be mindful that a rattlesnake has a scent that some dogs will point.

A “false point” is when a dog gets a snoot-full of a rattling viper. Many times it will be a half-hearted point, then the dog relaxes, then starts to point again as what his nose is smelling and what his eyes are seeing don’t match up. It not a locked up point bird hunters are use to seeing.

Use whistle or voice commands to “whoa” or stop the dog from trying to lock on or even pursue the point. Also get to the dog as quickly as possible. Many times this point will occur around a small bush where the snake is hiding.

Also remember that not all snakes are bad. Blue indigos will be out feeding and they are looking for rattlesnakes so let them go unharmed.



The end of the season is a good time to let younger dogs get in some field time. It may be having them hunt “dead birds.” It could be as a third dog to work with older pointers.

This field time allows the hunter/dog handler know where a particular dog is in its development. It also helps set the course for off-season training and may indicate the need to take the young pointer to a professional for “finishing.”

One final option for upland bird hunters provides a bit of a reprieve. Once the statewide quail season closes on February 25 many gamebird ranches continue to hunt released birds through the end of March. These guided hunts offer an opportunity to not only hunt bobwhite quail, but also chuckar and pheasant.

This “last shot” not only helps ease “hunter’s withdrawal” it also provides another chance to spend time afield with family and friends.

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Outdoor Calendar

THROUGH FEBRUARY 4, 2018,

Light and Dark Geese season, West Zone, *151 counties*. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 11, 2018,

Wilson's Snipe (Common snipe or Jacksnipe) season, *Statewide*. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Javelina season, *North Zone*. For more information you can consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, visit the TPWD website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Squirrel Season, *51 East Texas counties*. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Quail season, *Statewide*. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Rio Grande Turkey fall season, *Brooks, Kenedy, Kleberg, Willacy counties*. For more information you can consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 26, 2018,

Chacalaca season, *four Rio Grande Valley counties*. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or you can call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH MARCH 18,

Light Goose Conservation Season, *East Zone* (123 counties). For more information consult the Texas Outdoors Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH AUGUST 31, 2018

Javelina season, *South Zone*. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

FEBRUARY 2,

Gillespie County Chapter Mule Deer Foundation fundraising banquet, *Fredericksburg*. For more information and reservations call (816) 289-9299.

FEBRUARY 2-11,

Dallas Fort Worth Boat Expo, Market Hall, *Dallas*. For more information visit www.dallasboatexpo.com or call (469) 500-6155.

FEBRUARY 3,

Salt Cedar Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, *Borger*. For more information and reservations call (806) 440-3672.

FEBRUARY 3,

Mexia Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, *Mexia*. For more information and reservations call (9903) 388-5471.

FEBRUARY 5 - MARCH 18,

Light Goose Conservation Season, *West Zone (151 counties)*. For more information consult the Texas Outdoors Annual, or you can call (800) 792-1112.

FEBRUARY 8,

Sulphur Springs Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, *Hopkins*. For more information and reservations call (903) 521-4595.

FEBRUARY 8,

Huntsville Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, *Huntsville*. For more information and reservations call (936) 438-8000.

FEBRUARY 9,

Smith County Upland Game Bird Chapter National Wild Turkey fundraising banquet, *Tyler*. For more information and reservations call (903) 920-5115.

FEBRUARY 9,

Victoria Chapter Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Big Game banquet, *Victoria*. For more information and reservations you can call (361) 649-4751.

FEBRUARY 9,

Rusk County Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, *Henderson*. For more information and reservations call (903) 738-9897.

FEBRUARY 9 - 11,

7th Annual Coastal Bend Boat & RV Show, Richard M. Borchard Regional Fair Grounds Central Pavilion Arena, *Robstown*. For more information call (361) 205-9695 or visit www.coastal-bendandrvepo.com.

FEBRUARY 9 - 11,

All Valley Boat Show, McAllen Convention Center, *McAllen*. For more information visit www.allvalleyboatshow.com, or call (866) 639-8940.

FEBRUARY 10,

Houston Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraising banquet, *Houston*. For more information and reservations call (832) 492-1400.

FEBRUARY 15 - 18,

Austin RV Show, Austin Convention Center, *San Austin*. For show hours and more information visit www.autinrvexpo.com, or call (512) 481-1777.

FEBRUARY 16,

Whitehouse Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, *Bullard*. For

more information and reservations call (903) 245-9088.

FEBRUARY 17,

Parker County Chapter Mule Deer Foundation fundraiser banquet, *Weatherford*. For more information and reservations call (817) 475-9702.

FEBRUARY 22,

Brazos Longbeard Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraising banquet, *Richmond*. For more information and reservations call (512) 966-9539.

FEBRUARY 22-25,

Whooping Crane Festival, *Port Aransas*. The festival is open to birders, photographers, families, and anyone who loves the outdoors. Online registration available through Feb. 19 at www.whoopingcranefestival.org. Onsite registration will open on February 22 at 1:00 p.m. at the Port Aransas Civic Center and run daily through the festival.

FEBRUARY 23,

Brazos Valley Chapter Ducks Unlim-

ited fundraising banquet, *Bryan*. For more information and reservations call (979) 777-5848.

FEBRUARY 23,

Pioneer Chapter of Northeast Texas National Wild Turkey Federation fundraising banquet, *Clarksville*. For more information and reservations call (903) 219-2692.

FEBRUARY 24,

Texas Hill Country Chapter Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Big Game banquet, *Georgetown*. For more information call (512) 422-7322.

FEBRUARY 24,

Northwest Prairie Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, *Cypress*. For more information and reservations call (281) 213-3301.

FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 4,

43rd Annual Houston Fishing Show, George R. Brown Convention Center, *Houston*. For more information, ticket pricing, directions, and show times visit www.houstonfishing-show.com 🌟

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Tide Tables

FEBRUARY 2018

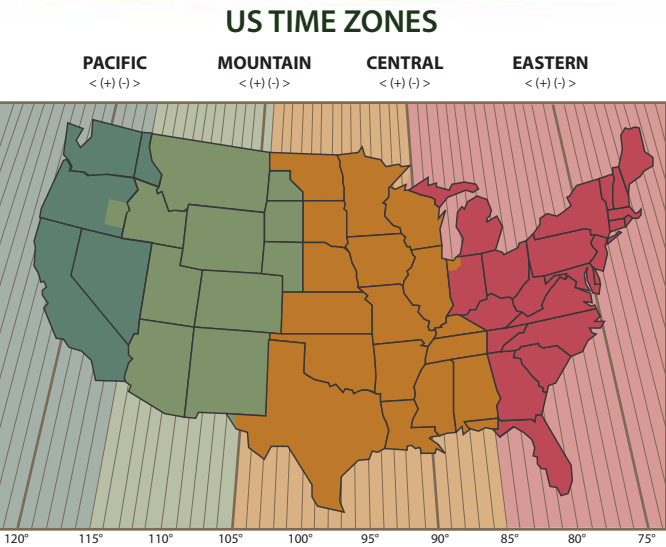
| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| | | | | H2:53A 1.0 L10:37A -0.8 H6:20P 1.0 L11:03P 0.6 | H4:01A 1.0 L11:28A -0.6 H6:55P 1.0 L2:18P 0.9 | L12:00A 0.5 H5:14A 0.8 L12:18P -0.4 H7:29P 0.8 |
| L1:05A 0.3 H6:37A 0.7 L1:09P -0.1 H8:00P 0.8 | L2:15A 0.2 H8:14A 0.7 L2:05P 0.2 H8:28P 0.7 | L3:25A 0.0 H10:06A 0.6 L3:21P 0.4 H8:54P 0.7 | L4:28A -0.2 H12:07P 0.7 L5:28P 0.6 H9:18P 0.7 | L5:23A -0.3 H1:50P 0.8 L7:26P 0.6 H9:40P 0.7 | L6:11A -0.4 H2:53P 0.9 | L6:55A -0.4 H3:34P 0.9 |
| | | | | | | |
| 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| | | | | | | |
| 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| | | | | | | |
| 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | | | |

MARCH 2018

| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | | | | | |
| 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

| Times are for Galveston, Galveston Channel | | |
|---|--------|-------|
| TIME DIFFERENCES | High | Low |
| Calcasieu Pass, Louisiana | -2:14 | -1:24 |
| Sabine Pass Lighthouse | -1:46 | -1:31 |
| Sabine Pass Jetty | -1:26 | -1:31 |
| Sabine Pass | -1:00 | -1:15 |
| Mesquite Point, Sabine Pass | -0:04 | -0:25 |
| Galveston Bay ent. south jetty | -0:39 | -1:05 |
| Port Bolivar | +0:14 | -0:06 |
| Galveston Bay | | |
| Texas City, Turning Basin | +0:33 | +0:41 |
| Eagle Point (1) | +3:54 | +4:15 |
| Clear Lake(1) | +6:05 | +6:40 |
| Morgan Point (1) | +10:21 | +5:19 |
| Round Pt.,Trinity Bay (1) | +10:39 | +5:15 |
| Point Barrow, Trinity Bay | +5:48 | +4:43 |
| Gilchrist, East Bay | +3:16 | +4:18 |
| Jamaica Beach, West Bay | +2:38 | +3:31 |
| Alligator Point, West Bay | +2:39 | +2:33 |
| Christmas Point, Christmas Bay | +2:32 | +2:31 |
| Galveston Pleasure Pier | -1:06 | -1:06 |
| San Luis Pass | -0:09 | -0:09 |
| Freeport Harbor | -0:44 | -1:02 |
| Pass Cavallo | 0:00 | -1:20 |
| Aransas Pass | -0:03 | -1:31 |
| Padre Island (South End) | -0:24 | -1:45 |
| Port Isabel | +1:02 | -0:42 |
| Tidal adjustments are not predictable for Port O'Connor, Matagorda Bay; Port Lavaca, Matagorda Bay; and Riviera Beach, Baffin Bay since they are driven by wind and weather. — NOAA | | |

Fishing & Hunting Times



FEBRUARY 2018

| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | | | | 1 ☀ | 2 ☀ | 3 ☀ |
| | | | | 11:20A - 4:20P | 12:20P - 5:20P | 1:15P - 6:15P |
| 4 ☀ | 5 ☀ | 6 ☀ | 7 ☀ | 8 ☀ | 9 ☀ | 10 ☀ |
| 2:10P - 7:10P | 3:05P - 8:05P | 3:50P - 8:50P | 4:20A - 9:20A | 5:05A - 10:05A | 5:50A - 10:50A | 6:30A - 11:30A |
| 11 ☀ | 12 ☀ | 13 ☀ | 14 ☀ | 15 ☀ | 16 ☀ | 17 ☀ |
| 7:10A - 12:10P | 7:55A - 12:55P | 8:40A - 1:40P | 9:25A - 2:25P | 10:10A - 3:10P | 11:00A - 4:00P | 11:50A - 4:50P |
| 18 ☀ | 19 ☀ | 20 ☀ | 21 ☀ | 22 ☀ | 23 ☀ | 24 ☀ |
| 12:40P - 5:40P | 1:30P - 6:30P | 2:20P - 7:20P | 3:10P - 8:10P | 4:05P - 9:05P | 4:35A - 9:35A | 5:30A - 10:30A |
| 25 ☀ | 26 ☀ | 27 ☀ | 28 ☀ | | | |
| 6:25A - 11:25A | 7:20A - 12:20P | 8:15A - 1:15P | 9:10A - 2:10P | | | |

MARCH 2018

| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | | | | 1 ☀ | 2 ☀ | 3 ☀ |
| | | | | 10:00A - 3:00P | 10:55A - 3:55P | 11:50A - 4:50P |
| 4 ☀ | 5 ☀ | 6 ☀ | 7 ☀ | 8 ☀ | 9 ☀ | 10 ☀ |
| 12:45P - 5:45P | 1:40P - 6:40P | 2:35P - 7:35P | 3:30P - 8:30P | 3:55A - 8:55A | 4:45A - 9:45A | 5:30A - 10:30A |

☀ BEST ☀ GOOD ☀ FAIR ☀ POOR

Fish, game and all wildlife move in search of food in cycles relative to the moon's location to the earth. The time spans listed above are the prime times to start each day at and along each time zone meridian of longitude 75 degrees (Eastern) 90 degrees (Central) 105 degrees (Mountain) and 120 degrees (Pacific) during Standard time and Daylight Saving during the time it is in effect. To determine the feeding cycle time for best fishing and hunting in the area you plan to fish or hunt advance the sum of 4 minutes for each degree west and back up 4 minutes for each degree east. The next prime feeding cycle (not listed on the calendar) will be approximately twelve and one-half hours later. There are minor periods that occur between the prime or major periods. The minor periods are typically fair periods and last only about half as long as the prime periods.

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