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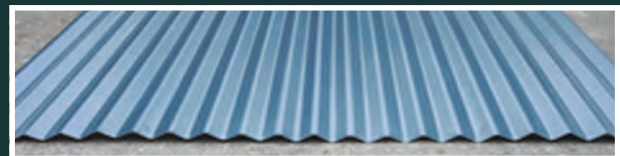
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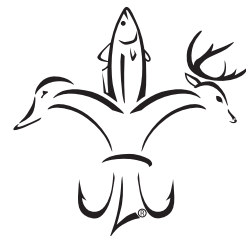
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**PUBLISHER:** Tony Taylor  
**ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER:** Mark Boyd  
**MANAGING EDITOR:** Bobby Cleveland  
bobbyc7754@yahoo.com, 601.506.0739  
**EDITOR:** Dan Kibler  
**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT:** Alicia LaFont  
**PRODUCTION DIRECTOR:** Jeff Caldwell  
**ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER:**  
Desiree P. Lewis  
**ART DIRECTOR:** Rodney Anouilh  
**GRAPHIC DESIGNERS:**  
Jeff Cashio, Kevin Orgeron, Alissa Zeringue  
**CONTROLLER:** Juanita Guidry  
**SALES DIRECTOR:** Tony Taylor  
504.416.7621/tonyt@lasmag.com  
**ADVERTISING SALES:**  
Mark Hilzim (National Sales), Jay Forrest, Asa  
Faulkner, Brent Comardelle, Mark Boyd, Greg  
Webb, Peter Church, Ron Dorsey, Bret Holden  
**CONTRIBUTORS:**  
David A. Brown, Andy Crawford, Jerry Dilsaver,  
Paul Elias, David Hawkins, Bill Garbo, Phillip  
Gentry, Michael O. Giles, Chris Ginn, Dan  
Kibler, Tommy Kirkland, Sammy Romano, Hal  
Schramm, Don Shoopman  
**CIRCULATION DIRECTOR:**  
Ricky Naquin 985.859.7744/rickyn@lasmag.com  
**CIRCULATION FIELD MANAGER:**  
Tim Stiglets 601.434.1526/timstiglets@comcast.net

**ADVERTISING INQUIRIES:**  
Contact Tony Taylor  
email: [tonyt@lasmag.com](mailto:tonyt@lasmag.com)/504.416.7621

**SUBSCRIPTIONS OR  
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985.758.7217

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There's nothing like fishing for bream when the weather warms in Mississippi. Learn all the tricks to catching plenty of these tasty fish. (Photo by Terry Madewell)

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Outdoor  
**UPDATE**  
with  
**Bobby Cleveland**



**Bobby Cleveland** has covered sports in Mississippi for over 38 years. A native of Hattiesburg and graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Cleveland lives on Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson with his wife Pam. He can be reached at [bobbyc7754@yahoo.com](mailto:bobbyc7754@yahoo.com).

Spawning activity makes speckled trout a target species in May, as many Mississippi sportsmen turn from hunting to fishing.

Bobby Cleveland

## DON'T PUT AWAY YOUR GUNS YET

FISHING IS BIG ON THE AGENDA FOR MAY ACROSS MISSISSIPPI, BUT SQUIRRELS, HOGS ARE STILL AVAILABLE TO HUNT

Once was the time that when May arrived, it meant the end of all hunting opportunities for Mississippi sportsmen until September.

Those times are gone.

Turkey season still closes on May 1, but other options exist that allow hunters to keep their firearms handy and their snake boots within easy reach.

- On May 15, the fourth-annual spring squirrel season opens statewide. It runs through June 1 and gives sportsmen 18 days to pursue the bushy-tailed quarry and, if desired, a chance to work their treeing dogs.
- Wild hogs are legal to hunt — as is the

case 24/7, 365 days a year — and wildlife officials encourage the public to do so with enthusiasm. Hunting and trapping are the best management tools to control the spread of these nuisance beasts.

Otherwise, all other consumptive outdoor sports are water-related. There's fishing — saltwater and freshwater — and frog hunting, and boy, are we blessed with so much opportunity.

This issue of Mississippi Sportsman is loaded with information and features to get you started. David Hawkins takes a look at the odd sport of going hand-to-mouth with giant catfish through the sport of noodling. Phillip Gentry shares experts' secrets to unlocking Pickwick

Lake's great bass fishing, and Mike Giles visits with young Collinsville pro angler Hunter Miles to discuss more ways to catch more largemouth. There's also a feature on the smallest of sport fish that bring the biggest smiles at the dinner table — bluegill bream. And Andy Douglas looks at the issues surrounding hunting clubs in Mississippi and some of the trials they're facing.

But, first, let's take a look around the state at some of the other outstanding May action Mississippians can enjoy outside, and also look at other news from around our great state.

Let's go, and let's head south to start our pursuit of good times and hot action. ■

# GULF COAST SPECKS, REDS ARE ON THE MOVE IN MAY

**M**ississippi's Gulf Coast is a great place to start looking at opportunities that abound in May.

"It's a time of transition, but also a great time to fish," said Capt. Ronnie Daniels, who runs Fisher-Man Charters out of Pass Christian. "It's when we see the redfish and speckled trout moving out to the islands and the marsh, and when the weather starts to settle enough to allow access."

Daniels is excited about the 2018 prospects, especially for May. A lot of those expectations are based on what hurt the fishing in March and early April — freshwater.

"I can look back to 2016, the last time the Mississippi River was high enough that they opened the Bonnet Carre Spillway into Lake Pontchartrain," he said, discussing the release of freshwater through the spillway into the salty lake to alleviate the flood threat in New Orleans and other areas. "That was one of the best trout

years we ever had, and this year is setting up like that. They opened the spillway again in March, and there's no doubt that pushes fish from Louisiana east toward Mississippi.

"In 2016, we were catching trout on the east side of the Biloxi Marsh, and I'm not just talking one or two, but several, a lot, that had been tagged and released in the

middle of Pontchartrain. That is proof."

Not only does it mean there will be more fish to be caught in Mississippi waters, but also more fish to spawn while they are visiting to improve future fishing years. Daniels said the spawn should be beneficial to fishermen in 2018, with increased catch rates in May.

"Trout spawn several times, throughout the spring and summer, but this year, the water was warmer than we're used to in March and April, and that's critical to the spawn," he said. "Even though specks spawn throughout the spring and fall, late April and May could be the peak this year.



Redfish are expected to fill Mississippi waters this summer because of big releases of freshwater through the Bonnet Carre Spillway earlier this spring.

Bobby Cleveland

"I'm thinking that there will be trout spawning on the full moon in April (April 29) this year. I caught some fish in March full of roe. Then on the full moon in May (May 29), I bet it will be widespread."

Daniels' technique for catching spawning specks begins about three or four days before the full moon.

"I'll go into the grass beds or big flats

## DANIELS NAMED TO COMMISSION

Capt. Ronnie Daniels of Pass Christian and Fisher-Man Charters was selected by Gov. Phil Bryant to serve on the Commission on Marine Resources, the panel that oversees the operations of the Department of Marine Resources.

"It will cut into my fishing time, for sure, but only two or three days a month at most, and I see that as time worth spending to serve the resource and its users," Daniels said. "It is worth giving up the time."

Five commissioners, one representing each of the major stakeholders of marine resources: commercial fishing, charter fishing, recreational fishing, seafood processors and non-profit environmental groups, make up the Commission.

Daniels replaces Capt. Ron Harmon of Capt. Ron's Charters in Biloxi, who was vice-chairman when his five-year term expired. ■



Ronnie Daniels

where I have known them to spawn and start casting," he said. "The males will start moving up ahead of the full moon. If I catch some that I can hear drumming — specks are actually members of the drum family; males make a drumming, thumping like noise to attract females — then I know where I want to be on the full moon. That's when the big females move in and when you can catch some quality fish on topwater early and suspending baits and jigs later."

Between the full moons, Daniels will target reefs and oyster beds for both specks

continues >

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Tripletail are just one of a handful of saltwater fish species that arrive in Mississippi waters in good numbers in time for May fishing trips.

## DEER-REPORTING BILL DIES IN STATE LEGISLATURE

**T**he Mississippi Legislature failed to pass a single bill related to hunting and fishing during the 2018 session that ended April 1, and that includes anything related to a harvest reporting system for turkey or deer.

"Sooner, or later, that's something you'd think they'd do," said Billy Reynolds, an avid hunter from Vicksburg who has hunted for six decades in the south Delta. "I'm an old goat, 74, and I can work a computer and a cell phone enough to do it, so don't tell me it can't be done.

"But I'm starting to think those guys (legislators) are never going to get it. This year, with the news that (Chronic Wasting Disease) has reached Mississippi, you'd have thought the time was perfect to put a reporting system in place, and they couldn't work it out. Probably never going to happen."

Wildlife committees in both the House and Senate passed versions of a mandatory reporting bill, and the full House passed the committee version. The Senate, expecting the House bill, let its version die on the calendar.

The Senate committee then rewrote the House version, keeping reporting mandatory, and passed it out to the full Senate for consideration. When it came up for a floor vote, it was argued and amended to change "mandatory" to "voluntary" and it passed. When the amended — and worthless — version went to conference committee to further work, it died on the calendar. ■



Bobby Cleveland

continued >>>

and reds, and will keep an eye on the sky.

"By the time May gets here, brown shrimp are out, and the birds are working," he said. "It makes locating trout easier.

The coastal reefs will be holding bait, and by the time the water reaches 70 to 80 degrees, the grass beds will come back, and you will want to look for them. They hold bait.

"Out in the Biloxi Marsh, I'm going to look on the oyster reefs on the bars on the outside of the Marsh for trout, and I'm going to be up in the clear, shallow water sight-fishing for reds. I look for tidelines coming off the points. Any time you have one of those, it's a great place for specks and reds."

### FLOUNDER AND TRIPLETAIL

While specks and reds get a lot of attention — and rightfully so — May is also a great month for two other popular and extremely delicious species.

"A lot of people overlook flounder in May, and it's a great time for them," Capt. Ronnie Daniels said. "They will show back up, and because of the timing, it is a month when the water is very clear and allows great opportunity for gigging.

"It is some of the cleanest water we have to gig flounder while they are shallow. We won't have or shouldn't have had an algae bloom yet. Plus, the shrimping season isn't open, so there won't be any shrimp boats dragging up the bottom to murky up the water. I'm serious, it's some of the best flounder-gigging conditions we have all year."

Daniels also starts to look for tripletail, and he said this year is setting up to be a good one with the warmer than usual water.

"The last two years, I've caught my first tripletails in May," he said. "Once the water warms enough that we can sustain 70 to 75 degrees, you need to start keeping an eye out for them; they will start showing up. That's usually in mid-May, but this year could happen in late April or early May.

"Then, later in May and into June, when we start sustaining 80 degrees, that's when they really show up in numbers. That's when it peaks and will continue through the summer and into the fall." ■

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# COBIA BITE PEAKS IN MAY

**F**ishermen may have started looking for cobia migrating into Mississippi waters in March and fished for them when April's winds would allow.

"But it's May when we really get to work them over," said Capt. Robert "Earl" McDaniel of the *Whipasnapa*. "That is when they settle down. The spawn is wrapping up, which ends the shallow fishing on the bars. They start moving to deeper cover, like reefs, wrecks, oil rigs and even boat channel markers.

"Really, any kind of cover will hold cobia.

McDaniel, whose brother, Randy, had the state-record cobia — 106 pounds, 13 ounces — caught on his boat in Gorenflo's Cobia Tournament in 1996, always has this fish on his mind. His charter menu includes inshore and offshore trips, and his specialty may be big, sow red snapper, but his true love is cobia, and if the opportunity exists, he's looking.

"I do love chasing those brown fish, but I know it's hard to make a living at it," he said. "Most of my customers want to catch a lot of fish, get a lot of action. Cobia fishing does not provide that, except for the

Enough cobia are in Mississippi waters in May to make for some great, targeted fishing action.



You see a big tortoise swimming at or near the surface, you better go look around it for one of the big brown fish swimming with it. Same with a log or a board, or a mat of grass — check them out."

rare day when everything is just right.

"But what it does lend itself to is being an opportunity that can be tagged onto another trip, like snapper in the summer. In May, we can stop and look for cobia

## GORENFLO COBIA EVENT STARTS TOURNAMENT SEASON

Mississippi's coastal fishing tournament season will get its unofficial start May 5-6 with the 32nd annual Gorenflo's Cobia Tournament out of the Gorenflo Tackle and Marina Store at Point Cadet Marina in Biloxi. The event offers more than \$100,000 in prizes, and a special prize of \$25,000 and a Ford F150 Pickup for anyone holding a new state record for cobia at tournament's end. The entry fee is \$500 per boat. Call 228-432-7387.

Other events in 2018 include:

- King Master Biloxi (king mackerel), June 1-2, Golden Nugget Casino, Point Cadet Harbor.
- Mississippi Gulf Coast Bill Fish Classic, June 8-9, Golden Nugget Casino/Point Cadet Harbor.
- Mississippi Gulf Coast Big Game Fishing Club Jeff Alexander Spring Tournament, June 15-17, MGCBGFC.com
- Mississippi Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo, June 30-July 4, Gulfport Harbor.

after fishing for specks, reds or gray (mangrove) snapper. I have moved a lot of my fishing down around Chandeleur Island, and that area has year-round cobia fishing opportunities from shallow spawning to oil rigs, and we pass close to other structure, too, all possibly holding fish. May is perfect for that because some fish will still be shallow but others deep."

McDaniel uses two methods for cobia: chumming and sight-fishing.

"While they are spawning shallow, I like to set up a chum drift by anchoring and putting out a long chum slick over an area I think is holding cobia," he said. "I also like to pull up to rigs, buoys and other cover and look for fish. If we see them, we cast live bait like eels, or hardhead catfish, or white trout and usually they'll take it."

Roy Turner of Biloxi has another trick. "I take a wooden baseball bat and if I don't see a cobia on a piling or a rig, I will take the bat and whop the structure a few whacks, then rev the motors in neutral," he said. "Cobia are the most curious fish in the Gulf and they will come up and take a look. Then you toss them the bait. It works." ■



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# IS MAY TOO HOT FOR SQUIRRELS?

**M**ississippi gets its fourth-annual spring squirrel season in Mississippi in 2018, but it has yet to lure many sportsmen to participate, with most citing “too hot to hunt” as the reason.

But is it?

“No, not at all,” said Greg Berry of Oxford.

“The daily limit is four, and I usually get that before it has a chance to get too hot. My dog and I are usually in and out by 8. When we take a couple of other shooters along, we can still be done by 10 and still be OK.

“That said, I would add that it borders on being too snaky. You need to keep an eye out for them, especially around water. Last May, we ran into cottonmouths on

every trip, and we saw a lot of copperheads, too. We saw one or two rattlesnakes, but heard more.”

Even the threat of a no-shoulder encounter isn’t enough to keep Berry and his four-legged mixed-breed partner, Willy, out of the woods.

“Every day that I get to hunt with Willy is a blessing, and it’s worth the snakes and the gnats,” Berry said. “We have about five places we hunt in rotation, and I think we’ve found every mulberry tree there is. If Willy hasn’t treed any before we get to the mulberry trees, then we sit and wait underneath the fruit, and they will come.

“We found two trees very close together



Spring squirrel hunting is a real treat for many Mississippi hunters who take advantage of the 2-week season.

last year, and three of us with guns, plus Willy, limited out in two hours. Willy’s OK with it because he is a rare treeing dog in that he also retrieves. He’s 10 years old, and he is content to just sit with us and wait.”

The season opens May 15 and ends June 1. The bag limit is four per day per hunter. ■



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# CWD UPDATE: NO NEWS IS APPARENTLY GOOD NEWS

**S**ince the first confirmed case of chronic wasting disease in Mississippi was reported in February in a 4½-year-old buck in Issaquena County, no other diseased animals have been found.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks has sampled more 200 deer from the 25-mile, six-county containment zone that the agency killed and collected. All were sent to an Iowa lab for testing, and all have been returned as “not detected for CWD.”

MDWFP has also sent other deer, either road-kill or those reported as sick by landowners/hunters, and they have all been returned as negative for CWD.

The agency held its second public meeting in March at Vicksburg, with CWD experts from Colorado and Arkansas participated. The message there was clear: “be vigilant, don’t panic, don’t stop hunting.”

Amy Blaylock, the MDWFP’s wildlife bureau director, said the agency will continue to collect and test samples from the containment zone and urges the public throughout Mississippi to report deer showing signs of illness, especially: drooping head, excessive drooling, uncoordinated walking or excessive weight loss. Contact online at [mdwfp.com/CWD](http://mdwfp.com/CWD) or call 601-432-2400 or 1-800-BE SMART.

The agency also announced good news related to a CWD area of concern in south Mississippi. Seventy deer tested during the 2017-18 hunting season were all found to be negative for CWD.

According to MDWFP, the agency discovered a “non-permitted high-fenced enclosure” in 2013, southwest of Hattiesburg in Lamar County. An extensive investigation by MDWFP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service revealed that animals within this enclosure had been transported from Texas facilities that were linked to CWD-positive animals.

In January 2017, a tornado struck the Hattiesburg area and damaged approximately 6,845 feet of the enclosure fence, releasing animals into the surrounding area.

MDWFP established a 5-mile radius surveillance zone around the enclosure in an effort to detect any CWD-positive animals. Hunters who harvested a deer within the zone were asked to voluntarily submit deer heads at local fire stations around the area. Seventy were submitted for testing, and all were returned “not detected for CWD”.



MDWFP plans to continue this sampling method for two additional years and requests that anyone who observes a deer with ear tags in this area immediately call 1-800-BESMART. In addition, deer exhibiting signs of infection should be immediately reported to MDWFP. ■






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**SCRAPBOOK**

Jade Juneau and her dog, Pete, show off bass caught from the Pascagoula River.



Born with spina bifida, Mark Brown shows how a little faith and determination goes a long way. Mark and the founder of Forever Outdoors, Rob "Bobcat" Robinson, went fishing on Feb. 15 at Sam D. National Wildlife Refuge in Noxubee County where Mark caught these using a white H&H Carolina spinnerbait.



Hunter Gilmore killed this public-land 7-point in Yalobusha County.



John-Wyatt Daily cured buck fever with an 8-pointer he killed at Eastport in Iuka.



Billy Brooks, 73, got his first buck in January, hunting family land in Yazoo County.

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# HUNTER KILLS UNUSUAL WHITE, TROPHY GOBBLER



Bo Brown killed this unique "smoke phase" gobbler in Copeiah County. The bird had long spurs, 1¼ and 1¾ inches, and a 10 5⁄8-inch beard.

Photo courtesy Kristi Brown

## BEAUTIFUL, UNIQUE BIRD TAKEN ON MARCH 25 HUNT IN COPIAH COUNTY

By Bobby Cleveland

**B**o Brown had little choice, the way he had it figured, but to lift up his shotgun, aim and fire at the gobbler. "This was not a shot I would normally take, I assure of you, but in that situation, I did," he said. "It's kind of like a 'speak-now-or-forever-hold-your-peace' type of thing. I didn't have time to think, I just did it." What Brown did the morning of March

25 was send three 2-ounce rounds of No. 4 shot from his Remington 1100 through the woods at a tom turkey that his hunting party had run into in the woods of Copeiah County.

"Probably 50 to 60 yards, maybe further," Brown said. "Like I said, not a shot I'd normally take, but this was not a normal situation."

This was no run-of-the-mill gobbler either. It was mostly white.

It was also big, about 20 pounds, and was sporting a big beard, and, as Brown would later learn, it had long, sharp, hooked spurs measuring 1¼ and 1¾ inches.

A trophy by any definition, the bird — its coloration is often referred to often as a "smoke" or "ashen" phase — was simply beautiful.

"My buddy told me, 'Dude, you got a trophy bird there, and it's white to boot,' and he's right," Brown said. "I am very lucky,

very fortunate to have killed this bird, and it's only my second gobbler."

The story behind the bird is a good one, too. A native of Copiah County, Brown, who lives in Magnolia in Amite County, is having one heck of a year.

"So far, I've had a son (Jan. 9), started a great new job (Jan. 15), bought a new house (Feb. 23) and now this bird," Brown said. "I have truly been blessed."

An avid turkey hunter, Brown landed an invitation to hunt the private property by doing good deeds during deer season.

"I have a great blood-trailing dog, and these guys at this property called me several times during the season to help them trail deer," Brown said. "I love doing it, and I do it for free. They always offer to give me something, but I always turn it down."

"One time this past winter, I was helping them trail a deer and we ran into a big group of turkeys in a field. I told them they must have fun during turkey season, and one of them said that 'No, we don't turkey hunt.' He told me I was welcomed to hunt there if I wanted to, and then this other guy said, 'You ought to see this other food plot; it's got white turkeys in it.'"

This was an offer Brown couldn't refuse, and last week, he decided to try it out.

"A friend and I went up there Friday and got on a couple of gobblers but we couldn't close the deal," he said. "Then I decided to let it rest on Saturday, and my wife Kristi and I went on Sunday morning. The landowner said he wanted to join us, so we all three went."

They didn't raise a gobbler with pre-dawn owl hoots in one spot.

"Not a peep, so I decided to go to a field where I had seen a gobbler at 10 a.m., alone, on Friday," Brown said. "We went over there, and I positioned everyone and tried some soft calls and still couldn't get a peep. What I didn't know was that I had positioned the landowner close to, if not under, some of the birds on the roost. When they flew down, he texted me to say they went the other way. They may have heard him; I don't know."

"We kept texting back and forth and decided that the birds had flown in the direction of two food plots that had an old dirt road connecting to them. We gathered and decided to follow that road, staying off in the edge of the woods, to go to the food plots. We didn't make it."

The road led from one ridge to another,



The unusually colored turkey that Bo Brown of Magnolia killed in Copiah County was only the second of his hunting career.

Photo courtesy Kristi Brown

and it was by coincidence that at the same moment the group fell off one ridge along the road, a group of turkeys dropped off the other ridge. They were talking right at each other, and at about 50 yards, they met.

"All of a sudden, there they were," Brown said. "I saw that big, white bird, and realized it was a gobbler. I could see his (black) beard. Of course, he turned immediately, and he had some wheels. He took off running straight away, and I threw the gun up and let all three shots go."

The gobbler rolled, hit the ground and started flopping.

"I've only killed one other gobbler, but I've hunted a lot and watched a lot of hunts on TV, and I've always been told — and I've always seen — that when you shoot a turkey and knock it down, you run straight to it," he said. "You have to get on it, I was told, or it could get away."

Brown didn't want this great white gobbler to be his Moby Dick, so he took off running.

"Good thing, too, because by the time I got to him, he was getting things back together, trying to get his feet under him,"

he said. "I sort of tackled him. It was quite a wrestling match going on. I thought that if I could just control his legs I could end this, but I regretted that idea very quickly. That's when I first found out about his long, sharp spurs. Stabbed me right in the palm of my hand, and it hurt. That's when I decided to take a different angle."

"I stood up and sort of straddled him. I must have looked like I was in a rodeo riding either a bucking bronco or a bull. It had to be funny looking, but I was able to get control of him, get his head on the ground and using the butt of my shotgun, I was able to kill him."

And that's when Brown realized how lucky he was.

"It was so amazing," he said. "I know that people are going to say I shouldn't have taken that long shot. I didn't call this bird in; I'm not going to lie to you, but I got him."

The bird is being shipped to a taxidermist for a full body mount with one request.

"I asked that he check and see if he can find any of the No. 4 shots in the bird," Brown said. "I may have just knocked him silly." ■



# RED SNAPPER SEASON

## TO OPEN MAY 25

MISSISSIPPI GETS MORE OPPORTUNITY;  
JUST HOW MUCH IS IN DOUBT

By Bobby Cleveland

It could become confusing, but fishermen on Mississippi's Gulf Coast should be happy with the 2018 red snapper season announced April 17 by the Department of Marine Resources.

The season will begin on Friday, May 25, in both state and federal waters out to 200

nautical miles.

When it will end, well, that's where it could get tricky.

The season is projected to run through Sept. 3, Labor Day, but it could close earlier, at any time that the assigned quota for recreational anglers or the state's

for-hire charter boats is reached after the season opens. It will also close if the Gulf-wide quota is reached.

However, there is a chance the season could include a "time out."

MDMR said it is possible that the season could close between July 9-22, with the



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To create a Tails N' Scales account visit [tailsnscales.org](http://tailsnscales.org).

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**Mississippi anglers will have more red snapper opportunities in 2018, thanks to a new program that gives states more control of the season.**

summer-long season is great.

"It's not only great for getting more opportunity, but also it gives the states a chance to show what we've been saying all along — that the fishery is best managed on a local basis and not by a federal agency that 'guesstimates' what the harvests are across the Gulf."

Federal officials approved Mississippi's request for an Exempted Fishing Permit, which allows states to harvest certain requested species that otherwise would not be allowed under federal regulations. Requests were also approved for Florida, Alabama, Louisiana and Texas.

The permits will allow the Gulf States to participate in a two-year pilot program for recreational red snapper harvests based on a quota for each state. Gulf States officials said the program would allow managers in each state to gather data on red snapper, giving better accountability to harvest than how federal officials have estimated it in the past.

Mississippi's state-managed season is for private recreational anglers and fishermen fishing with the state's for-hire charter captains. They will be allowed to fish out to 200 nautical miles. The daily limit is two per angler per day, with a 16-inch minimum length.

Mississippi's quota is 137,949 pounds,

which the agency said will be split proportionally between the private recreational and state for-hire sectors. The quota for recreational fishermen is 135,149 pounds. The state for-hire quota is 2,800 pounds.

MDMR will manage each group's allotment individually, but the seasons will coincide.

"This program allows Mississippi anglers more opportunity and greater flexibility to harvest red snapper," said Matt Hill, director of MDMR's Finfish Bureau. "It also allows the agency to closely monitor the harvest using the Tails N' Scales Program."

Tails N' Scales is a mandatory reporting program. Anglers must create a profile and start a trip before going fishing for red snapper. They must have a trip number when they are out on the water. They also must report their catch within 24 hours and close out one trip before creating a new one.

Anglers caught without an authorization number will be fined, and their fish confiscated.

Tails N' Scales is available through a smart-phone app, a website and a call center. The app is available in iTunes and Google Play, and the website is [tailsnscales.org](http://tailsnscales.org). Fishermen also can call 1-844-MSSNAPP (677-6277) to speak to a representative if they don't have access to a smartphone or computer. Anyone using the app must download the latest update before creating a trip this year.

For questions regarding the Tails N' Scales system or to report any issues, call 228-697-5762. ■

intention of insuring Mississippi's annual quota is not met before Labor Day. It will depend on the pounds caught before July 4.

"That sounds a lot better than anything we've heard over the past, what, two or three decades," said Phillip Rodgers, an avid recreational fishermen from Gulfport who relishes including red snapper in his offshore trips. "That we have basically a

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# BREAM BASICS

May is prime time for Mississippi anglers to concentrate on tasty panfish. That takes care of the 'why' — leaving the 'where' and 'how' up for debate.

By Bobby Cleveland

**B**luegill or redear? Cricket or worm? Wet fly or dry? Cane pole or jig pole? Fly rod or spinning rod? Creek or lake? Reservoir or farm pond?

For such a simple sport, fishing for bream is full of choices, so many in fact, that it could be considered a reason why so many Mississippi sportsmen — women, kids, moms, dads, grandpas and grandmas — are hooked.

It appeals to all, regardless of ability.

Truth be told, there is one ultimate decision a bream fisherman will have to make, and behind it lies the biggest motivation for chasing the little panfish.

Fillets or whole?

"A fish fry, that's what it is all about for me and my family, eating bream," said Charles Dawkins of Jackson. "I don't care whether it's a bluegill or a chinquapin ( aka redear or shellcracker). I don't care what pole you use or whether it was caught on a cricket, a worm or something plastic."

**J**ust make sure you fry it up right, and let's eat. To me, that's what bream

fishing is all about. Nothing like a nice mess of 'em, either beheaded, gutted and scaled or filleted off the bone, deep-fried to a crispy perfection — the way my grandma did it — dipped in buttermilk and dragged through stone-ground cornmeal with salt and a lot of black pepper.”

And, Dawkins said, “It is so much better when you caught them yourself, cleaned them and then cooked them the same day.”

There is a sense of satisfaction that can only be understood by the legions of us who go in search of bream, especially when bluegills are on the bed around the new and full moon phases. It peaks in May.

We spend hours watching corks or tight lines, swatting away mosquitoes and gnats, chasing away snakes and turtles that would steal a quick meal, handling worms or crickets and having fish pee on us — yeah, you know you've been squirted.

or other tool, and then wielding a sharp knife to remove the heads and entrails.

Finally, we get to fire up the grease, ring the dinner bell and feast. Sides of slaw or a pot of greens, some hush puppies or cornbread, and of course, ketchup and/or hot sauce round off the meal.

No dessert needed; there won't be room.

A day worth living, that's all that is. And May is perhaps the No. 1 month on the calendar for bream fishing. Let's take a trip.

### FIRST CHOICE: WHERE?

Any dinner plan involving bream must start with choosing a fishing hole. In Mississippi, there are so many options available, but obviously, some people will have more, and they work hard to that end.

“It's funny, but in the spring, the most-popular people in our congregation are the members who have stock ponds or have a direct connection to a stock pond — like kin,” said Dawkins, a part-time preacher. “Before I had my own pond, I used the church and family and extended family connections to wrangle an invitation, and that's how I tell people to start. You have to network your way into a lake.

“I know there's a lot of good public fishing holes out there, some great ones for

bait, some poles, some gear, some drinks and snacks — and a box to put the fish in. If they're not biting in one place, move to another. Sooner or later, you will hit the jackpot, especially in May when they are bedding. If you can catch one, you generally can catch 20 or 30 in a spot.”

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks offers an outstanding list of bream holes through its state lakes and state parks systems. They are scattered throughout the state, with the exception of the Delta, where the Mississippi River floods too often to establish and manage a lake. Otherwise, a state lake is within an hour's drive on anyone in Mississippi, and the best bream holes are located in all corners.

Up north, there's Tippah County Lake near Ripley, Lake Lamar Bruce near Tupelo and Lake Monroe near Aberdeen.

In the east, there's Kemper County Lake near Dekalb, Lake Tom Bailey at Toomsaba, Neshoba County Lake near Philadelphia, and Lake Claude Bennett near Bay Springs.

In central Mississippi, there's Calling Panther Lake near Crystal Springs, Roosevelt State Park near Morton, Lake Lincoln State Park near Wesson, and Simpson Legion Lake between Magee and Mendenhall.

In south Mississippi, choose between Lake Perry near Beaumont, Prentiss Walker Lake near Mize, Lake Mike Connor at Collins, and Johnson State Park near Brooklyn.

At most of those sites, bank-fishing opportunities are endless. When building fish attractors, the MDWFP always considers non-boaters.

Other entities have great bream fishing holes, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Pat Harrison Waterway District.

“As good as those are, it would be ridiculous to not mention the fishing holes that Mother Nature provided,” Ronnie Parker of Vicksburg said. “The Delta is full of oxbow lakes famous for bass, catfish and crappie, but honestly, they are first and foremost the best bream-fishing holes anywhere. I'd put Eagle Lake, Chotard, Albermarle, Tennessee Chute and Lake Washington against any lake, anywhere, for bream.

“Especially in May — if the river is stable — I can't tell you how many thou-



Almost any small body of water in Mississippi is likely to be host to a population of some sort of bream.

Bobby Cleveland

Then, we spend another hour or two at a cleaning table, either running a fillet knife to carefully remove the white flesh cleanly, or scaling fish with a big spoon

bream, too, but there is nothing better than a small farm pond that has been stocked with bream. No pressure. No butting heads. Just take a chair, some

Bluegills are the bream species that most anglers are likely to run into, but they're not the only one living in Mississippi waters.

sands of hand-sized and thicker bluegills my family has taken out of Chotard and Albermarle over the past century. My great-granddaddy taught my grandfather, who taught my dad, who taught my brothers and me. I bet we have drowned a million crickets in those waters."

### BAIT: CRICKETS OR WORMS?

Due to the "yuck" factor, crickets are usually the bait of choice of most bream aficionados. In the words of the prettiest bream fishermen ever — my late mother — worms are just "too yucky to touch."

But then again, there are two kinds of cricket fishermen: those who have had a cricket jump in their mouths and those that will have a cricket jump in their mouths ... or down a shirt, or get lost in a woman's big hairdo, or down a bra (my Mom literally turned our boat over one time).

In May, there's a biological reasoning other than "yucky" to choose crickets over worms. It is in this month that the bluegill bedding (spawning) cycle hits its first peak, and bluegills are readily caught on crickets.

"I have absolutely no scientific evidence to support it, but I think bluegills feed up, meaning they are looking up," said Joe Watts of Canton. "I catch more bedding bluegills by using a cork to hold my cricket between 6 inches and a foot off the bottom. When they are bedding, that works so quickly that I can set the hook and remove the fish from the bedding area faster so as not to disturb the other bream on the bed.

"If I find there are chinquapins in the area — and you do a lot in April and May when their bedding periods overlap

continued >



Bobby Cleveland

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## BREAM BASICS

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— then I might switch to a worm. Chinquapins are more bottom-feeders. One of their nicknames in south Mississippi is shellcracker, because they have the capability of picking up snails and other shelled critters off the bottom and crushing them.”

Watts said that when a bed is really hot in May, especially two or three days either side of the full moon, he often catches bluegills and redears together and that both will take a cricket.

At the other end of the spectrum, rarely will one find Wiley Thomas of Brandon with anything other than earthworms in his boat.

“Bream are a lot like catfish in one respect,” Thomas said. “They both are adept at smelling out their food. I think bream feed as much by smell as they do anything, and if you’ve ever smelled your fingers after a day of putting worms on hooks, then you know they stink.

“It doesn’t matter whether I’m tight-lining on the bottom without a cork or whether I’m using a float to keep the bait up off the bottom, I use a worm. They can smell it and find it, and if they do that, they’ll eat it.”

Thomas has another reason why he prefers worms — cost.

“I know it sounds crazy, because if you’re buying worms, they’re really more expensive than crickets,” he said. “But I don’t buy them; I grow them at home and dig up my own bait. I got five worm beds, each about three yards square, that I have tended to for the past 10 years. I’m a landscaper, so I’ve always had compost piles, and I found that the piles would attract and hold worms. Voila! I did a little research and found that if I started beds with some store-bought worms, they’d go to work reproducing.

“After that first year of leaving them alone, and adding paper and



Chinquapins, aka redear sunfish or shellcrackers, are a popular bream species that prefer worms over crickets when it comes to live bait.

Bobby Cleveland

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the usual compost stuff, I have never had to restock my worm beds again. I can go out there in the shady spots I picked, turn a few shovels of dirt, and I get enough worms to fish all day.”

Ken Merritt of Madison has his own source of worms, at least part of the year.

“I have four catalpa trees, which means that I get a lot of catalpa worms,” Merritt said. “They are the best bream bait, hands down, and they last. The secret is breaking off just a small piece and learning how to use the hook to turn the worm inside out as you push it on. That one piece will last a while and by turning its insides out, the smell is stronger.”

Merritt said he picks enough of the strikingly pretty, chartreuse worms when available to freeze some, to be thawed later and used when the trees are bare.

“You have to take them before they go to cocoon stage,” he said. “After that, they are worthless other than the moths they become are what lays the eggs that produce the next year’s batch.”

## POLES: CANE OR GRAPHITE?

Most of us started fishing with cane poles, 12 to 14 feet of pre-rigged and pre-arched poles from the bait shop, and many still depend on these economically friendly tools that already have line, bobber, weight and hook.

“I still use cane poles, but the first thing I do is cut all of that line and other stuff off and replace it,” Merritt said. “I think they use at least 20-pound test line, and no telling how long it has been on the pole.



A cooler full of slab-sized bream is a great start when a weekend fish fry is on the schedule. Catching them is only half the fun.

Bobby Cleveland

“I use nothing more than 10-pound line, and I prefer 8-pound if I can find it. I use enough that I have at least 1½ times the line than the length of the pole. Gives me more length to reach further out and also enough that if I break off a hook, I can re-tie and still have plenty of line. Then, I put on a Styrofoam float, a small split-shot and a No. 8 long-shank hook. I like the length of the shank to help remove the fish from the hook.”

Watts, a cricket man, likes an offset short-shank No. 6 or even No. 8 hook.

“I get more bites off the short-shank hook because they can’t see it; a cricket can pretty much hide a small hook,” he said.

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**BREAM BASICS**

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“I also convert more bites into catches. The offset hook just works better for me, and I have no problem reaching in with needlenose pliers to retrieve one if it goes deep.

“One thing I don’t like is a gold hook; it’s too flashy. Same thing with a silver-toned hook. I want a brown hook or a red hook. The brown matches the cricket and the red, well, I read somewhere that it triggers a reaction from predator fish, and I read somewhere else that fish don’t see red. I don’t know about all that, but I do know red hooks work.”

Watts hasn’t used a cane pole in decades. He changed to a B’n’M Buck’s Graphite Jig Pole about 20 years ago, is still using the same one and has added to his stable.

“I use the 11-footer, and my original one didn’t have a true reel seat, so I just have one of those plastic reels on it to strip line with my hand,” he said. “It’s great for fishing close. My go-to bream stick is a newer Buck’s Graphite Jig Pole that has a reel seat for an ultra-light spinning reel.



Find a spot where bream are actively bedding and you can fill up a stringer in just a little bit of time.

Bobby Cleveland

I put the lightest, decent-quality reel I could find on it and put on 6-pound line. I have the 11-foot length for pole-fishing, but I have the capability of casting 30, 40, or even 50 feet without much effort.”

The casting difference can be crucial when trying to keep one’s distance from the bedding area.

“I got grandkids I fish with, so noise can be a problem,” Watts said. “I can

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hold further off the bed, reach it and still have the fun of fighting a bream back to the bank or the boat with a lightweight graphite pole.”

Casting a long pole can be a problem and takes practice, but B'n'M is among many companies that now make shorter, 6- and 8-foot jig poles with reel seats. This writer's favorite pole is an 8-foot B'n'M pole that allows easy casting and fun fighting with any-sized fish.

## EATING: WHOLE OR FILLETS?

Watts puts his electric knife to work and fillets everything he catches. Thomas is just the opposite, getting rid of only the scales, heads and guts.

“I do fillets because I feed so many children fish,” Watts said. “I don't want them dealing with bones. I am fortunate enough to live on a lake and have access to others that have big bream. If it isn't big enough to fillet with a knife, then I toss it back.”

Those are words completely lost on

Dawkins.

“It's not blasphemy, but it's pretty close,” he said. “I love to eat the whole fish, especially the crunchy tails and even the fins from small fish. I came by it naturally. Before he died, Dad told me to keep all the big fish and bring him only the small ones. He would take a 3- or 4-inch fish, knock the scales off, cut off the head and remove the guts and fry it until it was nearly as crisp as a potato chip and then eat it, bones and all. Give him about five or six of them, and he was set.

“But if we get into the big bream, and we usually do, then I will fillet a bunch for feeding the kids. By kids, I mean people from babies up to 40 years old. I'm 72, and my generation learned to eat whole fish. We didn't waste much of anything. Kids today, they like it easy, but they don't know what they're missing by just eating fillets.”

Watts agrees with one aspect of the newer generation's disconnect with bream fishing.

“Bream fishing is a lot like small-game

hunting,” Watts said. “Fewer and fewer children are learning to squirrel hunt and go straight to deer hunting. Kids see so much about bass fishing and even marsh fishing for reds and specks, and that's all they want to do from the start. They want to cast and reel and catch something big.

“I hate that, and I make sure that each of my grandchildren learn to bream fish and appreciate it. The bedding period in May sure makes that easier, because the one thing that will catch and keep a child's attention is action, and when the bluegill bite is on, it's non-stop. They'll get hooked.” ■



**Bobby Cleveland** has covered sports in Mississippi for over 38 years. A native of Hattiesburg and graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Cleveland lives on Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson with his wife Pam.

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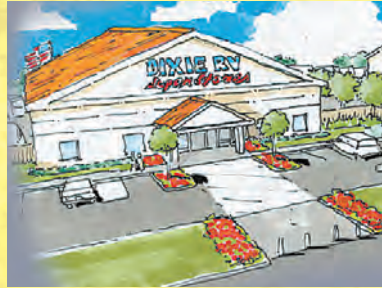


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# DOUBLE DOWN

## FOR PICKWICK'S POST-SPAWN BASS

By Phillip Gentry

Courtesy Lou Williams

If you can keep up with smallmouths and largemouths that appear always on the move, you're well on your way to conquering this Mississippi-Alabama-Tennessee reservoir

**A**n obvious key to successfully bass fishing on a post-spawn pattern at Pickwick Lake — or any water, for that matter — is knowing in what phase of the spawn the largemouth and smallmouth are at any given time.

If you're around Pickwick, in the northeast corner of Mississippi where it borders both Alabama and Tennessee, you might consider a short drive into Tennessee to the Sweet Lips Store, where you can strike up a conversation with owner Lou Williams.



**A**s resources go, Williams offers some of the best bass-fishing information on the Tennessee River impoundment. In addition to the store, Williams operates a Facebook page (Lou's Pickwick Reports), a valuable resource for anglers wanting to get the most-updated fishing information.

One of Williams' favorite topics is when the bass spawn occurs and whether it occurs separately for largemouth bass and smallmouth bass.

"The biology books all say largemouth spawn between 68 and 72 degrees and smallmouth spawn between 58 and 62 degrees," Williams said. "What they don't factor in is that largemouth spawn in shallow water, from a foot to 5 feet deep, and smallmouth go deeper, 8 to 10 feet deep. What happens is these two (depths) reach those temperatures at about the same time."

No one is arguing that by May, both species are in post-spawn patterns, especially on Pickwick. Williams said a lot of anglers struggle during the post-spawn period, but rarely because the fish won't bite.

"They move, and they suspend," he said. "That's what throws people off. It's similar to the prespawn when they move into the spawning grounds, except they'll stage at various places along the way. In post-spawn, if you're not out there on the water chasing them nearly every day, you can get lost."

Williams makes no great distinction in the tactics he uses to catch both largemouth and smallmouth on Pickwick in May. He said bass are moving out of the shallows and are hungry, but because they stay on the move, they are hard to locate.

"Smallmouth take a lot longer to regain weight, because they're always on the move," he said. "Largemouth will go somewhere and lay up and

ambush prey, so they expend less energy and regain weight faster than smallmouth."

Points and humps in 6 to 12 feet of water are ideal post-spawn locations to find both species; look for bass to suspend off the structure. Other good locations are along the ledges that line the lake's western end. A rock ledge that sticks out a foot or two is a great concentration point along an otherwise unbroken length of solid rock wall.

"You don't want to fish these areas vertically; you want to cast to them and work the bait to you horizontally so you cover more area," Williams said. "A lot of guys think about fishing clear water vertically, but you're only fishing a small target area, and you need to cover more water by casting."

Areas with gravel bottoms and chunk rock are also good spots. By May, the lake



Courtesy Brad Whitehead

Quality smallmouth can be found in moving water near the upper end of Pickwick Lake. **BELOW:** Largemouth bass typically recover weight better than smallmouth after the spawn.



Phillip Gentry

will be approaching summer pool of 414 feet above mean sea level, and the water is usually a greenish color. Because of this, the big distinction between species will be the color of baits used.

Williams said crankbaits, jigs and plastic worms will all work as well as swimbaits and jerkbaits. The difference is smallmouth seem to prefer brighter colors like chartreuses, pinks and oranges, while largemouth favor more subtle, natural colors.

Williams does most of his fishing on the west end of the lake, but he recommends the southern end where major tributaries like Bear Creek and Yellow Creek, both in Mississippi, and Second Creek, in Alabama, offer more spawning grounds and will have more bass migrating from those areas out to the main lake and into the main tributaries.

“Going south on that end of the lake, you’ll find a lot of bars, humps and points that will hold post-spawn fish,” said Williams, who makes a distinction between resident fish — those that live in

a particular area year-round — and the migratory fish that stay on the move and only commit to an area only during the spawn.

“You have to factor that in, too; some fish will move off the beds, but they stick around because it won’t be long until the bream move in to spawn, and quality bass will stick around and pick off those bream,” Williams said. “The other two major food sources are crawfish and the abundant threadfin shad population.”

## THE LIVE-BAIT APPROACH

Guide Brad Whitehead from Muscle Shoals, Ala., will start catching and using threadfin shad, which he refers to as yellowtails, as soon as smallmouth bass come off the spawn.

“Lou is on the west end of the lake near the Pickwick Dam, but this live-bait pattern is for the east end, behind Wilson Dam in Pickwick” said Whitehead, who believes it is important to understand a riverine lake. If there’s no current flow-

continues on page 33 >

## DESTINATION INFORMATION

**GETTING THERE** — Pickwick Lake on the Tennessee River forms the border between portions of Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee. The lake originates downstream from Wilson Dam near Muscle Shoals, Ala., and runs 48 miles to the Pickwick Dam near Counce, Tenn. Mississippi’s nearest town is Iuka, at the intersection of MS HWY 25 and US 72.

**MISSISSIPPI ACCESS** — The best access area to reach the Mississippi side of the lake is the State Line Boat Launch on the north shore of Yellow Creek near the MS HWY 57 bridge. Cooks Landing, another choice, is at the mouth of Indian Creek in J.P. Coleman State Park.

**TACTICS/TECHNIQUES** — Favorite Mississippi areas for post-spawn bass fishing include Yellow Creek, Indian Creek, Bear Creek and smaller “sloughs” off the main Tennessee River and the upper end of Yellow Creek. Look for fish on points, humps and underwater bars or around large rock outcroppings. Both largemouths and smallmouths will suspend, so you need to make long casts to cover ground around the structure. In the Wilson tailrace on the east end of Pickwick, primarily smallmouth bass can be caught fishing live threadfin shad on light tackle, drifting the bait on a split-shot rig near the bottom with the current.

**LICENSES** — A Mississippi license is good only on sections of Pickwick Lake where it shares a border with either Tennessee or Alabama. Once an angler enters into areas totally in Alabama or Tennessee, licenses for those states are required.

**FISHING INFO/GUIDES** — Lou Williams, Sweet Lips Store, Henderson, Tenn. 731-989-2156; [www.facebook.com/Lou-Pickwick-Reports-175616311651](http://www.facebook.com/Lou-Pickwick-Reports-175616311651); Brad Whitehead, 256-381-7231.

**MAPS** — Kingfisher Maps, 800-326-0257, [www.kfmaps.com](http://www.kfmaps.com).



Brad Whitehead catches threadfin shad for bait with a net along the rocks at the dam or in small cuts and pockets off the main flow of water.

Phillip Gentry

# POST-SPAWN TIPS FOR PICKWICK

Post-spawn fishing for bass can encompass everything from hatched eggs to shady summer haunts, but it begins as soon as the bass start leaving their spawning beds, and it runs through the summer.

Though some anglers love this time of year and others hate it, once you get post-spawn bass pinpointed, you could be in for some of the best fishing of the year, especially at Pickwick Lake.

Just because bass have quit spawning doesn't mean they've quit being bass, so some of the tactics for catching spawning bass will still work. One of the pros' favorite spawning baits is also very effective during post-spawn — a soft-plastic lizard in green pumpkin, one of the most productive bass baits ever made.

After the spawn, Carolina-rig the lizard and fish it in areas where you expect to find the fish coming off their beds.

Even when fishing offshore areas, continue fish the lizard — rigged both Texas- and Carolina-style — to catch bass the rest of the year. In areas where the post-spawn coincides with the shad spawn, look for some shallow chunk rock or riprap that will hold spawning shad. Predatory bass will often be holding nearby.

Sometimes post-spawn bass will take to the shallows or other staging areas until they leave for their summer hangouts. When going after post-spawners in the shallows try a tube jig. Rig the tube with a

Use your electronics to find post-spawn staging areas, similar to the ones used by bass during the prespawn.



Phillip Gentry

lightweight slip sinker for a slow fall to let bass see the bait longer. If the bass aren't feeding actively, and you want to trigger a reaction strike, use a heavier sinker like a 5/16- or a 3/8-ounce and fish it around any type of cover you can locate. ■

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continued from page 31 >

ing, it's going to be hard to catch fish anywhere, but especially near the dam, which is why he prefers to wait until the late afternoon to do live-bait trips for bass.

"People get home from work, and the day is starting to get hot, so they turn on their air conditioners," Whitehead said. "That's usually when the power company needs that boost, so they run water to generate the additional electricity."

Whitehead will arrive an hour or so before he starts fishing and will catch threadfin shad using either a cast net or a long-handled metal box net.

"You need to change the water in your tank or whatever you're using to keep the bait, because they get stressed and contaminate their water, and that will kill them quickly," he said. "You really need fresh, lively bait for this."

Using a light-action spinning rod spooled with high-visibility, 8-pound monofilament, Whitehead ties a 1/0 hook on the line and attaches a split-shot about 18 to 20 inches above the hook. Though it may seem a bit on the large side, his preference is a 4- to 6-inch threadfin, although finding baits that size in May could be difficult.

"Use the biggest baits you can catch up to that range," he said. "You want that bait close to the bottom but not dragging the bottom, so you adjust the weight of your split shot by the amount of current you have: more current, more weight."

He puts a couple of rods in rod holders and drifts with the current. Fish will hold behind rocks around bars or other structure out of the direct flow of current.

"You really need to watch your line, which is why I like the high-visibility stuff," Whitehead said. "Sometimes, the fish will take it and run

Live baiting in the moving water below Wilson Dam is a great smallmouth post spawn and summer pattern.

with it, but many times they just inhale the bait and don't move much, and you want to set the hook before he figures it out." ■






Phillip Gentry is a freelance outdoor writer and photographer who says that if it swims, walks, hops, flies or crawls he's usually not too far behind.



Courtesy Brad Whitehead


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**A**fter studying his depth finder, Hunter Miles made a cast in the direction of a submerged tree, working his Carolina-rigged worm into the brush top. He shook it a little and felt a thud.

A bass slammed the worm and bore down into the cover. Miles set the hook and fought the fish as it wallowed wildly in the limbs of the treetop.

After a short battle, Miles got his hands on the 6½-pound Okatibbee Lake lunker and put him in the livewell to anchor his limit.

Miles, 18, from Collinsville, had run his boat along a submerged creek channel and studied the side-imaging screen on his Lowrance unit, marking the brush tops and structure he found along the channel. That, he said, is a key to his ledge and creek fishing and finding bait and bass.

“That was a great day on Okatibbee,” Miles said. “I caught one over 6 and a few in the 3- to 3½-pound range. I marked several tops and stumps along the submerged ledge,

but the ones that were loaded up with crappie were the ones that I caught good bass on.

“Every bass that I caught was buried in the brush, and I could

feel them in there when I set the hook. I was able to pull most of them out and bring them to the boat.”

Though young by most standards, Miles has been fishing at a high level since he was 13, when won his first team tournament with 23 pounds of bass on Okatibbee Lake. That victory turned him on to bass tournaments; he was instantly hooked and determined to become a pro angler, which remains his dream.

“After winning that tournament, I decided that I wanted to fish the professional tour, and I’ve done everything I could to this point to work to that end,” Miles said. “At 16, I fished the (FLW Outdoors) BFL tournament trail as a co-angler, and, at 18, I started fishing the trail as a boater.”

Miles has some specific things he looks for when he heads for reservoirs across Mississippi this month.

**EARLY MORNING: TOPWATER UP NEXT** ➤



## GO THE EXTRA 'MILES' FOR MAY largemouth

By Mike O. Giles

Young Collinsville angler shares his thoughts, strategy for putting late-spring bass in your livewell.

Michael O. Giles



## EARLY MORNING: TOPWATER

"During May, fish will move out onto the ledges and creek channels, but there will also be an early morning bite on Okatibbee and similar lakes in Mississippi," Miles said. "I really like fishing topwater this time of year, as the bass are feeding up after resting from the spawn."

Miles loves topwater lures and prefers fishing around grass and pads when given the chance. He also targets shallow coves, flats and creeks that hold fish in early May. If there's a shallow pocket or point near deep water, it makes it even better.

"I like to throw a Ribbit frog and a Strike King Sexy Frog," Miles said. "I'll burn those frogs and just rip them across the top and get reaction bites; sometimes, they will be bone-crushing strikes. But once the sun gets up, the topwater bite will be over fast, and I'll move out to the deeper water and target those offshore fish."

## LEDGES, CREEK DROP-OFFS

Okatibbee Lake doesn't have a lot of ledges, but what it does have is a lot of ditches and creek channels that feature stumps, logs and brush piles. Some are natural, but there are plenty of brush piles sunk by bass and crappie anglers, and the brush holds a lot of forage, crappie and lunker bass.

---

Boat traffic doesn't bother Hunter Miles when he's fishing on ledges; bass are deep enough not to be bothered very much.

"You can find a lot of schools of spots on the ledges and drop-off areas along the submerged creek channels," Miles said. "I like to use a Strike King 6 XD (crankbait) as my search bait while I'm looking for schools of bass or lunker bass in water 12 to 20 feet deep. Whether I'm fishing shallow or deep, I prefer fishing a crankbait fast and enticing bass into striking out of reaction."

Miles burns his crankbaits with an Ardent Reel on a 7½-foot Phenix M-1 Series crankbait rod when targeting deep-water bass, and a 7-foot rod when fishing square bills.

"I like to keep it simple and use basic colors like the Sexy Shad in clear water and the chartreuse/craw color in dirty water," Miles said. "My biggest bass to date, a 10-pound, 4-ounce lunker, came on a 1.5 Strike King square bill. That crankbait is my best friend on this lake; that and a shaky head."

If Miles has located bass in a particular area and has caught good numbers, he'll switch gears and go to his big-bass lures.

"Ninety percent of my bigger fish come on the Carolina rig," Miles said. "For bigger fish, I'll stay with the magnum worms like the Zoom Ol' Monster or Strike King Menace. A Brush Hog is one of my favorite baits too."



Michael O. Giles

## FINESSE BITES

Though May action can be really good, finesse baits will often be required to get bass to bite, and Miles is pretty good at that too.

"I like to use a shakey head with a green pumpkin or black and blue trick worm," Miles said. "Ninety percent of the time, I'm a power fisherman and like to fish power baits and fish fast, but sometimes you have to slow down to get bites, and I'll do that when the situation dictates it too."

## MAYFLY HATCH

May offers one period of time when bass will stay shallow and feed all day, and that's when the Mayfly hatch occurs.

"When the Mayfly hatch occurs on Okatibbee and the water is right, the bass will feed all-day long, and I'll be there for them," Miles said. "I'll throw a frog all-day long and usually catch big bass, but you have to be there when the hatch happens, because it won't last long."

## LOVE THE LEDGES AT PICKWICK UP NEXT >





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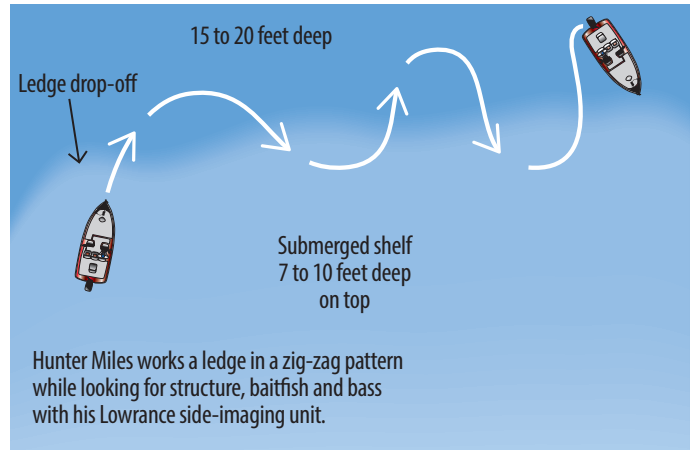
# Miles' May mindset

Young bass pro Hunter Miles' gameplan for May bass trips includes:

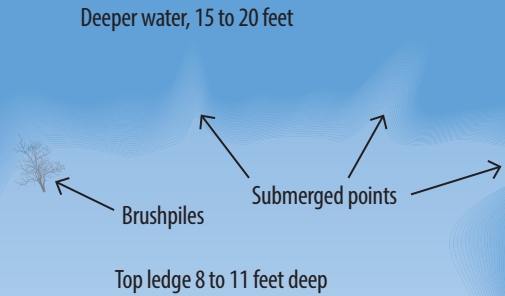
**Start shallow:** "If you're looking to catch big bass in May, then you probably want to start shallow and work any shallow pockets and flats close to deep water. Finding shad spawns and Mayfly hatches are added delights and will be short-lived but provide fantastic opportunities, with lunker bass always a possibility."

**Ledge fishing:** "After the shad spawn and Mayfly hatches are over, or the sun comes out bright, the bass relate to offshore ledges and structure, and it takes a different approach. Hit the ledges with crankbaits, Carolina rigs, big spoons and shakey head rigs. Pinpoint ledges with structure and baitfish and concentrate on the sweet spots on each ledge and you can spend the day catching bass instead of looking for them."

**Electronics:** "Study your electronics and keep an eye on the screen when fishing and running around the lake. Sometimes a shallow ledge or small depth change in the bottom located offshore could mean an opportunity to find a honey hole that might go overlooked. If there's baitfish or shad present, then you might punch your ticket to a live well full of a bass or a tournament win." ■



Miles targets anything out of the ordinary on a ledge.



He starts fishing on the outside of deeper water and then works in toward cover as he goes deeper.

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➤ continued from page 37

Hunter Miles pulled this 6½-pound Okatibbee Lake bass off a brush top along a creek channel.



Michael O. Giles

## LOVE THE LEDGES AT PICKWICK

“Pickwick Lake is one of my favorite places to fish, and it has a lot of ledges,” Miles said. “I’ll look for big schools of bass on those ledges, in the grass and on gravel bars. I’ll target the shallow ledges off points if they’re holding and feeding on them, and then move deeper if needed.”

A lot of the deeper ledges run from 20 feet on top to 40 feet off the drop.

“On Pickwick, current is everything; it makes the fish bite,” Miles said. “If you have current, then the fish usually bite, but if it’s shut off, the feeding frenzy usually stops. I love fishing a Ned rig on Pickwick, and I catch a lot of good bass on it along the submerged ledges there.”

## ROSS BARNETT’S FLATS

“I like to throw a Skinny Dipper or a swimbait across the flats on Barnett,” Miles said. “I’ll throw that Skinny Dipper on an Owner Flash hook to give them a look at something different. The extra flash will draw strikes when a plain Skinny Dipper doesn’t work.”

Miles also likes to fish a swim jig at a very fast pace and cover a lot of water. At the BASS Open tournament at Barnett this year, he caught a 5½-pounder on a swim jig with only 30 minutes to go in the tournament.

“I knew that I needed one more big fish with only a short time until weigh-in so I switched to a swim bait and got a big bite, a 5½-pound bass that smashed it,” Miles said. “That last-minute bass got me a check!” ■



Mike Giles of Meridian has been hunting and fishing Mississippi since 1965. He is an award-winning wildlife photographer, writer, seminar speaker and guide.

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**Y**ou are submerged in murky water, too stained to see your hand in front of your face. You're not wearing a mask; you have no way to breathe, and someone is pushing you down.

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Then, something mysterious and very powerful bites your hand up to the wrist, clamping down so hard you wince, half out of fear and half out of excitement, putting more strain on your already empty lungs.

Sound like a horror movie or a nightmare?

Oddly enough, this is fishing, or at least it is for many catfish fans who like to battle their blues and flatheads by hand. It is called noodling, grabbling or hand-grabbing, and people who do it are called noodlers, grabblers or hand-grabbers.

They are also called lunatics.

Noodlers go under water, reach into about a 6- by 8-inch opening, hoping a giant blue or, preferably, a flathead catfish will bite their hand. Without protection, the rough teeth of these creatures will tear the skin from fingers, hands, wrists and if it big enough to reach that far, forearms.

Then, the tug of war begins, and often it's tough to tell if the human has the catfish or the catfish has the fisherman. The angler has the advantage of strength, leverage and, you'd think, common sense, but this is a person who has put himself or herself in this position, so the common-sense angle is questionable. The catfish has one huge

advantage: it can breathe underwater.

If the human can hold onto enough breath to endure the fight, the adrenaline-aided strength and leverage prevails. Once the fish is clear of the hole, the fisherman rolls it on its side and presses its belly against the rib cage, under the arm to control it. Only then can he or she stand and take a deep breath.

The nightmare — or the excitement — is over.

Noodling, as odd as it sounds, attracts men, women, boys and girls, all willing to go underwater, reach in a hole and battle catfish that often weigh upwards of 50 pounds.


"There is a method for a successful catch," said Greg Parker of Carthage, who has been hand-grabbing for 20 years and has introduced dozens of newcomers to the sport. "Boys, girls, men, women; I don't know anyone who has quit grabbing because they were scared.

"I know there are those who don't keep it up after they have tried it, but that is usually because they lack the support system needed to keep it up. I've seen so many young women give it a try and be very good at it."

He'd like to see more give it a try. The key is finding an "in."

## WHERE TO BEGIN

Interested persons will find little info aside from articles. It is really best to have a mentor for your first experience.



PUT YOUR HAND IN THE MOUTH OF A HUGE CATFISH? PLENTY OF PEOPLE AROUND MISSISSIPPI BELIEVE THAT GRABBING, NOODLING OR HAND-GRABBING IS THE WAY TO GO WHEN IT COMES TO BATTLING A BIG BLUE OR FLATHEAD.

By David Hawkins

# THE GUSTO

Once you have a few fish under your belt, expanding the experience is totally up to the individual. Devotees have formed an organization, the Mississippi Handgrabbers Association. Its Facebook page — [www.facebook.com/Grabbin/](http://www.facebook.com/Grabbin/) — has lots of pictures and good information.

“The sport has grown all across Mississippi,” said Dwain Brister of McComb, MSHGA’s president. “We held our first statewide tournament in 2014 and continue to see an increase in participants with each event.”

Fear of what might be waiting in a submerged is an obstacle for many.

Let’s dispel a few of the myths that are common in the sport. Turtles, snakes and alligators are not going to spend any amount of time in a nesting box. All of these creatures must breathe air from the surface and have never been reported to inhabit the boxes.

Generally, the hole in the box — either a square or a circle — is about 6 inches wide. Snapping turtles and alligators are just too big to fit in the hole. What will be in the nest are large amounts of catfish eggs and those fishes that feed on those eggs, primarily small catfish and panfish brave enough to dash in for a meal at the risk of becoming eaten by the nesting fish.

Holes in banks, spaces under logjams and abandoned beaver hut tunnels also offer nesting cavities for catfish,

and many noodlers prefer natural holes. For our purposes, we are going to discuss only man-made boxes.

Searching for box plans was an exercise in frustration. There are no pre-set measurements that need to be followed when building a box, and most grabbers just use whatever they have around, but regulations restrict on what materials may be used and where the boxes may be placed in Mississippi.

According to Jerry Brown, a fisheries biologist for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, blue and flathead catfish prefer a cavity for spawning purposes. Catfish boxes must be constructed mostly of wood; no metal, concrete or PVC pipes or boxes may be used.

“Water heaters, plastic buckets, concrete pipes and PVC pipes are a few of the illegal cavity nests we encounter,” Brown said. “Wood is the only acceptable material for a man-made box. The regulations are published in the *Outdoor Digest* each year.”

Placement of boxes is not allowed on some bodies of water, and noodling is prohibited on others. Boxes may not be used in state lakes or state-park lakes, and the sport is illegal on all Mississippi waters of the Tenn-Tom Waterway. Barnett Reservoir allows boxes but has specific regulations regarding placing attractors.

**BUILDING A BOX** UP NEXT ➤



## BUILDING A BOX

There is no standard for the size of the box, just as there is no standard for the natural cavities catfish have found acceptable for centuries. As a grabber, you will want to think about the box being big enough to hold a large fish, but not so cavernous that the fish can retreat to the rear of the box and remain out of reach. A length of 30 inches is a good starting point.

The opening in one end of the box should be about 6 inches tall and 8 inches wide, big enough to allow the catfish access and provide the grabber with adequate room for his or her arm. A smaller hole on the opposite end, just large enough for a prodding stick, allows an assistant to move the fish in the direction of the grabbers' hand, should that be necessary.

Other dimensions are an inside height of 8 to 10 inches, and a width of 20 to 22 inches.

"Our boxes vary in size to accommodate the size of the catfish we are targeting," Brister said. "A flathead that weighs 40 to 50 pounds will fill a small box, but double or triple the size of the box, and you may find three or four large cats in the same cavity. We once pulled four females and one male from a box. They were packed in like sardines. Multiple fish in the same nest are not at all uncommon."

Put a box where catfish want to nest is important.



Photos by David Hawkins

**ABOVE:** Becky Barton Rockham smiles after successfully noodling her first catfish, a nice flathead. **BELOW:** Group outings often result in a collection of blue and flathead catfish exceeding 200 pounds.



## BOX PLACEMENT

The general rule for box placement is a level bottom at a depth where the grabber can stand flat-footed with his or her head above the surface. Being close to a creek bed or channel is a plus, as catfish like being near deeper water most of the time. Placing several boxes in a line is a preferred method that can streamline a day on the water.

Strange as it might seem, a disturbance caused by removing a fish from the box will not cause fish in an adjoining box to flee.

Being able to find a box once it is submerged is not as simple as it may seem, although modern technology like GPS have made it a lot easier.

Parker uses landmarks such as trees, water tanks and channel markers to align himself in such a way to locate his boxes. Other people use the compass app on their iPhone or devices in their boats to locate precise latitude and longitude.

A short pole of some sort, not unlike the handle of a golf club, is also handy when panning the bottom. After a few trips, finding the location becomes second nature.

Keeping the box in place can be an issue for beginners. Strong currents can relocate a box or cause it to float away before the siltation holds it in place. One solution is using a biodegradable bag, such as a croaker sack, filled with small stones or gravel. As the sack degrades, the stones will settle into the mud nearby. Place the boxes at least 6 to 8 feet apart, but there is no wrong distance.

With proper diving apparatus, deeper water can be explored, and that has led to some of the biggest catches reported at lakes like Barnett Reservoir, but such equipment is costly and requires some training.

Most grabbers wear old jeans and shirts, while a few wear swimsuits. Basically, they wear whatever is comfortable.

Gloves and arm protection are essential; big cats can easily get your fist and wrist in their mouth. A 15- to 20-pound blue cat has some serious teeth that will remove skin with the ferocity of a wood rasp. Gloves with long arms or cut-off legs from denim pants held in place by duct tape are strongly recommended.

The Mississippi hand-grabbing season opens May 1 and closes July 15. There is no limit or size restriction on catfish caught. Many grabbers limit the number of big fish they keep



Greg Parker holds a large flathead he just pulled from a box in Barnett Reservoir.

David Hawkins

for several reasons. Bigger fish, those over 20 pounds, may contain higher levels of lead, arsenic and mercury, which are harmful to humans. Older fish are also top breeders, laying thousands of eggs every spring.



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**N**oodling boxes do make it easier to find and catch large catfish, but at the same time appear beneficial to the catfish population by providing excellent nests to encourage spawning.

“Each year, we hear of hundreds of pounds of catfish being pulled from Barnett Reservoir,” said fisheries biologist Tom Holman of MDWFP, “and each year there seems to be a stable population for the new season.”

Holman says any changes in the regulations will be published in the *Outdoor Digest* and released to the public in online press releases.

Those placing boxes in a body of water must have written permission from the entity with control over that body. For instance, the Pearl River Valley Water Supply District controls Barnett Reservoir.

Nesting boxes are considered by the state to be fish attractors, meaning anyone can use them. If you happen across some boxes and decide to remove the fish, you are not breaking the law; however, the owner may want to inflict loud verbal abuse. Be ethical, fish your boxes or those you have permission to fish.

And have fun. ■



David Hawkins is a freelance writer living in Forest, Miss. He can be reached at [hawkins2209@att.net](mailto:hawkins2209@att.net).



Grabbers often wear protection on their hands and wrists to keep the sandpaper teeth of a catfish from doing damage to their skin.

David Hawkins

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# HONDA MARINE

Always wear a personal flotation device while boating and read your owner's manual.

A nesting box can be made from scraps that are found around the house or in dumpsters at construction sites. This box is made from treated wood and is 30 inches long, 22 inches wide and 11¼ inches tall inside. The hole is 8 inches wide and 6 inches high.



David Hawkins

## FISH ATTRACTOR RULES

**The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks' regulations regarding fishing attractors or structures, including boxes for noodling:**

1. It shall be unlawful to place structures such as plastic or metal barrels, plastic or metal pipes and tubing larger than 4 inches in diameter, hot-water tanks, concrete pipe and tires and any other non-biodegradable material into the public waters of the state for use as fish attractors.

2. However, wooden materials and plastic tubing and pipe materials may be used as fish attractors provided that the plastic materials are no larger than 4 inches in diameter. Concrete, rope, wire and nails may be used to construct fish attractors. It is legal to place such fish attractor materials into the public waters of the state provided written permission to do so is obtained from the federal or state agency that owns the specific water body.

3. The person placing fish attractor materials into the public waters of the state must have in their possession a copy of the written permission at all times when transporting and placing such material.

**In addition, Barnett Reservoir adds these regulations:**

1. No metal frames can be used in the construction of fish attractor structures to be placed in Barnett Reservoir.

2. A photograph of the structure(s) must be submitted with the permit application before it will be approved.

3. The permit application must include the approximate GPS coordinates for the location(s) where structure(s) will be placed. Exact GPS coordinates must be submitted after placement (for safety purposes only, to be used only by the Barnett Reservoir Police during emergencies and will not be available to the public).

4. No structures shall be placed inside any marked navigational channel, within 500 yards of any boat ramp or harbor, or within 100 yards of a residence or subdivision.

5. No structures shall be placed in the main lake below a line from the point at Rose's Bluff in Madison County to the point at Windward Bluff in Rankin County.

6. No structures shall be placed within 3.5 feet of the surface at lake level 297.5. It is the responsibility of the permit holder to ascertain the level at the time of placement to insure compliance to this regulation.

7. Each permit is valid for up to five structures placed within a 100-yard radius; however, GPS Coordinates must be supplied for each structure. ■

An advertisement for Plano KVD Signature Series tackle bags. The background shows a fisherman in a dark long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, wearing a cap and sunglasses, holding a fishing rod. In the foreground, a large black Plano tackle bag with red accents is visible, featuring the 'PLANO' logo. To the right, three smaller tackle bags are displayed against a yellow background. The text 'NEW KVD -GEAR-' is in the top left, and 'GET ON THE FAST TRACK' is in large, bold letters. The 'KVD SERIES' logo is on the right side. The main text reads: 'Push your performance. The all-new KVD Signature series by Plano® gives quick access to your gear so you can fish fast and fish first.' Below this, a list of features is provided: 'Designed by 8-Time Angler of the Year Kevin VanDam', 'Two sizes of tackle bags and two wormfile speedbags available', and 'Customizable storage with unmatched access'. The Plano logo and tagline 'PROTECT YOUR PASSION' are at the bottom, along with the website 'PLANOMOLDING.COM' and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.



With hunting land becoming more expensive and more difficult to find, many Mississippi sportsmen are turning to hunt clubs for shared leases. But even that option is starting to have drawbacks. Here are some ideas for sportsmen looking to join a club.

**M**ississippi hunters have a couple of basic choices when looking for hunting grounds: public or private land. Public land is open to anyone, and most private lands are owned by individuals, families or timber companies. Unless a hunter owns his own dirt or can barter with landowners for hunting rights, private land has to be leased for hunting privileges.

It's become something of a tradition for sportsmen in the Magnolia State to join hunting clubs. They pool their money every year and lease land as a group for the chance to chase their favorite wild game, with deer the most sought-after, turkeys second in line, followed closely by waterfowl. Small-game species, hogs, predators and sometimes fishing are on the hit-list as well.

May is when the mad scramble takes place. Most lease fees are due June 15, especially when timber-company land is involved. Club presidents and board members struggle this time every year to scrape together enough

members to pay for their leases.

While hunting clubs face trials and tribulations every year, the No. 1 problem most face is the rising cost of leased land. During the past decade, land-per-acre prices have risen dramatically, mostly due to the supply and demand for good hunting grounds. Timber companies are capitalizing, with individual and family landowners following suit.

Red Dot Hunting Club in Jefferson County is no stranger to the struggle. Like many other clubs, Red Dot's members are very passionate about this issue; it has hit them hard in the wallet, and they have the numbers and records to show it.

Bill Farmer, Red Dot's president, said 2009 was when the problem started.

"That's when our long-time timber company landowner, Georgia Pacific, sold out to Plum Creek," he said. "Then, in 2016, Weyerhaeuser bought it."





Hey, come join the club — or not



**T**he lease for almost 2,700 acres cost \$19,230 in 2008 and has increased by \$1,800 nearly every year since. With the latest increase, the Red Dot lease for the 2018-19 season will be \$39,907 — more than double in 10 years.

“One year, we didn’t have enough members by the end of May to pay our lease. I had to take \$4,000 out of my savings, and Charlie Pevey, our treasurer, took \$2,000 out of his pocket just to pay it until we scraped up enough members to get our money back. We’re not doing that anymore,” Farmer said.

The club, near Union Church, has been around since 1983, but with the rising lease costs and the problems that come with them, its future is unclear.

“This year’s increase is \$2,960; it’s the largest ever,” Farmer said. “I’m about 95-percent sure our club won’t survive this time.”

Hunt clubs are doing two things to compensate for the rise in prices: raising annual dues or taking in more members. Both of these solutions result in a domino-effect, with each bringing its own issues.

Adding more members will result in a higher member-per-acre ratio. Most hunters, especially deer hunters, are looking for a minimum of 100 acres per member. Members would love to have more acres, but this causes the price to join a lease to cost more. It all depends on individual hunters, what they’re looking for in a club, and their budget.

Austin Berry, a hunter from Warren County, said, “The right place is absolutely worth paying more to me. Overcrowding is a problem — too many members per acre can lead to too many hunters on a property at one time. This puts pressure on the deer.”

More members means more pressure on the game. Turkey and small-game species can become more elusive, while deer will turn nocturnal. Clubs are adopting rules to control the problems that adding more members produces. Some will also produce revenue to help offset costs. Here are a few:

- Restrictions on guests, including raising guest hunting fees.
- Limiting excessive ATV riding, designating parking areas to promote foot travel.
- Creating logs for signing into hunting areas to monitor hunting pressure.
- Charging fees/dues for members’ children who are capable of hunting alone.

Bill Farmer, president of Red Dot Hunting Club, has plenty of paperwork to do every spring, focusing on lease fees and club memberships.



- Offering memberships at a cut rate for game other than deer, such as turkey-only or duck-only memberships.
  - Limiting the use/checking of game cameras.
  - Limits on the number of deer stands.
  - Setting bag limits for deer at levels below statewide limits.
- Raising annual club dues is the other option to cover rising lease prices, but it comes with its own problems. While some hunters have deep pockets, the vast majority have limits on what can be spent for dues.

“I believe it’s got to the point where the average-income person is not going to be able to hunt unless it’s on public land,” Farmer said. “The older members are dying off or dropping out due to living on fixed incomes, and the younger hunters supporting a family can’t afford the rising cost of dues.”



## A LANDOWNER'S perspective

Leasing land for hunting is big business and is profitable for landowners. Lease rates, once priced to covering landowners' taxes, have risen in recent years and are still on the increase. Landowners, both individual and corporate, avoid commenting on the subject since it's such a hot topic.

Property owners shouldn't be blamed for the current situation. Supply and demand determines lease prices, along with the location of the property. As long as sportsmen are willing to pay, prices will continue to rise. It's simply business, and everyone wants to maximize their profits.

Resource Management Service (RMS), which owns mostly old, International Paper Company land in Mississippi, encourages and is friendly to long-term leasing of their properties for hunting. Jimmy Bullock, a senior vice president of forest sustainability, said, "We offer annual or multi-year agreements. Multi-year sets the price up front for three years so clubs can budget and know what to expect."

RMS encourages year-round activities along with hunting on their lands, such as camping, scouting or just enjoying the outdoors.

"Folks who lease long-term tend to take ownership and feel a real stewardship of the land," Bullock said. "We partner with hunters as land stewards."

Paul Durfield, Gulf Region Recreational Lease Manager for Weyerhaeuser, said, "Being the largest owner of timberland in the country, we are happy to be a provider of hunting land throughout Mississippi."

Weyerhaeuser provides a food-plot program available to any of its lease-holders. Clubs can rent protected areas with no worries about disturbances from timber-management practices.

"We also offer free spots for food plots in places timber won't grow: old log decks, in between thinned rows or any other areas where pines are not being managed for timber production," Durfield said.

Keep in mind, the free spots aren't protected. ■

**BELOW:** Weyerhaeuser offers a food-plot program that allows hunting clubs to pay for plots that will be protected from timber management activities.



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**S**portsmen are all about promoting hunting and getting youngsters to participate, and higher lease fees are one of many things keeping our youth from being exposed to the outdoor lifestyle.

Clubs face struggles and conflicts besides high costs and overcrowding. Their membership can be sort of a melting pot of hunters with different interests and ideas on what they hunt, when they hunt and how they hunt. One age-old deer-hunting conflict is between still-hunters and dog hunters. Managing for a harvest of quality bucks and promoting a family friendly club that allows youngsters to harvest liberally will often cause friction. Duck hunters busting woodies in a beaver pond can conflict with a deer hunter focusing on the peak of the rut in the same general area.

The list of rivalries between different hunting interests could go on and on. Luckily, most hunters are reasonable and courteous towards each other. When searching for a new or different hunting lease, it's always best for sportsmen to ask questions before paying dues, know the rules and look for clubs with hunters of similar interests.

Most Mississippi clubs are facing the same challenges and share the same concerns. Here is a short list of other burdens concerning many clubs:

- Timber harvest on SMZ's (Stream Management Zones).
- Loggers damaging or destroying deer stands.
- Logging during hunting seasons—with no compensation for loss of hunting area.
- Roads left inaccessible to normal traffic after timber harvests.
- Short notice on logging operations. Some landowners give plenty of notice, some do not.
- Annual lease agreements that need to be longer than one year.

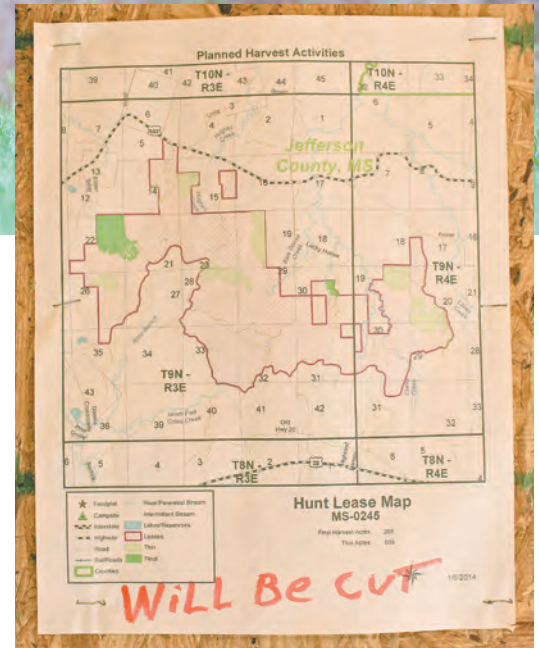
What will become traditional hunting leases in our great state? The answer isn't easy, and the struggles are real. The best stewards of the land, being the time-honored hunting clubs, are resilient and are sure to find a way to keep the tradition alive. ■



**Andy Douglas** is an outdoor writer and photographer from Brookhaven. A native of Lincoln County, he's chased deer, turkeys, bass and most anything else the past 35 years. He lives the outdoor lifestyle and is passionate about sharing that with others through stories and photos.



**ABOVE:** Turkeys are the No. 2 focus of most hunt-club members; some clubs offer turkey-only memberships for hunters who don't need deer-hunting land. **RIGHT:** Many timber companies send out notices to clubs in advance of logging activities.



## LOOKING FOR LAND IN all the right places

Here are some places where Mississippi hunters can look to find leases and where clubs can post to find members:

• **Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/search/top?q=mississippi%20hunting%20leases%20an%20club%20openings](http://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=mississippi%20hunting%20leases%20an%20club%20openings)

• **Bull Nettle Forum:** <http://forums.bullnettlenews.com/38-hunting-fishing-places-locator>

• **Weyerhaeuser:** <https://www.wyrecreation.com/leases>

• **RMS:** <http://www.resourcegmt.com/hunting-recreation>

• **Mississippi Market Bulletin:** <https://www.mdac.ms.gov/publications-forms/market-bulletin>. Click link for Hunting & Fishing Leases & Memberships.

Copiah County hunter Clint Gerald's main interest is deer, followed by turkeys — finding a club with a good duck hole is an added bonus.



Andy Douglas

# WHAT SHOULD A HUNTER consider in a club?

Hunters have a long list of concerns on which to focus when it comes to finding the right club. The wish-list depends on the individual hunter and the game being pursued.

A recent poll taken on hunters searching for a new club showed that most are concerned with finding good deer-hunting grounds. The No. 1 thing they're looking for is a good ratio of hunters per acre. Good management practices were next, along with price and a family friendly atmosphere.

"There are several criteria by which I would personally analyze hunting clubs if I were actively looking: location, genetics, habitat, and deer density," said Chris Jones, who hunts in Warren and Hinds counties. "I also value stability and a long-term approach to deer management."

Before a hunter signs on the dotted line, some questions need to be asked to make sure it's the right club:

- What types of game are available to hunt?
- What's the cost of dues and everything that covers?
- How many turkey hunters?
- Are there any fishing or duck holes?
- What's required for work days?
- Any limits on harvested game different from state limits?
- Are there antler restrictions on bucks?
- Does the club have a camp house or camper spaces available?
- Does the club have written rules? If it does, study them carefully.

This list could be much longer, and hunters should tweak questions to suit their needs. Sportsmen seeking to join a lease should surround themselves with like-minded folks.

Some clubs require applications and interviews. In the same spirit, hunters should also ask for names of current members as references. Search for former members that have left the club; they're sure to provide the reasons why they left. Make sure it's really the right club. ■

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- 99 Acres .....\$3,787/AC
- 115 Acres .....\$3,750/AC
- 125 Acres .....\$4,300/AC
- 127.5 Acres .....\$4,200/AC
- 151 Acres .....\$4,200/AC
- 200 Acres & Camp .....\$1,120,000
- 209 Acres .....\$3,348/AC
- 278.5 Acres .....\$4,000/AC
- 360 Acres & Home .....\$3,500,000
- 1305 Acres & Home .....\$7,500,000

### ATTALA COUNTY

- 540.5 Acres .....\$950/AC

### CALHOUN COUNTY

- 75 Acres .....\$1,493/AC

### CLARKE COUNTY

- 800 Acres & Lodge .....\$2,100,000
- 40 Acres .....\$2,025/AC
- 132 Acres .....\$2,651/AC

### CLAIBORNE COUNTY

- 75 Acres & Camp .....\$275,000
- 222 Acres .....\$3,148/AC
- 176 Acres .....\$3,181/AC

### COPIAH COUNTY

- 166 Acres .....\$2,289/AC
- 339 Acres .....\$2,651/AC

### COVINGTON COUNTY

- 162 Acres Cabin & River .....\$4,650/AC

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- 80 Acres .....\$3,125/AC
- 123 Acres .....\$2,500/AC

### FRANKLIN COUNTY

- 15 Acres .....\$3,200/AC

### GRENEADA COUNTY

- 160 Acres .....\$4,000/AC

### HARRISON COUNTY

- 243 Acres .....\$4,900/AC
- 129 Acres .....\$3,900/AC
- 47 Acres .....\$4,100/AC
- 82 Acres .....\$3,950/AC

### HINDS COUNTY

- 184 Acres .....\$2,700/AC

### JASPER COUNTY

- 114 Acres .....\$1,400/AC
- 69.5 Acres .....\$2,500/AC
- 58.5 Acres .....\$3,418/AC
- 40 Acres .....\$2,500/AC

### JEFFERSON COUNTY

- 53.94 Acres .....\$2,682/AC
- 73.24 Acres .....\$2,680/AC
- 2260 Acres & Lodge .....\$8,300,000

### JONES COUNTY

- 21 Acres .....\$2,000/AC
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### KEMPER COUNTY

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### LAWRENCE COUNTY

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- 710 Acres & Camp .....\$1,225,000

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### MADISON COUNTY

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- 40 Acres .....\$2,475/AC
- 40 Acres .....\$2,950/AC
- 58 Acres .....\$2,637/AC
- 77 Acres .....\$5,181/AC
- 80 Acres & Home .....\$219,000
- 132 Acres .....\$2,401/AC
- 135 Acres .....\$2,350/AC
- 140 Acres .....\$2,350/AC
- 144 Acres .....\$2,956/AC
- 192 Acres .....\$2,950/AC
- 275 Acres .....\$2,350/AC
- 423 Acres .....\$3,534/AC

- 335 Acres .....\$2,950/AC
- 467 Acres .....\$2,795/AC

### TALLAHATCHIE COUNTY

- 27 Acres .....\$2,962/AC

### WALTHAM COUNTY

- 15 Acres .....\$3,500/AC
- 38.78 Acres .....\$2,307/AC
- 45 Acres & Camp .....\$204,000
- 386 Acres & Home .....\$1,495,000
- 34 Acres .....\$3,808/AC
- 160 Acres .....\$2,181/AC

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When clear conditions make the fish spooky, a finesse jig will still produce bites.

# SMALL BAIT ... BIG RESULTS

By David A. Brown

Bigger isn't always better — a downsized finesse jig might be just the ticket for days when bass are playing hard to get. Here's how the pros rig up to take them down.

**W**hen you ask a specialist to design a tool, they'll likely give you a prototype with the details that matter most. That's what bass pro David Walker did for Z-Man when he designed the Cross EyeZ Power Finesse Jig.

Now, the funky eyeball pattern is a straight-up, old-school throwback, but Walker's structural design addressed a more tangible benefit. For him, finesse isn't all that effective if it can't stand up to the daunting locales in which big bass often reside.

Woody cover, docks, heavy vegetation — southern anglers often have to contend with rough and tumble neighborhoods — and when conditions require a less-intrusive appearance than a full-size jig, a finesse jig has to be able to hold its own against imposing habitats.

>

# “WHAT MAKES THIS A FINESSE JIG IS THAT EVERYTHING IS DOWNSIZED,” WALKER SAID.

“Instead of a 4/0 flipping hook, it has a 2/0, but it’s a heavier wire.

“A lot of the finesse jigs I’ve messed with in the past had a really light wire in them, and they were better for casting scenarios. But I wanted something I could still pitch into that cover and not feel like I’m taking a risk by throwing it in there.”

## WHEN IT’S RIGHT

“Water clarity is one of the biggest (factors) for finesse jigs,” Walker said. “When it’s clear, those fish can tend to be pretty spooky, especially if they’ve been around the bank for a while.

“When the fish first move shallow, they tend to be a little dumber, especially if the water’s dirty. But if the water’s a little

cleaner, those fish get a little harder to catch. Here, or if you’re fishing pressured waters, that’s when I’m going to go with that finesse style.”

The ideal setup for a finesse jig, Walker said, is a cloudless day with light to no wind. If it’s blowing 10 to 15, you rarely need finesse baits, he said. But when the fish are hyper-aware — particularly if the lake’s getting loads of pressure — send in the small stuff.

“There are times when we’re all fishing the same canals and a less bulky bait will get more bites than, say, a normal 3/8- or 1/2-ounce jig,” said bass pro Caleb Sumrall. “I like a Missile Baits Ike’s Mini Flip finesse jig, which is a smaller profile jig with thinner skirt strands and a com-

pact profile that comes through cover amazingly.”

While some anglers prefer spinning gear for lighter jigs, Walker likes the fact that he can fish finesse jigs on his bait-caster. Benefits include casting accuracy and a more fluid pitching motion.

“I’ll fish a finesse jig about the same way as a full-size flipping jig,” Walker said. “The only difference would be if I’m going to fish clear water where there’s not a lot of cover. In that case, I’m going to do a little more casting.

“I’ll throw it farther and fish it along the bottom, back toward the boat; instead of just pitching it into cover, lifting it a few times and making another cast. That scenario is not one of my favorites, because I really like to be able to cover water and pitch to specific spots and keep moving.”

Just like the full-size deal, Walker would much rather power fish with his finesse jig. Instead of painstakingly grinding through one pocket, he can keep moving and cover several.



If the bite's tough, don't hesitate to downsize your jig presentations.

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**SMALL BAIT ... BIG RESULTS**

Finesse jig trailers don't have to be fancy, as this Z-Man Finesse TRD demonstrates.

**TOP TARGETS**

Nothing revolutionary here; you can fish that finesse jig just about anywhere you'd fish a full-size flipping jig. The only difference is a more diminutive figure sneaking into the target zone. That being said, Sumrall describes one of his favorite finesse jig presentations.

"Flipping a black/blue jig with a matching Missile Baits D-Bomb into cypress trees is my favorite," he said. "I like to target the shaded sides, and I tend to go for the protected side of the cypress tree. I feel like if the fish are that shallow, they don't want to be on the (windward) side of the tree getting beaten up."

Mimicking forage is always a good bet, but Sumrall warns against deal-breaking encroachment. In other words, no dropping the bait right on their heads.

"If I can flip past the cypress tree, bring my jig up to the tree and then kill it, that's my favorite way to fish the finesse jig," Sumrall said. "I feel like sometimes,

if you flip to the tree, there's a lot of room for error. You can hit the tree too hard and potentially spook the fish."

His best move: Flip a foot or two past the target and then use his rod tip to sneak it toward the fish. Resembling a crawfish scampering along the side of a cypress tree, this move usually finds a willing taker.

**GEAR FOR THE REAR**

Addressing a key dynamic for all jigs — fall rate — Walker said his trailer selection also follows a generally downsized strategy, but specific choices depend on what he's trying to accomplish. For slower falls, he likes the Z-Man Punch CrawZ trailer, but to keep that overall package compact, he'll bite off the back half of the body and hang the remaining section claws-down.

continues on page 58



Bass pro Caleb Sumrall often bounces finesse jigs off cypress trees to trigger reaction bites.

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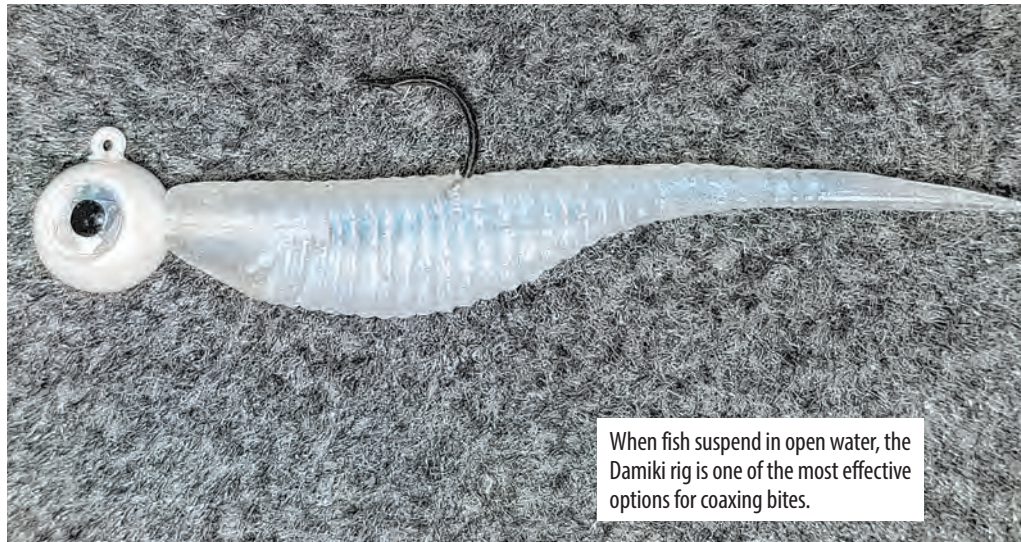
## DAZZLE 'EM WITH THE DAMIKI RIG

Bass anglers know that few scenarios rival the hair-pulling frustration of suspended fish. Maybe it's largemouth fleeing heavy fishing pressure on their offshore humps and contour breaks; or perhaps we're talking about Toledo Bend's spotted bass suspending in open water because they enjoy being difficult.

The reason this is so tough is because it's often hard to keep a bait in the strike zone long enough to tempt these fish.

Well, one of the hottest deals on the national tournament scene is the Damiki Rig, essentially a light jighead like the VMC Moon Eye and a tiny baitfish-imitating tail like the Damiki Armor Shad, from which the rig draws its name.

The Damiki rig is basically the same as the "moping" technique used by northern wall-eye anglers. However, southern folks might



When fish suspend in open water, the Damiki rig is one of the most effective options for coaxing bites.

better connect with this concept: Think float-and-fly, only your boat is the float.

Truth is, all you have to do with the Damiki rig is vertically drop it to fish you've spotted on your electronics, hold it front of their noses — maybe slip in a little wiggle now and then — and make them look at the easy meal until their stomachs blink.

Jig sizes vary with depth and fish mood,

so consider how aggressive the fish are and how fast you need your bait to reach them. Weights of ¼- to ⅜-ounce are common, but most anglers in the know keep a ⅜-ounce handy for particularly tough fish. Whatever you chose, you'll want a 90-degree line tie to keep the bait perfectly horizontal. ■

- David A. Brown

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## SMALL BAIT ... BIG RESULTS

Elsewhere, when wants a faster fall, Walker uses the straight simplicity of the Z-Man Finesse T.R.D. as his trailer. Less plastic equals less drag, and therefore a faster fall.

“You can get creative with a lot of different trailer styles, but when I’m using a finesse jig, I’m going to try to make that trailer look pretty natural,” he said. “I’m going to stick with more natural colors: green pumpkin, brown, green — not the really bold colors we might use on the flipping jigs.”

### PLASTIC TACTICS

Bass pro Andrew Upshaw’s a big fan of finesse jigs with skirts trimmed in bristly form. He’ll also alter his Gene Larew Biffle Bug Junior by removing the trailer’s center tail flapper to create a smaller profile, with only the legs flapping freely.

“This slims up the profile and makes it more compact; and that’s exactly what you want for a finesse jig,” Upshaw said.

Scent can play a big role in closing the deal with downsized presentations, so Upshaw also adds a generous dose of Gene Larew Biffle Juice to the trailer’s center cavity. And to play up the visual ruse, he’ll use an orange or chartreuse dye pen to touch up the Biffle Bug’s legs to mimic the pincers of indigenous crawfish.

“I’ll put a little bit on each pincer; not a lot — just enough to give the jig a little flash under the water,” Upshaw said.

One more rigging tip: if you’re dock-skipping finesse jigs and prefer to hang your trailer, rather than thread it onto the hook, adding a piece of worm onto your jig’s hook shank will stop the trailer from sliding up and potentially marring hook sets.

Many of the preparation and presentation points really aren’t that different from full-size jigs, so it’s not like learning a new technique. Bottom line: finesse jigs simply offer an option for lighter-detail work when situations call for subtlety.

“I rely on a finesse jig a lot in the wintertime, but they are also very effective throughout the year,” Upshaw said. “You can throw it around grass, wood, rock; you can throw it in 2 feet of water or 30 feet of water — it doesn’t matter.

“Finesse jigs are a great way to get bit.” ■



A full-time freelance writer specializing in sport fishing, David A. Brown splits his time between journalism and marketing communications ([www.tightwords.com](http://www.tightwords.com)).



TOP: The Gene Larew Biffle Bug makes a great finesse jig trailer, but try removing the center tail to present a smaller profile. MIDDLE: Touching up the tips of a finesse jig trailer can increase the attraction. BOTTOM: Sweetening a finesse jig with scent attractants never hurts, either.

# IT ALL ADDS UP TO MORE FISH IN THE BOAT.



COURTESY OF FLW / PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA

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A man wearing a light-colored cap and sunglasses is smiling while holding a large, golden-brown bass in a boat. The fish is hooked on a lure with a bright yellow spinner. The background shows a calm body of water with a forested shoreline and a house in the distance.

# BASS LEARN TO AVOID CAPTURE

HOW THEY LEARN REMAINS  
A MYSTERY, BUT IT MAY HELP  
YOU IMPROVE YOUR CATCH

Ponds provide excellent fishing, but bass quickly learn to avoid capture.

**S**tudies of largemouth bass, as well as several other fish species, including brown trout, rainbow trout, common carp and northern pike, have found that angler catch rates declines with accumulating fishing effort.

The decline in catch rates has been attributed to fish learning to avoid lures, but whether fish learn to avoid capture has not been clearly demonstrated. Research by graduate student Matt Wegener at Mississippi State demonstrates that largemouth bass do learn to avoid capture by anglers — and they learn quickly.

## THE STUDY

Six ponds in northeast Mississippi, from 1 to 5.6 acres in size, were fished weekly by two anglers from May to October for two years. All ponds had established largemouth bass, bluegill and redear sunfish populations. Fishing was minimal in these ponds before the study, and all ponds were closed to fishing during the study.

Two researchers fished each pond for one angler hour per acre each week, the same fishing effort as at Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks state-fishing lakes. On each outing, the researchers rotated through 11 different types of artificial lures selected to be effective in different habitats found in ponds. The researchers were skilled bass anglers and fished from a two-person “bass buggy” powered by an electric trolling motor.

All fish were handled quickly and carefully, measured and immediately released. No fish were “gut hooked” or bleeding, and survival after release was assumed to be 100 percent. All bass at least 8 inches long were counted in the catch.

In the first year, three ponds were fished weekly from May through October, and three ponds were fished weekly during May and June and September and October but not fished during a July and August closure period. May was selected as the start of the season to avoid bass spawning and fry-guarding influencing catch rate.

During the second year, the three ponds fished continuously during the first year were not fished in July and August, and the three ponds closed to fishing during July and August the first year were fished continuously. In other words, all six ponds got the same fishing treatment.

Wegener found catch rates declined throughout the May-to-October fishing season. In ponds fished without closure, catch rate declined from 6 bass per angler hour at the start of the 24-week fishing season to 1.5 bass per angler hour at the end of the season.

In ponds with closure, catch rates declined from 7.4 bass per angler hour the first week to three per angler hour at the end of June. When fishing resumed in August, catch rate was five bass per angler hour and decreased to 0.8 bass per angler hour at the end of October.

Wegener also measured “catchability” — the proportion of the population caught each week. Like catch rate, catchability declined with continuing fishing throughout the 24-week season. In the

ponds with closure, catchability quickly declined during the first 8-week fishing period. Catchability was high when fishing resumed after the closure and quickly declined during the September-October fishing period.

## WHAT IT MEANS

Largemouth bass catch rates are highest at the start of the season and decline with continued fishing effort. A two-month closure resets the catch rates to a level similar to the start of the season, but the catch rate quickly declines again. Anglers should expect the highest catch rates when a new fishery opens or after a period of low fishing effort, but they should also expect catch rate to be lower late in the season.

The decline in catch was a result of declining catchability of largemouth bass. But was the declining catchability a result of learning as has been suggested by other studies?

Yes, according to Wegener. The decline in catchability supports learning. Forgetting is also evidence for learning.

The increase in catch rate and catchability mid-season after closure, and the high catch rates and catchability at the start of the season support forgetting.

Learning can occur by "classical conditioning." Just like Pavlov's dog was trained to associate a bell ringing with food, bass could associate the adverse effect of being injured by hooks or restrained by angling after biting a lure. But on each outing, anglers used 11 different lure types to catch fish. Although fish can learn, it is doubtful they lack the ability to generalize among lures.

Wegner suggests that "angler avoidance" might be a more appropriate term than "lure avoidance." The captured bass may associate the adverse effect of capture with the sound of the trolling motor or the presence of anglers.

To what extent these results from ponds, although replicating actual angling, apply to larger reservoirs is not known. But they do indicate that low catch in heavily fished waters is not necessarily an indication of low bass abundance. ■



### BIG BASS, SMART BASS?

Larger bass may be harder to catch than smaller bass because they are fewer in number and have had more time to learn to avoid anglers.



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

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## LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

Although watching a bass take a top-water lure early in the morning is fun, there's nothing more exciting than having a youngster on the other end of the rod.



# FISH MAYNOR CREEK IN MAY

DRAWDOWN, INCREASE IN COVER HAS TURNED 500-ACRE LAKE AROUND

**M**aynor Creek, a 500-acre lake near Waynesboro, is a Pat Harrison Waterway District lake. One of the older lakes in that group, Maynor Creek had issues with its dam almost 10 years ago. The state pulled the water level down to repair the dam.

While the water was down, a tremendous amount of grass and brush grew up from the bottom of the lake. Once the lake level rose back to a normal level, that growth provided extra cover for spawning bass and young bass. Maynor Creek is in very good condition and is producing some 3- to 5-pound bass, as well as crappie and bluegills. You may catch a postspawn bass at Maynor Creek that weighs 7 pounds or more.

## EARLY MORNING

From just at daylight until about an hour after, I'll be fishing the lake's causeway. A small bridge there is at a place where the lake necks down, and the bass have to pass through that area to reach

the northern end of the lake. The causeway and the bridge create a funnel for baitfish and bass to move back and forth from one end of the lake to the other. At daylight, you'll usually see plenty of bass action in that area, and perhaps even schooling bass.

I'll be fishing this region with a white, ¼-ounce buzzbait and a shad-colored Zara Spook. To fish the buzzbait, I'll use a 7-foot-2, medium-heavy Shimano Expride rod and a Curado 200 XG reel with 23-pound test White Peacock fluorocarbon. I'll use a 6-foot-10 medium-heavy Expride rod with the same reel with 30-pound bass braid and a 20-pound fluorocarbon leader to fish the Spook. I'll cast both lures from the points of the causeway bridge down the road embankment to about 50 yards on either side of the bridge and on both ends.

The bass will be congregating in this section of the lake, since the baitfish will be feeding and holding there during that first morning light, until the sun comes up fully and forces them into deeper

water. In an hour, I'll expect to catch three to five nice bass in this vicinity, with one weighing 3 pounds or better, up to even 5 pounds.

## THE BLUEGILL SPAWN

During May, bluegills will be spawning, and the bass will feed heavily on them. To locate bluegill beds, I'll have a shad-colored Mann's Reel'N Shad rigged up with a ¼-ounce jighead on a 6-foot-10, medium-heavy Expride rod with the same reel spooled with 20-pound fluorocarbon.

I'll parallel the bank primarily in the mouths and the centers of pockets. At the same time, I'll be looking shallow for bluegill beds and sniffing for them, because they smell like ripe watermelons. I don't really care if I catch any bass on the Reel'N Shad, but I'll know from the bites that the bass are feeding on bluegills in that pocket.

Once I pinpoint bluegill beds, I drop my Power Pole to hold the boat where I want to fish. I'll start fan-casting a ⅜-ounce

black/blue Stone Jig with a black/blue crawfish trailer. I'll use a 7-foot-6, heavy action Expride rod to make long casts to keep my boat well away from the bluegill beds. I'll hold my rod tip high, swim the jig and shake my rod tip to give the jig an erratic action.

I don't expect to catch more than about three bass out of each pocket or bluegill bed I fish, but they will be in that 3-pound or better range. I'll also cast the Zara Spook and the buzzbait I have on my casting deck into those pockets.

## FISH THE BRIDGE AGAIN

My next move is to return to the bridge and use my electronics to identify the creek channel. I'll fish that slowly with a ¼-ounce shakey head and Mann's 6-inch junebug Jelly Worm on a Shimano spinning reel with 15-pound bass braid and a 15-pound fluorocarbon leader and a 7-foot-2, medium-heavy Expride rod. This creek channel is the most-defined creek channel at Maynor, and it holds many big stumps and rocks.

I'll fish very slowly all the way from the bridge to the dam. I'm mainly trying to locate the turns on that underwater channel, which is not all that deep — usually with only 4- to 6-foot dropoffs. This channel is a migration route for bass that have finished spawning and those holding in deeper water during their summer pattern.

On Maynor Creek in May, I'll expect to catch 10 to 20 good-sized bass in a day. ■



**Paul Elias**, of Laurel, has fished 15 Bassmaster Classics with career winnings of over \$1 million, including one Bassmaster Classic Championship. Elias also holds the current record for a four-day BASS tournament weigh-in with 132 pounds, 8 ounces, on Falcon Lake in Texas.



Maynor Creek has been kicking out some very nice bass, and May is a productive month to catch some of these chunky largemouths.

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## HAPPY TRAILS

Bill Garbo

# ANOTHER LOOK AT CWD FEEDING BAN

COULD MISSISSIPPI OFFICIALS HAVE USED BETTER BOUNDARIES THAN COUNTY LINES?

**U**nless you have been holed up in a cave with no way of communicating for the past three or four months, you are well aware that a buck discovered on Jan. 25 in Issaquena County tested positive for chronic wasting disease.

Mississippi wildlife officials immediately implemented a CWD response plan, and a containment zone was established, centered on the location of the infected buck. A zonal-response operation was initiated that included CWD testing of deer within the containment zone. Mississippi is the 25th state to confirm the presence of the disease.

Wildlife officials from Louisiana were notified, and after consultation with neighboring states, biologists and veterinarians, Louisiana initiated its own CWD response plan. A Declaration of Emergency was approved, effective March 5, that all supplemental deer feeding was to immediately cease in East Carroll, Madison, and Tensas parishes, which abut the Mississippi River across from Issaquena County. About 600 square miles, or around 30 percent of Mississippi's 1,964-square mile "Containment Zone" circle laps across the river and includes parts of all three parishes.

One major ramification of the two states establishing containment zones involves the banning of all supplemental feeding and mineral-station activities, not only within the the "buffer zone" — a circle with a 25-mile radius — but across six entire Mississippi counties and three

Louisiana parishes that have any overlap with the circle, no matter how small.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks released a sample collection report on March 22. Of the almost 400 samples that have been collected in the six affected Mississippi counties between Oct. 1, 2017 and March 22, 2018, no additional CWD infection has been found. This is great news, but of course, testing will be continuing.

## IS ANYBODY HAPPY?

I had a recent conversation with someone from Mississippi involved in the discussion about establishing the CWD response measures. He minced no words explaining to me that, in his opinion, supplemental feeding should have never been allowed in Mississippi in the first place. No sympathy whatsoever was expressed for hunters and landowners in the six counties that are being affected by the supplemental-feeding ban.

Fortunate or not, supplemental feeding became legal a few years ago. The hunting public wanted it and called for it, and the legislature passed it into law. When politics and science collide, as it did in this case, for every interested party that was pleased, there always seems to be

another party that was displeased.

I recently had another and very different conversation with a hunter/landowner whose hunting property in one of the six counties where supplemental feeding has been banned — but outside the buffer zone.

After the ban was instituted, the landowner called the MDWFP to ask why supplemental feeding was banned in his entire county when only a small sliver of the county was inside the 25-mile circle. The response he received was — and I'm paraphrasing it here — the entire county was subject to the supplemental feeding ban because MDWFP couldn't have "a containment boundary line running out through the middle of the woods."

Exasperated, my friend hung up and rechecked the MDWFP Containment Zone map. What he found, to him, defied logic, as there were several highways and waterways that could have easily been used as boundary lines in his county. Hearing this, I set out to see what was going on. What I found also had me shaking my head in disbelief.

## DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

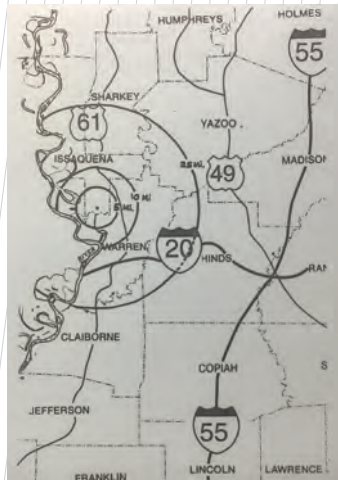
I drew my own map showing the containment-zone circles in conjunction

Supplemental feeding of deer has been banned in six counties after an Issaquena County deer was discovered to have CWD.

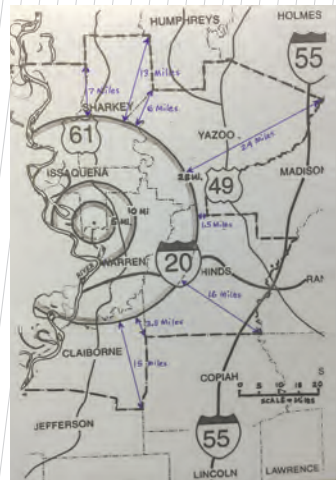
Bill Garbo

## A BETTER CHOICE?

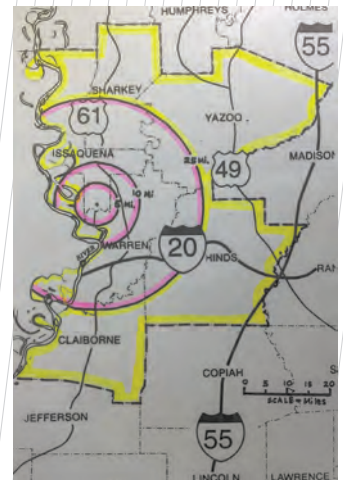
In Claiborne, Hinds and Yazoo counties, plenty of county and state roads — and several prominent rivers and streams — lie just outside the 25-mile buffer zone circle and could be used as easily describable boundary lines to tighten and shrink the footprint of the containment zone. Ease of enforcement, boundary wise, could be balanced a little better with logic.



Containment zone: 25-mile circle



Supplemental feeding zone ban



Author's feeding ban zone

with the six affected counties.

Only 7 percent of Claiborne County falls inside the 25-mile circle, but the entire county is part of the supplemental-feeding ban. But the northwest corner of Copiah County is just 3 or 4 miles from the circle, but supplemental feeding isn't banned there. Huh?

Only 22 percent of Hinds County falls inside the circle, but the entire county is included in the supplemental-feeding ban. The head scratcher here is that the western end of Madison County is 2 miles or less from the circle, and none of the county is affected by the ban. Say what?

Last of all, only 15 percent of Yazoo County is inside the circle, but the entire county, extending 24 miles from the circle to the east side of I-55, is under the ban. Again, the southern edge of Madison County where it borders Yazoo County is within 2 miles of the circle, and Humphreys County to the north comes within about 6 miles of the circle, but neither county is part of the ban.

As the famous lawyer once said, "I rest my case." ■



**Bill Garbo** is a petroleum engineer and avid whitetail hunter from Madison, Miss. He has lived and hunted out west and taken numerous big game species, but hunting big old mature southern whitetail bucks is his favorite pursuit by a country mile.



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## LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

The 'potato chip lip' on Rapala's Scatter Rap Glass Shad creates erratic movement gamefish just can't resist.

# RAPALA'S SCATTER RAP GLASS SHAD

'POTATO CHIP LIP' IS THE SECRET TO LURE'S WOBBLE

**S**ome anglers refer to the plastic lip recently added to the Rapala Glass Shad crankbait as a "potato chip lip," which is what it closely resembles.

Whatever they call the distinctively curved and angled plastic lip, it works. As the newest member of the Scatter Rap Series of artificial lures, the Glass Shad is triggering gamefish to bite from one end of the country to another. Bass, walleye, pike and other species fall for the new crankbait.

Mark Fisher of Molthen, Minn., the man behind its design, said he is proud of the unpredictable action in the Scatter Rap Glass Shad.

Rapala's chief lure designer, a 17-year veteran with the artificial lure manufacturer known worldwide for decades, talked about it a few days before the start of the 2018 Bassmaster Classic.

### PLASTIC LIP IS KEY

The Scatter Rap Glass Shad gives anglers a rattling and suspending crankbait with a durable, see-through body featuring a special plastic lip that gives it evasive, erratic action with a distinct wobble — like a spooked baitfish fleeing attack.

"It was a two-year project in all. We're very thorough, let me put it that way. We ran it through a lot of key guys (pro staffers and others) off and on through

the development. They were impressed," he said.

When designing innovative artificial lures, Fisher said, he and others continually "push the envelope."

The "potato chip lip" is all about influencing the crankbait's "tracking" path on the retrieve.

"What it does is throw the tracking off. When you actually use it, it's hard to believe how it works because it's so simple," he said, adding it dives to 10- to 14-foot deep.

"When we started working on the project, we said, 'Let's make a Glass Shad Rap that would have a built-in concept to lose tracking to attract neutral fish.'"



The Scatter Rap Glass Shad is 2 ¾ inches long, and is armed with VMC black nickel round-bend treble hooks.

That makes them effective for anglers who troll them, and also perfect for bass fishermen who cast and retrieve.

The crankbaits with the bold, new look and action have been on the market about a year and have been well-received, he said.

Back to front, they are extremely durable. A plastic lip attached to a plastic body makes the lure stronger, he said. "Here's the concept. I think it's one of the most fascinating things. The Glass Shad Rap has been around a number of years. When you talk about putting a scatter lip on a plastic lure, you gain durability with a plastic lip adhering to a plastic body. You put the two materials hand-in-hand," he said.

"We wanted to make a more durable bait for anglers who long-line troll, or for bass anglers deflecting them off of cover.

Plus, a lot of anglers still wanted a plastic bait that rattled. It was a perfect morph ... increasing durability issues and putting rattles inside the bait."

Scatter Rap Glass Shad crankbaits, which are 2 ¾ inches long, are armed with VMC black-nickel, round-bend treble hooks and are available in 14 colors.

For more information about the Scatter Rap Glass Shad crank bait and other

Rapala artificial lures, go to [www.rapala.com](http://www.rapala.com). ■



Don Shoopman fishes for freshwater and saltwater species mostly in and around the Atchafalaya Basin and Vermilion Bay. He moved to the Sportsman's Paradise in 1976, and he and his wife June live in New Iberia. They have two grown sons.

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# A LIFE WELL-LIVED: MAKING MEMORIES IN THE WOODS

HUNTING MENTOR'S LETTER REMINDS US OF WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT IN THE FIELD

**T**his month, I am stepping a bit outside of this column's normal subject matter, but I feel strongly about the message.

They say youth is wasted on the young, and also that with age often comes wisdom. So this is an opportunity to share with you the wisdom gained from a lifetime of experience in the woods, as well as life in general.

Take a moment to reflect on the true reasons why we hunt and shoot, and consider the difference you can make by mentoring someone.

I'm sharing a short reflection written last August by my mentor and friend, Gene Sutherland. He introduced me to archery, as well as deer hunting, and were it not for him taking the time to mentor me, I might not be involved in these passions today.

Archery season was fast approaching, and we were extremely busy at the shop. Gene called to tell me he was emailing me something he had just written.

He said, "I know how busy you are, and I wrote this so you could use it in your column." I didn't use it at the time, because the timing didn't seem right, but I saved it. Now it does.

Here is what Gene wrote:

## END OF THE ROAD

"My, my, how time goes by. How I cherished the opportunity to hear leaves crush under my boots. All I could think about was spending the weekend in the deer woods. All week long, I would put myself to sleep strategizing which stand would be best for me to sit, playing it out in my mind, to get a glimpse of "Big Boy." I would go over and over the many setups, trying to figure out the best one. This circular repetitive pattern was strangely exciting. It all added to the excitement of the hunt.

Then, it's go time. That first light of a cool, crisp autumn morning is something reserved for the hunters. The heart racing while walking to the stand, need-

ing you to pay attention to calm it down. Once settled in, the simple sound of a limb cracking will make the hair stand up on the back of your neck. You have plenty of time to appreciate how beautiful the woods are, studying everything the woods have to offer, searching for the slightest movement. Then, after a few hours, nature's thermostat begins to act. Suddenly the chill of the woods turns to a cozy, comfortable place to be.

The camaraderie, these are the bonds with friends and family that will never go away. Each and every person you share this bond with will be with you the rest of your life. All of the good times, laughs, sharing of viewpoints and stories and the relaxing times at the camp will be forever in your mind. I find it strange how I haven't had the urge to mention any of the bucks I have harvested over the years. As serious as I was about killing deer, I feel no urge to mention this. Strange, just so strange. All that is important to me are the memories. The rides

up to the camp, being with my buds, the beauty of the deer woods, and of course, the sight of a whitetail deer.

Due to a number of physical problems, I have been unable to hunt for about 10 years. I can no longer walk. This and the sudden death of a hunting buddy kind of took the wind out of my sails. I lost interest and the desire to hunt. I was recently talking to one of my old hunting buddies, though, and I shared with him how I have been missing the beauty of the woods. He told me to get in touch with another old deer bud who is a landowner and ask for permission to make a hunt. He said he would gladly assist me, and would sit me in a chair at the end of the road....”

## **PAY IT FORWARD**

As mentioned, Gene had been in poor health, which had prevented him from hunting in recent years. I was the landowner mentioned at the end of his email. I tried to get him to come up and hunt, but he wasn't up to it. Little did either of us know that he was coming to the end of his own road here on earth. Sadly, on Feb. 18, Gene lost his fight with heart failure.

He was larger than life, and had an impact on anyone who was lucky enough to spend time with him.

I think he would want anyone reading this to pay it forward and introduce a kid — or someone who hasn't had the opportunity — to this sport we all love so much.

Dedicated to Eugene Jefferson Sutherland Jr., July 28, 1948 - Feb. 18, 2018. ■



*Sammy Romano is a lifelong hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 24 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at samboka31@aol.com.*

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## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

# LEFTOVER TURKEY HAS LIFE

CAST-IRON TURKEY TAMALE PIE IS A GREAT WAY TO REMEMBER THAT GOBBLER

A cast-iron skillet is a must when cooking this turkey tamale pie, which uses many parts of the wild turkey that some cooks discard. **INSET:** Yellow grits are an important ingredient to fold into the pie.



Regular readers of this column know there is always one turkey recipe each spring to go with the turkey season. Only once before have I added a second turkey recipe, but I'm going to do it again. It's a turkey pie, cooked in a cast-iron pan, that can be cooked in the oven or taken outside to the grill in the warming May weather. It makes a lot, too, so there will be plenty for lunches for a few days.

This recipe should be in time to be used with one of those late-season birds while they're still fresh.

It's rare to have much for leftover turkey, but this recipe is tasty enough that you might consider being sure there is a little. It uses turkey that has been cooked, and it is a really good way to use the legs, wings, back meat and other small pieces. Several folks who used to only breast out their turkeys admit they now save the wings, legs and other carcass meat after trying this. It's a tasty, feel-good kind of meal and can be finished outside on a covered grill. The prep work can also be done on the side burners of most larger grills.

I like doing this outside but was forced inside for the accompanying pictures as my deck isn't covered and rains came.

It might require a light jacket, flannel shirt or sweatshirt to enjoy being on the deck or patio on a cool May evening, but when this pie comes off the cooker, no one will complain. Part of that is the fine taste of wild turkey, but part of it is a treatment for extended cabin fever. This recipe really is tasty enough to help cure minor cases of Seasonal Affective Disorder caused by winter being so stubborn and refusing to leave. ■

# CAST-IRON TURKEY TAMALE PIE

This recipe is about as simple as it gets, except that it requires a deep, cast-iron skillet. It uses several canned ingredients, and it just happens that certain sizes of cans hold the right amount. The prime ingredient is previously cooked turkey, and it isn't particular about how that turkey is cooked. There may be some left from preparing a whole turkey for another meal or you might simply boil some to remove it from the bones. Those odd pieces, like wings, legs and back or other carcass meat work well for this. The turkey should be skinned before chopping, especially if the turkey was fried.

The sausage patty adds a little flavor and just enough grease to wilt the onions. You can use a domestic pork patty, but if you have venison or feral pork (even bear) sausage in your freezer, it was made to your preference for spice and/or heat.

The recipe calls for beans, and I prefer black beans; however, it can be done with red, chili or white beans, depending on personal preference. Each will change the flavor just a little, but all are good.

The little bit of ground chipotle pepper is just enough to give a hint of the smoky chipotle flavor without adding any heat. Folks who like a lot of spice will add more when they fix this in the future. I suggest even those who don't like much spice, try it with the chipotle first. You can leave it out later if you don't like it, but I don't

## PREPARATION:

Chop the onion and chop/shred the turkey. Lightly brown the sausage patty in a deep, cast-iron pan, remove and crumble. Sauté the onion in the sausage drippings until opaque. Add 1 cup of chicken broth, drained tomatoes, chili powder, ground chipotle pepper, sugar, salt and pepper and cook on low for 8 to 12 minutes. Stir in the sausage, turkey, corn and beans. Once blended well and warmed, reduce the heat to warm.

Preheat the oven (or grill) to 400 degrees. Cook the grits in 3 cups of chicken broth and a pinch of salt until they have thickened and are almost finished. This is less liquid than suggested on the package and will require frequent stirring. Add the butter and cheese to the grits and mix well. Pour the grits over the top of the mixture in the

think you will. Salt helps kick the chipotle heat and I don't add much salt. If you prefer more salt, be aware it helps accentuate the spice of the ground chipotle.

As with any of my recipes, feel free to adjust it to your personal preferences. Add more cheese if you like and increase or decrease the amount of onion. I like yellow corn, but you might prefer white corn. I haven't done it yet, but I keep thinking one time I'll replace the tomatoes with Rotel.

This recipe has been southernized and works well using coarse-ground, yellow grits. An authentic Mexican tamale pie recipe would call for polenta or masa flour, but I prefer it with the yellow grits. Experiment if you'd like; and both should taste pretty good. Whatever you do, don't try this with white grits. It's not the same. Regular readers know I'm pretty flexible about substitutions and varying spices, but save yourself some time and effort by taking my word for it that you want yellow grits, polenta or masa flour for this.

This recipe offers a unique way to use turkey and even works with domestic turkey or chicken. There are a few minutes of prep, but it's really easy and allows for visiting with family and friends while it cooks and that's another reason to prepare it outside under a nice starlit spring evening. Give it a try, I believe you'll enjoy it. When you cook it again, you'll know you did. ■

large, cast-iron pan and spread evenly. Cook in the oven (or on a closed grill) for 25 to 30 minutes. Begin careful not to allow the grits' crust to scorch. Remove the pan from the oven (or grill) and allow to stand for 10 to 15 minutes before serving. Serve with salsa, sour cream and blue corn tortilla chips.

A lettuce wedge or green salad is a nice start to this meal and those wanting dessert will find that fried plantains or flan top it off well. ■

## TIP!

Many cooks believe grits need lots of salt, but I start with only a little, knowing that more can be added, but it's impossible to remove.

## INGREDIENTS:

2 cups chopped/shredded cooked turkey  
1 sausage patty, venison or feral pig  
4 cups chicken broth  
1 small to medium sweet onion  
1 large (28 ounce) can diced tomatoes  
1 small (11 ounce) can sweet yellow corn kernels  
1 regular (15.5 ounce) can beans (red, black or white)  
1 small (4 ounce) can green chilies  
1 cup coarse-ground yellow corn grits  
1 cup shredded Mexican blend cheese  
1 tsp sugar  
2 tsp chili powder  
½ tsp ground chipotle pepper  
1 tbs butter  
salt and pepper to taste  
fresh salsa  
sour cream  
blue corn tortilla chips



Blue corn tortilla chips and sour cream accent a tamale pie.

Jerry Dilsaver



Jerry Dilsaver of Oak Island, N.C., is a freelance writer, as well as a former national king mackerel champion fisherman.

# GET THE JUMP ON TOPWATER FROGS

By Patrick Bonin

## ELITE SERIES PRO SHARES HIS TOP 3 TIPS FOR FROG FISHING

**N**ot much can match the pulse-pounding thrill of a giant bass breaking the surface and engulfing a topwater frog.

Hooking up is definitely a thrill, but it takes time, patience and the right equipment to make it happen.

If you're looking to step up your frog game, try these tips from pro bass fisherman Keith Combs to

get fish to really commit to your lure:

### 1. CHOOSE THE RIGHT COLOR

This part of the equation isn't all that complicated, Combs said.

"I wouldn't get carried away with buying every color on the market, but I would look at something dark and something light. If I'm going to go out and fish a frog

continues on page 74



Bass pro Keith Combs landed this big 6-pounder with a topwater frog on a recent trip to Grosse Savanne Lodge in Cameron Parish, La., during Shimano's "Cast Smarter" Media Conference.

Patrick Bonin

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tournament — even if I've been catching them on black all week — I'm going to have a white one tied on," he said. "If I start missing fish on the black one, I'll switch to the white one and usually that will correct it.

"I don't care who tells you this: You can't go out on a cloudy day and say they're going to bite this color or that color. You can't look at the water color and say they're going to bite this or that. Just let them tell you. If they're eating your bait good, you know you've got it right. But it's a day-to-day, hour-to-hour thing, so give yourself options on color."

## 2. PROPER ACTION IS CRUCIAL

Just twitching the rod might get you some blow-ups, but really getting the frog to "walk" is a big key in connecting with more fish. Working the lure with a slack line is vital, Combs said.

"Somebody who's just learning how to frog — they know you need to twitch the rod. But what you really want to do is twitch it on a slack line to get that frog to walk back and forth," he said. "If it's just surging through the water, kind of humping through the water, then a lot of fish are going to blow up behind it.

"You want your frog to make three or four short choppy steps side-to-side, then pause ... Three or four short choppy steps, then pause. You want to have your rod tip down, and pump it on a slack line."

## 3. BEEF UP YOUR TACKLE

"I believe you need a 7-foot to a 7-5 heavy action rod with a lot of backbone and a little bit of tip," Combs said. "A fast tip is good, but you need a lot of backbone — so maybe the last foot of the rod has some action to it, but other than that, you're fishing with a pool cue."

A frog is almost like the 4-wheel drive of topwaters, and that's how Combs fishes it.

"A frog is a perfect lure to throw anywhere, where you cannot reach with any other lure — that's the perfect situation to throw a frog. It will come through the cover. If a fish eats your bait on the back side of a laydown, you can bring him over it. So use it like that — but you're going to need a stiff rod.

"And even though you're working the bait fairly slow, it is nice to have a high-gear-ratio reel because a lot of time if you're in open water and you set the hook, that fish may come right at you. You need a fast reel, like a 7.4 to pick up the slack — and I wouldn't recommend fishing less than 50- to 60-pound braided line."

## BONUS TIP:

### DON'T WAIT TO "FEEL" THE BITE

Combs said you're better off trusting your eyes and your experience when deciding on whether or not to set the hook on a blowup.

"You're walking it on a fairly slack line, so I wouldn't recommend you try to 'feel' the bite," he said. "Just pay very close attention — the more you frog, the more you'll know. When a fish blows up, 95 percent of the time you'll be able to tell if he took it or not just based on the way he hit it.

"Watch your bait. You may have one blow up behind it. Well, you don't want to swing (set the hook) because you might wait and twitch it two more times and he may eat it." ■



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# HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT REEL GEAR RATIO

Matching your reel gear ratio to the technique you're fishing will enable you to not only cover water more efficiently, but capitalize on the strikes you do get — and ultimately put more fish in the box.

Devin Denman

## IT DEPENDS ON THE TECHNIQUE YOU'RE FISHING

By Devin Denman

In this day and age, we have plenty of fishing reels from which to choose. They come in all sizes, shapes and types, with multiple gear-ratio options.

This is how I use each gear-ratio range to best suit different techniques proven to catch speckled trout and redfish.

### 8:1 GEAR RATIOS

I use a high-speed reel for any technique that involves lots of slack line. These include, but are not limited to, topwater lures, jerkbaits and jigs.

To be clear, by "jigs" I mean a jighead, usually 1/8- to 1/2-ounce, with a 3-inch soft plastic on it, typically a paddletail like a Deadly Dudley or Matrix Shad.

Having the fast gear ratio is important because it will achieve more inches-per-turn on each wind of the reel.

This will quickly take up slack between twitches, jerks and jigs of the rod tip, improving my odds of landing fish when they do strike.

### 7:1 GEAR RATIOS

This is my favorite for swimbaits, ranging from 4 to 7 inches in length. I love using this reel for sight-fishing redfish, because it strikes that perfect balance I need.

A 7:1 is not so fast that it will hamper the action of the swimbait,

maybe causing it to rise to the surface or swim at an odd angle. But it is fast enough to quickly burn in a bait and re-cast to a sighted red.

### 6:1 GEAR RATIOS

This slower gear ratio is the workhorse for my lipless crankbaits (like a Rat-L-Trap), spoons and especially spinnerbaits.

Again, it's not so fast that it interferes with a bait's action, but has the extra cranking power for slower lures like a spinnerbait with big Colorado blades.

### WHAT IF I COULD ONLY PICK ONE?

If I could only have one reel, then it would make sense to spend my hard-earned dollars on a 6:1, with the rest for gas to run the boat.

A 6:1 can do it all, including jiggging and sight-fishing redfish. And an 8:1 would be aggravating to work with when throwing slower lures. ■

*Editor's Note: Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit [lafishblog.com](http://lafishblog.com).*



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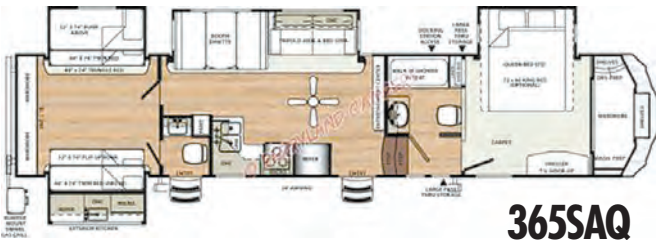
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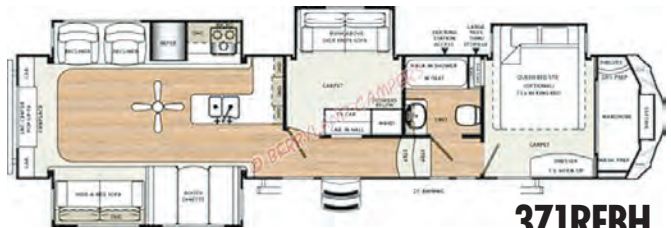


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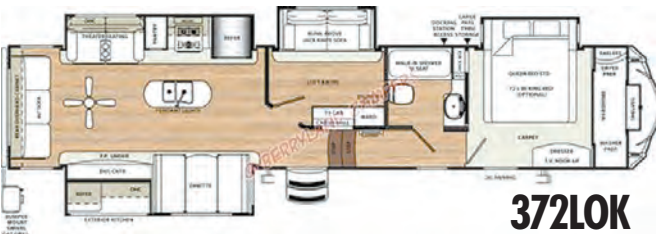
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# KNOWING WHERE WATER MOVES FIRST

SPECKS LIKE MOVING WATER — SO YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO FIND IT

Understanding flow velocity, and where water will start moving first, is a big key to locating feeding specks — especially when the tide goes slack.

By Devin Denman

It's common knowledge that specks use moving water to their advantage. They'll lay in ambush just out of the current, and wait for bait to pass before lunging out and striking.

So it makes sense that if you want to catch speckled trout, you've got to know what the tide is doing.

But what happens when the tide doesn't do what is predicted? Imagine it being slack when it's supposed to be falling hard.

After all, there are natural forces like the wind in play, and at that point in time your fishing trip is dead — at least until the water starts moving again.

But where will that be?

Here is key knowledge to keep in your back pocket for when that situation inevitably arises.

## UNDERSTANDING HOW WATER MOVES

Water is a fluid that hardly compresses and, because of this, will change how it

moves through different spaces.

When pushed through a smaller space, it will speed up, but when flowing through a larger one, it will slow down.

This concept is called “flow velocity,” and is nothing more than a fancy \$10 word used to describe how fast water moves through a space.

You can experiment with flow velocity by putting your thumb over a running garden hose.

What happens to the water? It shoots out like a firehose, right? Remove your thumb and it will slow down to a steady flow.

You can apply this same concept to discover where water will move first when the tide turns around.

## WHERE WATER MOVES FIRST

When the tide is slack, you should start looking for bottlenecks between two larger bodies of water.

This includes passes and even bayous,

though there are other spots you should try as well.

The tips of large islands, big points and the ends of rock jetties are great places to look, too.

Speckled trout have to eat and any mistake could be deadly, so they have already located these spots and know to be there if they want to be fed.

## CONCLUSION

Speckled trout utilize moving water to ambush passing baitfish.

Knowing where the water moves first — especially when the tide is slack — is key to salvaging a fishing trip.

Just be sure to be the first one there, because you likely won't be the only angler headed that way. ■

*Editor's Note: Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit [lafishblog.com](http://lafishblog.com).*

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# TOPWATER TROUBLES?

IF YOU'RE GETTING BLOWUPS BUT NO HOOKUPS, TRY THESE TIPS

By Patrick Bonin

**M**ay is a great month to throw topwater lures for speckled trout all along the coast. "It's prime time," said Nick Poe, a veteran Gulf Coast guide. "May is a great topwater month. They're typically right in the middle of the spawn and they're usually willing to eat topwaters, so you always catch a lot better fish on topwaters."

But sometimes, it seems like the trout just won't cooperate. "Especially in the first part of the month, they'll be in a finicky mood coming off spring and winter," Poe said. "So a lot of times you'll get a lot of blowups — but you won't be catching any fish." Poe can 'walk the dog' with the best of them, but he said it's hard to pinpoint why on some days trout just won't commit to a topwater lure.

"You'll see them hit 2 or 3 feet behind it and you know that fish isn't really trying to eat that bait," he said. "If he was trying to eat it, he'd eat it."

"In the bass fishing world, if you're working a topwater and they're hitting behind it, they say you're going too slow. But in the saltwater world, people say if you're working a topwater and they hit it and miss it, stop it. My deal is if I'm getting blowups, then I know they're there. So I'm going to find something else to catch them on. Whatever it takes, I'm going to figure it out."

## TRY A SUSPENDING TWITCHBAIT ...

Poe's first option is to switch to a suspending twitchbait like a MirrOdine if he's in pretty water. (His favorite color is black with an orange belly.) If the water is stained, he opts for a Corky or Soft-Dine.

"If I'm around good fish, I'm going to the suspending twitchbait," Poe said. "If I'm in 14- or 15-inch fish, I'll catch them on a jig because they're easier to unhook and get it back in the water. But you'll always catch bigger fish on a bigger bait."

## THEN DO THE JIG ...

If the twitchbait doesn't get any takers, then he opts for MirrOlure Lil Johns on an 1/8-ounce jighead.



Photo courtesy Capt. Nick Poe

Sometimes — for whatever reason — speckled trout just won't commit to your topwater presentation. When that happens, guide Nick Poe switches to a twitchbait, then opts for a soft plastic on an 1/8-ounce jighead if the fish are really finicky.

"Unless I'm fishing in the (Ship) Channel or dealing with some kind of mega-tide or something like that, an 1/8-ounce is usually what I have tied on," Poe explained. "But usually if there's a mega-tide you've got dirty water, so I probably wouldn't stop and fish it, anyway."

In pretty water, Poe opts for the Lil Johns in opening night and watermelon red. If the water is a bit more dirty, he goes with colors like molting and glow.

## THEN GO SOMEWHERE ELSE

And if he strikes out with the soft plastics?

"My next option is to pack it up and head somewhere else, because they just don't want to eat," he said with a chuckle. "They're there and they might help me the next day, but they're worthless to me then." ■

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Carolina rigs tipped with live shrimp are almost a guarantee for nice trout during the summer.

# CAROLINA RIG BASICS

## TO TARGET TROUT ON THE BOTTOM

By Andy Crawford

It's hard to beat a Carolina rig for catching big summer trout, coastal guide Jake Scardino said.

"I prefer to fish a Carolina rig, but a lot of my customers are novices, so it's easier for them to fish with corks," Scardino said.

But if he has some seasoned anglers onboard, the corks usually get exchanged for bottom-dragging rigs.

Scardino's rigs are built on a foundation of 14-pound mono, which he said is better than braid for a couple of reasons.

"If a client is fishing with braid, and they get hung up, it's much harder to break off," Scardino said. "It's also easier to tie to mono, so if they break off I can quickly tie a new leader on with mono."

A 3/8-ounce sliding weight goes on the main line first to keep the rig on the bottom as he drags it back to the boat.

Scardino then attaches a No. 10 swivel to the main line and uses 16 to 20 inches of 30-pound fluorocarbon for the leader.

A No. 1 or 2 kahle hook goes on the business end of the leader, and he finishes it off with a frisky, live shrimp.

So how does he hook the crustacean? He'll start by horn-hooking the bait, but he's not married to that approach.

"It depends on the bite," Scardino said. "If the fish are really slamming the shrimp, I'll keep hooking them

in the horn. But if it looks like they slow down, I'll turn it around and hook them through the tails.

"It allows the shrimp to do something different. And sometimes you'd be surprised: Later in the season, trout get sore mouthed, so they get shy of the horn. Hooking them in the tail allows them to bite without getting stuck." ■

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# ASTRO TABLES

**Astro Tables** is far more effective than "moon tables," because it takes into account critical solar energies as well as lunar.

The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars).

The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

**Astro Tables** is a quick-reference version of its parent publication, the **PrimeTimes Wall Calendar**, which is recommended for those wishing more complete data on the best days and times to go fishing and hunting for the entire year (see "Available Products" below).

**PrimeTimes** forecasts are based on solar/lunar research at a leading college of astrophysics and our own research pond/wildlife area. Annual data is supplied by the U.S. Naval Observatory. All times are adjusted to the center of your time zone and for Daylight Saving Time.

**AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:**

**The 2018 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar.** \$12.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2018 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks

-and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2018, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2019, and more. Comes with FREE 2018 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$7.95, plus \$3 s&h.

**Book: "How to Know When to Go" by Rick Taylor.** \$14.95 (plus \$4 s&h). 100 pages, 43 illustrations. A comprehensive look at the main factors influencing fish and game activity periods, plus how to devise an effective when-to-go game plan using any year's PrimeTimes calendars. Individual assessments of bass, panfish, deer, turkey, and more.

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2018 MAY	BEST DAYS				VALUE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Tue 1	█	█	█	█	45
Wed 2	█	█	█	█	33
Thu 3	█	█	█	█	26
Fri 4	█	█	█	█	25
Sat 5	█	█	█	█	26
Sun 6	█	█	█	█	32
Mon 7	█	█	█	█	44
Tue 8	█	█	█	█	37
Wed 9	█	█	█	█	35
Thu 10	█	█	█	█	38
Fri 11	█	█	█	█	42
Sat 12	█	█	█	█	55
Sun 13	█	█	█	█	69
Mon 14	█	█	█	█	82
Tue 15	█	█	█	█	91
Wed 16	█	█	█	█	83
Thu 17	█	█	█	█	76
Fri 18	█	█	█	█	65
Sat 19	█	█	█	█	59
Sun 20	█	█	█	█	61
Mon 21	█	█	█	█	68
Tue 22	█	█	█	█	55
Wed 23	█	█	█	█	47
Thu 24	█	█	█	█	43
Fri 25	█	█	█	█	41
Sat 26	█	█	█	█	48
Sun 27	█	█	█	█	56
Mon 28	█	█	█	█	64
Tue 29	█	█	█	█	66
Wed 30	█	█	█	█	54
Thu 31	█	█	█	█	43

25 50 75  
AVERAGE

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LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
9:41 pm	1:33 am - 2:55 am	7:40 am	1:58 pm - 3:20 pm	○	
10:37 pm	2:24 am - 3:40 am	8:19 am	2:49 pm - 4:05 pm	○	
11:30 pm	3:16 am - 4:24 am	9:02 am	3:41 pm - 4:49 pm	○	
	4:06 am - 5:12 am	9:48 am	4:31 pm - 5:37 pm	○	
12:19 am	4:55 am - 6:01 am	10:37 am	5:20 pm - 6:26 pm	○	Apogee
1:04 am	5:43 am - 6:49 am ☀	11:29 am	6:08 pm - 7:14 pm ☀	○	LOW
1:46 am	6:27 am - 7:39 am ☀	12:22 pm	6:52 pm - 8:04 pm ☀	○	HALF
2:25 am	7:08 am - 8:30 am ☀	1:17 pm	7:33 pm - 8:55 pm ☀	○	
3:00 am	7:48 am - 9:20 am	2:14 pm	8:13 pm - 9:45 pm	○	
3:34 am	8:27 am - 10:13 am	3:12 pm	8:52 pm - 10:38 pm	○	
4:07 am	9:05 am - 11:07 am	4:11 pm	9:30 pm - 11:32 pm	○	
4:40 am	9:44 am - 12:02 pm	5:13 pm	10:09 pm - 12:27 am	○	
5:15 am	10:24 am - 1:00 pm	6:16 pm	10:49 pm - 1:25 am	○	
5:52 am	11:08 am - 1:58 pm ☀	7:23 pm	11:33 pm - Midnight	○	NEW
6:33 am	11:55 am - 3:01 pm ☀	8:30 pm	Midnight - 2:23 am	○	
7:19 am	12:48 pm - 4:04 pm	9:39 pm	12:20 am - 3:26 am	○	
8:11 am	1:46 pm - 5:08 pm	10:44 pm	1:13 am - 4:29 am	○	Perigee
9:10 am	2:47 pm - 6:09 pm	11:45 pm	2:11 am - 5:33 am	○	HIGH
10:13 am	3:48 pm - 7:08 pm		3:12 am - 6:34 am	○	
11:19 am	4:51 pm - 8:01 pm	12:40 am	4:13 am - 7:33 am ☀	○	
12:25 pm	5:51 pm - 8:51 pm ☀	1:28 am	5:16 am - 8:26 am ☀	○	HALF
1:30 pm	6:50 pm - 9:36 pm ☀	2:10 am	6:16 am - 9:16 am	○	
2:33 pm	7:47 pm - 10:17 pm	2:48 am	7:15 am - 10:01 am	○	
3:35 pm	8:43 pm - 10:55 pm	3:23 am	8:12 am - 10:42 am	○	
4:36 pm	9:38 pm - 11:34 pm	3:56 pm	9:08 am - 11:20 am	○	
5:35 pm	10:31 pm - 12:13 am	4:29 am	10:03 am - 11:59 am	○	
6:34 pm	11:25 pm - Midnight	5:03 am	10:56 am - 12:38 pm	○	
7:32 pm	Midnight - 12:53 am	5:38 am	11:50 am - 1:18 pm ☀	○	
8:28 pm	12:17 am - 1:35 am	6:16 am	12:42 pm - 2:00 pm	○	FULL
9:23 pm	1:10 am - 2:18 am	6:57 am	1:35 pm - 2:43 pm ☀	○	
10:14 pm	2:00 am - 3:06 am	7:42 am	2:25 pm - 3:31 pm	○	

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS:  
☀ = DAWN ☀ = HIGH NOON ☀ = DUSK

WHILE THE LESSER MOONRISE AND -SET OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY BOLD BLACK TYPE.

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The Mark V CarbonMark, which retails for \$4,100, carries Weatherby's SUB-MOA accuracy guarantee, promising 3-shot groups less than an inch in diameter at 100 yards when used with Weatherby factory or premium ammunition.

**More Info:** [www.weatherby.com](http://www.weatherby.com)



## MERCURY'S V-6 FOURSTROKE OUTBOARDS

Mercury Marine decided that its 75- to 150-horsepower FourStroke outboards were so successful, the company has debuted a line of bigger engines with the same features.

Earlier this year, Mercury introduced V-6 FourStroke engines in 175-, 200- and 225-horsepower models, explaining the engines are lighter, more compact and fuel-efficient.

Built on the 3.4-liter V-6 platform, the new engines offer plenty of options as far as mechanical or digital controls, and hydraulic or power steering.

The 200-horsepower model weighs only 475 pounds, the lightest weight in its class by more than 10 pounds, and Mercury said it provides more torque than other outboards of similar sizes at cruising speeds, while providing up to 15 percent better fuel efficiency than its competitors.

The new engines will be offered in black, three shades of whites and four accent-color panels.

**More Info:** [www.mercurymarine.com](http://www.mercurymarine.com)

## CRANKA CRAB

Sheepshead fishing is part fun, part frustration, and one of the frustrations comes from the fish's ability to steal your bait before you know it. The main bait of choice among sheepshead anglers is a live fiddler crab. And catching the crabs, keeping them alive and constantly rebaiting with them is no fun — and it's time-consuming.

But sheepshead anglers finally have a viable artificial alternative, and it's one of the hottest artificial lures on the market today. The fine details make the Cranka Crab look as life-like as the real thing, and the unique hook placement (one treble hook on each of the floating claws) means a much higher hookup rate for anglers.

As the body of the fake fiddler either sits on the bottom, sinks or rests in the water column, the claws float upward, dancing and swaying in the current to entice sheepshead to bite. And there's no need to set the hook; just lift the rod, then reel.

The lure is available in two sizes and many different color variations.

**More Info:** [www.crankalures.com](http://www.crankalures.com)



## FLYING FISHERMAN POLARIZED EYEWEAR

By Andy Crawford

Good, quality polarized sunglasses cost an arm and a leg, right? Wrong. Flying Fisherman polarized eyewear offer quality protection at a price that won't hurt the pocketbook.

And the glasses come in more than 45 styles in three collections.

Flying Fisherman's Action Angler Series is the entry level line of glasses, featuring triacetate polarized lenses. The AcuTint Polarized Lens System offers 100 percent UV protection, and the lenses are hard-coated for scratch resistance.

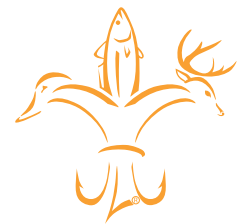
Action Angler glasses come in 25 adult models and three junior models. There also are six available clip-on models.

The next step is the Master Series Polarized Polycarbonate glasses that come in 13 models (plus three readers) and feature shatterproof RhinoLenses that are optically correct for enhanced clarity. The AcuTint Polarized Lens System are hard-coated for scratch resistance and provide 100 percent UV protection.

Move to the Master Angler Series glass line for superior ground and polished polarized glass lenses. The two options in this series employ Flying Fisherman's AcuTint polarized system, and provide high scratch resistance and the sharpest lens clarity.

Retail prices range from \$29.95 to \$89.97.

**More Info:** [www.flyingfisherman.com](http://www.flyingfisherman.com)



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## SPRO TARU SWIVELS

By Andy Crawford

One of the reasons I hate using spoons is the line twist that invariably happens, but the solution is to use swivels. And Spro's new Taru swivels offer all the lure movement necessary to catch more fish.

And these new swivels provide something other models don't: The breaking point of the swivel.

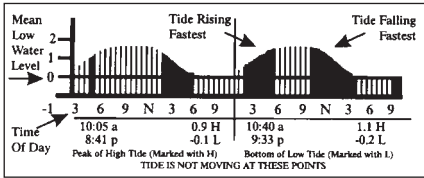
Snap and barrel swivels are available. Taru barrel swivels come in five sizes (3 through 12) with five strengths (from 28 to 100 pounds), while Taru snap swivels range from 28 to 50-pound-test over its five sizes.

Quality components deliver peak performance.

Both versions retail for \$2.13 per pack.

**More Info:** [www.spro.com](http://www.spro.com)



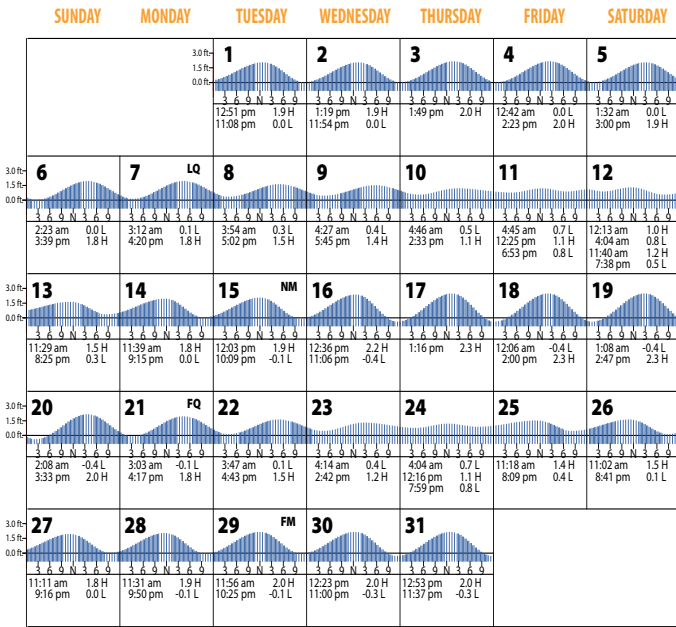


### How to use the **SPORTSMAN** Tide Guide

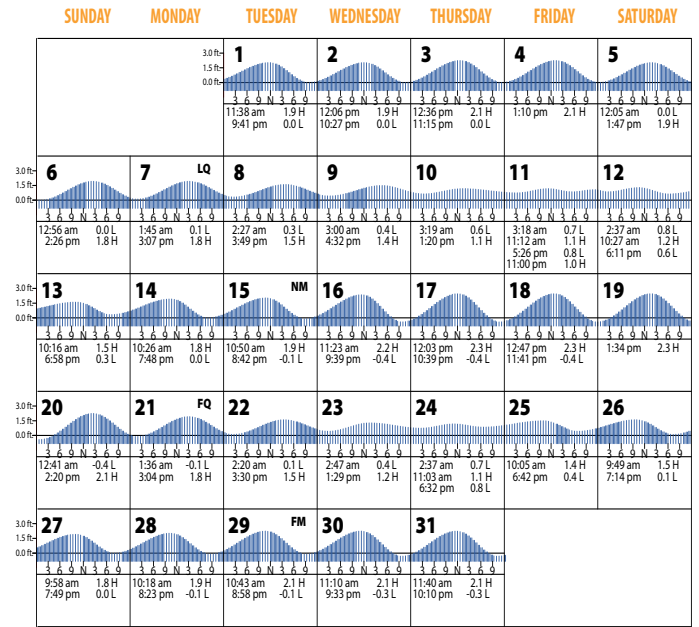
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Be sure to visit our web site for more tide locations: <http://www.ms-sportsman.com>

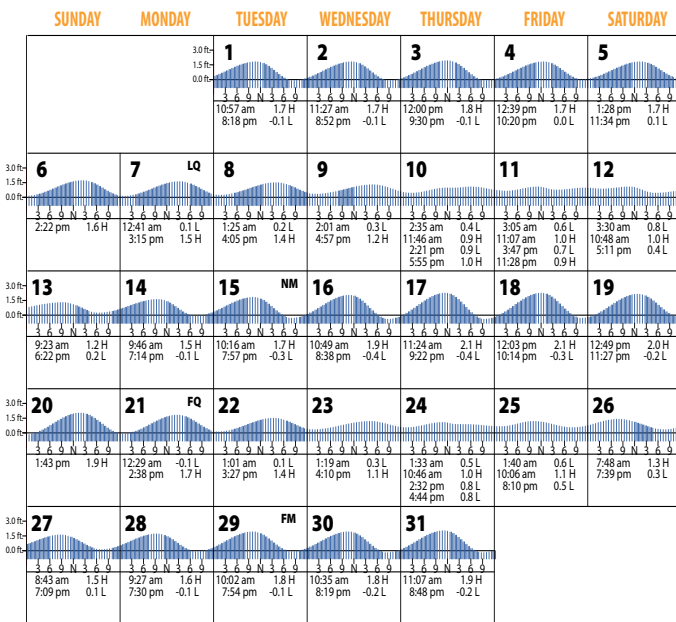
## Bay St. Louis Entrance



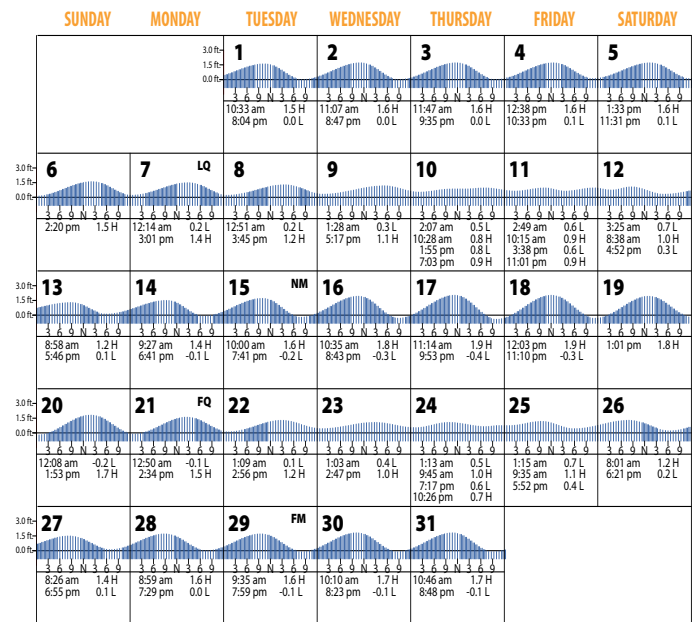
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