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**JOURNAL**



January 2019 / \$3.99



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# TEXAS OUTDOORS

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January 2019

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For more information on "Over the Rag Spread — Snow Geese" and other fine works of art by Noel Dunn, visit [www.minnesotasetters.com/noeldunn/originalsgallery.html](http://www.minnesotasetters.com/noeldunn/originalsgallery.html).

# Editor's Insight | Bill L. Olson



## Another New Start

Turn the page. It is time for a new start, or at the very least a time to regroup and get after it again.

There are many reasons to celebrate the beginning of a New Year. First each of us survived the last one and 2018 for many Texans was a tough year.

It was the year after Hurricane Harvey when countless numbers of our neighbors tried to put their lives together. The frustrations that carried over from 2017 and on through much of 2018 was because of the lack of timely or slow responses from insurance companies so recovery efforts could begin. Once claims were paid the shortage of labor and materials created additional stress.

The reality from the most costly storm to ever hit the Texas coast had an impact that reached much further and deeper into our state than most realize. Harvey's impact had a ripple effect that prevented many from their normal routines including vacations that were not taken, outdoor respites put on hold and even the role hunters play in wildlife management many times did not occur.

The impact was not just felt in coastal communities where they missed out on their normal visitors coming to play, it also impacted those flooded in southeast Texas. Many were forced to change their priorities in order to take care of their primary homes first. Recreation plans simply had to wait.

No matter how much desire and effort there was from a variety of government agencies wanting to help, recovery from such a storm simply takes time. There are no shortcuts. Well, Texas has paid that time, and while some continue to rebuild, a growing number are seeing their life show signs of returning to more normal routines.

As coastal communities saw recovery progress, other parts of the Lone Star State got hit with too much of what so many pray for — rain. Central and north Texas was impacted from torrential rains that resulted in more damage and destruction as rivers swelled out of their banks.

As 2019 begins to unfold, a lot of opportunities await those that missed out in 2018. The great thing is a lot of good has come from some things that were so bad.

The bad was mostly in the form of devastation to man-made things. In time most of this will be repaired or replaced.

The good was to all of the things God put here naturally. Aquatic or terrestrial wildlife benefitted from the increase in freshwater into coastal estuaries. A good portion of the rangeland benefited from rains regardless of their source. Plus the break so many were forced to take meant game and fish had a time to flourish with less pressure.

So now it is time for us to return to our rightful roles as stewards of the lands and all that swim or trod upon it. The increase has started and the New Year will provide more occasions to have a positive impact on these we cherish.

The turn around will not be dramatic or immediate. It will be slow and build over time, but that is the way it is when we start anew. Just being away and not able to enjoy our pastimes will bring a greater sense of appreciation for even the smallest of things that may have been taken for granted or overlooked.

One thing that enriches the outdoor experience is the anticipation of going. Start planning now for the return to whatever has been missed.

The reason is simple, 2019 is going to be better than what we just left behind. It is time for another new start.

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

**CAUTION:** All technical data in this publication, especially for handloading, reflect the limited experience of individuals using specific tools, products, equipment and components under specific conditions and circumstances not necessarily reported in the article and over which Texas Outdoors Journal has no control. The data have not otherwise been tested or verified by Texas Outdoors Journal. Texas Outdoors Journal, its agents, officers and employees accept no responsibility for the results obtained by persons using such data and disclaim all liability for any consequential injuries or damages.

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## Smartphone App Use and Today's Angler

With technology affecting every aspect of our lives, from the way we work and live at home and even to the way we recreate, it's no wonder it's also making an impact on old-time American pursuits such as recreational fishing. But that impact may be a little slower in coming for many—but not all. Results from a recent survey at AnglerSurvey.com reveal that while 85 percent of active anglers own a smartphone, only 25 percent of those anglers use apps related to fishing.

With so many owning smartphones, not making better use of helpful apps such as solunar tables, weather and tide charts would seem at odds. However, the number one reason cited for not using fishing-related apps is that most, 56 percent, simply don't recognize the need for one or haven't realized how apps can help improve their time on the water.

Others, 46 percent, also cited the desire to leave technology behind when fishing, seeking a more basic experience outdoors. Other top reasons cited included wanting to keep their hands free (20 percent), not realizing fishing-related

apps even existed (19 percent) and the fear of losing or damaging their phone (12 percent). Respondents could cite more than one reason in the survey.

But of those 25 percent of anglers who have discovered the benefits of using fishing-related apps, the top choices include Fishing and Hunting Solunar Time (19 percent), Navionics (19 percent), Fish Brain (16 percent), Tide Charts Near Me (11 percent), Fishidy (9 percent) and Tides Near Me (9 percent). Other popular options included Windy, Onx Hunt and iBobber. More than 39 percent cited "other" as their favorite apps weren't listed.

And when were most of these apps used? Seventy-one percent of app-using anglers use them prior to hitting the water, while 53 percent use them while fishing. Only 14 percent make use of them after they are done fishing for the day.

"While the overall number of anglers may not embrace fishing-related apps, trends would suggest this usage will grow over time as more recreational fishermen discover their benefits," says

Rob Southwick, president of Southwick Associates, which designs and conducts the surveys at AnglerSurvey.com, HunterSurvey.com, and ShooterSurvey.com. **T★J**

## Rainbow Trout Season Continues

Rainbow trout season continues across the Lone Star State. While it's not a regulatory season, just a stocking and temperature-controlled season, some TPWD stockings of catchable-sized rainbow trout continue into January and February. Trophy-size trout have been stocked twice in the **Guadalupe River** below **Canyon Dam** by the Guadalupe River Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Special regulations apply to that part of the river, see page 46 in the TPW Outdoor Annual.

Anglers interested in learning fly-fishing for the Guadalupe trout season or for other species, fly-fishing classes for beginners (adults and kids) are offered January 19 and February 2 from 9 to 1 at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center (TFFC) in Athens. No experience is required. Equipment will be provided, but

## Cover Art

Renowned Minnesota artist Noel Dunn has been painting his passions for over 31 years. Working in watercolor and oil he has built his stellar reputation painting cowboys, fishing and hunting scenes, dogs, aviation scenes and more.

Dunn is an avid hunter, angler and ranch hand that has traveled throughout the United States and Canada in pursuit of research material. "Over the Rag Spread — Snow Geese" was inspired after several trips to Texas in the early 1980s to hunt with art publisher Bubba Wood, former owner of Collector's Covey in Dallas. These hunts helped to cultivate a life-long friendship between the two men, and Dunn being the first artist one-man-show produced by Collector's Covey.

The painting captures a now nostalgic time when white cotton rags or diapers were used to create the spread over cut rice fields. These rags were effective in drawing geese in for passing shots or "in-your-face" shooting opportunities, but would many times leave the field weight much more than when placed. Cotton absorbed water found in the rice fields and increased the weight of these "decoys."

For more information on "Over the Rag Spread — Snow Geese" and other fine works of art by Noel Dunn, visit [www.minnesotasetters.com/noeldunn/originalsgallery.html](http://www.minnesotasetters.com/noeldunn/originalsgallery.html), or call (651) 772-1603. **T★J**



*"Over the Rag Spread — Snow Geese"*



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The \$50 fee includes entrance to TFFC for the day, lunch and a season pass to TFFC, so students can return often for more fishing. Instruction includes equipment, knot tying, casting and fundamentals. Participants can fish for rainbow trout in TFFC's 1.5-acre casting pond after class. Catch-and-release fishing is free, but anglers may pay \$5.00 and keep up to five fish.

Reservations are required, and classes limited to 20 persons. For information or to register call Craig Brooks at (903)

670-2222 or email [craig.brooks@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:craig.brooks@tpwd.texas.gov). — *John Jefferson* T★J

### Sportsmen Share Top Factors in Finding a Place to Hunt

When it comes to finding that perfect place to hunt, a lot of factors play into the decision, a recent HunterSurvey.com survey discovered. At the top of that list is the availability and abundance of game hunted. In a question that allowed for multiple answers, 48 percent of those surveyed said this was a critical factor in

their decision. Not surprisingly, hunters want to hunt where they feel they have a better chance for success.

The other top factors in choosing a place to hunt were convenience, as in how far a location is from home, with 45 percent of those surveyed citing that as a key reason, while the ability to escape crowds or finding a “quiet place to hunt” was chosen by 45 percent of those surveyed. Other reasons in order of how many respondents selected them include:

- Past hunting success on that property (32 percent)
- Location provides access to private land (27 percent)
- Land allows for public access (13 percent)
- Location is recommended by a friend or family member (13 percent)
- The size of the property (12 percent)
- How much it costs to hunt there (12 percent)

“Finding ways to provide hunters with relatively convenient and uncrowded places to hunt, along with a decent chance of encountering game, is a real challenge in many parts of the country, but is one the hunting and wildlife management community must continue to pursue,” says Rob Southwick, president of Southwick Associates, which designs and conducts the surveys at HunterSurvey.com, ShooterSurvey.com and AnglerSurvey.com. T★J

### Washington, D.C. Carry Permits Up 140%

That's not a typo according to a report released by the National Shooting Sports Foundation. Concealed carry permits were issued at a rocketing pace after the District of Columbia authorities shifted their concealed carry permit scheme from “may” to “shall” issue after a U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia decision last year.

Prior to the ruling, only 123 permits were issued in Washington, D.C. under the required “good reason” policy, with 77 percent of applications being denied. There have been 1,896 permits issued since, including some that were pending while the case was being heard. The District's Attorney General Karl Racine opted to not appeal to the Supreme Court, fearing an overturned case there would have national impacts. T★J

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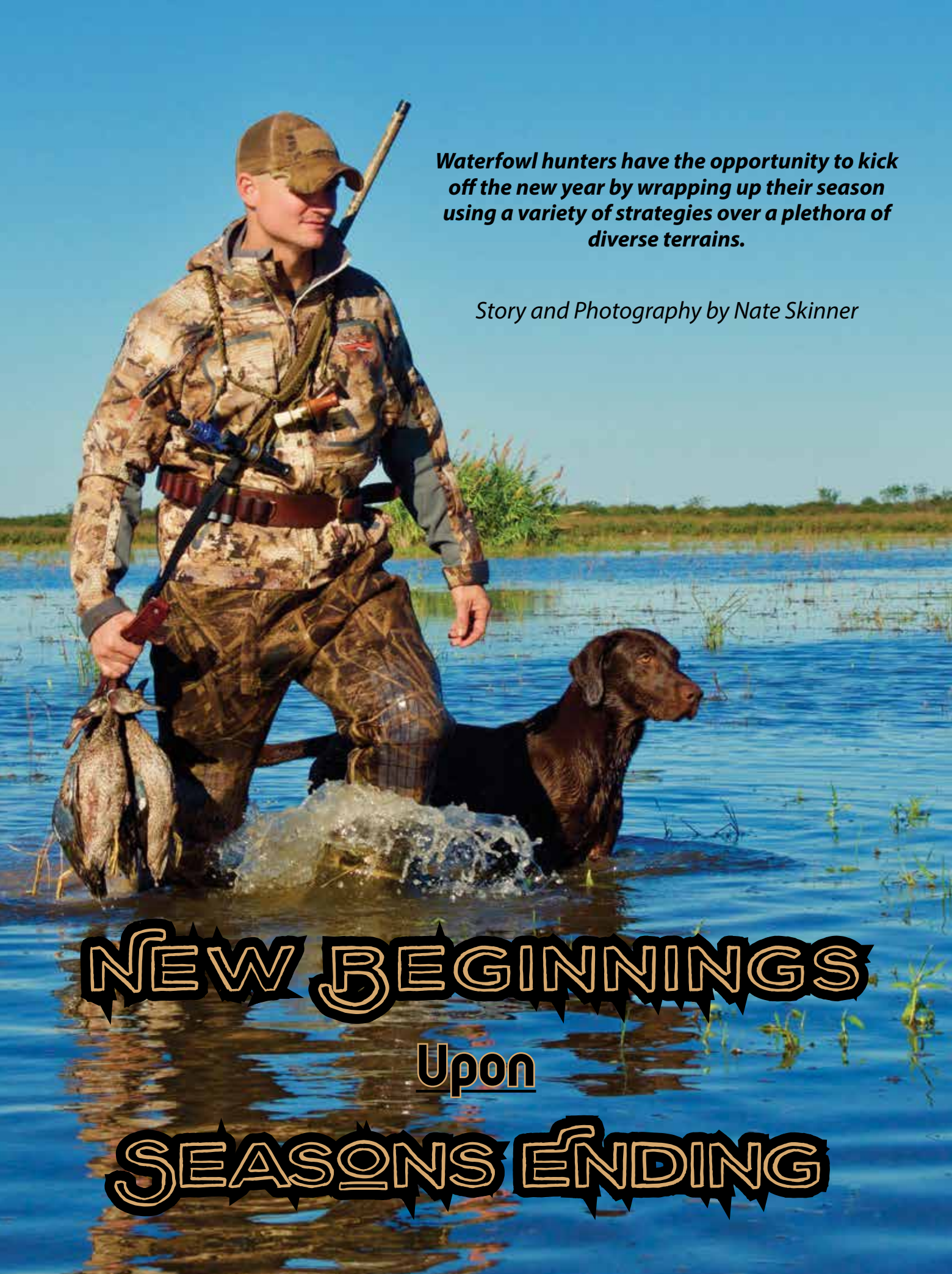


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A man in full camouflage gear, including a cap and sunglasses, is wading through a blue marsh. He is carrying a shotgun on his back and a harvested duck in his left hand. A dark brown dog is wading beside him, splashing water. The background shows a clear blue sky and distant greenery.

***Waterfowl hunters have the opportunity to kick off the new year by wrapping up their season using a variety of strategies over a plethora of diverse terrains.***

*Story and Photography by Nate Skinner*

# **NEW BEGINNINGS**

**Upon**

# **SEASONS ENDING**

**F**or those that live to chase ducks and geese, January kicks off a new year in glorious fashion. Hunters can pick just about any portion of the Lone Star State they prefer and plan to find some birds. With as many options as they can shake a stick at, about the only factor standing in between waterfowlers and full straps are the strategies they employ.

Late season waterfowl can be downright tough, and successfully fooling them is often having a deep grab bag of tricks. The best tactics vary depending upon the terrain and geographic region that is being hunted. This gives hunters an opportunity to pursue ducks and geese using a variety of methods.

When it comes to geese, two areas that all Texan waterfowl hunters should direct their attention to is the rolling and high plains. Intense agriculture in these regions makes them the prime location for some of the most premier goose hunting grounds in the state.

One of the most memorable goose hunts I've ever been on took place along the rolling plains in Haskell County with an outfitter named Ranger Creek Goose. We hunted a dry peanut field for two days and piled up limits of lesser Canada geese and specklebellies like there was nothing to it.

The largest eye opening aspect about this hunt in particular was the fact that waders were not a necessary gear item. In fact, our guide wore tennis shoes the entire time. That's how dry the field we were hunting was. Coming from the mud and boggy muck found along the coastal prairies, this was a refreshing experience.

The peanut industry is the driving force behind agricultural production within the rolling plains, especially in Haskell and Knox counties. That's the reason why hoards of geese winter in the area year after year. Vast peanut fields provide food and a source of energy for immense numbers of specklebellies, along with both greater and lesser Canada geese.

According to the TPWD Waterfowl Program Leader, Kevin Kraai, the numbers of specklebelly geese in the rolling plains have reached record levels in recent years.

"Specklebellies now account for about 75 percent of the goose population in the region," informed Kraai. "These birds



*The dry agricultural fields of the high and rolling plains represent some the most premier goose hunting grounds in the state.*



*Ponds and flooded fields of coastal prairies can produce excellent late season shoots when the right tactics are employed.*



*Fully plumed ducks help create memories late in the season.*

migrate from the northern slope of Alaska and there is no end to their increasing population levels in sight.”

Over in the high plains, corn becomes the focus of agricultural production and does its part to attract plenty of geese. Milo and winter wheat are also predominate crops in the region that also provides food for wintering waterfowl.

Crops in the high plains load up with thousands of snow geese. Kraai states the population of wintering snows in the region have remained fairly steady for several years.

“The western panhandle portion of the high plains has a stable population of snow geese that are referred to as pure whites,” he informed. “These birds migrate from the Arctic and Alaska, and there are very few blue phased snows mixed in with them. Nearly all of them are completely white.”

Whether it’s light geese in the high plains or dark geese in the rolling plains that hunters are after, two things rule when it comes to pursuing them—full body decoys and lay out blinds.

Massive spreads of full body decoys mimic an aggressive feed in the immense agricultural fields of these two northern portions of the state. Often times the ground is so dry and hard in these fields that hunters may need a small mallet to help them put decoy stakes firmly into the soil.

Coffin style lay out blinds are one excellent option for concealing hunters within a goose spread. A cheaper option that is just as effective is employing the use of a camouflage ghillie blanket. These camo covers are made specifically for waterfowl hunters and the top portion of them are constructed with mesh, which allows hunters to cover their faces while still being able to see the action.

A ghillie blanket can be used to blend into any type of harvested crop stubble field. Simply use a rake to gather a large pile of stubble next to the patch of ground that is going to be laid on. Crawl under the blanket and then spread the stubble all over the top of the blanket for the ultimate concealment.

Pairing a ghillie blanket with a lay out chair is an exceptional way to blend in with just about any field while hunting in comfort. These chairs are similar to the traditional, lounge style beach



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

*Late in the season let a cut rice field build for two or three days before hunting a concentration of geese. This allows the birds to get comfortable and feel secure.*



*Layout blinds and full body decoys rule when it comes to goose hunting the dry fields of the high and rolling plains.*

chairs. They keep hunters’ top halves propped up at an angle with their heads out of the dirt, putting them in a good position to quickly sit up and shoulder their shotguns.

Coastal rice prairies offer hunters a change of scenery for pursuing geese, not to mention the predominate species will be snows and specks. Very few Canada geese make it down that far south to winter among the acres of cut rice anymore.

For this reason, large white spreads of silhouette decoys are the best tool for drawing birds into shooting range. Captain Kevin Roberts chases geese along the prairies around Eagle Lake, Lissie, Rock Island, Garwood, and Bay City. He says his late season goose spreads will include a few more dozen decoys that will be set out in a particular way.

“In January, the birds will have wiped

out some of the feed along the prairies and are generally stacked up in massive groups,” he explained. “Specklebellies will be feeding alongside snow geese, but for some reason they tend to isolate themselves from the snows, rather than mixing in amongst them like they do earlier in the season.”

For this reason, Roberts prefers to add more speck decoys to his spread during January. He places them in small feeder groups away from the snows, so that his spread mimics the way the birds are naturally concentrating along the prairies.

Roberts also likes to ditch the white cloaks during last part of the season, and he uses ghillie blankets as his main source of concealment for himself and his hunters.

“If I’m hunting a field with decent stubble late in the season, there’s no doubt

I'm going to use ghillie blankets over white cloaks," he confessed. "By this time in the season the birds have become weary of white sheets, plus I just think ghillie blankets covered in stubble hide hunters a lot better."

As far as calling is concerned, Roberts claims there are plenty of times when he never touches a call during a late season goose hunt.

"In January, I'm only calling at geese about half as much as I would during the first part of the season," he indicated. "When you're in the field that they want to be in, it's best to keep the calls put away and just let the birds work."

Roberts' scouting methods change late in the season along with his hunting tactics. "I'll let a field build for two or three days before I decide to go in on a concentration of geese to hunt them at this point in the year," he added. "I want them get nice and comfortable in the area."

Ponds and flooded fields along coastal rice prairies can also produce memorable late season shoots for ducks, and often times both specks and snow geese can be taken over these same bodies of water.

When duck hunting along the rice prairies in January, Roberts claims that hunters should stick to the phrase, "less is more."

"I don't use any type of motion decoys late in the season, and I cut my spread down by about two or three dozen," he informed. "I want my duck spread to mimic what I'm seeing when I'm scouting. If I'm hunting a pond that's been loaded with pintails and shovelers, then those are the types of decoys I'll use."

Ponds and tanks on private properties away from crowds and heavy hunting pressure can become dynamite duck holes at the tail end of the season. One of the best hunts I've ever experienced for mallards, widgeon, and gadwall took place on a buddy's property near Paris, Texas. The pond rarely got hunted and that's why the birds were there. They piled in on top of us all morning over half a dozen decoys, and we harvested colorful straps of fully plumed ducks.

Along the coast, late season hunters will have to deal with low tides. This means that shallow back lakes may have little to no water, making open bays a main flyway for waterfowl. Getaway Lodge guide, Captain Ruben Garza, says

that he increases the size of his duck spread to compensate for the ducks' behavior during this time of year along the Lower Laguna Madre out of Port Mansfield.

"With less water on the flats, the birds tend to raft up in open, mid bay waters," he explained. "I try to make my spread look like the giant rafts of ducks that can be found across the bay."

Garza claims that duck hunters also have a decent chance of bagging a few geese while hunting along the Lower Laguna.

"We see a ton of geese down here late in the season, and it's not uncommon to get some passing shots at low flyers over the bay," he confessed.

The late season opportunities are endless for waterfowl hunters across the Lone Star State. Those willing to put in the miles can enjoy some diverse experiences in different regions of the state. Gaining knowledge from a variety of areas while employing different techniques will make hunters more skilled and successful at their craft. ⚡★



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## A New Year, a New Boat?

January is a fresh beginning as the New Year starts and many anglers will be thinking about getting a new boat, or maybe a first boat. That's why the boat shows are held this time of year. For most, a boat is a considerable purchase and should be well thought out prior to ever stepping into a dealership or boat show. Preparation now will translate into a much more enjoyable purchasing experience, and ensure a long and happy boating future.

There are several things to determine before you begin your search. Budget is probably top of the list. No matter the type or size of boat you are considering, there will be several different price points available, depending on manufacturer, options and engine size. Set a budget and stick to the number you've chosen. It is all too easy to end up spending thousands more than you intended by adding options and upgrades.

However, be sure to be realistic in your expectations. Allow enough in your budget to get the boat you really want. If that boat is not in the budget right now, you have two choices. Wait and save more money, or scale back your desires.

Be aware that the price of the boat will not be the end of the spending. Unless you pay cash, interest on your financing will add considerably to your actual cost. Taxes, destination/freight charges, prep fees and accessories like life jackets, will add to the final cost. As a general rule you should add eight to ten percent of the original price of the boat to find the final cost.

New versus used is a dilemma all consumers face. Much like automobiles, there are advantages and disadvantages to both. Cost is higher for new units, but the warranty is better. With a used unit you never really know what you are getting. How did the previous owner treat the boat?

Just like with cars there are clues. Instead of miles, a boat's life is measured in hours. While this truly only applies to the engine, it is an overall indicator of how much the vessel has been used, unless the boat has been repowered at some time.

Very high hours indicate a lot of use and should be shelved in favor of a similar unit with lower hours.

However, that is not necessarily a reliable indicator. For example, a boat with high hours that was pampered by the previous owner could actually be in better shape than a unit with low hours that was "rode hard and put up wet."

When in doubt, spend a little money and have a used unit checked out by a certified marine technician. Buying from a dealership should help, as they will thoroughly check out any used units taken in trade. If you're working with a dealership you can trust they will disclose any known issues, and should fix any major mechanical or safety issues before you take delivery. Bottom line, when buying anything used, buyer beware.

In addition to all of the other stuff I do for a living, I work in a boat dealership a few days each week. The people I work with are very much like family and the dealership was my sponsor for 20 years before I ever went to work for them.

After budget, the next consideration is size. Contrary to what you may have heard, size matters. Generally the bigger the boat the higher the price. I believe that too many people buy a smaller boat, in order to save money. That's fine as long as you know your limitations.

Bigger boats are more expensive, but they are also generally safer than a small boat. In the world of bass fishing, high school tournament fishing is exploding. Every week I see dads coming in wanting to get a boat so their child can be on the high school bass team.



*If your budget is bountiful, maybe a new fiberglass boat is in your future, but there are still features and accessories to consider.*

As any parent knows, teenagers are not known for their long attention spans and dedication to purpose. They want to do many different things as they grow. From playing guitar to racing go-carts, football, baseball, soccer and so forth. Chances are, the child's closet or garage is full of failed life-experiments. This is completely normal. It is part of growing up, and it's how we find our true passion in life.

It's also understandable that Dad wants to spend as little as possible, in case Johnny gives this up after six months too. So Dad comes in, sees a 16' aluminum bass model with a 25 horsepower motor and a small price tag and says, "That's the one!"

Well, that's not the one. Not even close. All tournament anglers face several challenges in addition to catching the fish. Although the boat may be rated for three or four people, a boat that small is not going to fish well with three people crowding the limited deck space. The boat itself was never designed to be on our bigger lakes, which can get pretty nasty in a 20 or 25 mph wind. Three foot swells will make that boat more than a little dangerous. And most tournament circuits will fish on bigger lakes, and in bad weather.

I get that Dad doesn't want to break the bank, but in this case I consider the minimum boat to be fiberglass, 19' in length, with a 200 horsepower motor. That's a huge difference in boat, and money. It's also much, much safer for what these folks can be expected to encounter. So, where does that leave you? Consider what you intend to do with the boat, how many people will be on board and what conditions could be encountered.

That little aluminum boat would be perfect for a couple, that will fish a small private lake, or in the coves of a bigger lake in mild weather. Just be honest with yourself in what you need, and what the boat can deliver safely. This is true of the type boat needed.

Bay boats, bass boats, skiffs, pontoons are all designed to accomplish specific goals. While some will be more versatile than others, anything outside that specific purpose will be a compromise. If you want to take 12 people with you when you go fish, then you're looking at a pontoon boat in an angler configuration. That is perfect for that purpose, but will



*For about a third of the price of a fiberglass boat, an aluminum one will still get the job done.*

be a poor choice for fishing shallow bass in the timber during the spawn. You will have to make some decisions in order to get the most out of the chosen boat.

As far as fiberglass versus aluminum, again, what's your end goal? An aluminum boat will be less expensive than a 'glass boat of the same size, with similar features. Fiberglass boats tend to be faster and hold the water better. That is, they aren't pushed around by the wind as much, and they generally ride better. Aluminum will take a lick from a rock or stump and show a scratch or dent, whereas the same rock could severely damage the 'glass boat, resulting in costly fiberglass work.

Understand these are not grandpas jon boat. Today's aluminum boats come with as many amenities as the 'glass boats, and can be exceptional fishing platforms. There are models in excess of 20' with ratings for 250 hp and more. They are anything but cheap, but are less than a comparable 'glass unit. Just be sure you compare apples to apples. That is, compare a 20 footer to a 20 footer with the same amenities.

As for accessories, determine what you must have and what you can live without. Do you really need four fishfinders at about \$3,000 each? Or can you get by with one or two? By all means get the best you can afford but remember it all adds up in the end.

I would be remiss if I did mention experience. Boating experience can't be bought — it must be earned with time on the water. During this time it is imperative not exceed your abilities. Go to any bass tournament and you might get the impres-

sion that a bass boat has two speeds, stop and full throttle.

No matter the size of the boat and motor there will be a learning curve in the operation of the unit. The bigger the boat and motor, the more dangerous it can be due to the higher speeds possible. Take time in getting to know the boat, its capabilities and operator's abilities. This builds confidence in all.

All tournaments have a rule that life jackets must be worn anytime the motor is running, and the kill switch must be attached. This is a rule to live by, no matter if fishing a tournament or not. As a matter of fact if you're in a canoe, rowboat, pontoon, bay boat, airboat, or floating raft, if you're in a boat wear a lifejacket.

One more tip. A lot of folks tend to think that the boat shows are the best place to get a great deal on a boat. Yes and no. The boats at the shows are the newest models from the various makers. These have not been in the dealership very long and tend to hold closer to MSRP pricing.

Another option is to see if the dealer has any of last years models left. He's had it in inventory for a while and may be more likely to cut his margin to find it a new home.

In the end you need to determine how much you can spend, how big your boat really needs to be and what are your must have accessories. We live in a wonderful age and when armed with the right questions you can surf the interwebs and narrow your search to a few boats, then go and do the hands on looking.

Wishing you fun and safe boating.





## Random Facts

I thought he was putting me on. A researcher once told me that if a pelican was trying to feed on a school of larger fish, it would turn its head to the left. Curious to see if that was really true, I started to watch pelicans. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that pelicans actually did that. To be successful, an angler has to stimulate his awareness above the water and under the water. I call this Angler's Science as opposed to Researcher's Science.

Under the guidance of Dr. Bori Olla, researchers studied a school of bluefish in a 30,000 gallon aquarium for seven years. One day, they let me watch while they fed the school. Two things became instantly obvious. Although the bluefish were swimming fast, they did not keep their mouths open and hope something fell into it. Instead, they focused on a single fish and chased it. If their prey did not move away from them, they would break off the attack. Finally, they stopped feeding.

Dr. Olla told me to watch what happened next. Researchers then tossed in much larger bait than they did before. At night, the bluefish would swim slowly in loose schools until first light in the morning. Just to complicate matters, the bluefish would respond to chum after dark just as they would in the daytime.

One of the most enlightening lessons in fish behavior came when I spent three days in a camouflaged blind studying brown trout in Pennsylvania's Spruce Creek with Dr. Robert Bachman. The first thing he showed me was that no two trout had the same spot pattern so you could identify specific fish. He then proved that fish feed throughout the day and not just early and late when light levels are low. And, there are no feeding lanes in moving water.

The most fascinating aspect was that the trout would leave during the winter months and return in the spring. Each fish took up the same position it had last year and the year before. The position was so critical that you could superimpose the eye of the trout from year to

year and the eye was in the exact spot. I began calling them seats in a restaurant. Each fish had no idea if there was more food upstream or if conditions were better somewhere else. That was their spot and that's where you found them every day. Equally important, the bigger fish were in the shallowest and least likely spots.

Based on this study and observations I had made, I concluded that saltwater species also had seats in a restaurant and maintained the same precise spot during specific conditions and certain times of the year. Let me share some examples.

Fishing guides work the same spots at the same time each year and you can bet that the fish are there. In the Florida Keys, guides fish for tarpon under the bridges of the Overseas Highway. Captain Jack Callion works specific spans on an outgoing tide and other spans on an incoming tide. Surprisingly, tarpon are there year after year in the same spots.

While we're on the subject of tarpon, consider two more facts. Tarpon require 75 degree water temperature to be on the flats. If the water temperature is 74 degrees you won't find many fish, but when the temperature rises a single degree, a thousand fish could suddenly invade the shallows. How did they know the temperature changed?

Each spring, the Palalo worm spawns on a shallow flat in the Florida Keys on an outgoing tide. When that is about to



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

*On Texas middle coast Capt. Nathan Beabout is refining his theory on when and where fish will appear in certain parts of San Antonio Bay. His premise is similar to the one presented by the author on fish returning to the same area at the same time of year and he has become a "fanatic" on observing fish activity and chronicling their movement throughout the seasons.*

happen, countless tarpon gather to feast on these worms. You won't find many tarpon anywhere else for miles. Somehow, they instinctively know where and when this event is about to take place.

Serious fishermen study their quarry continuously. The more you know and understand about fish behavior, the more successful you are going to be. Gamefish follow a pattern and they are usually consistent. The key lies in discovering the critical factors that are vital to each species. If, for example, you want to catch a Pacific sailfish on a fly or other artificial



or even natural bait on light tackle, you first have to raise the fish from the depths and tease it into striking. What happens if you were fishing inshore and suddenly decided to try for sails, but had nothing to tease the sails to the surface.

In one instance, I took an empty Coca Cola bottle, tied a line to it, and dragged it behind the boat so that it made a commotion. Within 10 minutes, a sail was trying to swallow the bottle. Observations over time taught me that most Pacific sails I've seen prefer to strike to the left. Obviously, that's where you want to put an offering as you remove the teaser. Just as a passing comment, I once caught a sailfish on a cigar and another time on a plastic worm designed for bass fishing.

Two captains in different parts of the country fished for different species based on a clock. They discovered that the fish they intended to catch changed locations on various stages of the tide and they used their wristwatch to know when to move. Even if I had just landed a fish in one spot, they immediately took me to another and the fish were there.

Fish are creatures of habit, yet few of us understand everything that motivates



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

*On Sabine Lake Buck Payne has caught speckled trout from the same set of old pilings on numerous trips. This has become so consistent that the pilings are visited on each trip. This premise is similar to the author's theory that saltwater species have "seats in a restaurant" and maintained the same precise spot during specific conditions and certain times of the year.*

them and where they will be under various conditions. You should know that water temperature is critical and every species can detect even a fraction of one degree in temperature change. Fish have to find

food, avoid being prey for a larger species, and live long enough to spawn. The more you work on observing fish behavior and using it every time you are on the water, the more successful you will be. 🌟🌟

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## Drawing Hunting Tags Out West

So, you live in Texas and are intrigued about hunting mule deer, elk, big horn sheep, mountain lions or goats and maybe even bears out west, but are intimidated by all of the rules and regulations. Well, there's plenty of good reason to be intimidated but don't give up.

After college I left The Promised Land (Texas) for a job and eventually ended up in Colorado. Upon encountering their regulations the first hunting season it seemed overly complex. So I understand your trepidation.

Yes, it can be a little confusing but don't panic it's not indecipherable. In due time I came to understand the system after living and hunting all over Colorado for 10 years and hunting in Wyoming. I then moved to Idaho and have lived there for the last 20 years.

There is a sound, scientific rationale behind draws, over the counter tags and other hunting permit options. Compared to Texas, the western states have huge blocks of Public Land, whether it is a Wilderness Area, National Forest or Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. Of note, in Wilderness Areas you cannot use any motorized vehicles. The national forest and BLM are less restrictive on travel methods.

Out west they use Game Management Units to regulate things, which makes

sense. If there is a bad winter kill or wolves have wiped out half of the herd, the number of tags that are available in that particular area are limited.

Something Texans are not use to at home are the huge snowfalls that occur out west. In bad years they can adversely affect game animal herds. Conversely if there has been good weather with a mild winter and a good amount of feed, then there maybe an increased number of doe and cow tags to help reduce the herd's impact on the rangeland.

Here are a few generalities that are somewhat common to all western states, however, realize that rules do vary from state to state. There are over the counter tags that are an unlimited number of tags available in that unit for a specific specie and sex of animal. Then there are "draw only" Units which means there are a limited amount of tags given out and they are allocated by draw only.

Most of the Units are the same for all species. But it can be a little more complicated than that. Let's say in Idaho you're hunting the McCall Zone. This zone includes Units 19A, 23, 24 and 25. Some hunting zones for a particular specie can include multiple units. However, Wyoming can get a little more confusing. Their Unit for Wyoming or Shiras moose may have different boundaries than the Unit description for elk and mule deer hunts.

Since I have lived and hunted hard out west for 30 years you'd think I had it down pat but even with my background it can still be confusing. I'm not talking about applying for tags in all of the western states of



*Regulation booklets vary for different game animals even within one state. This can add to the intimidation some hunters find when they head to the mountain states to hunt big game.*

Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Utah, New Mexico and Arizona. I'm talking about even in my home state of Idaho! So right off, I'm going to throw out a disclaimer.

For me to adequately explain applying for tags I'd have to printout all sets of regulations for these seven states, which would result in no small book. Especially when you realize there are individual rulebooks for many of the individual game species. The good news is most of the western states post their rules and applications on-line. But if you're like me you'll still want to call and talk to someone in person to make sure you're on the right track.

To talk to someone here's my advice. Don't call the bigger fish and game offices. Call the office in a smaller region, particularly near where you want to hunt. They'll be a little more kicked back and helpful. Although I have to admit, most of them have been helpful as a whole when I call.

To get started go online and find out all of the info you can on the state, the Unit and game animal you want to hunt. Then call the fish and game office, ask questions and have them mail you a set of regulations. Some states, such as Wyoming open their application process in January, so



*To make sure that you put in for the right draw unit study a National Forest map. Idaho's National Forest maps have the units outlined on them. Then order a MyTopoMap to hunt with in the field.*

you'd better get started right now.

The following link came from an online Search and revealed the application deadline dates for drawings in different states from the 2018 season. This will provide at least a targeted date for the 2019 seasons, but make sure to refer to the information available on line from the western state that will be hunted — draw deadline dates do change. ([www.gohunt.com/read/INSIDER/2018-western-hunting-application-deadlines-and-draw-results](http://www.gohunt.com/read/INSIDER/2018-western-hunting-application-deadlines-and-draw-results)) To add a little further to the confusion, to apply for deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, bear, mountain goat and cougar tags the various species application times will all vary, so start early so you don't miss your desired application deadlines.

The classification of a "Trophy Unit" is not used anymore since game departments are trying to appease the anti-hunters, but in most draw-only units, due to the limited number of hunters allowed to hunt, you'll have a better chance to see a trophy or better quality mature animal. However, fewer permits could also be because of the limited number of tags available because the herd number is low.

One thing I like are Preference Points. The first place I saw these was in Colorado but not all states have them. I wanted an elk tag in Colorado in their coveted Unit 76. Unfortunately, so did everyone else. But, if you didn't draw, you got a preference point and after you built up five to six years worth of preference points you knew you had a much better chance at drawing a tag.

Some states don't have a Preference Point system which is good and bad. I have a buddy in Idaho that put in for a bull moose tag for 17 years. I drew a bull tag on my second attempt and a cow tag on my first application. My buddy was some kind of upset at my "beginner's luck" good fortune. So Preference Points can be good if you have a bunch and discouraging if it's your first time to apply.

Then for one more "wrinkle." There are leftover tags if not enough people put in for the draw in a particular Unit. In Wyoming we used to get leftover antelope doe tags for \$25-\$40, and according to how many they wanted harvested that year, some years you could get up to five of them. This is a good way to hunt an area and do some scouting to see where you want to put in for a buck tag. Remember,

hunting is a management tool that helps keep the herd within the carrying capacity of the game management plan.

One last tip. Just because you've hunted in an area for decades double-check the rules every year. Conditions change so that means rules change.

Years ago, most of Colorado's mule deer tags were over the counter and then one year that all changed to draw only. I remember one fish and game guy almost gleefully writing yes, a lot of Texas hunters will arrive in Colorado to hunt mule deer this year only to find out they can't

get a tag.

If you've ever dreamed about hunting out west, don't be scared. Jump in and give it a try. You might just find out that hunting in the mountains can be addictive.

Hunting out west is challenging and rewarding as the hunt will occur in some of the most breathtakingly beautiful terrain God created. That big, rough, remote country, and its weather, is not without its own unique set of challenges. In an upcoming issue I'll explain how to prepare for a "Do It Yourself" hunt out west. Check back with me next month. **T★J**

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# WINTER'S FULL HOUSE

*Some of Texas' best fishing opportunities to get in on the cold weather action.*

*Story and Photography by Matt Williams*

**L**ike it or not, Jack Frost always brings some of the coldest, nastiest weather of the year to Texas. Rain, sleet, wind, snow.... chances are we'll see it all in some form or fashion over next couple of months before winter gives way to the warmer weather of spring.

Casual anglers might choose to cope with foul conditions by pulling a little tackle or boat maintenance, but it's a feel good stretch of time for members of the hardcore club.

I've been called lots of things over the years. "Fair weather fisherman" isn't among them. Though I'm not near as hardcore as some, I'd much rather fish when it's 40 degrees outside than 98.

On freshwater lakes and some rivers across Texas, it is not uncommon to find the bite red hot on days that might seem better suited for sipping hot coffee by a warm fire than dunking a shiner or slinging a Rat-L-Trap.

Here's an angler's guide to some of

Texas' best winter fishing opportunities and places to get in on the action:

## **Largemouth Bass**

*The Fish:* Most of the biggest bass of the year will be caught between now and the end of April. While the majority always come during early spring, when big females are lured to the sun-baked shallows to spawn, there are always some pre-spawn giants reeled in during the dead of winter.

The current Texas state record of 18.18 pounds was caught in January 1992. January and February have produced a combined total of 190 entries topping 13 pounds.

The biggest bass are always females. In winter, they are full of eggs and at peak weight for the year. Fisheries scientists contend that female bass may weigh around 10 percent heavier than normal when its ovaries are fully developed. A fish that weighs 10 pounds in August could easily weigh 11 pounds in January, possibly even more if it happens to get

caught after eating a big crappie or bar fish.

*Best Locations:* Pre-spawn bass like to hang out along channels, ditches and points that connect deep water to shallow. They will spend a high percentage of time in a suspended state at mid-range depths, often in relation to clumps of underwater brush, grass, stumps, underwater bridges or any other isolated cover/structures. Bass anglers sometimes refer to the sweet spots as "staging areas."

Anglers typically don't catch big numbers this time of year, but the quality can be outstanding. Some of the best fishing will occur during warming trends that heat the upper layer of water a degree or two. A two to three day warm-up may spark a feeding frenzy over shallow flats, points and shorelines adjacent to deep water. The same holds true of inclement periods of weather such as snow or sleet resulting from a frontal passage. Wicked swings in barometric pressure associated with foul weather have a



*Crappie weighing 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 pounds is a really solid fish on most lakes with fish weighting two pounds and up considered giants.*

lake and refuse to bite much other than a jig bumped slowly across bottom near a brushy channel ledge. You might catch a few doing that, but you might catch more fishing shallower. This is especially true if you are fishing a lake that has hydrilla.

Key on the outer edges where the grass breaks into deeper water with a jig or Carolina rig, or fish moving baits like a square bill or Rat-L-Trap over the tops of submerged grass beds. The key is to keep the bait

moving just fast enough to keep it ticking the top of the vegetation on the way in.

### **Crappie**

*The Fish:* There are two subspecies of crappie in Texas, white crappie and black crappie.

Like bass, crappie will be full of eggs now in preparation of the spring spawn, but they aren't near as large. The state record white crappie is 4.56 pounds. The record black crappie weighed 3.92 pounds.

Sometimes referred to as white perch, crappie are sought more as table fare than trophy status. A crappie weighing 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 pounds is a really solid fish on most lakes. Fish two pounds and up are giants.

The statewide daily limit is liberal at 25 fish with a 10-inch minimum. However, there are a few lakes where special limits apply. Anglers are reminded of a special "no cull" rule in effect on Lake O' the Pines and Lake Fork. Between Dec. 1 and Feb. 28, anglers on those lakes are required to keep every crappie they catch up to 25 fish, regardless of size. The no-cull rule was implemented several years ago because of the high incidence of hyperbuoyancy (overinflated air bladder) and delayed mortality on fish reeled in from deep water.

*Best Locations:* Crappie are a school fish. Other than spring, when they move shallow to spawn, the fish spend the

way of bringing out the headhunter in otherwise dormant bass.

The shallow bite can be particularly good on lakes with an abundance of grass or smallish power plant reservoirs. Power plants rely on lake water to cool turbines used for generating electricity. The water is discharged back into the lake at several degrees warmer than when it went in.

Thermal enrichment on a power plant lake like Brandy Branch, Welch or Martin Creek can cause water temperatures to be 15-20 warmer than on a neighboring cold water lake. This can fool bass into thinking it is spring, when in reality it is still winter outside. Winter fishing also can be exceptional at Lake Falcon and Mexico lakes, where warm weather is the norm and water temperatures rarely dip below 55 degrees.

*Tactics To Try:* Winter is a good time to break out some of the biggest baits in the box if you're after the biggest fish in the lake. Swim baits (hard or soft) are good choices in clear water. Other long time favorites are jig/plastic pork combos, large crank bait, spinnerbaits, Chatterbaits, lipless crankbaits and suspending jerk baits.

One biggest misconception about winter fishing is that all of the fish high tail it to the deepest part of



*In winter, female bass are full of eggs, are at peak weight for the year and may weigh around 10 percent heavier than normal.*



*Blues and channel cat gather beneath active cormorant roosts to feed on the nutritious droppings of these fish eating birds.*

majority of their lives away from the bank hounding roving pods of shad around deep water structure like river channels, creek channels, underwater points, bridges, brush piles and standing timber.

The fish are often suspended between the surface and bottom.

*Tactics to Try:* Crappie can be caught a variety of ways. Perhaps the easiest, and most common, is to soak a live shiner on a No. 1 gold aberdeen hook fished vertical beneath the boat. Strikes are detected by a slack line or bobbing rod tip.

It's possible to pick out a random stump or bridge piling and run up the score with shiners, but most anglers will rely on their sonar to tell them whether a particular spot is worth fishing or not before telling a minnow bon voyage.

Electronics will show fish, bait and depth at which everything is holding. Placing a 1/4 or 3/8 ounce smash weight about 12 inches above the hook will help get the bait down without restricting the movement of the shiner too much.

Artificial jigs can be even more effective at times, especially when casting around bridges to get at suspended fish relating to support pilings or the cross members that connect them. The trick is to cast parallel with the cross member and allow the jig to fall on a slack line through

the strike zone. If you don't get bit, reel in and repeat the process.

Deep strolling over main lake points, river ledges other structure away from the bank can be equally effective at times. The idea is to drop a 1/8 or 1/4 inch jig (some guys like a tandem set up) to the desired depth, then rely on the trolling motor to move it along through the strike zone. Some anglers will create a course to follow using marker buoys or the trail feature on their GPS.

### Catfish

*The Fish:* The lowly catfish won't win any beauty contests, but Texans love 'em just the same. In fact, catfish rank second in popularity with Texas anglers behind largemouth bass.

There are three kinds of whiskered fish in Texas' inland waters. Channel cat are the most abundant, followed by blues and flatheads.

Blues and flatheads grow significantly larger than channel cat. The current state record channel cat is a 36.50 pounder. The state's biggest blue catfish is a 121.50 pounder caught at Lake Texoma in Jan. 2004. The state record flathead is a 98.50 pounder that was caught from Lake Palestine on Dec. 1998.

Winter fishing can be particularly good for catfish, especially trophy class blues weighing upwards of 50 pounds. Big blues can be found in any number of lakes, but some are certainly better than others.

Among the best for whopper fish are Texoma, Tawakoni, Lewisville, Toledo Bend, Palestine, Waco and Lake Buchanan. Lakes Lavon, Livingston, Arrowhead, Cedar Creek and Richland Chambers also crank out good numbers of quality fish on hook and line.

*Best Locations:* Big blue cat are prone to show up just about anywhere when it's cold outside, but the majority are caught away from the bank, usually in relation to some sort underwater structure like a hump, old road bed or channel. A common denominator in most sweet spots is baitfish. Blues are eating machines. Find the shad and you'll find the fish.

Anglers shouldn't overlook the shallows, either. Wind blown points and shorelines are always potential hotspots. The wind pushes tiny zooplankton against the bank, which in turns attracts

the small baitfish frequently targeted by apex predators.

*Tactics to Try:* Drifting with the wind, using a trolling motor to move the boat slowly contour lines displayed a GPS mapping program or anchoring in a specific spot are good ways to target big blues away from the bank. Skilled fishing guides like Chad Ferguson, George Rule and Cody Mullinex have the drills down to art form.

When drifting or strolling it's important to put the bait where the fish are — suspended or on bottom — and keep it there by maintaining the proper speed. Carolina and Santee style rigs matched with circle hooks are the norm out there. As for bait, it's hard to beat cuts of shad, carp or buffalo. The fresher the better.

\* *Juglines:* A jug line is an open water set line that relies on a white plastic gallon jug or some other floating device to suspend the main line and bait stagings vertical in the water. Its a great tactic for keeping kids or beginning anglers entertained. Up to five hooks can placed on the main line using, but three is plenty.

\* *Cormorant Roosts:* Cormorants are big, black, fish-eating birds that migrate to Texas lakes in large numbers during the winter months. The birds disperse to main lake areas to feed, then to retreat to roost trees to rest and relieve themselves. Blues and channel cat gather beneath



*When the timing is right with river flows, photoperiod and water temperature, white bass make big moves upstream in giant schools that can number well into the thousands.*

active cormorant roosts to feed on the nutritious droppings.

Anglers can score around roosts by casting weightless chicken gizzards to trees or stumps, or soaking fresh shad or punch bait along the outskirts.

Fishing around cormorant roosts is a strong pattern on lakes Fork, Richland Chambers, Cedar Creek, Ray Hubbard and Lavon.

### White Bass

*The Fish:* The white bass is a nomadic fish that spends the majority of its life roaming open water and making life miserable on roving pods of shad.

Things change in late winter. That's when schools of the brawny sport fish begin gravitating to river bottlenecks in preparation their annual spawning run.

When the timing is right with river flows, photoperiod and water temperature, the fish make big moves upstream in giant schools that can number well into the thousands.

I've seen the spawning run get underway as early as Christmas, but it is usually a few weeks after the New Year and into February before things really start to click.

White bass are eager eaters when the dinner bell rings, too. Get on the right spot and it is possible to sack up a 25-fish limit in as many casts.

*Best Locations:* White bass are found in dozens of lakes, but the most pronounced spawning runs usually occur on major river systems that are linked to large impoundments with the most abundant populations.

Among the most fabled river systems are the Sabine River above Toledo Bend, the Trinity River above Lake Livingston, the Neches River above Lake Palestine and the Colorado River above Lake Buchanan. Notable spawning runs also occur on select creeks, rivers and tributaries that feed lakes Lewisville, Belton, Cedar Creek, Somerville and Whitney.

The best fishing areas vary with the river system. It's best to key on underwater sandbars, gravel bars and still water eddies.

*Tactics to Try:* White bass will hit assorted baits ranging from crankbaits to small spinners and Roadrunners.

\* *Roadrunners:* 1/4 and 1/8 ounce models work best in combination with thin line and light tackle. Cast around

eddies, brush and creek banks. Retrieve the bait slow and steady.

\* *Crankbaits:* Medium divers in shad or crawfish patterns work best. A slow, steady retrieve is the key.

\* *Rat-L-Traps:* 1/4 and 1/2 ounce models are ideal when fish are holding around underwater sandbars and still water eddies. Retrieve slow and hold on.

### Striped Bass

*The Fish:* You can't talk winter fishing without mention of ol' line-sides. It's the fourth most popular sport fish on Texas' freshwater menu, heavily favored for its nasty disposition, brawny power and violent, spool-stripping runs. Hook into a fish upwards of 15 pounds on bait casting gear and you're in for a bull-in-the-china-cabinet experience. Coax one into eating a topwater lure and it might seem as if a bomb went off

Texas river systems have a history of producing the biggest stripers. The 53 pound state record was caught out of the Brazos River in 1999 and the No. 2 fish, a 50 pounder, caught from the Guadalupe in 1996. The state's last Top 50 fish was caught from Lake Austin in August 2014. The 42.5 pounder ranks No. 33.

*Best Locations:* Striper fishing is big on a number of lakes, but it's huge on Texoma. The Texas/Oklahoma reservoir supports one of only few self-sustaining striper populations in the country and has a reputation for big numbers and quality alike. The fish are believed to generate \$20 million annually in economic impact for the Texoma area alone.

Other Texas lakes well known for producing top notch striper fishing include Tawakoni, Whitney, Canyon and Buchanan.

*Tactics To Try:* Stripers will hammer assorted moving baits as well as topwaters through the fall, but many guides switch to granny gear once water temperatures dip into the 50s to cope with the stripers' slowed metabolism.



*Shad pattern swim baits rigged on a 3/4 ounce jig head catch lot fish during the winter months when crawled slowly around points, offshore structure or areas where birds are working bait fish.*

Shad pattern swim baits rigged on a 3/4 ounce jig head catch lot fish during the winter months when crawled slowly around points, offshore structure or areas where birds are working bait fish.

Another popular technique is "deadsticking." The key is to locate pods of shad and schools stripers over deep water using your electronics, drop a shad pattern plastic like a Zoom Fluke rigged on 3/4 or one ounce jig head straight down amongst them and allow the bait to hang there motionless. Thus, the name, deadsticking.

Many guides will bump the bottom of the boat using broom handle or tap the side with a rubber mallet to attract fish and activate the action. It sounds strange, but I've seen it work multiple times for stripers, hybrids and white bass during the coldest part of the year. ★★



*For bass, anglers should key on the outer edges where the grass breaks into deeper water with a jig or Carolina rig, or fish moving baits like a square bill or Rat-L-Trap over the tops of submerged grass beds.*



## The Most Rewarding Thing About Shooting

Recently I spent a Saturday shooting with some new shooters. Most of the time new shooters are kids but this time I was teaching adults.

Two shooters were a father and his 17 year old son. They were from South Africa and had never shot a semi-auto rifle. The son had never shot any type of firearm in his life. I taught both of them how to shoot with AR-15 rifles.

The second group was a family who has moved to Texas from Chicago. Chicago is one of the most restrictive cities to live in if you want to own or shoot a gun. The husband had shot a 45 handgun once before. His wife and 19 year old son had never shot before. I brought 6 different handguns in three different calibers and they had a great time.

The big smile happens every time a new shooter hits the bullseye. Even experienced shooters act like kids and want to keep their targets to show their friends. I get more enjoyment out of shooting and teaching others than shooting or hunting myself.

Hunting seasons are coming to a close and from all the reports it looks like it has been a banner year. I have heard of more big deer being shot this year than ever before.

I even managed to get out and do some hunting myself. The freezer was looking a little bare. I didn't shoot anything big and no longer go deer hunting for that reason. I go for the most important reason — for friendship and family.

I enjoy hearing about my friend's hunts and spending time with my family around the campfire. I taught both my wife and children how to shoot and hunt. For them it has become a great life style and normal thing to do.

However, there is still a perspective by some that it is a man's sport. Teaching your kids to hunt and shoot can be one of the most rewarding thing to happen in your life.

Teaching kids to hunt and shoot can also be just as frustrating as it is rewarding. Kids have a short attention



*A modern sporting rifle AR 15 is great fun to shoot and first time shooters won't get bored with the experience.*

span, so keep things fun and exciting.

When you go to the range to shoot, remember they are not the same size as you. Don't expect your 30-06 deer rifle to work for your seven year old daughter. A rifle has to fit a young shooter or the recoil will hurt them when they shoot. What's worse is they will remember it hurting each time the trigger is pulled. If the rifle is too long, it makes it hard to see through the scope, as well as reach the trigger.

Don't pick a caliber too big for the child to shoot. A 270 Win. might be right for you but a 22-250 or 243 Win. will work better for the youngsters. Make sure the rifle fits, the trigger is easy to pull and the rifle doesn't kick too much.

Take time to work with your kids and spend lots of time at the range practicing. Shooting won't come easy to most young shooters. Schools and television have taught children shooting and guns are bad. You will have to teach them how much fun the safe handling of firearms and shooting can be. If they are going to go hunting, they also have to practice first.

Many factory guns are made to fit smaller shooters. Remington is building their Model 700 in a youth model. The stock is one inch shorter and the barrel is from two to four inches shorter than a normal rifle. This is a great gun for beginners.

I have worked on several of these rifles and shot many of them. They work great and the accuracy is everything needed

for hunting.

For kids I like this rifle in a .243 Winchester caliber. I recommend having the trigger lightened to about three or four pounds, so a little finger can pull it easily.

Also shoot a lighter bullet. The 80 to 90 grain bullets in a 243 is perfect for deer hunting. The recoil will be less, the accuracy will be better and I have never seen a whitetail walk away from a well placed 85 grain 243 bullet.

Scopes can be a problem for youngsters. Young eyes can see things we can't see anymore, but you have to train their eyes to look for the cross-hairs. Don't over power the scope for young shooters. A good 4x power scope will work better than a 12x power. A good 3x9 is great for kids but keep the power set low. At 9x power it is hard to keep the cross-hairs from moving all around on the target or the animal.

Use a heavy duplex cross-hair because it's easy to see in the scope. An even better option is to get a scope with an illuminated reticle for the young shooter.

Millet is making a great scope with an illuminated reticle in 1x4 power. I really like this scope and have several on some of my personal rifles. The scope is clear, small in size and best of all, the price is great. For less than \$300, the scope has an illuminated reticle with good cross-hairs that work.

Now, all of this can add up and get expensive quickly. A new rifle, scope,



trigger work, ammo, and shooting time at the range or even lessons tend to add up before hunting season even gets here.

There are several ways to get your kids shooting on a budget. First, the rifle doesn't have to be a deluxe grade. I started hunting deer with a single shot 30-30 with a cut down stock and a slip on recoil pad. Several companies make single shot rifles that are already cut down for kids.

There are lots of affordable scopes on the market like the Millet mentioned earlier. Both Tasco and Burris make great budget line scopes in 3x9 power range.

Buy good mounts for the rifle and scope. Nothing messes up a hunt worse than having a scope come loose and not being able to hit anything.

Ammo prices can range from cheap to very expensive. Both Federal and Hornady make great practice ammo that is as deadly as it comes. I have shot many deer with both of these brands of ammunition and they work very well.

Last, having a trigger job done. While it is not cheap, in the long run, it will pay off with better and easier shooting with good solid hits on the game.

Now if a new rifle is not in your current budget, consider taking one of your varmint rifles and cutting the stock down for your kid to shoot. I like the 22-250 for shooting Hill Country whitetail deer.

Another option is a modern sporting AR-15 rifle for your youngster to shoot and hunt with it. Most AR's have a short or collapsible stock and use low power scopes. You will want to get a five round



*The practice range is where shooting issues can be corrected like not leaning back or using the wrong eye while having fun learning to shoot.*

magazine and maybe have the trigger lightened, but that's about it.

The 223 is a very deadly caliber when the right ammunition and bullet is used. Don't go deer hunting with a 55 grain full metal jacket bullet. When hunting with a 223 use a soft nose or hollow point bullet. My favorite bullets are the Nosler 50 grain Ballistic Tip and the 52 grain Sierra Match Hollow Point.

A few years back, my daughter and I were hunting on the Barnhart Ranch in South Texas. Katie was having problems with her rifle working after it had fallen off the 4-wheeler and messed up the

scope.

Irvin Barnhart handed her his little .223 rifle loaded with 52 grain Sierra bullets and she shot a nice axis buck and later a cow elk. Both dropped with one shot like they had been hit with a Mack truck. It just takes practice putting the shot in the right place.

These are just a few ways to get your children or wife shooting and hunting. By starting now, you can accomplish this in time for the next hunting season. It is the most rewarding hunting experience I have ever done. I bet it will be the same for you too. **T★J**

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# *Laguna Legends*

A man wearing a tan cap, sunglasses, a red bandana, and a dark blue long-sleeved shirt is holding a fishing rod. He is wearing gloves and has a focused expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

*Those that observed, experimented and ultimately discovered what worked best in this very unique bays system.*

*Story by Danno Wise*

Located mere miles above the Mexican border, the shallow, clear Lower Laguna Madre is perhaps the most unique bay on the Texas coast. The Lower Laguna features species and habitat quite unlike that found in most bays in the Lone Star State. However, the Lower Laguna Madre region has always been somewhat cut off from the rest of the Texas coast by the broad expanse of the King Ranch.

As a result, the anglers in the Lower Laguna seemed somewhat behind the times compared to the rest of the Texas coastal anglers. However, in many ways they were far ahead of their times, especially in regards to shallow water fishing. This has become increasingly obvious over the past decade as anglers across the Texas coast have begun adopting boats, tackle and techniques that were pioneered in these shallow, pristine waters decades ago.

This is just a glimpse of how the modern fly and light-tackle fishery in the Lower Laguna Madre developed.

Capt Steve “JR” Ellis has a well-deserved reputation as one of the best sight-fishermen on the Texas coast. He has influenced, and been influenced by, a number of guides and fishermen in the Lower Laguna Madre area and beyond.

Although he’s from Houston, Ellis has fished the Lower Laguna his entire life, having spent his childhood summers with his grandparents in Raymondville and fishing from his family’s bay house in Port Mansfield, which his great-grandfather JW Turner had purchased in 1956. After graduating high school, Ellis moved back and forth between Port Isabel and Houston a few times before relocating in this region for good in 1979.

“When I’ve moved back in 1979 is when I met Chuck Scates,” said Ellis, referring to the late Capt. Chuck Scates, one of the first fly fishing guides on the Texas coast. At the time, neither Scates nor Ellis were guides. Rather, they were

surfers who liked to fish.

“Once Chuck and I got together, that’s when we got serious about fishing, but we knew absolutely nothing about this bay. We got ourselves a 12 foot x 4 foot scooter. Danny Gillain of Jim’s Pier gave us a 25 HP Suzuki off a boat that had been sunk in one of the hurricanes. That’s the boat we learned the bay in and the boat we started guiding out of.

“Really, everything we ended up doing had everything to do with Ronnie Ray, as well as Freddie and Janie Petty. We learned a ton from those three guides. Ronnie Ray taught us to spot-fish (sight-cast). He was really the first one doing that down here. Freddy had been a commercial fisherman and knew this bay like nobody’s business. We saw them and we thought ‘Wow, we can make money fishing?’ Then we saw Janie and



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE ELLIS

*Capt Steve “JR” Ellis and Capt Chuck Scates exploring the Lower Laguna Madre early in their guiding careers.*

Freddy on the cover of Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine and thought, ‘We can be famous, too!’

“Another guy who really got things going for us down here is Gilbert Vela. Gilbert taught me how to fish schooling redfish and how to get out off the shorelines and fish in open water. He was the master of open water fishing for schooling redfish. He was also the first snook fishermen I knew. He was the first full time guide we had that would actually target snook and take people to go catch them.

“Skipper Mock was somebody else

who became phenomenal at fishing schools of redfish. Skipper and Gilbert both grew up here and they knew that east side of the bay better than anybody. I learned a bunch from both of those two.

“But, really, guys like Ronnie Ray and Pee Wee Schumacker were the ones who started spot-fishing. Pee Wee only had one eye, but it was a good one. He could see fish better than anyone I’ve ever seen. He’s one of the guys Chuck and I would watch and try to imitate. So much of what everybody is doing now as far as spot-fishing, those guys were doing here in the ‘70s. That shallow water, spot-fishing style started here in the Lower Laguna.”

The genesis of fly fishing on the Texas coast can also be traced to the Lower Laguna Madre, thanks largely to a Mid-Westerner who transplanted to Texas. Bud Rowland grew up in Kansas,

but spent summers in Wyoming. He became an accomplished fly angler at an early age, even taking a group from Field & Stream Magazine to a hard to reach Wyoming stream at age of 13.

After moving to Port Mansfield in 1973, Rowland split his time between inshore and offshore. But, it was on the shallow flats of the Lower Laguna where he really made his mark.

“I was really trying to figure out how to catch fish in the bay and thought, ‘hell these trout look a lot like the

trout I was catching in Wyoming’,” said Rowland. “So I tried using my fly rod. Of course, my rod and reel fell apart in about a year (due to salt), but I figured out that these fish could be caught on fly.

Rowland, who also became a fixture of radio and television in the Rio Grande Valley, eventually relocated to Port Isabel and has spent the past four-plus decades fishing the southern end of the Lower Laguna Madre with his quiver of fly rods.

“There wasn’t really any information on fly fishing for trout and reds back then, so I experimented a lot. Tying my own flies (including his famed Numero Uno



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUD ROWLAND

*Rowland, who "stopped killing big fish years ago", releasing another big trout.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE ELLIS

*Capt Steve "JR" Ellis, center, and clients with a unique LLM Slam of black drum, redfish, speckled trout, flounder and snook.*

pattern) and adapting what I could from things I'd learn from bone fishing and freshwater fly fishing.

"A big turning point for me came when I had some guys from the Austin Angler fly shop come down and fish with me. They had been fly fishing in Mexico and a lot of other exotic locations. The equipment they had was so much better than the stuff I was using. That's what led me to get in contact with Sage and some of these other companies and really try to

get the best equipment I could.

Of course, the Lower Laguna Madre is legendary for trophy trout and Rowland has made a name for himself catching giant specks, including the current state record fish, which measured 37 1/4 inches and weighed 15.6 pounds. Rowland has set nine IGFA Records and humbly admits he has caught more big trout than anyone he knows. At 82 years old, he still fishes at least three days a week.

"Sight-casting is my love," said

Rowland. "I grew up fishing for trout, so trout have always been a special fish for me. But, I don't care if I catch a piggy perch or a trophy trout – I love 'em all, but I like seeing what I'm casting to. A lot of people think you can't sight-cast to big trout. And, many people think that you can't catch them from a boat. All the big (over 30 inch) trout I've caught, I've seen. All but a couple have been caught from a drifting boat in less than two feet of water. And, all of them have been within



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE ELLIS

*Ellis with a Lower Laguna Madre redfish circa early 1980s.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF MANNY DELGADO

*Manny Delgado working on one of the countless boats he's modified for use on the Lower Laguna.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE ELLIS

*Capt. Steve "JR" Ellis casting from atop his console.*

30 to 35 feet of the boat.”

Rowland has had an influence on countless fly fishers, including renown artist and tarpon fisherman Larry Haines, a Laguna legend in his own right, as well as current Lower Laguna fly fishing guides such as Capt. Eric Glass and Capt. Dale Fridy.

Of course, to fish shallow water, anglers also needed the right mode of transportation.

“So much of our bay couldn’t even be fished for years because there weren’t any boats that could get back in those areas,” said Ellis. “And, the whole west side is covered up by wildlife refuge and ranch land, so there is zero shore access.

“Once some boats came out that could run in shallower water, it was a matter of who was brave enough to try going in some of those spots. We were young and adventurous, so we would go and try getting into spots. We learned the hard way - we would get our boats stuck in areas and be there for hours and hours. Then we started the ‘UDT Marine Takeoff, as we called it, where we would go in circle to take off and also standing on console looking for redfish...

“UBM - Uncle Bruce Manufacturing - in Laguna Heights came out with a scooter. This was really the first commercially made, fiberglass, tunnel scooters I remember. Dargel had one, but we didn’t see them much because most of those guys fished up in Arroyo. We didn’t go that far. Hell, Cullen’s is a long way

to go on a 25 hp motor. We didn’t really go beyond that.

Rowland was one of those that had a Dargel Skooter.

“I fished the bay out of a john boat for years,” said Rowland, who now fishes from a New Water Ibis after fishing a Curlew for nearly a decade. “Then I got one of the first little Dargel Skooters. That boat opened up so much water. I fished out of that thing for years.”

Ellis says over time, larger shallow water boats came online.

“Shallow Sport is really the boat that opened up our bay system to the masses,” said Ellis. “They built enough of them to where most everybody ended up having a shallow water boat.

“Rex Hudson’s dad, Willis, was a boat maker in Houston (Cougar boats). Willis came up with precursor of Shallow Sport called a Falcon. Rex started running one around down here. Then his dad came up with the design for the Shallow Sport 18. They started building those in the Port of Port Isabel. Those boats changed the entire fishery.

“I knew who Rex was before he moved here, but actually met him in South Bay one day when we were doing a demo in that Falcon Boat on the Table Top in South Bay. We saw him take off from there and we didn’t even think it was possible. We thought that was the coolest thing and had to meet that guy.”

Shallow Sport is the boat most commonly associated with the Lower Laguna



PHOTO BY DANNO WISE

At 82 years old, Bud Rowland still fishes the Lower Laguna at least three times a week.

Madre. It gave anglers access to miles of shallow water flats and also gave a start to another Laguna Legend.

Manny Delgado was a carpet layer with no experience in the boat industry. However, his life took on an entirely different direction after he got a job laying carpet for Shallow Sport boats. When they needed a substitute for carpet, Manny came up with paint splatter nonskid that is so popular today. While laying carpet and painting, he learned fiberglass repair by watching others work in the shop.

Eventually, he opened his own fiberglass repair shop, Manny’s Boat Repair, that he still runs today, along with his son Victor. Through the years, he has earned a reputation as the go-to guy not just for repair, but those wanting to modify their boats for the shallow water fishing environment of the Lower Laguna Madre. He’s been doing it so long he can glance at a boat and immediately tell what it needs for optimal performance on the Laguna. Like so many other legends of the Laguna, he learned by observing, experimenting and, ultimately, finding what worked best in this very unique bay system on the southern tip of Texas. 🌟🌟



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE ELLIS

Ellis and Scates later in their careers at the renown Dunkin House.



# Lake Roundup

## EAST TEXAS



By Matt Williams

**NACOGDOCHES** — It's wintertime in eastern Texas. Anglers headed to Lake Nacogdoches, or any other "grass lake" this month, will need to bundle up and make sure the 'Trap box is close by.

A grass lake is a lake with an abundance of hydrilla. 'Trap is short for Rat-L-Trap, but the moniker can be applied to any number of lipless crankbaits.

Lipless crank baits will catch bass year-round, but they work exceptionally well on grass lakes when the water gets cold. Chunk it. Wind it. Hang on tight. That's the mantra many East Texas 'Trap fishermen live by this time of year.

Things are set up for some great winter 'Trap fishing at Lake Nacogdoches this year. The lake is full and there is a two to three foot window of water on top of the grass in some places. Some of the best stuff is located at the lake's upper reaches on flats adjacent to Big Loco and Little Loco creeks. East Lake Estates cove, Pine Cove and Yellow Bank Creek also are worth a look.

As good as the 'Trap works, there may be times when the fish want something different. Don't be afraid to give it to them. Among some of the better choices are Chatterbaits, spinnerbaits and square bill crankbaits. Boot-tail swim baits and suspending jerk baits also can be effective if the water is pretty clear.

There also will be some fish holding around hard bottom structure on points

and along channel swings away from the bank in 14-25 feet of water, but it's more of a numbers deal than anything else. The old pipeline near the dam is a community hole everyone knows about. It's also home to several PVC fish structures put in place by TPWD a few years ago. These structures will hold bass as well as crappie.

**CONROE** — Docks and rock. Those are two words Lake Conroe fishing guide Butch Terpe lives by this time of year.

"If you're after bass, docks and rocks are the main deals going," Terpe said. "You can also catch some fish out deep if it gets really cold, but most guys are going to stay closer to the bank. It's pretty much a repeat of December."

There is plenty of rock to choose from up and down the lake. Bridge crossings offer plenty, as do break waters around numerous marinas like Walden, Seven Coves, Harbor Town.

Assorted baits will produce around the hard stuff. Terpe says there are always some big fish caught during January and February using crawfish patterns crankbaits. Other good choices include Chatterbaits, spinnerbaits and jig/craw combos.

The guide says the same baits will work around boat docks located in close proximity to deeper water. Docks where the perimeter has been doctored with brush can be especially attractive.

If the shallow bite doesn't pan out, Terpe suggests looking deep to main lake points, old pond dams and other structure away from the bank in water 15-25 feet. Spoons, Carolina rigs and deep diving cranks are the orders of the day out there.

Anglers wanting to catch a few channel catfish for the freezer should be able to find quick, 25 fish limits by baiting holes along major creeks or along the edge of the San Jacinto river channel in water ranging 20-22 feet deep. Terpe likes to attract the fish using cattle range cubes, but you can also find some success using soured chicken scratch, corn or maize. Best baits are night crawlers, punch bait,

stink bait and cheese bait. It's important to keep both ends of the boat secure when fishing over baited holes.

Terpe says crappie fishing can hit or miss with the best bite coming around bridge pilings at the FM 1097 Crossing and brush piles in 20-25 feet of water.

**SAM RAYBURN** — Sam Rayburn fished off the charts for the better part of 2018 and 2019 is sizing up to be just as good if not better. The big lake was slightly above pool level as November gave way to December. Things were setting up for some for some outstanding winter fishing in shallow and deep water alike.

If you like to fish grass, you're in luck. Hydrilla beds can be found up and down the lake in any number creeks.

"Not all of them have it, but a bunch of them do," said fishing guide Randy Dearman.

Dearman says he will spend an abundance of time targeting the outer edges of grass beds in water ranging 8-12 feet deep. Fish can be caught on assorted baits, but if this year is like most it will be hard to beat at Rat-L-Trap.

"January is 'Trap time," Dearman said. "The water is going to be pretty cold, so you'll need to fish the outer edges where the grass meets with deeper water unless we get a few days of warm weather. If that happens the fish could move up on top of the grass and go shallower."

Dearman says 1/2 and 3/4 ounce 'Traps rule. Best colors are crawfish patterns like red, brown or orange. Bone also can be deadly at times.

As good as the 'Trap works around the grass, it's not the only bait that will catch fish. Square bill cranks, suspending jerk baits, swim baits and slow rolling a spinnerbait also can work well at times.

Strong as the grass bite can be, Dearman predicts some of the better tournament sacks will be caught this month by targeting pre-spawners that are holding away from the bank in water ranging 25-28 feet along drains, ditches and creek channels. The guide listed

umbrella rigs, deep cranks and Carolina rigs as the better baits/techniques for getting at them.

"That's how a lot of bigger sacks, upwards of 20 pounds, were caught last year," Dearman said. "I'm not looking for this year to be any different."

**LIVINGSTON** — Veteran bass fishing guide Randy Dearman ranks January as one of the toughest months of the year to put together a solid pattern on Lake Livingston.

"The lake is just about always muddy this time of year because of all of the runoff that comes rolling down the Trinity River," Dearman said. "If it's a wet winter you can just about count on it. I always tell people they'll probably be better off fishing some place else if the conditions get bad. It's always best if the water is clear. You won't catch a bunch of fish, but you can catch some big ones."

One of Dearman's favorite ways to target outsize bass in January is slow-rolling a Strike King spinnerbait in white or white chartreuse color pattern. He likes to fish the bait in the mouths of major creeks in places where the water falls

abruptly from four to 10 feet. To refine the search he looks for stumps, lay downs and brush along channel swings.

"These are the types of places where those big pre-spawners like to set up and wait for things to get right in the shallows," Dearman said. "The fish won't be very active unless we get a few days of warm weather, so you'll usually need to fish pretty slow to get bit. A square bill or medium diving crankbait also can be worth a try."

If the fish won't chase a moving bait, Dearman will switch to a 5/16 or 1/2 ounce Strike King jig trailed by matching plastic pork chunk or craw. Black and blue is a color choice that is hard to beat.

Dearman says creeks up and down the lake can be good, but those north of the bridge generally have the most potential early in the year because the water is shallower and tends to warm up the quickest. A few degrees can make a huge difference this time of year.

January also is the month when white bass begin staging for their annual spawning up the Trinity River. Dearman says the spawning run can get underway as early as New Year's day, but it's usually towards the end of the month or into February before things really get cranked up as far north as the Lock-N-Dam at the State Highway 7 Crossing.

Until then, Dearman says anglers should look for schools of whites to be holding around sloughs, drains or ditches that dump into the river up north near the bottleneck. You can catch them on crankbaits, Rat-L-Traps, Roadrunners, spoons and small spinners.

**PALESTINE** — Lake Palestine fishing guide Ricky Vandergriff has learned from years of experience that January is the month when bass anglers need to get their big fish goggles on.

"Palestine produces big bass just about all year long, but late winter and early spring is usually when we see a flurry of activity at the north end of the lake," Vandergriff said. "That end of the lake always warms up the quickest,

so that's always where the pre-spawn fish start pulling up first."

The guide says anglers should key on old drains and ditches that dump into the Neches or those that dissect the shallow flats around an area known as the Old Folks Playground. The ditches aren't significantly deeper than the flats that surround them, but they have a history of attracting pre-spawn females like a magnet.

"Cade's Lake, Kickapoo Creek and the areas around the islands also produce some big sacks in tournaments this time of year," Vandergriff said.

Any number of baits will produce big bites in early spring, but Vandergriff has the most confidence in his Shimmy Shaker bladed jig, a spinnerbait, jig/craw combo, weightless Senko and a Texas rigged lizard.

Anglers who have never visited Palestine before should be aware that the lake's upper reaches is full of stumps and can be tough for a first-timer to navigate without tearing something up. This is especially true if faced with low water conditions, which probably won't be case. The lake was five inches high as November gave way to December.

Anglers who prefer to fish where it is easier to get around can stay south and target boat docks and any number of major creeks. Vandergriff says the best docks will be in wind protected pockets in water ranging four to six feet deep. Brush piles are a huge plus.

Black bass aren't the only option to consider when it's cold outside. The crappie and channel cat will be on the prowl this month, as well. Time it right and catching a limit is a good possibility.

Vandergriff says some of the best crappie fishing always takes place around the Highway 155 Bridge pilings and the old cedar trees at the southern reaches near dam. While small shiners will just about always get you bit, he had much rather use jigs when he can get away with. Pink/white and white are two of the best colors to have on hand.

Baited holes in 16-18 feet of water around humps and channel ledges are hard to beat for channel cat. There also are some big blues caught this time of year drifting over deep open water or on jug lines using fresh shad or live perch as bait.

**TOLEDO BEND** — Bass anglers planning a trip to the big lake expecting



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUCK PAYNE

*Many times fish in large private lakes will mimic similar patterns to fish in large reservoirs. This 9.7 pound, 24 inch long black bass was caught on a private lake in Grimes County on a watermelon colored sinking bait in deeper water by Buck Payne.*

to find grass in the shallows will need to look south of the Pendleton Bridge that connects Texas to Louisiana to find it. That's the word from veteran fishing guide Tommy Martin of Milam.

"It's not everywhere, either," Martin said. "Some of the best grass is around Indian Mounds, Buck Creek, Hausen and Indian Creek in water ranging three to seven feet of water. It should be just right for throwing a lipless crankbait like a Rat-L-Trap or maybe a square bill."

Water temperatures could be in the low 50s or possibly in the upper 40s by the time January rolls around. If that's the case, the best bite will almost always occur after two to three days of warm sunshine.

"The grass bite is generally best between cold fronts during warming trends," Martin said. "If you can time it right and be on the water at the tail end of a warming trend, right before another front passes through, that can be big plus."

Other than the shallow grass bite in limited areas, Martin says there will be some of groups of fish positioned in much deeper water in relation to drops, channel swings, ridges and timberlines in water ranging 30-45 feet deep. The guide says this will likely be more of a numbers deal than anything else, but it is not uncommon to stick a fish in the 5-8 pound class on occasion.

Finding fish will hinge heavily on having good electronics and, more importantly, a working knowledge of how to use them.

"It's mostly vertical fishing where you sitting right on top of the fish using your depth finder," Martin said. "We'll catch a lot of fish on drop shots and spoons, but I've also caught them vertical fishing a jig on those sharp river banks. The jig usually produces the bigger fish if they are around."

Crappie fishing on T-Bend can be outstanding provided the right conditions exist. The main keys are having relatively clear water and fairly stable water levels. The bite can be especially good along the Sabine River ledges in the mid-lake area.

"Muddy water and river current can really shut it down quick, though," said crappie guide Stephen Johnston. "You want things to be fairly stable. That's when the crappie and the balls of shad will really pile up around the river, even when it gets really cold." **T★J**



By Brian Hughes

As we move into a New Year it is time to look at our winter fishing forecast and see what will be our best options. I like to include the TPWD Rainbow Trout stocking program in this forecast because it is an inexpensive, fun way to spend an afternoon when those winter blahs are upon us. Plus the trout have the added bonus of being really good on the plate. You can find the rules and regulations, and even some tips on catching, on the TPWD website.

Stockings take place throughout the winter months, at locations across the state. All you need is a small spinning rod or spin-casting outfit, light line and small hooks and you have all the gear you need. Bait for these fish consists of prepared baits like salmon eggs or trout "nuggets" and is available at most good tackle outlets. Or you can simply head to the pantry. Trout also like kernel corn, Velveeta cheese, even mini marshmallows. A single can of corn will provide enough bait for an entire season. For those looking to use artificial baits, a small spinner like the Rooster Tail, a Super Do, or various flies work very well.

I like to use bait for the trout as I am usually taking the kids along on these outings. Two or three kids slinging lures around is a lot to keep up with.

I'll get a tiny treble hook, a swivel (also very small) and a small Texas rig worm weight and tie up my own little "trout rig." I start by threading on the worm weight, with the nose pointed back toward me, just like a Texas rig. This allows the rig to come through any weeds or junk on the bottom. The ponds where the trout are stocked are not full of brush or anything, but they can have stuff

accumulated on the bottom of the pond just the same.

Then I tie on the swivel. After tying on about an 18" leader line I'll tie on the hook. Now I have something I can cast rather far, (with little effort and without slinging off the corn), and retrieve along the bottom.

In addition, when a trout picks up the bait he won't feel the weight because the line will slip through the sinker. Once I've made the cast, I'll leave the bail open and watch the line until it begins to spool off the reel, indicating a bite. Close the bail, give a sweep of the rod and you've got a trout! For those that wish to fish out on our larger lakes, here's what to expect. **T★J**

**FORK** — January is a really funny month according to Mark Stevenson, "We'll usually get two to three warm up days, then a cold snap, and sometimes the whole month just bounces back and forth." The plan most days is to fish deep. "Light line, a Texas rig, shaky-head, or dropshot with a finesse worm is a good choice." Says Stevenson. One secret he shared with our readers, "A LFFT Crappie Magic shad in watermelon or shad colors, nose hooked on a small hook, 'nuff said!"

It's no secret that a jig is one of Marks' favorite baits. "A ½ or 3/4oz black and brown jig, or (another secret) black/brown—green with four to five strands of orange."

Stevenson also has a very specific way to fish a jig in January, "I guess you'd call it crawl and shake. You crawl the jig across the bottom until it hits something, then shake it over and hang on!"

January on Fork starts the bass thinking about the pre-spawn. The really deep (30+ feet deep) fish will move up to 15 feet or less, using the channels as their highway. Be there waiting with the above mentioned jigs or even spoons, and you could catch the fish of your lifetime.

"Of course, I have to mention the 'Traps and spinnerbaits this time of year," said Mark, "The grass is always a good place to look, but in January it is not crucial. It's more important to cover water, looking to intercept the fish as they feed. It's also my favorite time to throw suspending jerkbaits. We use them in the afternoon on a sunny day."

He's had some really fantastic days in the last two or three hours of daylight with this method. "Last year produced several fish in the 10 pound range, both a little



under and a little over.” Use shad colors like Tennessee shad or look for a purple back, gold sides and a silvery bottom.

Sand bass on Lake Fork have really taken off in population over the last 10 years or so. When they first showed up many anglers were concerned about the effect they might have on the largemouth bass. Now, most anglers have embraced them as another fish to catch, and something to fill a cooler with for the fish-fry.

“Sandies will be on the humps and points for sure but fishermen tend to cross over these at one location and move on. They need to go as far out as 50 to 100 yards from the structure to really get a picture of what the fish are doing.” says Stevenson. Once you locate fish use a jiggin’ spoon on humps or an Alabama rig, also keying on humps and points.

Crappie are easy to find just look for the boat flotilla on the lake near the dam. Then use jigs unless it is too windy then minnows will work. Remember, Fork is also a Crappie2 lake. If you don’t know what that means you need to reference the TPWD Outdoor Annual!

**EAGLE MOUNTAIN** — Located just north of Fort Worth, Eagle Mountain is a great bass fishery and has one of the best catfish populations in the area. Numbers of fish as well as quality fish can be caught south of Lakeview Marina in 25-35 feet of water. Catfish will either be on structure in open water at the deepest depths, or up really shallow in two or three feet, depending on temperature and shad location. Look for the gizzard shad, and look shallow if deep doesn’t pan out.

A fresh bait is imperative so catch your own before heading out each day. Other places to dunk a bait include inside and around marinas, Baptist point and Twin Point.

These locations will also play host to the sand bass so be alert to the environment and be ready to change over to a slab or jerkbait.

**WELSH** — On Welsh, I’d start on the upper end around the channel, timber and hydrilla. January will probably be in post-spawn mode, with fish hitting topwaters like the Yellow Magic, Whopper Plopper and buzzbaits. You might be able to throw these all day if there is some cloud cover.

After the topwater bite plays out go to a Homers Clown spinnerbait if there is a breeze, or a Senko on a calm day.

Stay in white/chartreuse on the Clown, and watermelon/red or a bold pink in the Senko. For a deep bite, look for a big hump out in the middle of the lake. It’ll have timber and there is a drop-off into the channel. Use your electronics to find the hump, and you should also find some post-spawn fish. These should be feeding fish that will hit drop-shots, Carolina rigs and a-rigs. You may also want to try some diving crankbaits, and never overlook the effectiveness of flutter spoons, especially for catching the bigger fish.

**CEDAR CREEK** — Once Cedar Creek water temps get down below about 50 degrees, the crappie can get a little finicky. If the water is warmer than that you should find the crappie hanging out around the planted brush on points and any deep structure. Some deeper docks may hold a few crappies as well.

The sand bass will be a little more active, on main lake humps. Look to about 20-30 feet, and deadstick you bait. The same approach is called for to catch the hybrids, but you’ll need to adjust your depth and go deeper. Somewhere in the 35-40-foot range. If you wanted to focus on sandies only, downsize your baits.

For hybrids try a four inch swim bait on a lead head. Use a 1/2 ounce to 3/4 ounce head as that will help you get deep in a hurry. “Slow roll” the bait across the

humps. Colors should be natural shad colors like silver, white with silver flake or chartreuse and silver flake.

Hybrids take a little more work than the sand bass as they are constantly on the move. This means you’ll have to use your electronics to keep up with the hybrids.

**LAKE ‘O THE PINES** — L.O.P. is just the opposite of Cedar Creek. In the dead of winter, when the water is at its coldest, the crappie will be active. They’ll pull off the timber and go to the channels. You can use both jigs and minnows on these fish, but you’ll probably want to keep moving. Instead of sticking in one spot, drift across the channels with the wind. Small 1/8-ounce jigs, rigged two to a line, will help you find the bite.

You should be fishing around the twenty to 30 foot mark, maybe a bit deeper. Try chartreuse, blues and greens at first, but be ready with a variety of colors. You never know what color will work on a given day.

Any warming trend will probably pull the fish shallow again, even in January. If the water gets into the mid-50s you may have to go shallower than you think.

Please remember that at Lake ‘O the Pines you must keep first 25 crappie you catch, regardless of the length of the fish. This regulation is in place through the last day of February. **T★J**



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD JUE

*Don't let the cold weather of the New Year keep you from fishing. Just bundle up and get after 'em — there's fish to be caught.*

# AFTER SEASON DEER SUPPLEMENT



***There is a preferred natural food source that is distributed late January through mid-August fortified with the right stuff.***

*Story and Photography by Bob Zaiglin*

*The diet of whitetail deer during late winter and spring is critical to both antler size and reproductive performance.*

**B**efore the corn sack laid over the dusty tailgate was half empty, some 15 deer exited the sea of brush and were engulfing the palatable energy-rich golden kernels littering a 100-yard stretch of sendero. It was the last weekend of deer season, and the individuals dispensing the attractant were hoping to complete their season by luring in a nice buck to harvest. The chance of that happening appeared pretty good as deer continually exited the thornscrub, paying little if any attention to the truck or the individuals distributing the energy-rich grain.

Several hours later, as the sun dipped below the horizon and darkness shrouded the landscape, the sportsmen descended the elevated blind where they had spent the evening looking over several promising bucks. Nothing mature enough to shoot appeared so their hunting season concluded.

Driving over the remaining kernels of corn as they returned to camp, deer dashed nervously back into the brush lining the road, but the pickup's tail lights hadn't disappeared before the animals reappeared in hopes of obtaining a little more of the delicacy.

The hunting season was over for the hunters as they would return to the somewhat stable environment of their homes and jobs. The same, however, was not true for the deer. Once the distribution of corn came to a halt at the end of the hunting season, they would go through what has to be something similar to cold turkey, at least until spring green-up would provide them with ample nutrition in the form of succulent plants and palatable regrowth of the various brush species.

An undeterminable amount of corn is distributed each season throughout Texas' wild lands by sportsmen, that represents a nutritional benefit based on the fact that it's extremely attractive to deer. These golden kernels facilitate the harvest of surplus animals that relinquishes additional naturally occurring vegetation for remaining deer.

Containing a minimal amount of crude protein, corn, like prickly pear cactus, is an energy source for deer similar to a candy bar to humans. However, if an excessive amount of the grain is consumed, the pH in the rumen declines to one that is acidic (a disease referred to as

acidosis). This results in the destruction of papillae, which are tiny, rugged-looking projections lining the rumen wall, which not only provide habitat for the bacteria, but increases the surface area facilitating absorption of digested nutrients. Also, the good bacteria that aids in digestion is destroyed and replaced with bad bacteria 'streptococcus sp.' that hinders digestion.

Consumed at a reasonable level, starch, the principal component of corn, actually represents a source of energy for deer similar to cactus. This is particularly true during the winter period correlated with the rut when bucks are extremely active and their energy reserves are reduced.

Corn is simply an attractant providing managers the opportunity to satisfy harvest recommendations. However, supplemental feeding is the provision of a nutritionally beneficial food source that comes close to satisfying the animals' daily nutritional requirements.

The distribution of a well-balanced food source over a period of time to eclipse the effects of poor range conditions brought about due to a lack of rainfall is referred to as supplemental feeding.

If the goal is to improve antler size,

the nutritional supplement should be available to the deer just prior and throughout the antler-growing period, say March through August. Providing a supplement at this time would also enhance the lactation capability of doe that must sustain their progeny throughout the dry summer months.

Supplemental feeding can also be defined as providing a food source during periodic drought to assuage the acute demand deer place on preferred brush species that remain dormant throughout such time periods characterized by minimal if any regeneration. This makes those plants susceptible to damage by the impacts from over browsing.

Feeding year around is not a supplement; in reality, the feeders are considered by the deer to be nothing different than other plants that they become dependent upon. Although feeding on a year round basis is expensive, it is especially beneficial because the animals utilize the supplement prior to the time it is actually required.

One of the principal concerns with supplemental feeding is just when is it required, and when should it be distributed.



*The development of food plots where applicable is a popular method of providing deer a quality diet while facilitating a selective harvest.*



*Cottonseed not only represents a quality diet for deer, it forces the rumen, which is a muscle, to work harder to digest the supplement, making it especially beneficial to the overall health of the animal.*

For example, in a wet spring, deer will utilize little of a supplement because they inherently gravitate to those naturally occurring preferred plants. But ideal conditions can rapidly dissipate, and the accompanying intense heat reverses what was once ideal range conditions to that which is less than nutritionally beneficial to deer. The time it takes most individuals to recognize and address such

conditions with a supplement can take weeks if not a month, and even when a supplement is made available, it takes time before a high percentage of the population locates and begins utilizing the resource.

In order to circumvent this problem, a supplement should be distributed from late January or early February through mid-August. By doing so, it is available throughout the antler-growing period as well as peak fawning with feed distribution based on the amount consumed.

What those feeders should contain is also critical when it comes to benefitting the animals of concern.

Although supplements come in a variety of forms, the most common is the pellet. It is especially fortified with protein and a number of other essential micro and macro-nutrients that work holistically to provide deer with a well-balanced and palatable dietary item. However, when it comes to choosing the right pellet, it can be at times more

difficult than purchasing a new truck and just as expensive over time.

There are a variety of deer pellets on the market and basically all can get the job done. I personally don't have a favorite because much of a pellet's effectiveness is correlated with the habitat where it is incorporated which varies on a geographical basis. What I do know is that deer perform well on a diet sustained at a 16 percent crude protein level with increases of 18 and 20 percent proceeding the breeding season nutritionally beneficial to physically strapped bucks while benefitting pregnant doe.

Deer benefit from higher levels, 18 to 20 percent of crude protein, at certain times of the year, but one must remember that crude protein consumed in excess amounts is converted to fat.

Although most individuals supplement a deer's diet in order to see larger-racked bucks, body weight and fawn survival increase most rapidly. That is, recognizable increases in body weight of both males and females along with higher fawn survival rates are measurable over the first year a supplement is introduced.

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EXOTIC GAME HUNTS IN TEXAS



*Deer gravitate to the energy-rich corn distributed by sportsmen in the fall and winter periods, but its nutritional benefit is minimal.*

The impact on antler size takes longer in some cases — up to three to five years. But it's important to understand that unless the desirable genetic components are present and bucks reach the mature age classes, it's irrelevant what a supplement contains because trophy bucks will never materialize.

Protein pellets may be the most popular supplement, but there are other options such as cottonseed that is nutritionally beneficial to deer.

Whole cottonseed contains high amounts of digestible energy, 20 percent crude protein, and a moderate amount of fiber. It is also rich in phosphorus which is important for body and antler development and often limited in native forage.

It is also important to note the passage rate of cottonseed through the rumen is much slower than a pellet feed, presumably facilitating the absorption of a higher percentage of its valuable ingredients. It also forces the rumen to work harder, and the rumen, being a muscle, actually gets stronger over time as a result. The bottom line is a deer with

a strong rumen is a healthy animal.

An additional advantage of cottonseed is that it does not break down in moist conditions and more importantly is not sought after by non-targeted animals like feral swine and raccoons, which waste more pellet than they consume. Thus it can be distributed in small basket-like structures composed of inexpensive chicken mesh wrapped around three or four t-posts anchored firmly in the ground. Plus in the absence of livestock, costly hog-proof fencing is not required.

One potential concern of feeding whole cottonseed is the presence of gossypol, a natural pigment that has been shown in livestock to decrease reproductive capability, especially in males, and suppress body weights and condition if consumed at high doses over several weeks. However, with the commonly available, diversified food source on open range, this is not apt to occur. However, it remains prudent to curtail the distribution of cottonseed minimally five weeks before the whitetail deer breeding season.

The distribution of a supplemental feed for deer is not a new concept. Dr. Charlie DeYoung and I investigated the impacts of the practice back in 1975. The development and distribution of pellets since that time have improved with results demonstrated by the increase in antler quality realized over the last 10 to 15 years. Paralleling the development of the pellet, however, has been an increase in price.

The distribution of cottonseed is somewhat more user-friendly because it is slightly less expensive to purchase, remains weather resistant, and is less attractive to feral hogs and raccoons, thus requires no isolation fencing, which reduces cost. More importantly, it's a natural food source fortified with the right stuff. **T★J**



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## CoastWatch | Danno Wise

January is often a month of contradictions along the Lower and Middle Texas coast, with weather oscillating between fall and winter – and fishing patterns doing the same. Most of the time, fish will be holding deep. But, given a few days of sun, specks and reds will begin to crawl out of the deep water and onto the shallow flats.

Once the water warms sufficiently to encourage the fish to move up shallow during the day, flats anglers can have outstanding sight-casting opportunities. The fish may not be as aggressive as they are in spring, summer or fall, but they will still provide plenty of shallow water action. When the fish are not on the flats, it is a matter of picking your favorite deep hole and fishing slowly.

Beyond big trout and redfish, anglers will also have plenty of opportunities for species such as black drum, sheepshead, and on the Lower Texas Coast, snook and mangrove snapper. Regardless of which species are targeted, winter weather won't keep the fish from biting. So, although the weather forecast may be bleak, the fishing should be hot. **T★J**



At the southern tip of Texas, the stretch of the Lower Laguna Madre squeezed between Port Isabel and South Padre Island generally sees milder winter conditions that bays further up the coast. This allows guides such as Capt. Austin Camacho to chase fish on the flats on all but the coldest day. Redfish and big trout will be found on the flats unless the weather takes a drastic turn. The best time to target these fish is usually after mid-morning, unless there has been a series of warm days. Topwater and large



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

*There are warmer winter days in the Brownsville Ship Channel that makes you roll up your shirt-sleeve and enjoy catching a variety of accommodating gamefish.*

soft-plastics are the best bets.

Schools of keeper size speckled trout, on the contrary, will be holding over deeper flats as well as in the holes and channels all winter long. These fish can typically be caught on live shrimp or artificials. Black drum and sheepshead will also be common in the channels this month. Although these fish will occasionally hit soft-plastic jigs, anglers targeting either drum or sheepshead specifically should switch to shrimp - live or dead.

Another good winter option for Port Isabel and South Padre Island area anglers is to fish the deep water areas in the Port of Brownsville and the Port of Port Isabel. Both ports produce a wide variety of fish, including snook and mangrove snapper in addition to redfish, speckled trout, black drum, sheepshead and flounder.

Port Mansfield guide Capt. Steve "JR" Ellis of Get-A-Way Lodge says January can be really good, but does take some adjustment.

"Fishing in January can be good, but you've got to be ready to fish some

different spots," said Ellis. "We always have super low tides in the Laguna Madre during January. That's not necessarily a bad thing – it's just different. There is still plenty of fishable water, but a lot of spots we're used to fishing won't have enough water on them in January. So, you need to look for other areas.

"What you really want to do when the tide drops is concentrate on the areas that are normally deep. So, look for holes, access channels, and cuts. Basically, a lot of the areas we don't fish in the fall because they're too deep are now shallow. The good news is that even though you will have to fish different water, having less water in the bay concentrates the fish, making them much easier to find.

"Usually we start to settle into a pattern where we have about four or five days in between fronts. The last two or three days before the next front, usually we'll start seeing a lot of fish up on the flats, but they won't move very far from the deep water, so concentrate on the edges of the flats.

"January is also a lot like August for

us. By that I mean we get a lot of light wind days and the fish transition between deep and shallow water during the day. Couple that light wind with bright sun and the fish will be on the flats. But, the fishing time is the opposite of August – instead of starting shallow early, we’ll wait until midday to hit the flats because the fish won’t move into shallow water until the sun has been up long enough to warm the water.

“A lot of time we’ll have really clear water in January as well. This allows you to work areas that are generally off-colored and sight cast to fish on flats that you can’t sight cast on during other times of the year because the water is too murky. So, if you get a couple warm, sunny, light-wind days, you can have some excellent sight-casting.

“I really like fishing topwaters in January,” Ellis confessed. “However, if the fish aren’t reacting to topwaters, I’ll switch to plastics. Whatever you’re throwing, this is the time of year you have to fish extremely slow. Let those soft plastics drop down in the potholes and ‘kick up some sand.’”

Corpus Christi area anglers should see an outstanding big trout bite in the traditional trophy trout hotspots in Baffin, the Upper Laguna and Nueces bays during January. Muddy bottom areas and active mullet will be the keys to locating big trout this month. Fishermen looking for numbers of trout should focus on areas with depths of four to five feet of water between fronts and in the deep channels and holes during periods of colder weather.

Redfish will be active on the flats on warm days during fronts and will be found in the guts and channels during and post-front. Black drum will also be caught in good numbers, especially in the deeper holes and channels. **T★J**



Aransas area anglers will find most fish relating to mud and shell during January. The primary bays will be Nueces and Aransas. Both of these bays have plenty of mud bottom and shell pads. Slow-sinking plugs and big soft-plastics will produce the majority of fish, although live shrimp below Alameda rattlers will also work well. When the water falls out behind a front, look for fish to stack up along the channel edges.

Redfish will also be plentiful this month. Redfish will still be on the flats, except for periods of extreme cold. Anglers can usually rely on good flats fishing for reds during the mid-day hours on winter days. For the most part, redfish will



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PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. NATHAN BEABOUT

*After several days of warm temperatures anglers will fan out along the edge of flats near deeper channels and holes. The key to fishing this time of year is to fish slowly.*

be working over flats with mud and grass bottoms. East Flats and the St Joe Island shorelines are traditional winter redfish spots. Spoons, along with various soft-plastics will work for reds, as will cut mullet and live shrimp.

In addition to reds and specks, black drum will also be found in good numbers during January. Look for black drum in the channels and adjacent flats. Live or fresh dead shrimp work best for black drum.

Fishermen heading out of Rockport will also want to key on areas with mud and shell during January. There will be plenty of big trout holding on mud flats during the next few weeks. Wade fishing or drifting while throwing topwaters, slow-sinking plugs or lightly-weighted soft-plastics should produce plenty of solid specks. Anglers looking for numbers of fish should concentrate on the deeper mud flats, reefs and channels. Live shrimp and soft-plastics will result in good

number of keeper size specks.

Anglers targeting redfish should focus on potholes in grass and mud flats. There drift or pole and sight-cast or blind-cast a variety of lures and natural baits. Another popular method for targeting winter reds on the flats is to anchor amid a cluster of potholes and fish cut baits on the bottom in the potholes.

Another option for Rockport area anglers is to look for black drum in the channels and adjacent flats around Dagger and Stedman Islands. Live or fresh dead shrimp work best for black drum.

Seadrift guide Capt. Nathan Beabout says the year's first month is a great time to be fishing for trophy trout.

"While most folks are chasing that winged adventure in January, the final month of the season, I will be concentrating on big trout staging during pre and post front activity," said Beabout. "The fishing grounds can be silent this month, with the exceptional good weather Saturdays. Generally, we have very little boat traffic and fishing pressure this time of year. But for most of the month, I'm hoping to be bundled with thermals, fleece pants, a couple jackets and my trusty Simms waders.

"These cold weather situations will trigger major feeds from both trout and reds. Rising and falling barometric pressure is a key ingredient to get these big trout to feed. Being in the right place at the right time will lead to some great catches and a few personal bests being set this month.

"As long as there is winter fishing, color selection and retrieval speed will always be debated. The way I always answer this when asked by customers is,

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'it's like building a fence, there is 100 ways to do it and none of them are wrong.' It boils down to personal preference, weather conditions, water clarity, and knowledge of the given area you fish.

"I will be spending time scouting between trips and finding areas that are off the beaten path holding good fish. One thing I have noticed is fish this time of year travel much less than summer patterns if the baitfish hold. This makes it easier to stay on fish for weeks at a time. Patterning big trout in pre and post-front conditions, one might find these fish will only move 50 to 100 yards under different weather conditions. Knowing, when to be in that area is another big key this time of year.

"I can't wait to see what kind of big trout season is in store for us here on the Middle Texas Coast."

Port O'Connor area fishermen should have plenty of good days on the water, with most of the fish concentrated in areas with mud bottoms or a combination of mud and grass or mud and sand during January. Slow-sinking plugs and soft-plastics will produce plenty of fish over mud bottom flats, as will topwater plugs.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. NATHAN BEABOUT

While wade fishing on a cold day, Capt. Nathan Beabout caught and released this beautiful 28 inch speckled trout.

So long as the weather remains relatively mild, most of the redfish and trout will be on shallow to mid-depth mud-bottom flats. If the temperatures drop, the fish will head into the deeper holes and channels, where they are most easily targeted with live shrimp and soft-

plastic jigs.

During periods of extreme cold, anglers can also expect schools of big reds to be hanging around the jetties. When fishing for redfish around the jetties during January, heavy jigs, live shrimp and cut bait are the best options. ★★

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## TPWD considering restrictive length limit on Trinity, mandatory reporting statewide.

Just about every Texas freshwater fishing fan knows the alligator gar is regarded as a pretty special fish.

Once plentiful across the South, alligator gar numbers in some states have undergone a rapid decline or been extirpated due to heavy fishing pressure from commercial operations or careless anglers who consider it a "rough" fish with no sporting value. Texas is believed to have one last stronghold of the prehistoric throwbacks.

But is there a need for more regulation on constituents who want to target the state's biggest and longest-lived freshwater species?

Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission thinks so. In fact, the commission has taken the pole position in cinching the noose tighter on already restrictive alligator gar harvest limits currently in effect on the Trinity River and other Texas water bodies.

Under current law anglers are limited to one alligator gar, per day, on all Texas waters with the exception of Lake Falcon, where anglers are allowed five per day. The one-fish limit was put in place statewide in 2009 to protect alligator gar from the possibility of overharvest.

### Focus on the Trinity

Last spring, the commission instructed inland fisheries managers to fashion an even more restrictive regulation specifically for the Trinity River, arguably the state's premier destination among rod and reel fishermen and bow fishers hoping to collect a trophy class fish.

The allure of alligator gar is its fierce appearance and massive size. The fish have been known to reach lengths of eight feet and weights beyond 300 pounds during a slow growth life cycle that can last for decades.

Angler interest in catching the toothy fish has increased exponentially during the last 10-15 years, largely because of the way it has been portrayed by television programs like *River Monsters*.

The Trinity maintains a robust population of big ones, and the TPW Commission is adamant about it keeping



PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

*Alligator gar are Texas' longest-lived and largest freshwater fish, capable growing beyond seven feet and reaching weights exceeding 300 pounds.*

it that way. Thus, the clear message delivered to inland fisheries staff last March: Bring a halt to the harvest of super size alligator gar on the Trinity.

"The commission expressed their concern to us about harvest of alligator gar on the Trinity River and directed us to propose regulations to eliminate harvest of large alligator gar," Dave Terre, TPWD Chief of Inland Fisheries Management and Research, said in a TPWD press release. "To meet this desire, we looked at a variety of options, but the potential changes we landed on aim to protect the sustainability of Texas' world-class population of alligator gar while still allowing the harvest of some smaller gar."

### Maximum Length Limits

Following several months of deliberation, and reviewing public feedback from an alligator gar survey conducted online last summer, TPWD fisheries staff previewed their ideas to the commission during a November meeting in Mission.

The potential changes include placing the section of Trinity River from the I-30 Bridge in Dallas to the I-10 Bridge in Chambers County under a maximum length limit on alligator gar and leaving the one-fish daily bag limit in place.

Terre said participants in the summer survey indicated strong support for length limits on alligator gar, but no specific length limit was advertised.

Fisheries staff initially suggested a five foot maximum length limit for the Trinity, but reduced it to four feet at the behest of commissioners who believed a five foot maximum wasn't restrictive enough.

A four foot maximum length limit would mean anglers could not retain or kill an alligator gar longer than four feet. According to Terre, the average weight of a four foot alligator gar is about 26 pounds.

Rod and reelers could work around the regulation by catching and releasing large fish, but Trinity River bow fishers looking to take a trophy gar would be forced to take their game elsewhere to find one, likely resulting in more pressure on other fisheries.

### Mandatory Reporting

The preview package of potential changes also suggests implementing a mandatory reporting requirement for alligator gar harvested on all Texas waters, excluding Lake Falcon.

Mandatory reporting, which also drew support in the online survey, would require anglers to report each harvest within 24 hours online via a mobile app. It could potentially be a great tool to help scientists track how many big alligator gar are being harvested statewide, which water bodies/rivers are giving them up and the primary harvest methods — if anglers and bow fishers play by the rules. Biologists say they have a formula to

factor in for fish that go unreported.

"Because relatively few alligator gar can be sustainably harvested each year, and interest in alligator gar fishing has increased, it is critical that we closely monitor harvest numbers and locations," Terre said. "This is a key piece of information that is difficult for us to gather in any other way than through a mandatory harvest reporting system. This information will be needed to further refine our management of alligator gar populations."

#### No need for change?

It is worth noting that TPWD fisheries managers usually don't suggest making such drastic changes in harvest recommendations without solid research data to back it up. Interestingly, there is no concrete data to suggest the Trinity River alligator gar population is in trouble, or that a more restrictive regulation is necessary to sustain it.

As earlier mentioned, the order for change came down from above.

"The commission directed us to protect these trophy fish out of an abundance of caution in protecting this valuable resource," Terre said. "We value that, but

I don't know that we would have acted as quickly on the Trinity without the push of the commission. We are being responsive to their wishes at this point and time."

Biologists have been monitoring the Trinity River population since the one fish limit was put in place in 2009. Terre said the department's most recent data suggests the population could sustain itself and continue offering opportunities to catch large fish under the current regulation with an annual harvest rate of two to four percent. However, should annual exploitation exceed five percent for an extended period, it could lead to over-harvest that could take years to reverse.

"Based on our current estimates those populations are within sustainable exploitation at this point and time," Terre said. "But the information we have is not perfectly current up to 2018. We know that the fishery is becoming more popular by the day, but we don't know what the exact take currently is out of that system. Our quantitative assessment from 2008-2010 shows the population was within limits to sustain itself at that time."

Terre said the four foot maximum length limit and the mandatory reporting

option are only suggestions this point. A formal proposal won't be made until the January 23 TPW Commission meeting Austin, with a public comment period to follow.

In the meantime, anglers and others with an interest in the state's alligator gar fisheries are encouraged to offer their input.

Here's a suggestion that might be worth pondering: Given that TPWD's most recent research data shows the Trinity River's alligator gar population is holding its own under current harvest regulations, why not implement the mandatory reporting requirement and use those numbers, along with data gathered from continued research, to try to get an idea how many fish are taken out of the river over a specified amount of time?

If the updated harvest rates warrant more protection to sustain satisfactory populations of large fish, give it to them. If not, leave the regulation alone.

Decisions like this one should be based on sound science. Public comment should be directed to Dave Terre (dave.terre@tpwd.texas.gov; (512) 389-4855).

T★J



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# The HAUNTS of Old Man WINTER

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*Certain winter hotspots along Texas' upper coast have been producing success for years, and for good reason too.*

*Story and Photography by Nate Skinner*

It's no secret there are some diehard winter junkies when it comes to inshore angling. These fanatics willingly layer up with warm clothes to brave the elements during the coldest period of the year. Sometimes they even do so in conditions that raises the question, "Why?"

For one, fishing pressure is at its all time low during the wintertime. Late season hunting opportunities captivate the interest of many outdoorsmen and women, while others just prefer to stay indoors during the blustery season.

The other motivating factor that draws anglers out into frigid conditions is the fact that the action can be downright phenomenal. Winter patterns make targeting fish like speckled trout and redfish a task that anglers can successfully plan for. Their movements and behaviors become predictable with the apparent prevailing conditions, prompting anglers to evolve and adapt their strategies accordingly.

The most difficult thing about finding success during the coldest months of the year is aligning windows of opportunity with windows of prime weather conditions that will provoke an aggressive bite between fronts. Most folks can't jump in the boat at the drop of a hat when the stars align for the fish to feed. That's when possessing a solid on-the-water game plan becomes key. Without a doubt, the one single trait that all successful wintertime anglers share is that they have a plan of attack before they ever hit the water.

Cooler water temperatures means the fish will likely be lethargic most of the time, aside from when the right conditions produce a feeding frenzy. With this being said, it's pretty clear that having options is the only way to consistently stay hooked up during the winter. When a go-to spot doesn't work out, anglers that have a plan B, C, and D will be able to catch more fish than those that are left scratching their heads.

For decades, certain hotspots along Texas' upper coast have been known for providing outstanding hauls of fish during the winter, and for good reason too. Many of these areas possess similar traits and characteristics. Some of the best are located near deep water refuges and consistently hold warmer water than their surroundings while receiving good

fluctuations of tidal movement.

Major rivers, bayous and creeks have been playing a huge role in providing anglers with fishable options during the winter for decades. These areas offer protection from almost any wind direction, plus they have plenty of deep water that fish are drawn to when strong cold fronts turn open bay waters upside down.

The Colorado River, that empties into Matagorda Bay, has long been known as a cold water hotspot. One of the best pros at fishing the Colorado is veteran Matagorda Bay fishing guide, Captain Tommy Countz. He says some of the best winter trips of his career for trout have taken place along the sheltered waters of the Colorado River in temperatures that would keep most from stepping outside.

"I can't even begin to describe how many times I've braved brutally cold weather to fish the river," he confessed. "There's been years where I rarely fished in east or west Matagorda Bays during the wintertime because the action in the Colorado was that good."

Countz indicates his approach while fishing the Colorado River is pretty simple. He spends most of his time working the west bank where there are many scattered sand bars.

"Depending on how cold the water is the fish may be holding up tight to the bars or off of them down in deeper water," Countz explained. "I'll use the trolling motor to ease the boat down the west bank, chunking soft plastic jigs and varying the water depth in which they are retrieved until I find where the fish are concentrated."

Another major river that is a dynamite wintertime hot spot is the Neches River located on the northwest end of Sabine Lake. It is a staple target area for Sabine Lake guru and fishing guide, Captain Randy Foreman.

Foreman's favorite

time to fish the Neches River is after the gusty northwest winds from the passage of a strong cold front blow the water out of the shallow marshes that drain into the main river channel.

"This significant drop in the tide level stacks up schools of fish along the ledges and drop offs of the Neches River," Foreman explained. "When the conditions are right, the action for redfish can be incredible."

In the Galveston Bay complex, several rivers and bayous offer protection from the wind along with a plethora of premier winter hotspots. They include the Trinity River, San Jacinto River, Oyster Bayou, Robinson Bayou, Chocolate Bayou, Hall's Lake, Bastrop Bayou, and Dickinson Bayou.

Oyster reefs make up an additional list of wintertime hotspots along the upper coast. One of the best places to find hoards of shell that concentrates fish all winter long is West Galveston Bay. The late A.C. Becker often wrote about the outstanding cold weather opportunities within this estuary, and one location he mentioned often was Confederate Reef. Present day pros and winter savvy anglers are still finding the same success fishing



*The Neches River offers up excellent redfish during the wintertime for those willing to brave the cold weather. This lady angler landed this chunky red while fishing the Neches River with Capt. Randy Foreman.*

that Becker described and experienced many years ago.

Galveston Bay fishing guide, Captain Ryan Battistoni, is an expert on fishing West Galveston Bay. He claims that Confederate Reef is one of his favorite areas for catching both numbers of speckled trout as well as trophy sized specks during the winter.

“Confederate Reef is a massive and diverse expanse of oyster shell,” Battistoni confessed. “There’s so many different ways to approach it and find success.”

One of Battistoni’s favorite ways to approach Confederate is to wade fish along the edges of its shallow humps in areas that are adjacent to deeper guts.

“I really prefer to wade Confederate at nighttime or in the wee hours of the morning,” he elaborated. “I’ll pick a cold and dark night when a major feed time in accordance with the solunar tables occurs early in the morning, prior to daylight. I’ve caught several heavy stringers of trout while wading Confederate before most other anglers have even thought about launching their boats.”

Confederate Reef also offers plenty of opportunities for anglers that prefer to fish from their boats while drifting. The deeper guts around the reef concentrate more fish during cold spells. On warmer days in between fronts, the fish are usually found stacked up along the reef’s shallower fingers.

East Matagorda Bay is another estuary that has plenty of oyster shell worth mentioning. One shallow mid-bay reef known for producing some noteworthy catches is Drull’s Lump. This reef can be waded, or anglers can drift around its edges. Both tactics can do the trick.

Other reefs scattered throughout the western half of East Matagorda Bay make exceptional wintertime hotspots as well. A few of them include Cleveland Reef, Long Reef, and 3-Beacon Reef. Long drifts over these stretches of shell will help anglers pinpoint where fish are staging.

The satellite bays located along the Houston Ship Channel in the western portion of Trinity Bay are littered with shell that trout and reds stack up along during the winter. Areas inside Tabb’s Bay, Scott Bay, and Burnet Bay can be



*Having a plan B, C, and D will keep anglers hooked up this winter.*

lights out.

Regardless of what patch of oyster shell anglers are targeting, some of the best action will take place in stretches of streaky, off colored water. In areas where the majority of the water is clear, baitfish will stack up in the dirtiest water they can find. Hungry gamefish will be hot on their trail and are often found feeding along the edges of color changes where dirty and clear water meet.

The Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) is another great option full of opportunities during cold snaps. The “ditch” provides a deep water refuge for fish to retreat to when water temperatures plunge. Points and secondary channels that lead to shallower marshes and back bays off the ICW are great areas for anglers to target between cold fronts.

In West Galveston Bay, prime locations off the ICW include Green’s Cut and Mecom’s Cut.

Another outstanding stretch of hotspots along the ICW lies near the San Bernard River watershed. Deep guts and channels connect the Cedar Lakes and Cowtrap Lake to the ICW in this area, and specks and reds regularly stack up in these guts during cold weather.

Flats adjacent to deeper water along the upper coast are also key features for anglers to focus on during the winter. In the northernmost reaches of Trinity Bay, mud flats in Jack’s Pocket and the Anahuac pocket have a reputation of producing some solid stringers for waders. This is also the same for areas along the south shoreline of East Galveston Bay.

East Matagorda Bay’s south shoreline is another area covered with flats that are



*Study a Hook-N-Line Chart of the area to become familiar with the lay of the land. Pay attention to the compass rose to determine how the bay is oriented in order to adjust for any change in wind direction.*

worth wading for memorable wintertime catches. Matagorda fishing guide, Captain Trey Prye, spends the majority of his time on the water during the winter catching trophy trout while wading the flats along this bank.

Coffee Ground Cove, which is located in the northeast corner of Sabine Lake, is another flat worth exploring this winter. When the fish get stacked along this section of the lake's Louisiana shoreline, the catching can be hot and heavy.

The best way to approach one of the aforementioned hotspots for the first time is to study a Hook-N-Line Chart of the area they are located in. Make note of each location's surroundings and get familiar with the lay of the land. Also pay attention to the compass rosette to determine how the bay is oriented in order to adjust for any change in wind direction.

Look for other locations within that bay system with similar characteristics. Come up with a game plan and create a list of spots that should be fishable under the apparent conditions. Layer on the cold weather gear and go find out what winter fishing on Texas' upper coast is all about. 🌟🌟



*Fishing pressure is at it's all time low during the winter and layering on the warm clothes to hit the water can result in success when the right areas are targeted.*



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# Finishing with a Flurry

*Coastal duck hunting is off the grid and packed with adventure.*

*Story and Photography by Robert Sloan*



One of the craziest hunters I've ever seen came across the Intracoastal Waterway and up to the ramp at Stingaree Marina located on East Galveston Bay. He had six ducks – four gadwall, a widgeon and a pintail.

I ask him where he had hunted.

"Back there in that little marsh pond," he said. "Nobody ever hunts back there. I put out about a dozen decoys, lay out sheets of camo over this canoe and wait for the ducks to come in. It's totally off the grid, and usually set's me up with some pretty good shooting."

That's the fun thing about hunting along the Texas coast. It's wide open and unlimited in adventure. Plus, the cost is minimal. Most of the coastal marsh and bays are free to hunt. But there are sections that are set aside as wildlife management areas. Some are good and easy to hunt. Others require a good bit of exploring before you figure them out. And there is always the option of hiring a guide if you really want to hunt off the grid.

Back in the 70's and 80's a pack of buddies and I used to hunt on Matagorda Island. That's where Texas Parks and Wildlife Department ran duck hunts on the many small freshwater ponds scattered out along the island. The headquarters for the hunts was the old Army Base. We had



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

*Buy a \$48 Annual Hunting Permit, scout coastal wildlife management areas and the waterfowl hunting can be spectacular and inexpensive.*

the option of running across the seven miles across the bay from Port O'Connor to the island, or spending the night on the island in one of the old buildings that had electricity and restrooms. At any rate, if you wanted to hunt the sign up time was 5 a.m. We would pick the area to hunt, load up in a trailer and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department personnel would haul us to the pond and drop us off.

I've duck hunted all over Texas for over 50 years. The hunts we had on the

island were some of the best I've ever had. The ducks, lots of them, would head over to the island ponds after feeding on the bays and in the rice fields. Big flights of pintails and widgeon would start coming into our decoys at about eight o'clock in the morning. Back then we could shoot 10 ducks. It wasn't at all unusual for us to get full limits of bull sprigs (drake pintails) – that would be 10 apiece. It was excellent shooting, but it was all about getting set up on the right pond. Many of



*Blinds can be elaborate or simple when hunting coastal marsh or back lake areas.*

the ponds didn't attract ducks, other were like magnets.

TPWD is still running hunts on those ponds. It's actually called Matagorda Island WMA. It covers 56,688 acres. On one side is the Gulf of Mexico on the other is all bay shoreline. It's the perfect place to get shots at a variety of ducks. There are eight hunts scheduled for the island during January.

Thanks to Hurricane Claudette all of the buildings on the island were pretty much destroyed. Tent camping is the only option now. There is no electricity or running water. You can either camp out, or make the boat ride across the bay in the dark. Another really cool thing about this WMA is that you can do your own cast and blast. You can duck hunt in the morning and fish the Army Hole during the afternoon. It's all free.

To find out more about the Matagorda Island WMA I highly recommend buying into the TPWD Annual Public Hunting Permit Program. The cost is \$48. After buying the permit you will get the 2018-19 Map Booklet titled Public Hunting Lands. With that book and the permit



*Hunting coastal marsh with a favorite friend adds to the enjoyment of the outing.*

you'll have access to all the public hunting lands and WMA's in Texas.

Since 1987, the Annual Public Hunting Permit, formally known as "Type II", has offered the opportunity to participate in a variety of inexpensive, family oriented outdoor recreational activities including hunting for a multitude of wildlife species, fishing, nature watching, camping and other activities in Texas. Over the years, a little over 1 million APH Permits and Limited Public Use (LPU) Permits have been sold.

Today's Public Hunting Program includes over a million acres of land located throughout the Lone Star State. The downloadable map booklet and the website has information on property owned by TPWD as well as acreage leased by TPWD from other state and federal agencies, forest product industries, and other cooperating private landowners; and includes the Public Dove and Small Game Hunting Areas. To access a property for hunting and other recreational activities, purchase the APH and you are good to go.

One of the best public duck hunting areas along the Texas coast is the J.D. Murphree WMA located in Port Arthur near the Texas/Louisiana border. This

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WMA is a 24,498-acre tract of fresh and brackish water coastal marsh on the upper coast.

The original 8,312 acres of the Big Hill Unit were acquired in 1958 using funds generated by waterfowl stamp and hunting license sales. The Lost Lake Unit was acquired in 1983 through mitigation. An additional 11,231-acre tract was added to the Area in August 1997, in a trade of Sheldon WMA lands for lands in Sea Rim State Park. This acreage was added to the Lost Lake Unit and re-designated as the Salt Bayou Unit (15,595 acres).

The Area represents the coastal marshes of the Texas Chenier Plain and is managed as wetland habitat with a special emphasis on migratory waterfowl habitat. The Hillebrandt Unit (591 acres) was added to the Area in 1987.

Sabine Lake guide Jerry Norris has been hunting the J.D. Murphree WMA for over 45 years. He lives right across the road from the check-in headquarters.

“It’s been like having my own duck lease,” says Norris. “The duck hunting has always been good. I know it like the back of my hand. That’s one thing that’s very important if you’ll be hunting on public lands. Pick one out that you like and get to know the lay of the land. You want to know where the best hunts take place and how to get there first, before other hunters move in.”

I’ve hunted this WMA with Norris a few times. On our first hunt we had greenhead mallards, pintails, widgeon and gadwalls. It was as good as a hunt can get, and the best you can have on public water for sure.

This WMA is best known for its excellent hunts for gadwall, a.k.a. gray ducks. It’s got the perfect habitat for them. Mike Rezsutek is a wildlife biologist there and says the hunters came in with a variety of ducks during the first two weeks of this season. Right at 1,145 gadwall were checked in, with teal being second at 596, (324 green wings and 272 blue wings). Other ducks checked in were 72 spoonies, 42 widgeon, five mallards and two woodies.

If you like to shoot big ducks, like lots of gadwall that will work to a call and float in over the decoys, this WMA is the place to hunt.

Another very popular public hunting area along the Texas coast is the Guadalupe

Delta WMA. This WMA consists of four units, Mission Lake (4,447 acres), Hynes Bay (1,007 acres), Guadalupe River (1,138 acres) and the San Antonio Unit (818 acres). The Guadalupe Delta WMA units are located within the delta of the Guadalupe River along the Texas coast. It’s the perfect habitat for attracting lots of ducks. The units of the Guadalupe Delta are freshwater marshes that provide important habitat for wetland dependent wildlife, especially migratory waterfowl.

The good thing about duck hunting is that we have so much diversified waterfowl habitat, and miles upon miles of it is located along the Texas Gulf coast. Some of the best bay and estuary lake hunts start at Port O’Connor, and extend south through Rockport and on down past Baffin Bay and into the Laguna Madre.

Some of the best hunting along the entire Texas coast is out of Port Mansfield located on the middle area of the Laguna Madre.

“I’ve been duck hunting a long time and the backwater marshes we have on the Laguna Madre hold excellent numbers of ducks,” says guide Ruben Garza Jr. “This

has been one of the best seasons we have had here that I can remember. I run all my hunts from airboats, and we get way off the grid. I like my hunters to shoot a variety of ducks. During the first split we were getting limits that consisted of pintails, widgeon, teal, gadwall, scaup, redheads and even a few spoonies.”

The thing about hunting the coast is getting away from hunters. That’s where the best duck hunts will take place. “I don’t mind running 30 minutes to an hour in the air boats,” says Garza. “We take hunters to the birds, set up brush blinds and are ready to shoot at shooting time.”

I’ve hunted with Garza a time or two and can say for a fact that he runs a first class operation. He gets his hunters in the blind, while he stays behind brush outside the blind. He lets the hunters know when the birds are coming in, what direction they are coming from and calls the shot. During a lull he’ll serve up tacos and hot coffee. That’s what I call a fine coastal hunt. Plus, he runs his hunts, as well as cast and blast trips, out of Getaway Adventures Lodge in Mansfield. It’s all first class. **T★J**

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# Lake Roundup

## CENTRAL TEXAS



By John Jefferson

This lake report is usually fun to compile, since the Central Texas and the Highland Lakes region have so much water and so much fishing, but about the only thing I can honestly report is that there has been abundant rain and all the lakes are full.

“Abundant rain” is a gross understatement, as most of you know. We were beginning to look around to see if any of our neighbors had a do-it-yourself project going on in their backyard – like maybe building a boat, one about 300 cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and 30 tall. But the backyards in our neighborhood aren’t big enough to build a boat tall enough for a couple of giraffes, much less long enough to host major league hardball in. If you’re not into Biblical dimensions, 300 cubits is 450 feet.

Now that I think about it, there *is* a certain amount of wickedness going on, nowadays, but I understand there isn’t a flood of Biblical proportions forecast ever again.

When the flood hit Junction on the **Llano River**, which ultimately flows into the **Colorado River** at Kingsland, that was the culmination of semi-continuous rain since September 2, and the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) closed

all lakes on the Colorado to boating due to the inevitable flooding. That shut down all fishing on the seven Colorado River lakes except fishing from the bank. If you were a catfisherman, that was not a problem. Cats get more active during floods. Most bass fishermen, instead, headed to **Decker, Bastrop, and Choke Canyon lakes**. Popular fishing guide, Duke Kinley, went to **Granger**.

I asked Kinley if the water there was as murky as the Highland Lakes. “It’s always murky,” was his reply. Granger is a shallow lake and has a multitude of stumps, making it a challenging place to fish by boat. That may contribute to Granger being one of the state’s best crappie lakes. Crappie prefer good cover and all the aggravating stumps do contribute to that. Wind on a shallow water body increases turbidity and that gives Granger the infamy of being muddy. Once you start catching crappie and have to count your catch of 10 inch-long fish to avoid going over the 25 fish per angler limit, you’ll probably forgive the muddy water.

Granger also has a high population of white bass that move up the **San Gabriel River** and **Willis Creek** each spring to spawn. Whites will begin staging this month in the upper end of the lake before heading upstream, so if you are like me and favor the fast action of fishing the white bass spawn, start getting your tackle together. I’ll do the same. Heavy largemouth tackle isn’t necessary. In fact, light line in four to eight pound test is good and small 1/16 or 1/32 ounce chartreuse jigs are my favorites.

Every year, about the first few sunny days in late-January, I begin hearing reports of good catches of whites on the San Gabe and Willis Creek above Granger. Anglers in the know head to the Highway 95 Bridge over the San Gabriel north of Taylor. The first road to the east just north of the bridge will take you to a place to access the river. It’s just before a 90 degree bend in the road to the left. You’ll probably see cars parked along the road near the climb-down to the river.

White bass also will head upstream to

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**Before the Flood:** Lake Travis in mid-September 2018; water had receded over 150 yards away from the end of the Cypress Creek boat ramp.



PHOTO BY JOHN JEFFERSON

**After:** The flood had brought the lake up to 704 feet msl before receding to full pool level of 681 feet msl and almost to the top of the boat ramp on November 20, 2018 in this image.

spawn from all the lakes. About the first place where fishermen begin catching them is on the Colorado above **Lake Buchanan** at Colorado Bend State Park. Again, I almost always hear of good stringers from there in late January. The river is shallow enough to wade and the fishing is usually excellent there.

My guess is that the inflow from the Colorado is a little warmer than water coming into the other lakes on the river that receive chilled inflow from the bottom of the dams forming the lakes. Being a little warmer, it may trigger the spawn earlier above Buchanan than on the other six lakes below it. Granger, being shallow, also probably warms up faster, contributing to an early spawn above it, too.

Back to the other Colorado River lakes, be advised that **Lakes LBJ and Marble Falls** are going to be lowered beginning December 30. LBJ will be lowered four feet. Marble Falls will go down seven. Both lakes will start refilling February 23. This is being done to allow lakeside landowners to remove debris from the recent floods and repair docks, retaining walls and other structure. LBJ will drop to mean sea level of 820.2 – 820.8 feet. Marble Falls will recede to 729-730 feet msl.

I had already asked Marcos de Jesus, the district TPWD inland fisheries biologist for Central Texas, if he thought the remains of the bridge at Kingsland that broke off into the lake when severe water from the Llano and from upstream on the Colorado struck it and tore a large portion of the bridge off, if the sunken remnants would provide new structure for fish. He replied that it would.

I asked Duke Kinley what he thought about it, knowing he keeps his ear turned

toward the water. His reply was, “Oh, yeah, all the fishermen are talking about it. We can’t wait!”

But it’s going to be an interminable wait. A call to LCRA referred me to TXDOT, since they construct our bridges. Five calls later, I got in touch with the bridge man. Surprisingly, he said TXDOT had entered a contract to have the torn-off portion of the bridge *removed* from Lake LBJ. Too bad; I was looking forward to fishing the wreckage, myself.

More bad news: Duke has fished **Lake Austin** recently, and reports that Zebra mussels “are everywhere.”

By January, most of the lakes should have cleared up and the debris should have settled. With all the new water, fish could well be in different places, since there are - well- lots of new places. **Lake Travis**, for one, will have a lot of new habitat since it rose the most. And, remember that LBJ and Marble Falls will remain lowered until after February 23. That will increase boat traffic and longer waits at boat ramps on other lakes.

But all lakes should be open in time for arguably the best largemouth fishing of the year in late February and on into March. **T★J**



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# CoastWatch | Danno Wise

January signals the start of a new year and because of the “fresh slate,” the first month of the year is met with optimism for more people. This doesn’t necessarily hold true for fishermen along the Upper Texas and Louisiana Coasts, although it should. Many casual anglers don’t consider January a “fishing month” because of the often nasty weather. However, most serious saltwater anglers know it can be one of the best fishing months of the year – despite the weather.

Obviously climatic conditions are a factor during the first month of the year. Of course, January in this region may see everything from short-sleeve weather to below freezing temperatures. And, this year seems to be shaping up like a “real” winter.

Whether it is cold, warm or somewhere in between, the angling action should be hot for fishermen willing to vary their locations and techniques. If January turns out cold and bitter, those anglers willing to brave the conditions will find fish stacked up in deep holes and channels. During warm spells, trout and reds will move back up into the shallows along the shorelines.

Again, since the vast majority of casual fishermen don’t really consider fishing in January, anglers willing to work

the water in January often have the bay all to themselves. Another plus to fishing in winter is the best bite is often midday. That means there is no need for an early start, which allows anglers to sleep in and approach the fishing day at a more relaxed pace.

Of course, there will be plenty of boat shows and other fishing-related options for days when the weather is just too nasty to fish. But, anglers are well advised to hit the water at every opportunity during January. **T★J**



Matagorda guide Capt. Tommy Countz says he always looks forward to fishing after New Year’s.

“January in Matagorda is always a great time to fish for redfish and trout in the Colorado River,” said Countz. “Colder water temperatures force fish to seek deeper warmer water in the winter. We normally fish the river from the FM 521 Bridge down to the Intracoastal Canal.

“How cold the temperatures are will dictate how you fish. With warmer temps we normally drift with the current casting paddle tail baits rigged on 3/8 ounce lead heads towards the bank and slowly work them back to deeper water.

“If temperatures are

colder, we may drift along concentrating on the deeper water closer to the middle of the river. If it is really cold, we’ll usually troll baits behind the boat feeding them out to get down 10 to 15 feet. Water cools in thermal layers so the deeper down you go, the warmer the water.

“Another January tactic is to be in East Matagorda Bay making long drifts either on the scattered shell on the west end or the big mud flats on the east end. Once again, I like to use heavier lead heads and bright paddle tail baits. Chartreuse or hot pink baits seem to show up better especially if the water is off-color. When drifting East Bay in the winter I always look for off color streaks of water. Crystal clear water is normally not very productive.

“January is also a great time to look for the biggest trout of your life by wading the south shore of East Matagorda Bay. Corkie Fat Boys in pink or chartreuse worked very slowly could put a big girl on your wall. Afternoon fishing, which allows the surface water to warm, is the most productive time to fish. A new bait that I’m anxious to try this winter is the LeLe’. It works just below the surface with an erratic action and so far seems to be a bait that fish love to hate.

“Give Matagorda a try this January and you just might find your personal best trout.”

Sargent based guide Capt. Trey Prye of Captain Trey’s Trophy Charters says he will be solely focused on trophy trout during January. And, he says, more often than not, their efforts pay off with good fish.

“I will be looking for big trout in January,” said Prye. “And, I will no doubt be wading. I’ll be wading the drains and tributaries on the south shoreline of East Matagorda Bay and also fishing around mud and scattered shell on north shoreline. No matter where I am, I’ll be targeting big trout with Corkies and tails.

“Of course, there are times the weather will affect how we fish. And, there are times I will fish over deeper shell in four to five feet of water. I’ll also catch some



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. TREY PRYE

*Big trout like this one caught by Capt. Trey Prye await around mid-bay reefs and deeper channels off shorelines in East Matagorda Bay*

good trout over that deeper shell, like in five feet of water.

"Again, I don't vary what I do a whole lot, because I am really targeting big trout. For big trout in January, who have to find mud and shell and you have to be pretty persistent. But, we usually catch quite a few big trout out of East Matagorda Bay in January."

January offers the opportunity to do several different things for Freeport guide Capt. Mike Segall of Reel Threel Charters.

"We'll still be fishing for bull reds off the beach in January," said Segall. "People don't think about bull reds in the winter, but we catch them pretty much year around. We'll also be doing some state water snapper fishing. When we get the right conditions, we'll run a little further out and look for kingfish. You never know when the weather will cooperate in January, but when it does, we can actually do pretty good offshore."

"I'll also be doing some inshore stuff for specks and reds. I move around quite a bit when I'm fishing inshore. Sometimes I'll be fishing in East Matagorda. I'll also be fishing around Freeport along the

ICW and Brazos River. When the water's right, the winter trout fishing can be outstanding in the Brazos River so long as the river's not too fresh."

Galveston guide Capt. Greg Verm says January fishing is pretty good in the Galveston Bay complex thanks to the amount of deep water areas the bay system boats.

"January is usually cold, so the fish will be holding deep," said Verm. "We've got a lot of deep water spots throughout the Galveston Bay complex, so we'll be hitting those in January. West Bay is usually good in January and that's where we'll spend most of our time. We also have some good trout fishing around the causeway."

"No matter where you are fishing in the bay, the key will be to find off-color



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. TOMMY COUNTZ

*This angler caught this nice sized speckled trout while fishing with Capt. Tommy Countz. In the winter the Colorado River and East Matagorda Bay are Countz go-to hot spots.*

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or dirty water. The water gets crystal clear in winter. The clear water is usually colder and doesn't hold bait. So, you will find more fish in the dirty water because it's warmer and holds more bait.

"Later in January, the black drum and sheepshead will start hanging around the jetties. Flounder gigging can also be good in January. In fact, during winter, we usually do really well on flounder once the water comes back in following a front. It's tough to gig when all the water drops out, but once it come back we usually find plenty of fish."

Sabine Lake guide Capt. Randy Foreman says how he'll be fishing in January has everything to do with the salinity level in the lake.

"During January, I spend most of my time up on the north end of the lake and in the river," said Foreman. "That is, if it's not too fresh up there. We had a lot of rain during the late summer and fall, but hopefully by January it will be plenty salty up there. It got right in early December, so as long as we don't have any major rain, it should be good. If it is, that's where I'll be spending most of my time.

"What I like to do in January is make long drifts on the north end of the lake when those northerns come through. When I'm doing that, I'll be throwing dark colored soft-plastics for redfish. Most of the redfish will be over mud flats in a couple feet of water.

"If the water is salty, there will also be quite a few trout on the north end of the lake and in the river. I'll be fishing the humps and mussel beds for trout and throwing pretty much the same baits. The key to finding fish this time of year will be mullet. That will be about the only bait left in the lake. So, you find mullet, you'll find fish. Basically, I'm looking for muddy bottom areas with active mullet.

"We had some strong fronts this fall, so we may



PHOTO COURTESY OF REEL THREEE CHARTERS

*A lot of people overlook the number of big bull redfish caught this time of year out from the Freeport jetties says Capt. Mike Segall.*

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be in for a cold winter. If it gets really cold, I'll fish in the ICW for drum and redfish. When that happens, I'll anchor on the edge of the channel, then cast across the channel and work the bait up the face of the ledge. You're casting into about 18 to 24 feet of water and bringing it back up the edge of the channel. I'll do the same thing in the Sabine Channel. Both channels will be holding a lot of fish when it gets really cold." 🌟🌟



Lake Calcasieu guide Capt. Nick Poe says the year always gets off to a good start on Big Lake.

"January is always a great month," said Poe. "However, weather conditions





PHOTO BY CALVIN CARTER

*From Freeport TX to Lake Calcasieu LA redfish are a winter time option as these fish move up on shallow flats to feed as temperatures warm.*

can be tough depending on the frequency of passing cold fronts. Between fronts is often best. However, even with strong north or northeasterly winds, great redfish action often awaits.

“The fishing can be incredible even when temperatures dip into the mid to low 20s. Bull reds will be located up and down the east bank on points and pockets. Fishing them is as easy as drifting down wind and casting until you hook up. Smaller ‘eating’ fish can be more difficult to find at times, but the wiers often produce plenty of smaller, tastier fish. Often times bait and colors don’t matter as long as your bait is near the bottom.

“Even if water temperatures dip into the low 40s or upper 30s, redfish can still be caught. GULP! or dead shrimp on bottom are often the only way to catch them when the mercury plummets, but they can be caught.”

Venice area fishermen will mostly be focused on redfish during the year’s first month. Areas like Yankee Pond on the west side will provide the most consistent action for spottails. Although redfish will be the main focus, there will be some decent trout action on the west side as well, especially in and around the Burrias Canal. For the most part these fish will be holding deep, but will hit live shrimp and jigs.

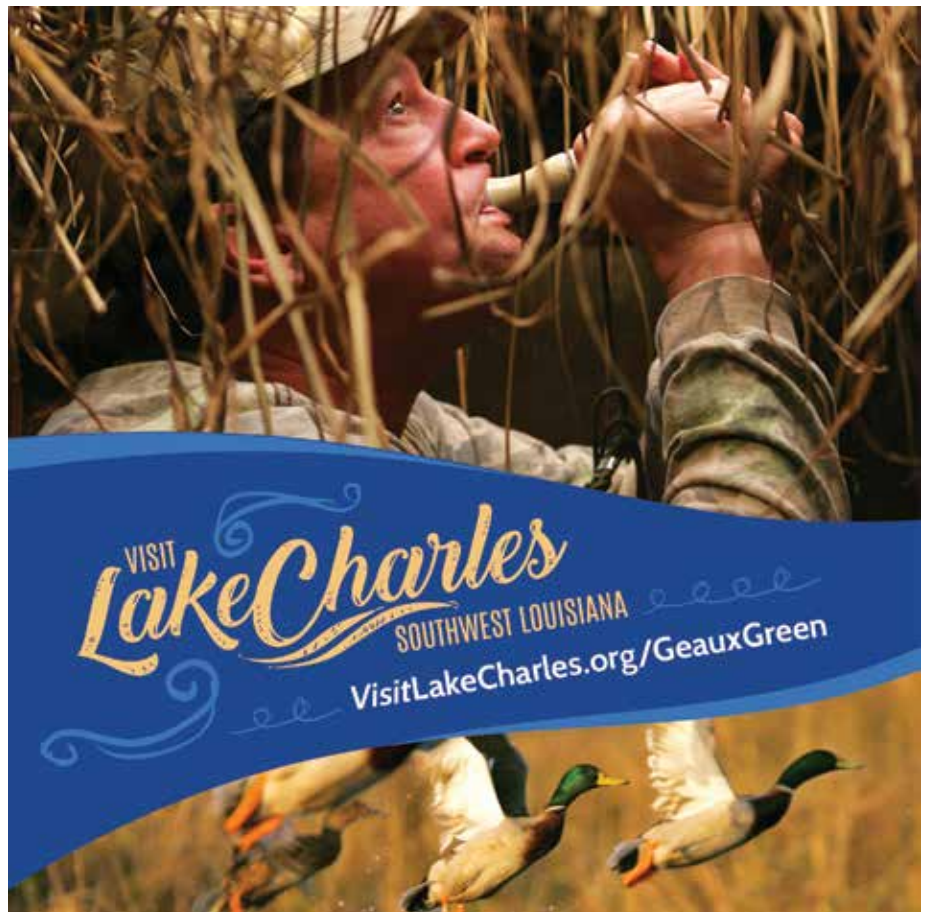
Although most of the best fishing will take place on the west side of the

river during January, some deep water areas on the east side, such as Taylor’s Point, will also be holding good numbers of fish this month. **T★J**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. GREG VERM

*When water returns to Galveston Bay after a cold front has passed, some good gigging for flounder occurs with Capt. Greg Verm.*



# SEE IN THE NIGHT



## NIGHT VISION, THERMAL & DIGITAL

*Delve into this expanding hunting opportunity available through new technology imagery.*

*Story and Photography by Bill L. Olson*

Most hunters and shooters are aware that many of the firearms used today recreationally have their origin rooted in military applications. A number of great calibers and actions have proven themselves over decades of military use and found a place within the hunting and/or shooting community.

The same is true with specialized optics that have become favorites among specialized hunting disciplines — particularly varmint and hog hunting at night. A variety of night vision optics have crossed over from military and law enforcement tactical applications to improve the success of a growing rank of nighttime recreational hunters.

On the surface a newcomer to night vision, thermal and digital imagery or optics may seem as simple as traditional optics. Simply put all one would need to figure out is the fixed power desired or range of magnification available from a variable scope.

The other consideration is the diameter of the objective that gathers the ambient light as well as the quality of lens and coatings. The larger the diameter of the objective the more light is allowed in and targets seen in diminished light conditions.

Once selected a shooter has the scope mounted and bore sighted. Then through a progression of shots fired at a target at a specified distance the scope is zeroed on target. The ballistics of the caliber of the firearm will determine how much hold over is needed for longer distances shot to remain on target.

When it comes to night-vision, thermal and digital the variables are a bit more complicated. So much so that this article may well raise as many questions as it answers. It hopes to be a start of another learning curve of knowledge that will increase over time.

The first suggestion is to set aside any preconceived notions derived about these tools from Hollywood movies. Other than they are effective tools used at night by military and tactical law enforcement is where the similarities end and difference begin when applied to hunting. The reason is that most military and tactical encounters using night-vision, thermal or digital imagery are done at fairly close ranges, say within 100 yards or less, in

many instances less than 50 yards and in confined quarters.

When it comes to hunting, those calling in varmints or hunting hogs most times will be looking over unobstructed pastures that may be several hundred yards long. In order for the optics to be effective the ballistics of the caliber has to be taken in to consideration, particularly if longer shots are being taken.

To assist with this learning cover I consulted with Clifford Cheadle, managing partner of Third Coast Thermal in Katy TX. He has been in business for four years and developed a straight-forward philosophy and insight into this new technology.

“Digital is the least expensive of the three,” he began. “This optic is severely limited in performance, distance and what can be seen. However, if used on a bright moonlite night images can be seen. Conversely digital cannot see in dark brush cover. Digital covers the visible light spectrum. Depending upon the ambient light 100-150 yards is about the maximum range digital can effectively be used.

“Night vision on the other hand has the broadest application. It not only covers the visible spectrum but also a portion of the spectrum not visible to the human eye.

“There are two advantages of night

vision over thermal imagery. First night vision can see through glass where thermal cannot, so you can drive around with the windows rolled up.

“Night vision can be used in conjunction with tradition optical sights used during the day with night vision. Plus the resolution does not degrade but can be enhance optically.

“The other big advantage of night vision is it can see a laser pointer or laser aiming devise that is about the size of a quarter. Basically, put the laser beam on a hog, coyote or other intended target and the beam can be seen with night vision. That same beam can not be seen with thermal.”

Cheadle explained the more technical, but applicable side of night vision by saying animals and humans will not see the emitted light that is above 850 nanometers (nm). “If they can’t see it they won’t shy away from it. Any beam 940 nm or greater is branded as a black flash.”

Thermal introduces a whole different set of abilities, features and limitations. “Thermal can not look through glass as mentioned, he said. “It can’t see IR illuminators or beams, in fact it does not see light at all.

“It does see the heat or energy that radiates off animals and objects. The device receives a message that defines



PHOTO BY CALVIN CARTER.

*Hunting hogs at night using a variety of imaging devices provides year round opportunities to help check the growing wild swine population.*

heat to provide a heat radiate, or thermal image. The heat source is identified through a Germanium lens as opposed to an optical lens.”

According to on-line research, “a Germanium lens is a special lens, where visible rays cannot pass through it and it appears to be black to the physical eyes. As Germanium is an extremely costly material, it requires special skills for polishing it to high precision. Hence, the Germanium lens itself becomes costly,” and thus the cost of the thermal product is more expensive.

Cheadle said, “Thermal is the most expensive of these devices used at night. As noted the increased cost comes from the expense of the Germanium lens and the detector array. The more intense the



Two helmets are available to mount night vision gear. On the right is a light-weight “bump-helmet that basically provides a helmet to secure the night vision and protect your head from bumps. On the left is a heavier ballistic helmet that provides even more protection..

array the cost climbs even more.

“Think of it like a digital camera, the more pixels the more expensive the camera. The same is true with thermal.”

Hunters are no different than any other consumer — we want the most for the least amount of money spent. Cheadle counters by stating, “The least expensive way to purchase thermal is to start out with where you are going to end up. That means not buying a starter level product and then upgrading later when it becomes apparent the performance is not what is desired.”

My limited exposure and experience confirmed what most have encountered — night vision is where everyone started. Cheadle says today it is thermal, but that depends on how the device is going to be used.

“Night vision has been either a monocular or binocular with some mounted to a helmet,” he stated. “When mounted to a helmet it can either be a monocular or binocular. Obviously this set up is going to allow the observation of game and the surroundings.”

Cheadle explained that night vision looks like a dot, but is not the same as dot scopes. Instead it is a laser that bounces off of anything it hits, but the laser does not emit anything outside of the device.

“The most common combination is to mount the night vision behind a traditional optical scope,” he explained. “Another option would be the interfacing of night vision with a laser. This is typically more of a tactical application used by law enforcement when there is a need to see what is going on around them. In this situation someone else will be using

thermal to provide a different viewing perspective.”

The complexities and questions that need to be answered continued as my accelerated course on night imagery continued.

“Now we need to consider where the night hunting will take place,” Cheadle questioned. “Texas is pretty vast with a diversity of terrain. In the Pineywoods of east Texas the tight cover means shots will be shorter in distance.

“In the panhandle, high plains or west Texas this big open country with lots of elevation differences offers much longer shot possibilities. In the brush country of south Texas the situation may include some of both — tight cover as well as longer shots on senders.”

Our discussion turned to various potential calibers and their individual ballistics. Traditional all-around calibers like a 30-06 or .270 take the largest majority of game animals. However, what happens if a rifle is chambered in .338 or .223. Vastly different ballistics and effective maximum range becomes a consideration.

“Night vision with a laser is fast, but not precise,” Cheadle stated. “Night vision with crosshairs is more precise. Putting night vision on a helmet or gun will work with some, but not all scenarios.”

Throughout this exercise and discussion what became clearly obvious is this type of vision enhancement is even more specialized and specific than what most hunters have experienced. Cheadle expanded that thought by saying, “That is why it is important to gather all of the



Trijicon offers two thermal imaging devices, the IR-Hunter and the Reaper-IR that have the features hunters want, the quality desired and at a reasonable price point.

data of where, when, and how the hunting will take place. This is combined with distance and ballistic of the caliber to be used, and finally factor in one's budgetary limitation.

"There are people every day that inquire about what can I get to do the most for the least amount of money? That is a reasonable question but not where this type of hunting or imagery will end up. It is matching all of the variables to arrive at getting the best available.

"There are many hunters that are already paying several thousand dollars for sophisticated, high-end optical rifle scopes made in Germany as well as other parts of the world. Affordable optics for nighttime hunting is also available.

"The best advice is to consult or "partner" with someone reputable that can help gather all of the data that will go into evaluating the specific need or application so the right decisions are made. There is a variety of information on this topic, some good and some not so good or accurate. As the learning curve continues and technology advances increase work with the partner to delve into this new and expanding hunting opportunity."

For more information or consultation with Clifford Cheadle, Third Coast Thermal visit [www.thirdcoastthermal.com](http://www.thirdcoastthermal.com) or call (713) 858-4826. 🌟🌟



*Hand-held or mounted on a helmet night vision has been the first choice for many varmint and hog hunters. Shown to the left is a monocular and to the right are two binoculars.*



*Thermal imaging optics see the heat signature an animal or object puts off and is rapidly becoming the new "standard" night hunters are using.*



PHOTO BY BOXIE KALLINA.

*An increasing number of deer hunters are realizing the need to control the number of predators like coyotes that prey upon the whitetail herd.*



# Lake Roundup

## SOUTH TEXAS



By Danno Wise

January is generally when the first truly cold weather hits South Texas. However, this year, freezing temperatures arrived in early November. And, that wasn't even the first "hard" front of the year, as the area had a strong norther push through in October. Several of the fall fronts were also accompanied by rain, which helped replenish water in lakes across the South Texas region. So, as the New Year begins, most lakes are in fairly good shape water-wise – some are even full. However, it also looks like this could be a very cold winter.

As uncomfortable as winter weather may be, it is also the time of year when spending time on the water can be richly rewarded. Every year, plenty of lunker largemouths are caught during what is usually one of the two coldest months of the year, making it well worth the effort for those fishermen who brave the cold. With plenty of pre-spawn (and even spawning on some lakes) bass invading shallow lake waters, there will be plenty of fat fish to be caught.

White bass also begin to attract anglers to their local lakes and rivers in January. By month's end, white bass on every lake in this part of the Lone Star State will have already begun their annual run up river or will be concentrated in giant schools in the main lakes preparing to enter the rivers.

**COLETO CREEK** – Coleto Creek is 100 percent full, which is a promising start to 2019 for anglers fishing this power

plant reservoir. January generally signals the start of the black bass spawn on Coleto and the high water level should ensure there are plenty of suitable spawning sites for bass this year.

"Usually, our fish are ready to spawn in January," said Victoria bass pro Dennis Lala. "But, that really depends on whether they have the power plant pumping. If they turn it on, our fish will be getting ready to spawn in January. If not, it may be as late as March. So, the biggest key will be whether or not the plant is pumping hot water discharge into the lake.

"Once they start getting ready to spawn, you can find them anywhere from a foot to four feet of water. Almost always, though, they'll be right up against the shoreline. When they're holding tight to the shore, I'll usually toss a spinnerbait up to the bank and draw it off real slow. If I run it all the way to the edge of the deeper water, then let it fall for a beat or two and start slowing retrieving it again.

"I also like using a real light Carolina rig in this situation. Sometimes, I'll just use a split shot ahead of a watermelon Power Jerkshad. That's a great rig to throw up around the cane, which is really the only vegetation we have left. We haven't had hydrilla in a few years, but now they've killed off even the lily pads, cattail and coontail moss. So, if you want to fish vegetation, you have to fish the cane. But, the fish will get back up in there – especially now that the lake is full.

"If you are fishing around the cane, you need to look for the indentions and irregular spots in the cane. Pitch the bait as far as you can into these indentions, then work it out real slow. You can pick up a lot of bass that way in January, but you got to work the bait real slow.

"You can also do pretty good with a square bill crankbait both around the cane and around the flooded timber.

"Again, I'm not sure if they'll have the plant running. They weren't running in the fall for some reason, but once they turn it on, there will be a lot of fish around the warm water discharge. We'll have a lot of hybrid stripers and catfish, as well as black bass, crappie and bluegill."

**MEDINA** – Jim Gallagher of Jim's ReBait Tackle said January is a bit different on Medina than on other South Texas lakes.

"Fishing on this lake is predictable, but not easy, in January," said Gallagher. "Our fish are deep – really deep – in January. And, they're not real active, so you have to really slow down your retrieve. It's kind of a time when you can do pretty good if you know what you're doing, but if you're not used to fishing this lake, it can be tough.

"This fall, we had some cold weather hit much earlier than usual. We also had a pretty good rise in lake level. So, in January, there will be plenty of water over that deep structure and it will definitely be cold enough to push those fish deep.

"Vertical jigging is the best method when fish are suspended at 30 to 35 feet, as they will be most of January. Jigging spoons and drop shot rigs are really good. Senkos are one of the best producing baits we have on this lake when the fish go deep. The only problem is we've had a lot of wind this fall and early winter. When it's windy, it's pretty tough to do any vertical fishing.

"So, the next best thing is throwing deep running crankbaits. Most Texas bass fishermen are more used to throwing crankbaits than using vertical fishing techniques anyways, so a lot of guys will throw crankbaits even when it's calm.

"I'm really expecting a pretty cold January based on how they weather has been so far this year. But, you never know. We can always get a few warm days in January. If that happens, the fish will move up a little shallower, so you'll need to concentrate on the main and secondary lake points and shorelines. If they're on the points, crankbaits are the way to go.

"You can also do pretty well on whites and hybrids during January. It's a little too early for them to be running, but they can be found schooled up on the surface around the lake. There's no predicting where they'll be from day to day, but if you run across them, you can have some good action. Anytime you fish for white bass or hybrids on this lake, a KT Spoon

in chrome or white is the best thing to throw.”

**CHOKO CANYON** – In January, bass on Choke Canyon will be preparing for the spawn, which means it's time for anglers to spend more time fishing in the river. This is true for fishermen looking for both black and white bass. Heading into the New Year, Choke is more than half full, meaning there will be ample water for the fish to move up river. The water level has gone from over 28.5 feet low over Labor Day weekend to being 13.5 low as November gave way to December. That is 15 feet of additional water covering a variety of brush, channels and shorelines.

More often than not, the white bass run on Choke Canyon begins in January. Fishermen should start looking for white bass from the Highway 99 Bridge up on the Frio River. Rat-L-Traps or small, flashy jigs will take plenty of whites during January.

The majority of Choke's black bass spawn in the rivers and creeks, so they, too, will be leaving the main lake in January. There will no doubt still be fish hanging around the deep structure in the main lake, but most of the bigger fish will be in the river. When fishing for pre-spawn bass, anglers should concentrate on brush in shallow water areas with muddy bottoms. Places such as Sam McGill Creek or Coodie Creek are well-known hot-spots. Soft-plastic jerkbaits and spinnerbaits will produce plenty of bass around the shallow brush, as will football jigs and Texas-rigged lizards.

**FALCON** — The bass on Falcon should also be in pre-spawn mode as the New Year begins. For the most part, this means fish will be moving shallower and will be found not only on the points, but also in the coves and up the tributaries. Weather will dictate how soon bass on Falcon move up to spawn. If the weather turns harsh, the fish may not move up until the end of January. However, if the winter weather is moderate to mild, the fish will be looking to get on their beds earlier.

When the fish are still hanging deep, Texas rigs and deep diving crankbaits will be the best bets. Once the fish move up shallow, anglers should switch to shallower-running crankbaits and spinnerbaits. There will be some fish will still be caught on jigs and oversized soft-plastics, but crankbaits and spinnerbaits

will allow fishermen to quickly cover water, which is usually necessary when working the brush shallows of Falcon.

There will be plenty of bass along shorelines up and down the lake, but most of the bigger fish will be found in the coves and creeks along the lower half of the lake. Therefore anglers hoping to hook into a lunker largemouth should focus on their efforts on the lower reaches of Falcon Lake during January. **T★J**



By TOJ Staff

It's a never-ending battle out west and in the high plains for water. Farmers and fisherman both know it.

The good news is it looks like some popular lakes have caught some much needed runoff from rains in 2018. Others seem to be holding their own for now.

Here's what to expect to start the New Year.

**AMISTAD** — After a slow rise earlier in 2018 “Big Friendly” is about 26.5 feet low to start the New Year. That is about three feet lower than January 2018 and seven feet lower than the start of 2017.

Look for bass to be fairly deep and relating to woody or rocky slide structure. These areas will warm the surrounding water after several days of sunshine. Fish jigs, Texas rigged worms or bump square-billed crankbaits around this structure.

Stripe bass will still be in the deep water in front of the dam. Look for birds working over fish feasting on bait. The other option is to look for bait balls and fish on electronics.

Catfish will be deep. Look for these fish in water 50 feet deep and deeper. Catch some and you'll have some of the cleanest and best tasting fillets ever.

**O.H. IVIE** — This is one of the most exciting stories to report on this beat. Ivie has come up about 18 feet and as of early

December was continuing a slow rise and was passing the 20 foot low mark. That additional 18-plus feet of water will have flooded a lot of vegetation that came up while the lake was low.

With the additional water look for bass to still be relating to any deep water structure available. Mark it with electronics and then work all sides of the structure. Texas rigs, jigging spoons and jigs are good options.

**BROWNWOOD** — After having been about seven and a half feet low in October 2018 this popular lake was about three quarters of a foot high at the beginning of December. That rise alone has set the stage for some good winter fishing and should result in a good spring spawn.

Until the warm up occurs try fishing around in vertical structure in deeper water that have shallow flats nearby. Look for fish to hold tight to the structure and make a modest move up after several consecutive days of bright sunshine. Senkos, Texas rigs and even slow rolled spinnerbaits are options this month. **T★J**



By TOJ Staff

**COLEMAN** — is a bright spot for this region. The lake is a few inches over capacity. Look for black bass to relate to deeper structure and along the first deep drop. Lipless crankbaits and billed crankbaits are both good options.

Meredith continues a slow recovery from devastatingly low levels. As of early December the lake was about 49 feet low.

Not much in the way of black bass or even smallmouth reports. However, catches of walleye are becoming commonplace. TPWD did a restocking of walleye in 2018. It is certainly a different option that provides a glimmer of optimism for this lake. **T★J**



## Between Seasons

Although hunting in Texas is a year round sport, thanks to the opportunities afforded us by exotics and wild pigs, we do have specific regulated seasons for deer, turkey, waterfowl, javelina and other native game species. Between these seasons is the time for maintenance and preparation. Have you cleaned your deer rifle or is it still just reclining in the gun safe?

Whether at home or on the hunt Birchwood Casey has three handy new firearm cleaning kits that contain all of the components needed to clean rifles, handguns and shotguns from top to bottom. Each kit comes in a cool case loaded with the appropriate brushes and jags and the shotgun kit contains mops to fit both 20 and 12 gauge guns.

A muzzle guard guide and utility brush are also included to help properly clean all popular calibers and gauges. The rod sections and high-quality, free-floating handle screw together to create a sturdy setup for scrubbing the dirtiest of barrels. The Handgun Cleaning Kit sells for a retail price of \$19.99, the Rifle Cleaning Kit for \$24.99 and the Shotgun Cleaning Kit is \$22.99.

If maintenance chores involve disassembly then we need Birchwood Casey's The Weekender Professional Gunsmith Kit featuring 27 professional

gunsmith selected tools, plus specialty bits for specific firearms and all in a durable hard case. Included are 1 Nylon and Brass Faced Hammer, 1 Precision Phillips, 1 Precision Flat Screw Driver, 1 Long Shank #2 Philips, 2 Brass Punches-5/16", 3/16"; 4 Roll Pin Punches-1/16", 3/32", 1/8", 5/32"; 4 Steel Pin Punches-1/16"/ 3/32", 1/8", 5/32"; 1 Synthetic Punch, 3 Driver Bits: Flat-3/16", 3/8", 1/4", 2 Torx-T10, T15; 1 Philips Size#1 and 6 Hex 5/64", 7/64", 1/8", 5/32", 1/16", 3/32". This kit is especially handy for working on AR type rifles since the works is basically pinned together. The Weekender Professional Gunsmith Kit sells for a retail price of \$36.00.

Between seasons is the time to stay tuned up and Birchwood Casey delivers again with a series of new targets. They have added four new AR500 Steel Gongs to their World of Targets line. Their 2-in-1 Gong Target Hanger makes for easy set up. I have had what I thought were tough steel targets only to have .223 FMJ rounds go through them like a fork in mashed potatoes. These steel gongs are made of 3/8" thick AR500 steel that holds up to shots from high-powered centerfire rifles and handguns.

They come in 8" and 10" diameter versions and are available with both single and double hole mounting configurations. The targets are painted black and come with 3" Birchwood Casey Target Spots attached. Retail is \$40.00 for the 8" models and \$53.40 for the 10" versions.

For fun rimfire practice there is

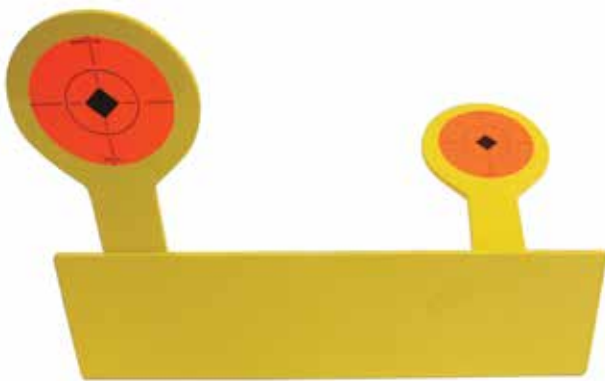


*The fully loaded Ruger 10/22 Custom Shop Model.*

the new Bushwacker Rimfire Target. It features two 1/4" AR400 steel target paddles that measure 4" in diameter with 3" Target Spots attached. The targets alternate between upright and down positions when shot, allowing shooters to focus on quick target acquisition plus we don't have to go down range and change targets. We can just blaze away and enjoy the action and the dinging. This setup comes fully assembled with no tools required and sets up right out of the box. The Bushwacker Rimfire Target sells for \$79.99. These tools and more can be found at [www.birchwoodcasey.com](http://www.birchwoodcasey.com). As always, set up in a safe area with backstop and wear eye and ear protection.

Serious practice with targets or the ever popular plinking with empty soda cans is a great excuse for a new rifle. Ruger has just launched their custom shop and an initial offering is the Ruger 10/22 Custom Shop Model. This rifle is loaded with features such as a hard-coat anodized, CNC-machined, heat-treated and stress relieved 6061-T6511 aluminum receiver with an integral, optics-ready, 30 MOA Picatinny rail. The receiver is matched up to a 4140, heat treated and nitrided, match CNC-machined bolt creating a tight-fitting, smooth action with a match bolt release. The receiver incorporates a second bedding lug, ensuring it is securely bedded to the stock.

This rifle also has an exclusive second barrel locator to provide a free-floating barrel for accuracy. The receiver incorporates a unique rear cleaning port, providing access to the barrel from the



*The knock down, swing up Bushwacker Rimfire Target.*



rear of the receiver for ease of cleaning. The 16-1/8" cold hammer-forged bull barrel is fluted to reduce weight and dissipate heat and is also threaded with a 1/2"x28 pattern to accommodate the included muzzle brake or other barrel accessories.

Rounds are touched off with Ruger's excellent BX-Trigger with a crisp 2.5 to 3 pound pull weight with minimal overtravel. This trigger is also available as a customer drop in for all 10/22's. An extended ambidextrous magazine release makes quick work of changing out the 10-round rotary magazine.

The works is secured in a painted and textured laminated stock that provides a slip-free grip. The stock features a fully adjustable cheek rest, which can be repositioned horizontally and vertically so we can create a custom fit to our face. The Ruger 10/22 Custom Shop Model comes in a hard case with a Ruger Custom Shop Certificate. The suggested retail for this fine rifle is near \$ 900, but the real world price through our favorite dealer will be less and this one is a keeper. See more at [www.ruger.com](http://www.ruger.com).

For practice or hunting my go to .22 ammunition is from Aquila. Arguably the world's largest manufacturer of .22 rounds, their quality is legendary and the choices are many. From sub-sonic to

high velocity speeds, solid lead to copper-plated bullets, plinker grade to match grade they cover the spectrum. Check the many offerings at [www.aguillaammo.com](http://www.aguillaammo.com).

Just as we need to stay in shape between seasons, so do our faithful hunting dogs. Birchwood Casey pops up again with their new WagOne Ultimate Ball Thrower that launches a tennis ball farther and with less effort.

The WagOne Ultimate Ball Thrower feature easy hands-free and slobber-free ball loading. Simply push the steel fingers onto the ball and its picked up for the next throw. The auto-cocking feature makes throwing easy on the arm and the rugged polymer handle provides plenty of leverage for launching the ball long distances. The design allows for easy right or left-handed use.

The WagOne™ Ultimate Ball Thrower is proudly made in the USA and sells for a retail price of \$30.00. Now we have a better work out for Fido and less strain on our old shoulder, tennis elbow or arthritic wrist.

Now let us get ready for the next season. **T★J**



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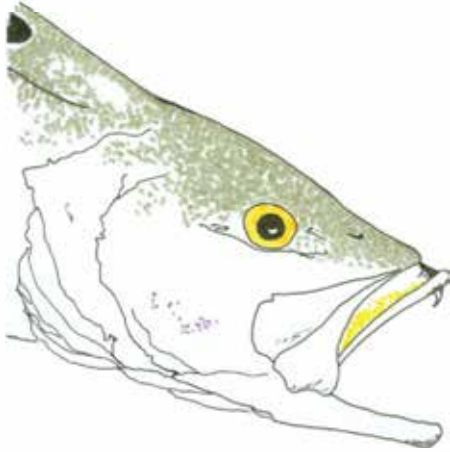
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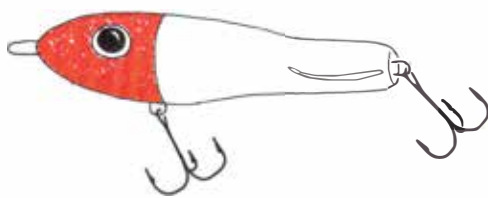
## Big Specks' Winter Flats & Hot Spots



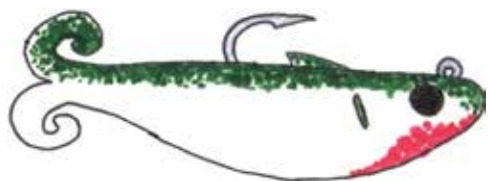
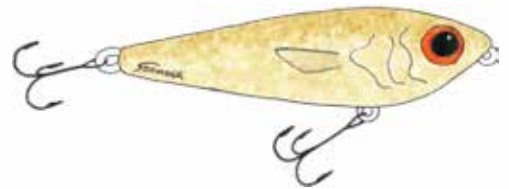
January is the beginning of big trout season for many fishermen along the Texas coast. Although the weather is often cold, drizzly and, well, nasty, many jumbo specks are taken during January and February. In fact, some of the best big trout days occur on the worst weather days. So, for anglers who are willing to brave the elements and be patient enough to wait on a few big strikes, now is the time to start seeking sow specks.



Big trout will certainly be found in shallow water on all but the coldest of days. However, they will be in shallow water that 1. has a muddy or mixed mud and sand bottom, as mud retains more heat than sand and 2. is close enough to deep water so that they can quickly escape in the event of a severe temperature drop. In several Texas bays, the flats between the ICW and spoil islands offer an ideal locale to hunt for big specks in winter. But, every bay has shallow flats with muddy bottoms that are close to deep water. These are the areas big trout fishermen should focus on during the winter months.



Among the standard weapons for fishermen targeting big trout are slow-sinking plugs, both hard and soft-plastic, such as the Corky (upper left), topwater plugs like the Bomber Badonk-A-Donk (upper right), swimbaits like the DOA Baitbuster (lower left) and large profile plastics like the DOA Airhead (lower right). When rigged weightless, these big soft-plastics can be worked on or near the surface or used in the same manner as a slow-sinking twitch bait.



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## First Month Inland Fishing Surprises

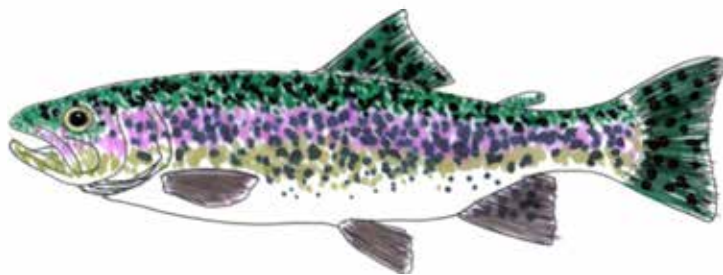
January, and February for that matter, gets a bad rap among casual freshwater fishermen. However, the first month of the year actually offers a surprising amount of angling opportunities - including some rather unique ones. Sure, the weather is often less than ideal. But, fishermen looking to catch the fish of a lifetime or a different species, should make it a point to spend some time on the water during January. In reality, every species of fish still has to eat in cold weather, so they can still be caught throughout the winter. Here are a few suggestions, however, for some of the first month's angling highlights.



**Largemouth Bass-** Some of the largest largemouth bass that are caught each year are caught in January and February - often on some of the worst weather days. In many lakes, especially those in South Texas and power plant lakes across the state, largemouth bass will be in either pre-spawn or even spawning mode, meaning there will be plenty of big bass in the shallows.



**White Bass-** White bass activity usually heats up during the chill of January. On lakes in the southern half of the lake, white bass are likely to begin their annual run up rivers during January. But, in lakes all across Texas, white bass will be gathering in large schools preparing to run. So, even if they are still in the main lakes, they will be more concentrated and easier to locate.



**Rainbow Trout -** Yes, there are rainbow trout in Texas! Actually, in January there are several rainbow trout options. There is a year around fishery in the stretches of the Guadalupe River that is at its best during the winter. However, Texas Parks & Wildlife also stocks rainbow trout in lakes and ponds in cities and towns throughout Texas during winter, giving everyone the opportunity to catch another species.



**Smallmouth Bass-** Fishermen looking for a Texas bass trifecta may want to target smallmouth bass during January. Lake Belton, Lake Amistad, Lake Texoma, and Lake Meredith are among the best smallmouth fisheries in the state, along with the Devil's River and a number of streams across the Edward's Plateau region. These fish are available year around, but are often more activity during winter.

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## Hunting Options Continue

Texas rifle hunters prepare to go into their annual “funk” on January 6, 2019 or January 20, 2019. That is when the North and South Zone whitetail deer seasons respectfully come to a close.

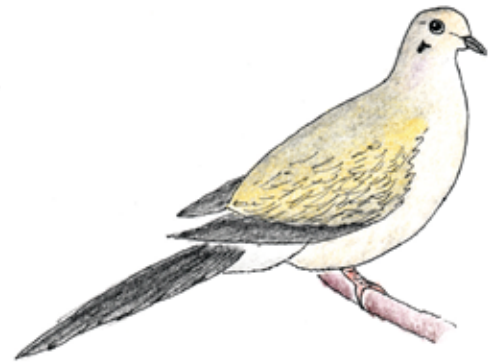
For many there is no other critter other than a whitetail buck worthy of the effort, time and cost to pursue. Unfortunately that mindset is shortsighted and prevents hunters from improving their woodsmanship skills, hunting tactics and learning more about the whitetail deer that is so beloved.

There are late season youth-only hunts available in both the North and South Zones January 7-20. A late muzzleloader season is also available during those same dates for those that want to take a step back in time to use a primitive firearm to take spikes or doe. Also the special late doe season in the North Zone (January 7-20) and in the South Zone (January 21-February 3) provides that last opportunity to reduce the number of animals consuming available forage

The proven hunting philosophy is every moment spent afield provides an opportunity to learn more about habitat and the game animals found on the rangeland.

Another frequent oversight is that the only firearm worthy of being hunted with is a long rifle. There are numerous seasons that remain open through winter or will open as spring arrives for those using a smoothbores.

Late dove seasons, quail seasons, late duck and goose seasons, conservation snow goose season, and spring turkey hunting are just a few of the options available for shotgunners. While the waterfowl options may take place in areas different than those hunted for whitetail deer, they do provide an opportunity to test one’s hunting skills in a different way.



For the hunter that just has to have a rifle in hand, there are underutilized options that will test and reward. Those passionate about whitetail deer should do some varmint hunting to take the predatory pressure off the deer herd from coyotes, cats and even wild hogs.

Off-season hunting for exotic species is another great option in the Lone Star State. This springtime hunting pleasure is highlighted by nilgai in South Texas, free-range and managed exotics species from around the world. Every mouth that is removed results in less pressure on native game, provides an excellent hunting experience and superb table fare.

Once the general whitetail season has closed is a perfect time to do some post-season scouting. At this time there is no fear of scaring off that trophy buck because the season is closed to the hunter as well as those on adjoining property.

Hunters would do well to challenge themselves to see how close they might be able to stalk or still-hunt to a deer. Even without the option of harvesting a buck this experience is an opportunity to slow-down and test skills with one of the most challenging game animals in the country.

While it is not necessary to get so close to touch an animal, closing to within reasonable shooting distance may provide dividends in the future. You may even learn what techniques work compared to those that don’t. Nothing lost and knowledge gained.



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# Outdoor Calendar

**THROUGH JANUARY 6, 2019,**

Rio Grande Turkey fall season, **North Texas**, 123 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 6, 2019,**

Whitetail Deer general season, **North Texas**, 226 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 14, 2019,**

Dove, Late Season, **Central Zone**, 138 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 14, 2019,**

Dove, Late Season, **North Zone**, 105 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 20, 2019,**

Rio Grande Turkey fall season, **South Texas**, 26 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 20, 2019,**

Whitetail Deer general season, **South**

**Texas**, 30 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 20, 2019,**

Sandhill Crane season, **Zone C**. 51 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 21, 2019,**

Dove, Late Season, **South Zone**, 54 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

Sandhill Crane season, **Zone A**. 103 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

Sandhill Crane season, **Zone B**. 63 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

High Plains Mallard Management Unit: Regular duck season. Second Split. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

"Dusky" Duck season, **High Plains Mallard Management Unit**. 92 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

Duck regular season, second split, **North Zone (139 counties)**. 139 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

"Dusky Duck season, second split. **North Zone**. 139 counties. For more

information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

Duck regular season, second split, **South Zone**, (54 counties). For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

"Dusky Duck season, second split. **South Zone**. 54 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

Sandhill Crane season, **Zone A**. 103 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

Sandhill Crane season, **Zone B**. 103 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 27, 2019,**

Light and Dark Geese season, **East Zone**, 123 counties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH JANUARY 31, 2019,**

Woodcock, **Statewide**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH FEBRUARY 3, 2019,**

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 10, 2019,**

Wilson's Snipe (Common snipe or

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Jacksnipe) season, **Statewide** (254 counties). For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2019,**  
**Rio Grande Turkey fall season, Brooks, Kenedy, Kleberg, Willacy counties.** For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2019,**  
**Chacalaca season, four Rio Grande Valley counties.** For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2019,**  
**Squirrel Fall Season, 51 East Texas counties.** For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2019,**  
**Javelina season, North Zone.** For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2019,**  
**Quail season, Statewide.** For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH AUGUST 31, 2019**  
**Javelina season, South Zone.** For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

**THROUGH AUGUST 31, 2019**  
**Squirrel Year-Round Season, (open counties with no bag limit).** For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

**JANUARY 4-6,**  
**Austin Boat & Travel Trailer Show, Austin Convention Center, Austin.** For more information visit [www.austinboatshow.com](http://www.austinboatshow.com), or call (512) 494-1128.

**JANUARY 4 – 13,**  
**64th Annual Houston International Boat, Sport & Travel Show, NRG Center, Houston.** For ticket information

and show hours, call (713) 526-6361 or visit [www.houstonboatshows.com](http://www.houstonboatshows.com).

**JANUARY 17 – 20,**  
**Dallas Safari Club Annual Convention and Exposition — MOGAMBO, Kay Bailey Hutchinson Convention Center, Dallas.** For show hours and more information visit [www.biggame.org](http://www.biggame.org) or call (972) 980-9800.

**JANUARY 26,**  
**West Bay Big Trout Tournament & Fundraiser, West End Marina, Galveston.** For more information visit [\[westend.com\]\(http://westend.com\) or call \(713\) 594-4252.](http://fish-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

**JANUARY 25-27,**  
**Houston Safari Club's Annual Convention and Worldwide Hunting Expo, George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston.** For show hours and more information visit [HSCFDN.ORG](http://HSCFDN.ORG), or call (713) 623-8844.

**JANUARY 28 – MARCH 17,**  
**Light Geese Conservation season, East Zone, 123 counties.** For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112. **T★J**

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# Tide Tables

## JANUARY 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		L7:17A -0.4 H3:09P 1.0 L8:30P 0.8 H11:53P 0.9	L7:53A -0.6 H4:03P 1.1 L9:33P 0.8	H12:12A 0.9 L8:27A -0.7 H4:47P 1.1 L10:21P 0.8	H12:31A 0.9 L9:00A -0.7 H5:25P 1.1 L10:49P 0.8	H12:52A 0.9 L9:32A -0.7 H5:59P 1.1 L10:47P 0.8
		1	2	3	4	5
H1:19A 0.9 L10:03A -0.7 H6:31P 1.0 L10:37P 0.8	H1:48A 0.9 L10:35A -0.6 H7:04P 1.0 L10:50P 0.8	H2:16A 0.9 L11:08A -0.6 H7:38P 0.9 L11:28P 0.7	H2:38A 0.8 L11:42A -0.5 H8:12P 0.9	L12:30A 0.6 H2:50A 0.7 L12:16P -0.3 H8:44P 0.8	L12:51P -0.2 H9:13P 0.8	L1:29P 0.0 H9:36P 0.8
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
L4:59A 0.3 L2:14P 0.2 H9:53P 0.7	L5:08A 0.1 H1:46A 0.5 L3:17P 0.4 H10:03P 0.7	L5:33A -0.2 L4:56P 0.6 L5:57P 0.7 H10:07P 0.7	L6:06A -0.4 H2:22P 0.7 L6:57P 0.7 H10:11P 0.8	L6:44A -0.6 H3:13P 0.9 L8:12P 0.8 H10:34P 0.9	L7:28A -0.8 H3:58P 1.1 L8:44P 0.8 H11:26P 0.9	L8:15A -1.0 H4:43P 1.2 L9:07P 0.9
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
H12:28A 1.0 L9:04A -1.1 H5:27P 1.1 L9:37P 0.9	H1:31A 1.1 L9:54A -1.1 H6:09P 1.1 L10:17P 0.9	H2:36A 1.1 L10:46A -1.0 H6:50P 1.0 L11:07P 0.7	H3:46A 1.0 L11:38A -0.8 H7:27P 0.9	L12:11A 0.6 H5:07A 0.9 L12:31P -0.5 H8:01P 0.8	L1:27A 0.4 H6:44A 0.7 L1:27P -0.2 H8:33P 0.8	L2:48A 0.6 H8:38A 1.2 L2:31P 0.1 H9:02P 0.7
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
L4:01A -0.1 H10:44A 0.6 L4:00P 0.4 H9:29P 0.7	L5:04A -0.3 H12:45P 0.7 L6:04P 0.6 H9:55P 0.7	L5:58A -0.5 H2:18P 0.9 L7:50P 0.6 H10:21P 0.7	L6:46A -0.6 H3:20P 1.0	L7:30A -0.7 H4:06P 1.0		
27	28	29	30	31		

## FEBRUARY 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					L8:09A -0.7 H4:42P 1.0	L8:45A -0.7 H5:10P 1.0 L10:04P 0.8
					1	2
H12:55A 0.9 L9:19A -0.6 H5:33P 0.9 L9:46P 0.8	H1:39A 0.9 L9:50A -0.6 H5:54P 0.9 L9:51P 0.7	H2:22A 0.9 L10:20A -0.5 H6:16P 0.8 L10:20P 0.7	H3:05A 0.8 L10:49A -0.4 H6:39P 0.8 L11:02P 0.6	H3:52A 0.8 L11:19A -0.3 H7:03P 0.8 L11:50P 0.5	H4:50A 0.7 L11:50A -0.2 H7:25P 0.8	L12:42A 0.4 H6:07A 0.6 L12:23P 0.0 H7:44P 0.7
3	4	5	6	7	8	9

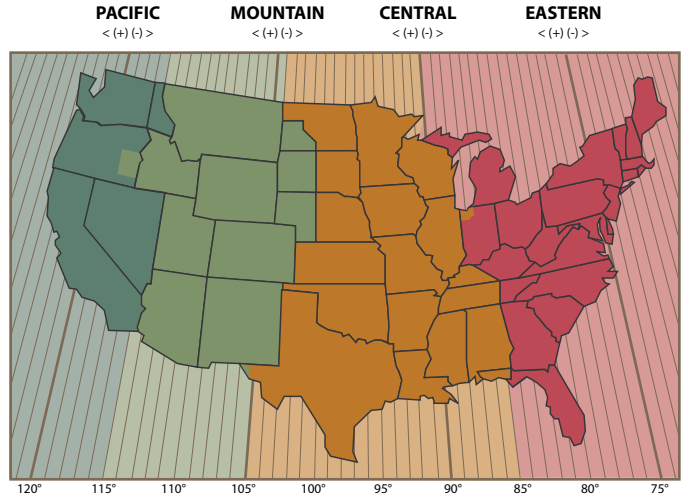
### Times are for Galveston, Galveston Channel

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

## US TIME ZONES



## JANUARY 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 ☉	2 ☉	3 ☉	4 ☉	5 ☉ NEW
		7:45A - 12:45P	8:45A - 1:45P	9:45A - 2:45P	10:45A - 3:45P	11:45A - 4:45P
6 ☉	7 ☉	8 ☉	9 ☉	10 ☉	11 ☉	12 ☉
12:45P - 5:45P	1:35P - 6:35P	2:25P - 7:25P	3:15P - 8:15P	4:05P - 9:05P	4:30A - 9:30A	5:20A - 10:20A
13 ☉	14 ☉	15 ☉	16 ☉	17 ☉	18 ☉	19 ☉
6:10A - 11:10A	6:55A - 11:55A	7:45A - 12:45P	8:25A - 1:25P	9:15A - 2:15P	10:00A - 3:00P	10:50A - 3:50P
20 ☉	21 ☉	22 ☉	23 ☉	24 ☉	25 ☉	26 ☉
11:40A - 4:40P	12:50P - 5:50P	1:50P - 6:50P	2:50P - 7:50P	3:50P - 8:50P	4:20A - 9:20A	5:20A - 10:20A
27 ☉	28 ☉	29 ☉	30 ☉	31 ☉		
6:20A - 11:20A	7:10A - 12:10P	7:55A - 12:55P	8:35A - 1:35P	9:15A - 2:15P		

## FEBRUARY 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1 ☉	2 ☉
					9:55A - 2:55P	10:35A - 3:35P
3 ☉	4 ☉	5 ☉	6 ☉	7 ☉	8 ☉	9 ☉
11:15A - 4:15P	11:55A - 4:55P	12:55P - 5:55P	1:40P - 6:40P	2:25P - 7:25P	3:15P - 8:15P	4:05P - 9:05P

● 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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