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AUGUST 2018

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Kenneth Lancaster
Host, "The Given Right"

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"This year was a real eye opener for me for planting food plots. I worked with Primos Hunting for 13 years, am an active member of Bone Collectors... have been planting food plots for over 30 years... back when we were just scratching the ground with a rake and throwing out ryegrass.

Over the years I have used everything you can imagine... Evolved Habitat, Whitetail Institute, Biologic, Pennington, even mixed my own. **This year we planted WAX Game Mixes... Supreme Brand, Supreme Brand Plus, 6-Way, Lundy Special... and we had the very BEST, most BEAUTIFUL food plots we have ever had...all through the year, all year long!**

Supreme Brand Plus worked for me in places where other mixes never worked, and I think it's because of Marshall ryegrass in the mix. Marshall has greater cold tolerance than any other ryegrass, is highly palatable to deer and will basically grow anywhere. Marshall ryegrass is only in WAX mixes.

Lundy Special is my favorite for good ground, the clover in this mix is phenomenal! Managed properly, you will have a multi-year stand of the best clover.

WAX Wild Game Mix has truly changed my way of planting food plots. The germination and stand was the best ever, looked like every seed came up! You will find these mixes ONLY from WAX. I am mowing clover right now in June, and still amazed at the difference in WAX compared to everything else on the market!"

Kenneth Lancaster
Host, "The Given Right"
as seen on The Discovery Channel



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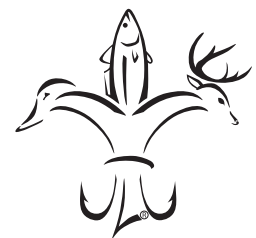


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SPORTSMAN
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SUBSCRIPTION ISSUES,
CALL 1-855-371-1546**
 Monday thru Friday, 6 am to 11 pm
 Saturday & Sunday, 8 am - 5 pm CST

MISSISSIPPI SPORTSMAN is published monthly by Louisiana Publishing, Inc., Allen J. Lottinger, President, 14236 Highway 90, P.O. Box 1199, Boutte, LA 70039. Periodicals postage pending paid at Boutte, La., and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Mississippi Sportsman, P.O. Box 433294, Palm Coast, FL 32143. All rights reserved. Reproduction of contents is strictly prohibited without permission of Mississippi Sportsman. **EDITORIAL:** Mississippi Sportsman uses free-lance writers throughout the state. Call (985) 758-7217 for information on submitting articles and photos. Mississippi Sportsman is not responsible for the loss of queries, manuscripts or other materials.

P.O. Box 1199, Boutte, LA 70039-1199
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It's hard to think of a more-exciting way to spend a summer day on the water than sight-fishing for big reds in the Biloxi Marsh. Photo by Brian Carroll.

“WAX Game Mix is Still the Best!

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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.

AUGUST MEANS SEASONS ARE JUST AROUND CORNER TIME TO START GETTING IN THE HUNTING MOOD AGAIN

August's arrival means we're halfway through summer in Mississippi, and although the oven is still set on high, we can at least imagine that the end to the torrid temperatures is approaching. Please, can't we?

Ugh, realistically, perhaps not.

But it does mean for sure that hunting season is getting closer. As August begins, just know it's only:

- 30 days until alligator season (Aug. 31).
- 31 days until the first of the early migratory bird seasons — dove, Canada geese, gallinules, rails and moorhens (Sept. 1).
- 46 days until the teal season (Sept. 15).
- 55 days until the youth squirrel season (Sept. 24).
- 61 days until the first archery season on deer in most zones (Oct. 1), and the same for the regular squirrel season.
- 109 days until the regular gun season on deer (Nov. 17), so close I can smell the venison loin searing on the grill. Until then, Mississippi sportsmen can

relish some time on the water with hook-and-line or a little peaceful time in the air-conditioned comfort of their dens reading the magazine. In this edition, our writers will take you sight-fishing for redfish in the Gulf of Mexico, night-fishing for giant largemouth bass, troll fishing for crappie in the heat, and updating you on what's behind a surprisingly good summer on Barnett Reservoir.

To help set the tone for hunting season, there's also a guide to picking the best public lands for archery season.

We've got plenty more, too, so sit back, turn the thermostat down another degree, and enjoy another month of *Mississippi Sportsman*. ■

ABOVE: August is a time to relax, tolerate the heat and dream of the big deer to come as hunting season nears. **RIGHT:** Hunters like Chris and Lanie Ewing are ready for the upcoming hunting seasons in the Mississippi Delta.

Rick Small





WILDLIFE EXTRAVAGANZA SETS THE MOOD

Thousands attend the Mississippi Wildlife Extravaganza each year and walk away with increased anticipation for hunting season.

Courtesy WWF

The symbolic start to the Mississippi hunting season remains the Mississippi Wildlife Federation's annual Wildlife Extravaganza, which will have its 32nd run Aug. 3-5 at the Trade Mart in Jackson.

A consumer show that features more than 200 vendors/exhibitors offering the latest in outdoor equipment, the Extravaganza's many aisles exude an atmosphere, unmistakable in its message: Hunting season is just around the corner.

A yearly average of 30,000 people go and enjoy the feel — using all five senses in fact — to get their minds ready for the coming seasons. They will hear calls, smell scents, see big deer heads, handle equipment, and taste samples of deer processing and other treats. It is an event that has become a tradition for many a Mississippi sportsman.

"We make a day of it, my sons and I," said Will Burgess of Brandon. "We have since they were knee-high, and now that they are fully grown and pretty much out on their own, we still make it a point to try and go to the Extravaganza as a group. This year, it times out perfectly with my son in the military. He has leave that week, so this one will be pretty special."

The 2018 Extravaganza is loaded with attractions, including its Mississippi Big Buck Contest, which annually draws the biggest heads taken during the previous season. Then there's:

- A meet and greet with Will Primos from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at the Primos Hunting booth.
- Jason Reynolds and his pack of retrievers putting on exhibitions throughout the weekend at the Fetch n' Fish tank.
- A world championship-sanctioned Duck Calling Competition Saturday at the neighboring Fordice Equine Center, with a berth at the world event in Stuttgart, Ark., on the line.
- A weekend-long 3D Archery Shoot sponsored by the Mississippi Bowhunters Association at the Fordice Equine Center, with divisions for men, women, traditional, youth and cubs.
- Boots & Bling, a "hoedown" fundraiser for Mississippi's Toughest Kids, Saturday from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. featuring live music, BBQ, beer and dancing at the Fordice Equine Center.
- The cast of Real South Hunting.
- Demonstrations including hands-on for children by expert

game caller and call maker Paul Meek of Paul Meek Outdoors. • "Turkey Talk" exhibitions by Preston Pittman.

Show hours are 2-8 p.m. on Friday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Daily admission is \$10 for adults, \$5 for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children aged 5 and under. A weekend pass is available for \$20.

Friday is kids day, when children 12 and under get free admission and access to many special events. Many will get free gifts (as supplies last).

For more information, visit mswildlife.org.

[more updates...](#) ➤

YOUTH HARDHEAD RECORD SET

Every saltwater angler who has logged hours in the shallows of the Gulf of Mexico has caught a hardhead catfish, a bait-stealing scourge with sharp fins that can inflict infectious wounds.

So hated is the hardhead that the mere sight of one on a hook reeled to the boat causes frowns, if not angry scowls and unpleasant language.

But here's one that is sure to make fishermen of all types and ages smile. Greyson Borries, 3, of Vancleave, turned a hardhead catch into a record, if not a trophy.

The Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources certified Borries' 1-pound, 12.97-ounce hardhead catfish (*Ariopsis felis*) as a new youth division state record for the species on conventional tackle.

It is proof that the bane of thousands is the treasure of another. ■



Courtesy MDMR

3 MISSISSIPPI LAKES MAKE BASSMASTER LIST

The Magnolia State earned three listings from *Bassmaster* magazine in its annual rankings of best bass lakes around the country. Unfortunately, it did not have one in the national Top 10.

Instead, Mississippi settled for having three lakes ranked among the Top 20 in the Southeast Region, led by Pickwick Lake at No. 6.

Lake Ferguson, the oxbow lake off the Mississippi River at Greenville, was a surprise at No. 14, meaning news of the fantastic spring and early summer action has spread quickly throughout the fishing community.

Bay Springs Lake, the uppermost pool

on the Tenn-Tom Waterway in Northeast Mississippi, drew a No. 20 ranking. Just 20 years ago, this lake had a bad reputation for bass fishing, but it has undergone a change in identity thanks to its growing spotted bass population.

It was disappointing to see Barnett Reservoir fall out of the top 25 in the Southeast, in light of the fantastic fishing it has produced the past few months. Erratic spring weather made for tougher than normal prespawn action that could have hurt its ranking. ■



Bobby Cleveland

Producing big spotted bass, like this one for Brandon angler Robbie Bridges, is one reason Bay Springs Lake is growing in popularity and has it ranked among the best in the southeast.

NO NEW CASES OF CWD, BUT REGULATIONS COMING

In his latest chronic wasting disease (CWD) update on June 27, Russ Walsh said the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks has continued sampling deer throughout Mississippi, including 855 from the CWD Management Zone, without finding another infected animal.

That is the same song sung by Walsh, the MWDFP's executive director, since the confirmation of Mississippi's first CWD case in February from a buck found dead in Issaquena County on Jan. 25. CWD is a fatal disease that affects four species of cervids including elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer and moose.

Walsh announced July 3 that the agency has ceased killing deer in the 25-mile management area for its sampling program and will rely on animals killed by vehicles or submitted by individuals for testing.

Despite the continued negative tests, hunters can expect some new regulations/restrictions related to deer hunting in the CWD management area.

"Right now, we are currently drafting

hunting-season recommendations relative to CWD management and mitigation, so please look for those to be coming out in the next month or so," said Walsh, who expects the final decision to come at either the July or August meeting of the Mississippi Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

Since February, 1,853 deer have been sampled statewide, including animals collected by the agency and others found dead or brought by the public. That includes 245 deer from Issaquena County, 50 from Claiborne County, 64 from Hinds County (seven pending), 19 from Sharkey County, 338 from Warren County (36 pending), and 139 from Yazoo County.

Walsh also said that Louisiana continues testing in areas that would be included within the 25-mile zone if extended across the river, and thus far it results no positive



Courtesy Wisconsin DNR

The public is urged to stay vigilant and report sightings of sick deer, like this CWD-infected doe with obvious symptoms of weight loss and poor conditioning.

CWD results.

He asked that the public remain vigilant and report any suspicious-acting deer showing any signs of disease, and especially the CWD symptoms: excessive weight loss, increased salivation and thirst, listlessness, low-hung head and walking in patterns. ■

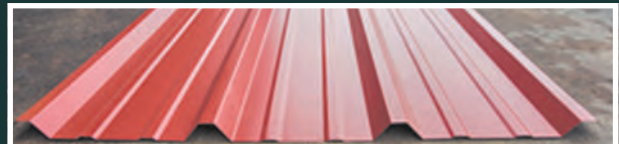
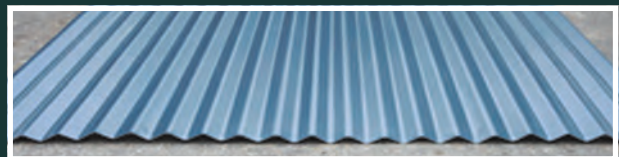
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Federal certification of Mississippi's red snapper management program, Tails n' Scales, means the state can receive federal funding to help manage snapper.



Ann Taylor

STATE SNAPPER PROGRAM CERTIFIED

Federal fisheries officials in June certified the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources' red snapper reporting program, which is a big step for state management of the resource.

NOAA's certification of the survey design for Tales n' Scales qualifies the agency to receive federal funding to help the program.

Endorsement of the program didn't end there, with local fishermen and fishing groups giving positive reviews. The Coastal Conservation Association of Mississippi announced that the "Tails n' Scales Program is truly an accomplishment we can all be proud of," according to a widely circulated letter written by F.J. Eicke, chairman of CCA-MS.

"CCA, both national and state, has supported state management of the red snapper fishery and Tails n' Scales is the data collecting system that is at the core of state management. We expect a mid-season accounting from MDMR that will determine the length of the state season based on data from Tails n' Scales."

Tails n' Scales compiles data through surveys of private recreational and charter-for-hire boats fishing for red snapper. By certifying the designs of the agency's Tails n' Scales survey, data collected will now be

accepted by NOAA Fisheries for use with federal Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) monitoring of red snapper and help contribute data associated with annual catch limits. Tails n' Scales will be included in the suite of implemented MRIP surveys for the Gulf of Mexico.

"The state of Mississippi has the most-accurate state monitoring program for red snapper," said Joe Jewell, director of the MDMR Marine Fisheries Office. "We are the only state that can currently provide real-time harvest and fishery data.

"The unique feature of our program, which sets Mississippi apart from other red snapper monitoring programs, is that recreational fishermen are required to participate in this program and acquire an authorization code prior to starting a fishing trip."

MDMR, along with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, NOAA Fisheries and outside expert consultants, have been working together to develop, test, review and refine the Tails n' Scales survey designs since 2015. These survey designs, used with both recreational and charter fishermen, include an electronic reporting system and a dockside access point intercept survey.

"Dockside Tails n' Scales surveys are

used to validate the trip information that anglers are reporting," said Carly Somerset, program coordinator at MDMR. "Besides collecting trip information, such as number of fish and the authorization code, biologists also collect biological data, such as weight, length and sex of the fish. This information is vital to the success of the program and we appreciate the willingness of red snapper anglers who cooperate with our surveys."

Access to federal funding will support ongoing improvements and implementation of Tails n' Scales.

"Tails n' Scales is a great example of collaboration that will advance the collection of high-quality recreational fishing data, which is a top priority for our agency," said Dave Van Voorhees, fisheries statistics division chief with NOAA Fisheries' Office of Science and Technology. "Working with our partners to develop and certify new survey methods demonstrates NOAA's commitment to meeting the unique data needs of the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery."

Mississippi's snapper season opened in May and will continue through Labor Day or until the MDMR, through Tails n' Scales, determines that the state's quota of recreational snapper has been caught. ■

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Bobby Cleveland

SECOND AMENDMENT TAX-FREE WEEKEND

Guns and ammunition are among the items that will be tax-exempt during Mississippi's 2nd Amendment tax-free weekend Aug. 31-Sept. 2, just in time for the start of dove season.

Mississippians can enjoy three days of tax-free shopping for firearms and some hunting accessories Aug. 31-Sept. 2 in what is called the Second Amendment Tax-Free Weekend.

All firearms and ammunition, hunting-related or not, and some hunting supplies are exempt from state sales tax. Created by the state legislature in 2014, the language

includes "hunting supplies are the following items when used for hunting: archery equipment, firearm and archery cases, firearm and archery accessories, hearing protection, holsters, belts and slings. The sale of general hunting supplies are not exempt. Hunting supplies does not include animals used for hunting."

Only items paid for during the weekend are included — no layaway-type

purchases included. Items that are ordered and paid for during the weekend and delivered after the weekend are tax-exempt.

For a list of tax-exempt and non-exempt equipment, visit: <http://www.dor.ms.gov/Pages/Second-Amendment-Sales-Tax-Holiday.aspx>. ■

Hunting/Fishing **SCRAPBOOK**



Tim Whitten with a turkey he killed on March 25, 2018, in Oxford.



Desmond Oatis caught this 9-pounder out of Jefferson Davis Lake in Prentiss.



Madelyn Kavanaugh killed her first turkey on April 15, 2018, in Warren County.



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CONSERVATION OFFICERS IN SHAPE



Courtesy MDWFP

It's always a good idea to be friendly to an officer of the law, and to never challenge his or her authority, or at least their ability to carry out their authorized duties. That goes double for the conservation officers from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

The enforcement staff of the state wildlife agency owns the title "Fittest Force in the Nation" after winning the top spot in the 17th annual National LawFit Challenge, held in Southaven in June. More than 150 officers from around the country competed in six events: bench press, 1.5-mile run, sit-ups, flexibility, pull-ups and a suspect-pursuit course.

The MDWFP team included Pvt. Derrick Scott, Corp. Justin Gates, Pvt. Cody Barber, Pvt. Cody Corso, Pvt. Tamarrius Good, Lt. Ricky Barry, Lt. Marcus Christon, Pvt. Karri Fulton. Here is their take from the event:

• First place bench press: Gates.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks won the national 2018 LawFit Challenge, a competition of fitness by law enforcement officers and agencies. The MDWFP team included: (kneeling, from left) Pvt. Derrick Scott and Pvt. Kerri Fulton and (standing, from left) Corp. Justin Gates, Pvt. Cody Barber, Pvt. Cody Corso, Major Chris Reed (team captain), Pvt. Tamarrius Good, Lt. Ricky Barry, Lt. Marcus Christon.

- First place 1.5-mile run: Scott.
- First place pull-ups: Christon.
- First place suspect pursuit course: Christon.
- First overall male: Scott.
- Second overall male: Christon.
- Third overall male: Gates 390
- First place Mixed pairs: Scott and Fulton.
- First place overall team: Scott, Christon, Justin Gates, and Barber.

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NEW BREAKWATER AT BARNETT RESERVOIR LANDING

A much-needed breakwater has been built at the popular Madison Landing on Barnett Reservoir in Ridgeland that will make launching boats easier.

The Pearl River Valley Water Supply District, the state agency that oversees and manages Barnett Reservoir just north of Jackson, used a federal Sportfish Restoration Fund grant arranged through the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks to build the two-part breakwater. It was completed June 29 and proved its value the very next day.

"We had a pop-up storm somewhere near the lake that caused some hard east winds, including gusts near 30 miles per hour at our Independence Celebration," said Craig Hunt, the parks and

recreation director for PRWSD. "The lake was white-capping with the waves coming from the direction that has always created problems at the landing.

"Outside the wall, 2- and 3-foot waves were hitting the breakwater, but inside the barrier, the surface was as slick as a mirror. The breakwater was doing its job."

The project also replaced worn concrete courtesy piers with new floating aluminum and ADA-compliant piers.

PRWSD is nearing completion in the engineering and design phase of a new landing being built on the upper end of the main lake along the south side of Mississippi Highway 43. The agency is hoping construction will begin later this year. ■

Bobby Cleveland

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MDMR:

ANGLERS CAUGHT 82,500 POUNDS OF RED SNAPPER

THAT LEAVES LESS THAN 40,000 FOR REST OF MISSISSIPPI SEASON, WHICH REOPENED JULY 23

Mississippi's recreational fishermen have been very successful at catching red snapper this summer — 82,500 pounds, state officials say — but that is proving to be both good and bad news for anglers.

It's good that the stocks appear strong, but it's bad in how it could impact the May 25-Sept. 3 season. The season had a two-week interruption July 8-22 targeted to prevent an early closure that would cost anglers the Labor Day weekend.

However, a premature closure is more than possibility; it seems likely.

According to information provided by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, the season will close when the state's recreational quota is met, or when the Gulf-wide recreational quota is met, or on Sept. 3.

Mississippi's recreational quota is 135,149 pounds, but MDMR has instituted a 10-percent buffer, reducing the target catch to 121,634 pounds, according to Finfish Bureau director Matt Hill.

"When this amount is harvested we will recommend the season closes," Hill

wrote in an email response to questions from *Mississippi Sportsman*. "The target allows us to stay within the quota when additional pounds added due to non-compliance, misreporting and late reporting are calculated."

Hill indicated in the email that Mississippi fishermen had reported a total catch of 82,500 pounds between May 25, when the season opened, and the interruption on July 8. The amount is monitored closely through the agency's mandatory Tails n' Scales trip reporting system.

Using the buffered quota of 121,634 pounds, that leaves fishermen less than 40,000 pounds for the remainder of the season, July 23-Sept. 3.

Since Mississippi anglers caught twice that much in the first seven weeks, it becomes obvious the season could close well before Labor Day weekend.

This is the first year in a Gulf-wide program that transfers management and catch assessment more into the hands of state officials instead of federal fisheries management agencies. States say they can produce real catch numbers, far

more accurate than the federal estimates of the past. This has provided fishermen with more opportunity.

"Even if they do have to close the season early, we're better off with what we had this year than anything we've had in the past decade," said fisherman James Thompson of Gulfport. "I've already been on six trips with friends this year, and we have a few more planned after it opens. The six I've already made is double the amount I made in any of the last eight or nine years."

Thompson said he hopes that the new system will lead to increased opportunities, not so much in days allowed but in the daily catches.

"I think we're going to find that the red snapper are far more plentiful than federal officials have been estimating," he said. "I'd love to see them up the limit from two to either four or five per day. Even if it costs us a week or two of the season, I'd prefer the higher limit. It is so expensive to make a trip to just catch two fish. I'd much rather pay the same, catch twice as many and just cut back on my trips." ■

HUNTING RANCH ON 457 ACRES



Location: The property is located 14 miles south of Florence, MS in Simpson County.

Size: 457 Acres

Roads: Roads have been built along the high fenceline and throughout the property

Utilites: Electric and Butane, rural water supplier, working well, and treatment system on site

Lakes: 2 Fully stocked lakes and 2 smaller ponds

Homesites: Fully Furnished Lodge, 2 Private cabins, a detached bunkhouse, and a poolhouse

Other structures: Large Skinning shed

Wildlife: Approximately 100 animals on site: Red Stags, Axis, Fallow, & Blackbucks

Price: 1.9 Million



Surrounded by a high fence and beautiful accent gate, this 457 acre parcel is located just 30 minutes south of Jackson in Simpson County. The majority of the property is hardwood timber with scattered pastures, wildlife openings, 2 fully stocked lakes, and 2 smaller ponds. After a long day in the field or by the lake, sit back and unwind in the fully furnished Main Lodge or one of the two private cabins. With a total of 8 bedrooms, 5 full baths, and 2 half baths; having enough space for everyone will never be a problem. After a dip in the heated swimming pool in the poolhouse, relax around the firepit on the deck of the main lodge or catch a movie in the media room at the Lodge.



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Mark Wright stood atop his boat's tower, scanning the shallows along a shoreline in the Biloxi Marsh at the west end of the Mississippi Sound.

"Sight-fishing is the closest thing you can get to hunting without a firearm in your hands," he said.

Then, he saw the redfish.

"Straight ahead of the boat, 12 o'clock. Do you see it?" Wright asked the angler on the front deck.

"I see the body, but which way is he facing?" the angler asked, cocking his spinning rod back for a cast.

"He's facing left; put it just in front of

him," Wright said.

The angler tossed out an easy cast with his gold spoon, then watched it flutter down through the water column, saw the redfish tilt its nose down, and *BAM!*, just like that, was hooked into a big fish.

After a few drag-pulling runs, Wright dipped the net in the water and captured the 40-inch redfish. After a few photos, the fish was released, and the sight-fishing began again.

That's a typical scene in the Biloxi Marsh, which never tires Wright, who operates Legends of the Lower Marsh Fishing Charters out of Pass Christian.

"It's pretty self-explanatory what we do when sight-fishing," he said. "You want to have a good pair of polarized shades, and having clear water is always a plus. Some ripples are okay, but you don't want too many. The thing about fishing in the Biloxi Marsh is that no matter how rough the ocean is, you can find some pockets and pools of water that are surrounded by enough land that it's calm enough to still sight-fish."

VIEW FROM ABOVE

UP NEXT >

Sight-fishing for bull reds in the Biloxi Marsh gives anglers a chance to hunt and fish at the same time. Here's how....

SIGHT IN ON REDFISH

By Brian Cope





VIEW FROM ABOVE

While the Marsh is made up of countless islands separated by waterways, some fairly large, calm, pond-like pools of water are dispersed throughout. These are havens for redfish, and finding them in these pools isn't too difficult, especially with a shallow-draft boat equipped with an aft tower.

Even though spotting redfish from the bow isn't a problem, Wright's perch yields a better look at a greater distance, and he can sometimes see several groups of reds across the whole pool. The allows him to target the most-obvious group first, while also giving him an idea of which fish to target next.

And it lets him see know more about the fish, such as which way they're facing as in the above scenario.

Wright uses solid gear when catching redfish this way: a medium to medium-heavy rod, Penn 3000 series spinning reel and 30-pound Power Pro braid. For lures, he said a gold spoon is tough to beat, and he also likes a Mann's Hardnose Swimshad.

Wright ties his braid directly to the lure, because most strikes are reaction strikes, and the fish don't shy away from the braid. With one fewer knot to tie, that's one less thing to worry about.

When fishing lures, Wright said the best way to work them is to just steadily reel them is with a steady retrieve.

"There's really no need to pause or jerk these lures," he said. "Just a steady retrieve does the trick. You might want to speed it up or slow it down just slightly if you're not getting any bites, but you don't want to get too crazy. Just a nice, steady retrieve is good."

And when you do hook up, be prepared for a battle.

IT'S A BATTLE UP NEXT ➤



Brian Cope



While many fishermen sight fish from the front deck, Capt. Mark Wright enjoys the advantage of the view provided by his rear tower. Remote control allows him to pilot the trolling motor from his perch.



Reds don't have to be in a protected marsh pond to set up shop on a creek mouth or similar cut. Don't pass up a spot like this along a main channel.

Brian Cope

BILOXI MARSH: BEING THERE IS WORTH GETTING THERE

The weather plays a crucial role in any type of fishing, but when fishing the Biloxi Marsh, getting there can be more of an inconvenience than actually fishing.

That's because the Marsh is a minimum 15-mile ride through the open Gulf from Mississippi ports; it is actually across the state line in Louisiana.

Once there, you can find some shelter from the wind and waves.

It's never a good idea to take to open water in dangerous weather, but if the weather just looks a little too rough for your fishing enjoyment,

Mark Wright of Pass Christian's Legends of the Lower Marsh Guide Service said, "Remember that the worst part will be the ride to and from the Marsh."

On more than one occasion, Wright has been either the only boat, or one of only a handful of boats, to leave the dock due to conditions many anglers consider not unsafe, but simply too rough to comfortably fish. And he's never been disappointed with the fishing.

"It's very rare to not be able to find a break from the wind and waves once you're in the Marsh," he said. "On most days this time of year, especially in the mornings, the weather is very good, and it's not a problem. But sometimes, the weather can be an inconvenience, and you have to take it a little slower than you'd like to get there and get back — but while in the Marsh, you'll be fine.

"And on those days that the (Gulf) is a little rough, there's a good chance you won't even see another boat."

Because the Biloxi Marsh is across the state line, Mississippians are required to possess a Louisiana permit before fishing. Not to worry, licenses are available 24 hours a day with credit card by calling 888-765-2602 or online at www.la.wildlifelicenses.com. ■




Biloxi Marsh

Under foreboding skies and with rolling seas, fishermen can still enjoy fishing the Biloxi Marsh, which offers many protected areas where they can find redfish.



Brian Cope







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IT'S A BATTLE

Most of these redfish range from 32 to 45 inches long. Once they know they're hooked — and they'll know it right quick — they will run, and they will make your drag sing. While they're running, just keep your rod bent and let the fish have its way. When the fish takes a break, recover as much line as you can, keeping the rod bent the whole time.

If the fish decides to make another run, let it run. Don't ever allow any slack in the line. Don't ever point your rod directly at the fish; always hold it high, and let it bend toward the fish.

One of Wright's most-essential tools is his bow-mounted Minn Kota electric motor, which he can control wirelessly from anywhere in the boat, including his tower. This frees him up to scan for redfish.

And while they will hang out all along the banks of these pools, any type of indentation or cut in the bank deserves a closer look. When the bank runs a straight line, then all of a sudden juts inward or has a smaller creek emptying into it, redfish will gather. Subtle depth changes or bottom areas that transition — from mud to shell, from shell to weeds, or from weeds to mud — are also spots to which anglers should pay special attention. Wright can't stress strongly enough how often he finds fish in such areas, even when finding fish elsewhere is tough.

This also holds true for the bigger, main channels that run between islands, so just because you're not in a pool, don't overlook these bank cuts, depth changes or structure differences. Many anglers bypass good spots by thinking they need to get in these ponds before making a cast. On some days, Wright finds enough fish without even entering a pool.

PATIENCE PAYS OFF, TO A POINT

Wright believes patience has its place in fishing this way, but he said anglers shouldn't waste much time fishing areas where they aren't seeing fish, especially if the water is clear enough to spot them.

"You can certainly pick up some fish when casting to areas where you simply can't see into the water because it's too deep or muddy, but if you're finding clear water and are not spotting fish, you should move to another area," he said. "If the wind or weather is making the water choppy or murky, you need to move on."

Which brings up another point. What does Wright suggest for anglers who are finding the water too choppy or murky to see through?

"You can always find banks that are protected from the wind and chop in this marsh, and you almost never have to move very far to do it," he said. "When you do find muddy or choppy water in a creek or a pond, look to the opposite bank. More often than not, that one will be clear enough to see into. If it's not clear, or if it is and you don't see any fish, then make a move. These islands are plentiful here, they hold plenty of fish, and plenty of areas are easy to see into on any given day." ■

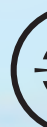
For on information on Legends of the Lower Marsh Fishing Charter and Guide Service, or to book Capt. Mark Wright, call (228) 324-7612 or visit online at legendsofthelowermarsh.com.



Brian Cope is a retired Air Force combat communications technician. He has been writing about the outdoors since 2006. He's spent half his life hunting and fishing. The rest, he said, has been wasted.

TIPS FOR LANDING A BULL REDFISH

UP NEXT ➤



Any small creek or ditch draining a section of the Biloxi Marsh can be a gathering place for redfish — and savvy fishermen.



Brian Cope



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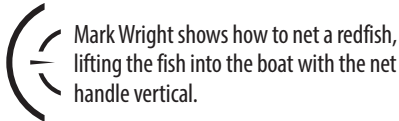


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TIPS FOR LANDING A BULL REDFISH



The Biloxi Marsh is full of bull redfish, and when fishing there, you're going to catch your share. The last thing you want to do is lose a big fish at the boat, but many anglers do.

So how do you avoid this problem? These tips from Capt. Mark Wright of Pass Christian's Legends of the Lower Marsh Guide Service, will help.

- Have the drag on your reel set properly, which means not too loose and not too tight. Too tight, and the line will snap. Too loose, and the fish has a chance to find something to wrap around or rub against and break off. Check before your first cast.
- When netting a big red, the most-important rule for the angler holding the net is that the fish's head goes into the net first. Trying to swoop the fish into

the net from the tail end is a big mistake. Anything that touches the fish will result in a reaction to get away, so touching it in the hind end is going to give it an extra incentive to flee even harder. Unless you get extremely lucky, you're going to push it away from behind with the net.

Netting the fish headfirst gives it little room to maneuver away. It's not going to like the sight of it, but its only option is to swim straight into it, dive up or down or turn to the left or right, which is far less troubling for the net man than swimming directly away.

- Don't swing the net. The best net men realize their role is much less than that of the angler. Ideally, the net man will dip the net into the water, hold it steady, and wait for the angler to guide the fish into it,

head first. Sweeping the net at the fish is a bad move that can push the fish away, often resulting in knocking the hook free.

- Don't bring the fish in green. Most big fish still have plenty of fight in them the first time they are close enough to net. Trying to net a fish that isn't ready to give up almost never works out. Dip the net when the fish is in range, but don't force the issue if the fish makes a run. Let the rod and the reel's drag do their work and wear it down. It may take a few runs, but the fish will tire eventually. Just be patient and ready.
- Once the fish is netted, lift it straight up, not out. When you've finally got your trophy in the net, all that's left is getting it in the boat. Failing here is like getting tagged out at home on an in-the-park

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Brian Cope

home run. Many anglers try to lift the net with the handle parallel to the ground and swing the fish into the boat. That's a bad move. You want to lift straight up, with the handle pointing to the sky. The fish goes deep into the net, which extends below the opening when you lift straight up. To escape now, the fish would have to jump up and to the side, a difficult task especially once it's out of the water.

Then, you keep lifting with the handle pointing straight up, grab the hoop of the net, and once it is above the side of the boat, bring the net and fish aboard, then help celebrate the catch. ■





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Mississippi public-land deer are there for the taking, especially when archery season rolls around. Take a look at this profile of some of the state's best WMA opportunities.

By David Hawkins

Stick a WMA whitetail

Choosing a Wildlife Management Area to hunt during Mississippi's archery season can be as simple or as complex as your desired result, from chasing a trophy, putting meat on the table or just enjoying deer encounters.

Naturally, every hunter enters the woods dreaming of a new Pope & Young record buck, but the odds are not in his or her favor. But remember: "Never say never." It could happen.

By dialing back your goals, your chances improve dramatically on public lands. If securing some meat for the freezer is your goal — and that is a laudable endeavor — you stand a good chance of succeeding.

If seeing some deer while enjoying time in the woods is the pinnacle of your early season outing, you will not be disappointed. Our WMAs certainly can meet that demand. Deer are plentiful.

Taking a deer is the primary goal of most hunters, and to be successful during archery season — Oct.

1-Nov. 16 in most zones and Oct. 15-Nov. 16 in the southeast — biologist William McKinley, the deer program leader for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, offers sage advice.

"If it's dry, hunt water (sources); if it's normal, hunt food sources," he said. "Every WMA has both, to some extent.

"Being a deer biologist as well as a deer hunter, I can say the single, most-important aspect of early season deer hunting anywhere is knowing where the deer are and what they're eating. The only way to know this with any modicum of certainty is to scout likely areas, find deer sign and find a location for a stand or blind. Then, hunt at every opportunity. The investment in time will pay off in venison."





Public hunting land abounds in Mississippi. Aside from parts of the west, few states have the abundance of public land per capita as does Mississippi. Admittedly, some areas are better than others, but all things considered, state residents have a treasure trove of deer hunting that is vastly underutilized.

It is impossible to give the reader the specific GPS location of the best tree on the hottest trail in each WMA, but we can help the novice archery hunter and even the veteran locate an area where the chances of success are good by providing the following list of our Top 10 Archery WMAs. They are not listed in any specific order, and remember that the hunting processes for these apply to all public lands.

SHIPLAND WMA

Located in Issaquena County near Mayersville, Shipland is one of two WMAs in the Mississippi batture lands — the land between the Mississippi River and the main-river levee. Batture lands are highly prized by deer hunters.

The area is classified as bottomland hardwood, but the habitat varies across Shipland, ranging from a small sand fields comprised of grassland and stunted trees, to a forest of oaks, pecan, and sugarberry trees, to low, wet areas of willow trees and buttonbush.

Hanging a stand in the hardwoods where the field edge can be seen is a good idea, as deer like to travel the borders.

In the past 10 years, several types of logging operations have been conducted to improve the habitat for wildlife. WMA personnel also plant winter and summer food plots and maintain permanent openings to provide additional food for wildlife.

Deer hunting is the most-popular form of hunting at Shipland, followed closely by squirrel and waterfowl. Deer seasons are restricted to archery and primitive weapon, with harvest limited to antlerless deer and bucks that meet the antler criteria for the area.

NANIH WAIYA WMA

A wide-open area close to the headwaters of the Pearl River near Philadelphia, Nanih Waiya necessitates preseason scouting. Wind storms over the years have dropped some huge hickory and oak trees, resulting in the emergence of briar,



Apply in August to hunt in October

Applications for some WMA archery hunts must be submitted between Aug. 1 and Aug. 31.

Mississippi's archery season for deer may not start until October, but if you plan to hunt on certain WMAs, the process begins this month. Applications must be submitted between Aug. 1 and Aug. 31.

Information on applying for permits and hunting opportunities across the state are found at www.mdwfp.com.

Successful applicants will be notified by email, so each application requires an email address. Those who become permitted must have a copy of their permit in possession, in addition to a valid hunting license, and a WMA user permit card. A photo ID such as a valid driver's license is also required. ■



David Hawkins

OPPOSITE PAGE: While WMAs offer Mississippi hunters primarily a chance for venison, the opportunity for a trophy buck is always there.

cane and brush: perfect deer habitat. Numerous trails dissect the WMA, so finding an active one is not a problem. Hang a stand close enough to the trail for an accurate shot and make yourself comfortable.

Hogs are present at Nanih Waiya, but as with every sounder across the state, they may or may not be seen on the day you are hunting. For the time invested, this is a top-notch area for bowhunters.

CANEMOUNT WMA

Mississippi's premier draw WMA for deer, only two hunters will share an area the size of most deer camps if they are fortunate enough to be selected for hunts at this Claiborne County site south between Port Gibson and Alcorn State University.

This is a WMA where hunters could encounter a buck that could rival anything from the best private camps in Mississippi. The three-day experience is worth every penny of the fee required to apply for the draw. Having hunted Area 3 at Canemount, I can attest that there are so many beautiful locations, deciding on

one place to hang a stand is difficult.

Hogs and black bear have been seen on the area, so caution should be used in target identification. Rental cabins are near the area headquarters, or hunters can commute from Port Gibson.

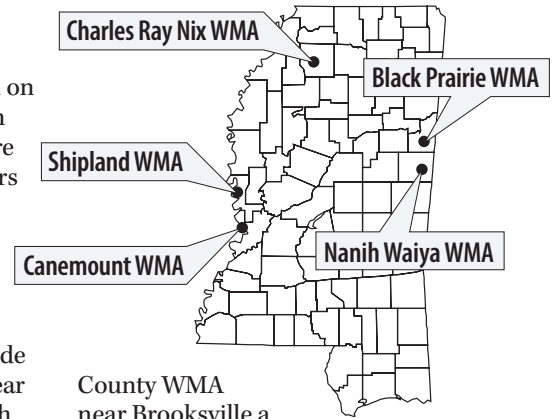
CHARLES RAY NIX WMA

McIvor Creek and its tributaries divide this 4,088-acre Panola County tract near Sardis. It's an easy-to-scout WMA, with an ATV trail around much of the property. There are no permit restrictions for archery, but there are for later primitive weapons seasons. This WMA boasts a dove field, so there is an added incentive to dove hunt in September, then scout for archery hunting spots on the same visit.

There is some soft mast such as persimmons and dogwoods in the fringes, and a wide variety of acorn producing oaks as well.

BLACK PRAIRIE WMA

Many people would call this Lowndes



County WMA near Brooksville a sleeper, but they shouldn't, since it sits in the middle of the black prairie belt that has produced many trophy bucks, including record-book deer.

Much of Black Prairie is open and does not lend itself to tree stands. For the bowhunter comfortable in a pop-up blind, it offers hundreds of acres of great set-up locations. This is not to say a few good trees for hanging a stand don't exist, but why limit yourself.



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Barret Van Cleave poses with a buck he killed in southwest Mississippi. Barret hunts exclusively with a bow.

Hunting here is by permit only for all seasons aside from special youth hunts.

COSSAR STATE PARK

Located adjacent to Enid Lake, this 600-acre park is a golden opportunity for a new archer. This is the second season the park has been opened to hunting on a draw-permit basis. The success rate promises to be very high, with each hunter drawn having a dedicated portion of the park.

Overpopulation has resulted in the deer herd being smaller than the state average with regard to body weight, but the high number of deer means increased chances for harvest.

Draw opportunities are available from archery season opening through the Dec. 2 opening of the primitive weapon season. Antler restrictions on bucks have been waived, making it easier for youth or new hunters to concentrate on making a clean kill.

Being at Enid, home of the world-record white crappie, the park offers the opportunity to combine world-class perch jerking with hunting. Cabins are available at the park, as are primitive and developed campgrounds.

MAHANNAH WMA

Its location in Issaquena County near the epicenter of Mississippi's first chronic wasting disease discovery in January does not lessen the fantastic opportunity

the Mahannah provides. Nearly 250 animals have been harvested in Issaquena County since the discovery of the fatal cervid disease, many from the WMA, with no additional positive results being found.

CWD-related regulations have not been announced for the 2018-19 season, but don't be surprised to find a representative of the MDWFP at the checkout, taking brain-stem samples for random testing.

As far as choosing the best stand location, hunters will be wise to study topo and aerial maps to locate natural funnels created by water and dense undergrowth. Deer will bed dense thickets that offer multiple escape routes.

Mahannah offers hunters an excellent opportunity to take a wild hog, and sign is evident all across the WMA. Bear are also common on the WMA and are definitely off limits, and hunters are urged to be sure of their targets, especially when drawing on a hog, before hitting the release.



Photo courtesy Barret Van Cleave

"There are places where acorns can be heavy, and honey locust are dropping all along dense undergrowth," said hunter Steve McFarland of Brandon. "You may hear hogs but never see them, but other days they will parade by in droves. Deer are the same way; you may see 20 doe and yearlings before you see a shooter buck."

Earlier this year, the MDWFP announced plans to purchase some of the surrounding property, which will allow it to expand future hunting opportunities at what is one of the state's premier WMAs.

LAKE GEORGE WMA

In Yazoo County between Holly Bluff and Satartia, this WMA is 8,383 acres dominated by regenerated bottomland hardwood forest with less than 40 acres of mature timber. Extensive flooding is not a major problem.

"Deer habitat on the area is exceptional, since most of the area has been replanted in trees," McKinley said. "This hardwood regeneration has created an early successional habitat that has allowed the growth of massive amounts of browse."

Due to high-quality habitat, the deer

As archery season advances, acorns become the top draw for deer. Find acorns, and the deer should be close behind.



Deer Hawkins

herd on Lake George is in very good condition. Buck quality is above average for WMAs, although the antlerless harvest could be more intense and is encouraged. Bucks are not eligible for harvest unless they meet the antler criteria specific to Lake George: an inside spread of at least 15 inches or one main beam at least 18 inches long — youth can take any antlered buck. This rule has been in place for several years, so some higher-quality deer should be available for harvest.

Hunter success is generally high, and hunting opportunities are practically unrestricted. Deer hunting tends to be difficult because of low visibility. Hunting pressure, in general, is relatively low, which tends to slightly increase the quality of the experience.

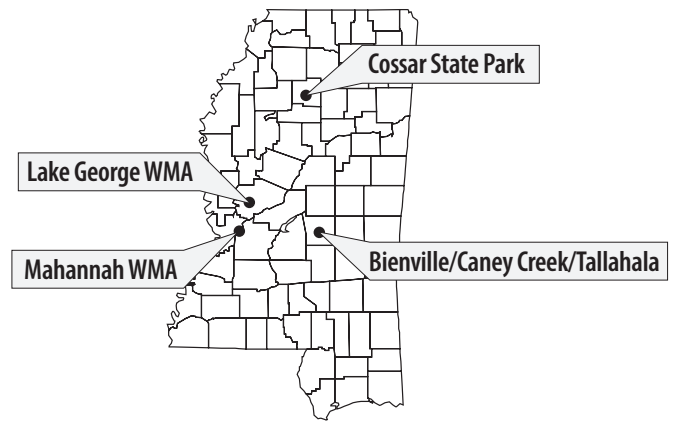
SCOTT COUNTY'S BIG 3

Bienville, Caney Creek and Tallahala WMAs all have a part in Scott County, but Smith County and Jasper also gets in on the resource. The still-hunting area

of Smith County, part of the Caney Creek WMA, is comprised of beautiful bottomland along the Strong River drainage. There is a lot of land and deer.

“There are very few times I hunt the area that I don’t see deer,” said avid bowhunter Brad Earls of Morton. “The area is close to home for me, and that has allowed me to scout and learn the area. I primarily hunt the open woods once the acorns start to fall. Look for fresh deer sign; deer are creatures of habit in early season, so where you see them today, you will likely see them tomorrow.”

Earls walks the creeks and riverbanks and looks for heavy use crossings, then places a climbing stand nearby where he can see the approach to the crossing. Deer like acorns with low tannin content.



Sawtooths and white oaks are the favored picks over red oaks or pin oaks.

“I’d say 90 percent of archers’ shots will be on does, but bucks will drift through as well,” Earls said. “I’ve hunted the public land since 1990, and I’ve had no complaints. Some days, I’ll hear or see other people, but a lot of the time I have my place in the woods all to myself.” ■

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Gear must include mosquito protection

When gearing up for an early season archery hunt on a WMA — or anywhere else, for that matter — make sure to include some mosquito protection.

Mosquitoes now carry several diseases including Zika and West Nile, which can ruin more than just a deer season.

If scent is a concern, try a device such as a Thera-macell.

Two other highly recommended devices: a charged cell phone and a backtracker GPS. Some WMAs have dense woods, making it easy to become lost. More than a few times, the MDWFP has been called out to find a lost hunter. ■



David Hawkins



David Hawkins is a freelance writer living in Forest, Miss. He can be reached at hawkins2209@att.net.

In addition to snake boots, early season archery hunters are wise to have an insect deterrent such as a Thera-macell. A GPS, either in a cell phone or standalone, is another important tool for the hunter remaining in the woods after dark.

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In June in a normal year, Gene Bishop of Ridgeland would be looking for a first-place check after catching a five-bass tournament limit weighing 18 pounds on Barnett Reservoir.

Not in 2018. No sir.

“We came in with a heavy bag, just over 18 pounds, thinking ‘Man, we got this thing won,’” Bishop said, referring to a team tournament he fished in early June. “Shoot, we ended up wondering if we needed to even put the fish in a bag and go to the scales.”

Turns out, he and his partner barely got a check in the event, in which five teams caught limits weighing more than 20 pounds and several others just missed that mark.

That’s five fish, post-spawn, averaging four pounds each.

“That many big bags is something you might see once or twice early in the year, during the prespawn, but in June, wow,” said Bishop, three years removed from a Bassmaster Open victory on The Rez that won him a trip to the Bassmaster Classic. In that win, Bishop showed out with 25- and 21-pound catches the final two days.

“That was in March, when the conditions got just right for the big females to start moving in during the tournament,” Bishop said. “Fishermen usually struggle on Barnett in June. Not this year. This lake is fishing as good as or better than I’ve ever seen it. I’m surprised, and I am happy.

“It seems some of the things the wildlife folks, the reservoir folks and the fishermen have been doing are working. I just hope it keeps working and it gets even better.”

A JOINT EFFORT
UP NEXT >

Fishing at Barnett Reservoir has never been better, at least not in recent years, thanks to efforts from agencies and fishermen. And the good times may just be getting ready to really roll....

WELCOME
BACK,

By Bobby Cleveland

OLD FRIEND



A JOINT EFFORT

Bishop is referring to efforts by the Pearl River Valley Water Supply District (PRVWSD) — the state agency created in the 1950s to build and manage the lake — to involve fishermen in the management of the fishery.

While PRVWSD manages the 33,000-acre lake and about 17,000 acres of land around it, the task of managing the fishery falls to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP). It has done quite well with bass, crappie, catfish and even bream, despite heavy fishing pressure from the metropolitan Jackson area.

Over the past five years, PRVWSD has organized and mediated fishery update meetings with fishermen and the MDWFP with a goal of producing and maintaining good fishing. A bass fisherman advisory committee was organized to work with the agencies on all things bass related, including weed control.

At each winter meeting, Ryan Jones, a fisheries biologist with MDWFP, has given a thorough report on the studies and sampling of the lake and takes questions — and comments/suggestions — from fishermen. Another biologist, John Skains, gives an update on aquatic vegetation, which is an area of growing concern.

Through those discussions, changes have been made to help the fishing, including those mentioned by Bishop.

IMPROVED STOCKINGS

The first was an angler-based stocking program each spring. Florida bass grown at the MDWFP Turcotte Fish Hatchery about a mile from the lake are stocked in the reservoir. But instead of a hatchery truck pulling up to the bank and unloading all the fingerlings in one spot, they are placed in large ice chests in bass boats manned by volunteer fishermen. They are allowed to carry the valuable cargo anywhere on the lake to be released, as long as they are placed in excellent habitat with plenty of cover.

“The idea is to give the Florida fingerlings a better chance at surviving,” Jones said. “Our hatchery trucks can only go to so many places where they can get close enough to the water’s edge to release fish. Fishermen in bass boat can get anywhere on the lake, back in the back ends of remote sloughs and pockets where there is prime habitat.

“How much does it help with survival rates? I can’t say a number with any kind of accuracy, but I can say this, it’s better than just dumping the truckload in one spot, and it’s far better than the survival rate of naturally spawned fish in the lake when you consider how many are lost as fry before they reach the fingerling stage. The goal of stocking these Floridas is not so much to increase numbers but to insure that the Florida genes stay in the population.”

How long does it take for the little fish to adjust to their new environment after having spent their entire lives in a small, open stock pond?

“Maybe 10 seconds,” said Jones. “You pour a bucket load into the water near lily pads or other vegetation and watch them. They sit there in the water a second as if they are stunned or in shock, then after a moment, they race over to the cover and get up in it or under it. It doesn’t take long for the survival instinct to kick in.”

The angler stocking has been a popular program, so much so that some anglers have adapted their equipment to make longer runs to insure a good spread.

“I rigged a 48-quart cooler with an aerator so that I can run up the river to some of the distant backwater areas with great habitat ... places I like to fish,” said Jimmy Carruth of Brandon, who does plenty of damage in team tournaments on Barnett with his wife and fishing partner, Paula.

“I appreciate the opportunity to take a few loads, meaning a few thousand fish, and putting them not only where they have a better chance of surviving, but also where I will have a good chance of catching them a few years later.”

Over the past five years, the MDWFP and the anglers have released about a million Florida fingerlings.





Photos by Bobby Cleveland

Shannon Denson said the bass fishing will get even better on The Rez with a couple more seasons of the 14-inch minimum length limit. **INSET:** An angler-assisted annual Florida bass stocking puts the fingerlings raised by the MDWFP into boats to be released in appropriate cover to increase survival rates.

A NEW LIMIT UP NEXT ►



A NEW LIMIT

Getting more fish in the lake was just a start. Protecting them through to maturity and a preferred catch size was the next change that came from the meetings.

“We’d been asking for years for a minimum-length limit bigger than what we had, which was 12 inches,” said Shannon Denson, a third-generation Barnett angler and an outspoken activist for bass management on his home waters. “We’d had a lot of changes in regulations over the past few decades after the fishing declined so much in the late 70s and the 80s, and I kept records of catches tracking numbers and average weights. The best fishing was when we had length limits.”



Bobby Cleveland

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The first change in the 1980s involved a spring slot length that protected 12- to 16-inch fish during the spawning season. After fishing rebounded, that was eliminated and regulations returned to a 12-inch minimum length.

“We started seeing the fishing fall off again, quickly” said Denson, who, along with a lot of fishermen, began asking for a 15-inch minimum length limit.

“We finally got it, reluctantly it seemed, and I’m not just talking about the biologists. And if you look, you’ll see that average weights and catch rates went up in tournaments,” Denson said. “About 10 years ago, however, some tournament fishermen started complaining that the 15-inch minimum was keeping them from bringing limits to the scales during the summer months.

“They complained loud enough and to the right people to get it reduced back to 12 inches. In my opinion, that was the worst thing that they could have done to the fish at Barnett with all the fishing pressure it gets.”

And, yes, Barnett gets a lot. Being centrally located and in the heart of the state’s most-populated metropolitan area, The Rez has a tremendous

Bass fishing on Barnett Reservoir has been red hot this summer, producing fish more typical of the spring pre-spawn period.

amount of fishing pressure, both from recreational and tournament anglers.

It's the tournaments that put the best fishermen on the lake, and there's so many events that the PRVWSD had to create a draw system to limit the number at each landing each weekend.

"There's not a weekend day between February and June when there isn't a registered tournament at the Highway 43 ramps, and there's usually two or three more at other ramps," Denson said. "Then, there's smaller club tournaments or fruit-jar events that don't even register; they just go out there and fish."

The tournaments continue, though at a slower rate, through the summer and into the fall.

"The fish are getting hammered, especially the 12- and 13-inch bass that are the most aggressive," Denson said.

"They are the ones that fishermen can find in a school blasting shad on the surface and sit there and whack 'em. In the summer, when you catch fish and lug them around all day in a hot livewell without taking steps to protect the fish, they are doomed."

At the 2016 fisheries update meeting, anglers won an increase in the minimum length to 14 inches.

"I know they wanted 15 inches, but our data indicated that 14 inches was the better option, in that it protected fish for another two years while giving fishermen a chance to catch more fish," Jones said.

The timing was good, too, Jones said, because he has been tracking two excellent year-classes of fish. One was a huge supply of fish measuring 11 to 13 inches and another 8 to 10 inches. Protecting those two classes of fish was exactly the scenario Denson and others wanted.

"I still think Barnett has a lot of room for improvement to get the bass fishing where it ought to be, but that was a start," Denson said.

GRASS CONTROL

Being a shallow, lowland reservoir, the land underneath Barnett began reclaiming itself the day the dam was closed to impound the lake in 1965. Lakes such as The Rez have a lifespan of between 100 and 150 years, experts say. Siltation begins filling the backwater areas, opening the door to vegetation, which, in turn, attracts even more siltation, which, in turn ...

"It's a steady process that just keeps



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happening,” said Eddie Bourne, a fisherman on the advisory committee who is working hard on vegetation and loss of fishable waters. “Sometimes you concentrate so hard on things, like stocking and limits, and (you) can be blind to other factors that are hurting the lake.

“When you start talking about more and bigger fish being caught, I have to wonder how much of that is because of more big fish and how much of that is because of less water. The less water you have, the more the fish are concentrated. Right now, in 2018, we’re looking at a lot less fishable water. We’ve lost thousands of acres already that we aren’t going to get back, and that includes some that historically were the most-productive areas (and) are now dry ground. And worse, we’ve got thousands of more acres that we can’t fish anymore, not because they are dry, but because they are covered in vegetation.

“*Yeah, it could hurt fishing for a year or two, but those of us who care about the long-term fishing on Barnett Reservoir, we’re willing to make the sacrifice.*”

If we don’t do something major and get those waters back, I’m afraid we’re going to forever lose them, too.”

Aquatic vegetation is a double-edged sword. It is vital to fish production, providing cover for young fish by creating natural nurseries. It also produces great fishing, since it attracts baitfish that attract big fish. But if the vegetation gets out of control, which it easily and abruptly can and has in areas of Barnett, water becomes worthless to fish and inaccessible to fishermen.

“We’ve got several thousands of acres right now, where we have backwaters as deep as 5 to 8 or 10 feet that are completely matted over,” Bourne said. “I know that PRVWSD is spending a lot of money and MDWFP is working hard to control it, but we’re not gaining on it.

“Look, I used to be in that group 15 to 20 years ago that got mad every time I saw a boat out there spraying grass. Now, I’m here begging that we do more. A lot of us who see the need, but there’s also a lot who think we shouldn’t be spraying at all. I feel that if everybody realized what’s at stake, that we’re losing so much water, they would understand we have to step up the efforts.”

Working with PRVWSD and MDWFP, Denson, Bourne and other fishermen have convinced the agencies that a change in strategy is necessary in addressing the grass situation.

“I know back in the 90s when the hyacinth first arrived and nearly took over the upper river area and backwaters, they were about to lose control of it until they tried aerial spraying,” Denson said. “They did it one year and wiped it out. We believe that’s what it’s going to take again, and our research shows it can be done at the same costs”

Plans are being drawn to begin aerial spraying later this year, after the bulk of corn, soybean and cotton in surrounding fields have been harvested. Most of it will be done in backwaters on the east side between Highway 43 and Ratliffs Ferry area, with a few



Photo by James Overstreet/B.A.S.S.

Gene Bishop caught big bass in the spring in 2015 to win a Bassmaster Open on Barnett. This year, Bishop is catching the same quality in the summer.

pockets further up the river in areas that are part of PRVWSD. “Yeah, it could hurt fishing for a year or two, but those of us who care about the long-term fishing on Barnett Reservoir, not just for us but also for our children and their children, we’re willing to make the sacrifice,” Bourne said. “If we can get control of it, and clear those backwaters, I think we will create the fish nurseries we need to keep this lake full of bass for years to come.” ■



Bobby Cleveland has covered sports in Mississippi for over 40 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.

RED HOT REZ
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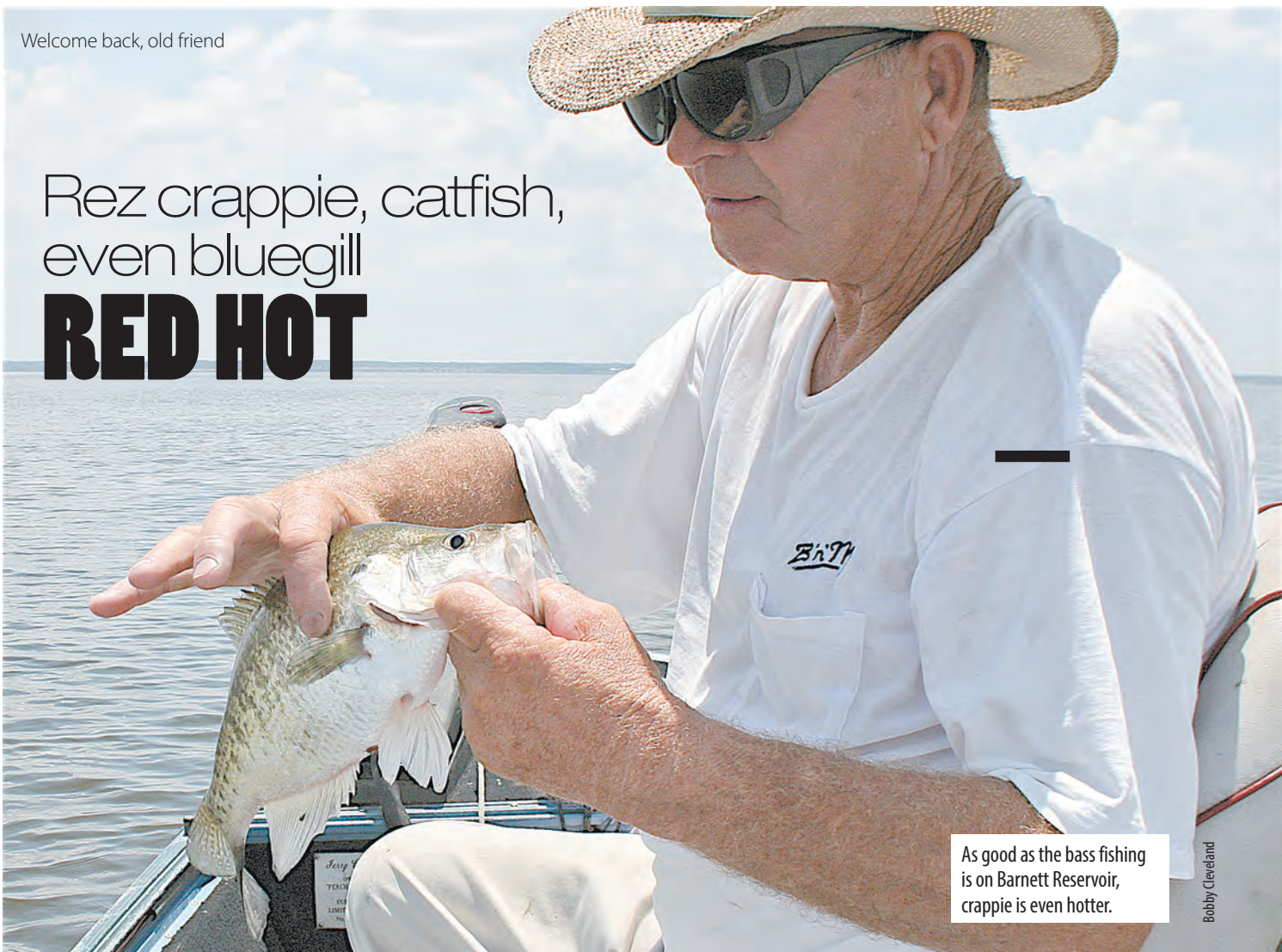


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Welcome back, old friend

Rez crappie, catfish, even bluegill **RED HOT**



As good as the bass fishing is on Barnett Reservoir, crappie is even hotter.

Bobby Cleveland

Rebounding bass fishing at Barnett Reservoir may get more attention, but the fishing for other popular species, including crappie and catfish, may be better. And so far, in 2018, even bream fishing has been phenomenal.

"This year in our creel surveys, we've seen more and bigger bluegill than I can remember," said Ryan Jones, a fisheries biologist with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks who oversees management of Barnett Reservoir. "They aren't catching the giants we see from Eagle Lake or the river lakes like Chotard, but they are catching a lot of fine, hand-sized bluegill. I've checked boats this year with 80 or 100 fish. That's a good thing."

Crappie is another species that thrives in Barnett.

"It never gets bad," said Jones. "I know crappie are cyclic, even at The Rez, you can see a down year or two of spawning, but a down year on Barnett is not the same as a down year anywhere else. An off-year at Barnett is more like a blip, while other lakes can lose nearly an entire spawn class."

"Barnett had a couple of down years recently, at least in our trawl samplings, but I don't hear people complaining about it, so I wonder if they even notice it."

Barnett Reservoir continually shows up in the top-20 crappie hot spots rankings from many national publications and websites, and it is best known for its quantity, not quality.

Three-pounders are indeed rare, but 30-fish limits are not.

Perhaps the sleeper fish at Barnett is the catfish.

"Oh my gosh, don't get me started about the catfish at Barnett," said Johnny Walters of Jackson. "It's unbelievable. I can run jugs and catch fish. I can run trot lines and catch fish. I can regular pole fish and catch fish, and it's not rocket science. The entire lake is full of channels, blues and flatheads."

"If you have a boat and a depth finder and the time to do it, you can catch a 48-quart cooler whenever you want to and eat fried fish every day. I'm serious. There's a lot of pressure on bass and crappie, but there's not that many of us who go out there concentrating on catfish."

"I try to target fish between 1½ to 5 pounds, the best for eating, and I let the bigger ones go. I released a 62-pound blue (in mid-June), my biggest yet on Barnett, and I caught it drifting a night crawler a foot off the bottom in 15 feet of water. I thought I snagged a stump until it got mad enough to start pulling my boat out toward the river channel."

After two down years in a row, 2018 has also seen an upswing in striped and hybrid striped bass on Barnett Reservoir.

"The lower lake is full of big stripers and smaller hybrids, all over it," said Clifford Neames of Clinton, who fishes for anything that swims in The Rez. "From crappie to stripers, it's just been a good year." ■

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Mike Giles

BASS

after dark

By Mike O. Giles

In the fading light, Justin Giles cast a shaky head worm toward a submerged shelf and let the worm glide towards the bottom until it stopped — the start to a nighttime fishing trip that would get off to a ...

BANG!

A huge bass smashed the young angler's worm on the fall and then bore down towards the depths as if it had been shot out of a cannon. The fish buried down in a thick brush top.

"That bass just smashed it on the way down," Giles said. "It never made it to the bottom, and when I realized it, I set the hook. He got down in the brush, but I wrestled him out and got him clear of danger."

The bass tipped the scales at better than 7 pounds.

Over the next couple of hours, Giles and his fishing partner caught and released several

Summer fishing trips are so much more productive when you wait until the sun sets to hit the water. Here are some nighttime tips for more bass.

bass in the 3- to 5-pound range, with a few 7- and 8-pounders to boot.

"I'd picked out two to three spots in deeper water on a ledge earlier in the afternoon and only caught one bass," Giles said. "I finally figured out that the bass were moving out of the deep water just before dark and feeding along the dropoff. We came back to the same spot around 8:30, and they were really biting. They fed pretty good for the next couple hours after the sun went down."

During the summer, Giles, an experienced angler from Clinton, spends a lot of late afternoons and nights catching and releasing bass on public and private waters.

"I found out that it's a different world out there after the sun goes down," Giles said. "The big bass move up along the ledges and feed on baitfish that swim over the edge, and that's when it gets fun. It's a whole lot cooler, and the bass bite so much better."

SWIMBAIT FEVER UP NEXT ➤



SWIMBAIT FEVER

Swimbaiting was introduced back around the turn of this century and quickly became a staple for anglers looking to catch big bass shallow during the prespawn and spawn in the spring. That craze died down a while ago, but anglers have discovered that these lures work in the evening hours.

"I started experimenting with the solid-body swimbait in deeper water and found out that the bass really love them," Giles said. "I don't think most of the lunker bass that are living in deep water have seen them much during the summer, and that's a key to catching any lunker bass."

"I wanted to give them a look at something different, a bigger profile, so I tried them in a slightly different technique than what they were originally designed for."

Giles rigs the swimbait on a swimbait hook and slides its tip just under the skin on the lure's back to make it weedless.

"I'll position my boat in deeper water, say 15 to 20 feet, and cast up onto the submerged shelf, which could be 5 to 8 feet deep on top," Giles said. "After the sun goes down, the bass will position along the edge of the drop and sometimes come all the way up onto the shelf looking for an easy meal. Sometimes the bass will hit the swimbait on the fall, and you need to pay close attention or they'll take your lure and dive into cover quickly."

If he doesn't get a bite, Giles will slowly work the swimbait off the shelf and work it down the ledge.

"If they don't bite on the initial fall, I'll hop it. I'll swim it a few turns and let it sink further down the ledge," he said. "Most of the time, you will find that they'll suspend or position themselves in the same spot, so after you catch a couple, you can concentrate on working that same level up and down the ledge."

If the ledge has cover, baitfish will try to hide in it, and bass will relate to it as well. If you can work your swimbait over the cover like a worm, they'll strike it too.

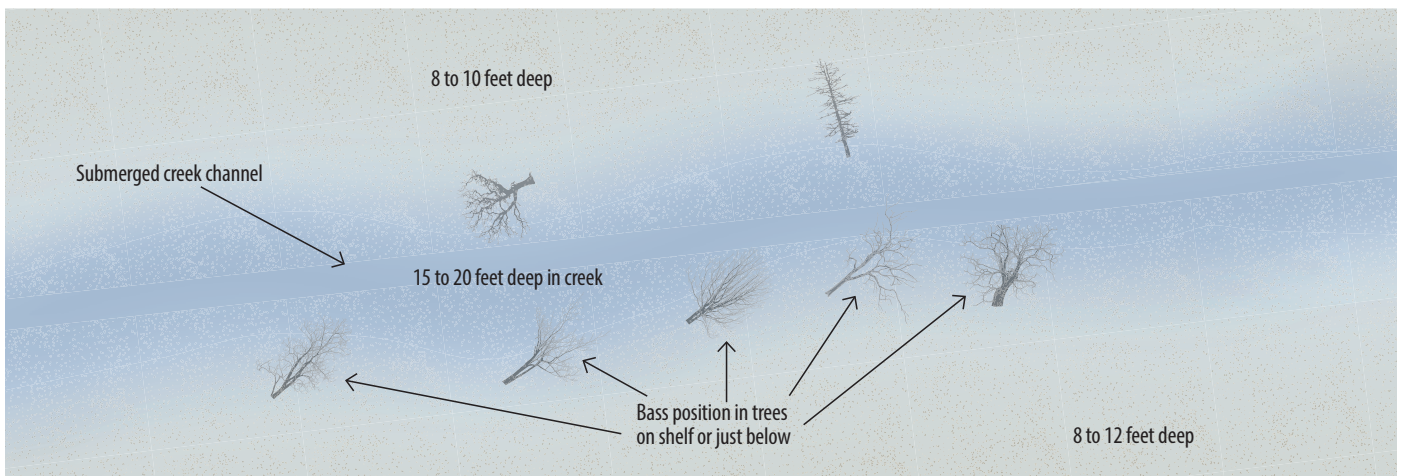
"Sometimes, you'll find a school of bass around a brush top along the side of the ledge or on top, and you can catch several bass," Giles said. "Sometimes, there will be a lot of brush scattered all along the ledge, and you can usually pick up a few from each piece of (cover), but there always seems to be a hot spot on each ledge or hump."



Jacob Daniels caught this bass at night on a topwater lure.

Mike Giles

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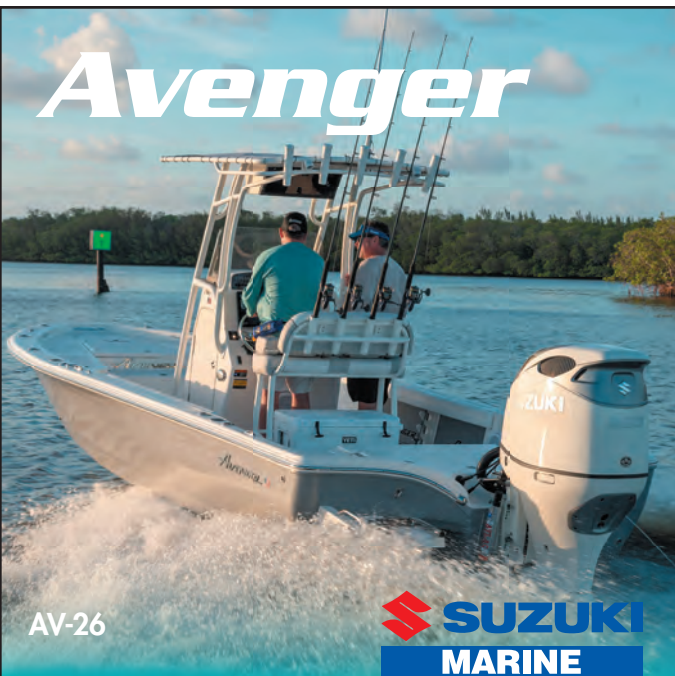
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FIND EARLY, CATCH LATER

Jeff Collum of Meridian spent many years traveling around the country, catching bass and winning tournaments, but he's not on the road anymore, choosing to stay home with his family and raise his boys, passing on his knowledge.

Collum still finds time to catch lunker bass, and even though he's slacked off fishing tournaments, he still gets a few chances to compete, such as a summer night tournament on Okatibbee Lake. During practice, Collum had located a ledge holding baitfish and bass, so he arrived before dark and started fishing the area.

"I'd found fish there before, so we knew where they should be, and we really caught them after it got dark," he said. "We actually caught most of our bass on a black Bandit 300 series crankbait on the ledges and off the clay banks that night. If you find them feeding after dark, you can usually catch them pretty good up until 10:30 or 11, and then it's time to go home. At least for me, that is."

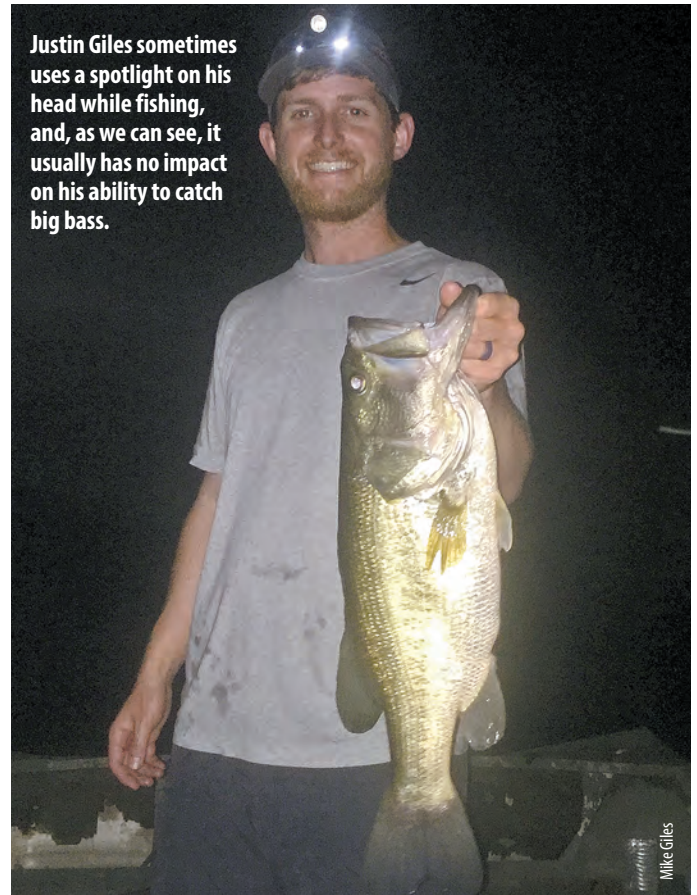
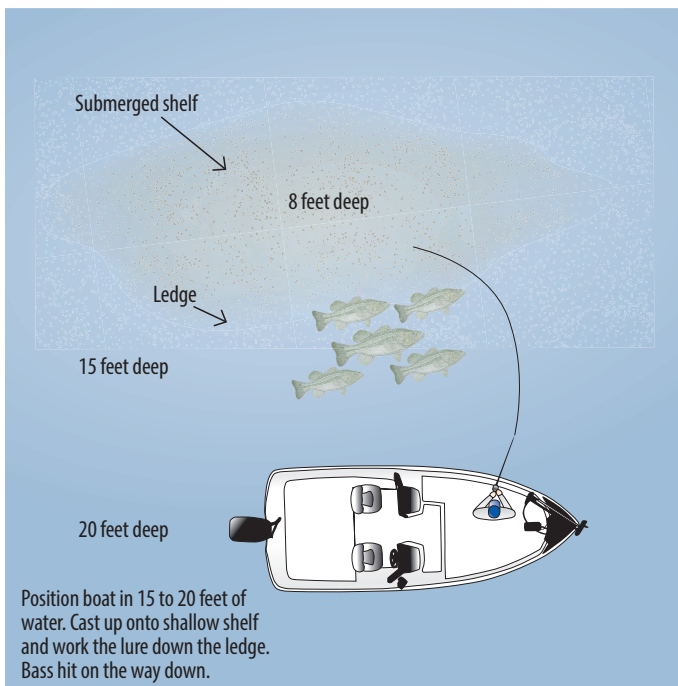
While many anglers beat the heat and fish all night, Collum prefers fishing the first 3 or 4 hours after sunset. At least that's when he's had his best luck.

"I'll work the ledges and clay banks just like I do in the daytime, casting that crankbait up onto the shallow ledge or point and cranking it back in," Collum said. "I've won quite a few tournaments by cranking deep-diving crankbaits on ledges and drop-off areas, and it just gets better after dark during the hot weather months.

"After the sun goes down, fish will move shallow, and when the moon comes up, it will make it even better. The bass will also troll along the weed bed edges, and you can catch them with a variety of lures, including topwaters and buzzbaits. Not too many people fish at night, so the bass are not as wary and will usually attack your topwaters with a vengeance."

Collum particularly likes to fish at night around the full moon.

"I like to fish a day or two before and after the full moon dur-



Justin Giles sometimes uses a spotlight on his head while fishing, and, as we can see, it usually has no impact on his ability to catch big bass.

ing hot weather," he said. "Sometimes, they'll feed all night. And if you can keep fishing and don't have to work the next morning, it can get really good just before daybreak, too.

"During a full moon, I like to use shaky heads and Texas-rigged worms on bottom and a dark Whopper Plopper or buzzbait on top. I also like to use a big worm with a big, wide tail and I really like to use the Strike King Anaconda in black or a dark green/pumpkin color."

Another old favorite Collum likes to use is a spinnerbait with a single, large copper or black blade.

"I like to reel the big-bladed spinnerbait real slow, just fast enough to feel the thumping of the pulsating blade," he said. "Those bass really key on the vibrations and sounds it puts off at night."

Another hot bait for catching bass after dark is a black Senko-style worm with white spots, custom made by Collum's father Gordon Collum. Collum Texas-rigs the Senko, makes a cast and lets it fall on a slack line; the bass just can't resist it.

"Dad also uses that Senko on a shaky head jighead when fishing a deep ledge, and they really tear it up too," Collum said. ■



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

Tips for catching bass **AFTER DARK**

Justin Giles doesn't fish at night for bass in the summer just because it's cooler, but because that's when he catches some of the biggest fish of the year. Here are some of his tips that can help you find and catch more fish after dark.

Key locations: Pinpoint deep water and offshore drop-offs, humps, ledges, roadbeds, ditches, flooded windrows and brush piles during daylight hours and then arrive just before dark to fish.

By picking specific areas, you can spend time fishing rather than running around the lake after dark trying to locate spots. Traveling on public waters after dark can be time-consuming and dangerous as well.

Gearing up: When Giles heads out for a night of fishing, he goes armed with 15-pound fluorocarbon on a Johnny Morris reel and heavy action Gloomis swimbait rod.

His lure selections include a shaky head rig: ¼-ounce Bass Pro Dragon Head finesse jigheads with a Strike King KVD Super Finesse worm in junebug and green pumpkin colors.

Giles is always ready to switch to his preferred swimbait rig: a



Mike Giles

While most fishermen head to the dock at sunset, others are just starting to fish. They know that during the summer, the action heats up as the night cools down.

4.3-inch Keitech Swing Impact Fat soft bait in sungill color, fished on an Owner Swimbait hook. He also likes to upsize to a 6.8-inch Keitech swimbait in bluegill flash color.

When the action is hot, Giles often switches to a Bass Pro Shops Speed Shad or Sassy Sally. The plastic is durable, and Giles said anglers can catch multiple bass on them without tearing up when used on a screw-on swimbait hook rig or swimming jig. ■

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Summer's By Phillip Gentry **slab trio**

Long-line, crankbaiting and power trolling are hot-weather techniques that will put crappie in your cooler.

Standing on the lower deck of his boat, Torch Tindle paused after unhooking another crappie from a brightly colored jig to reflect on a crappie fishing experience a few summers ago. “I used to think these Mississippi oxbows were

void of crappie,” said Tindle, a former crappie-fishing guide from Cleveland. “I mean, I used to come out here with a single pole in the summer and might get a few dinks, but nothing like what I’m catching since I learned how to troll.”

>

Trolling” means a lot of different things to different anglers, but Tindle was

referring to one of three very popular tactics: long-line trolling, crankbait trolling and power trolling. He once believed they only worked on big reservoirs but has come to change his tune after using them on oxbows.

“I fish Whittington a lot simply because it’s close to home,” he said. “Oxbows are a little different than, say, Enid, Sardis, Grenada and Arkabutla, because the levels are controlled by the river stage in the Mississippi River, but these tactics work anywhere during the summer.”

Tindle said that most anglers forget about crappie fishing after the spring spawn. In the summer, they either switch to other species or give up fishing altogether until cooler weather settles back in. Probably one of the reasons why many anglers — like the “old” Tindle — struggle trying to catch crappie during the summer is because patterns aren’t as easy to follow as fishing around visible cover.

“From about early June until September, these fish move out away from the banks and just suspend out in open water,” Tindle said. “In a lake like Grenada, they might be in water that’s 15 to 25 feet deep and suspend at depths of 9 to 15 feet, but they aren’t relating to anything. They’re just out there on a long flat, waiting for food to come to them.”

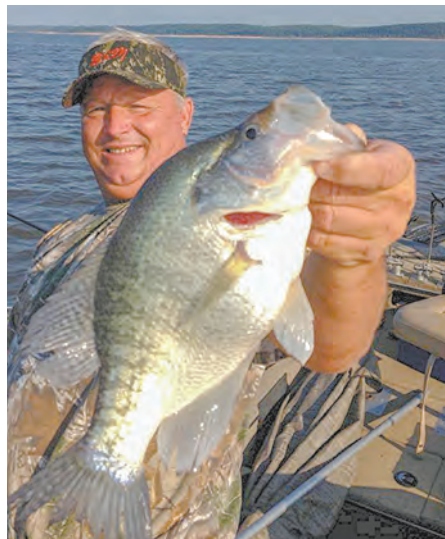
Trolling by any method is a way to get food to the hungry crappie.

Tindle said long-lining is his current favorite among the three trolling techniques.

“It’s a toss up between long-lining and crankbaiting, but if I’m starting out on a lake trying to locate schools of fish, I’m going to start long-lining, just because I can cover so much more water,” he said. “If I’m fishing a tournament and trying to catch the biggest fish, then I’m probably going to troll crankbaits.

“If I’m after the most numbers of fish, then I’m probably going to power troll, but I love long-lining because you can catch both size and numbers and cover a lot of water.”

continues >



Kent Driscoll

Panoptix: Ahead of the game

When Garmin released its much-anticipated Panoptix sonar a couple of years ago, it garnered the attention of many anglers in all walks of the fishing world. It was touted as being the future of fishing sonar in an industry that already has side-scan, down-scan, and nearly lifelike imagery.

One of the biggest advantages to Panoptix is its Live Vü technology feature. While other sonar systems show imagery of what the boat has passed over or passed by — in essence, the recent history — Live Vü projects ahead of the boat.

Forward viewing has several advantages never before seen in sonar technology. Forward real-time sonar allows you to see your bait as it works its way into and through the water column. If you think you’re casting a 12- to 15-foot, deep-diving crankbait, you can verify that by watching the bait on the screen. Think you’re slow-rolling a spinnerbait just off the bottom? Look and see.

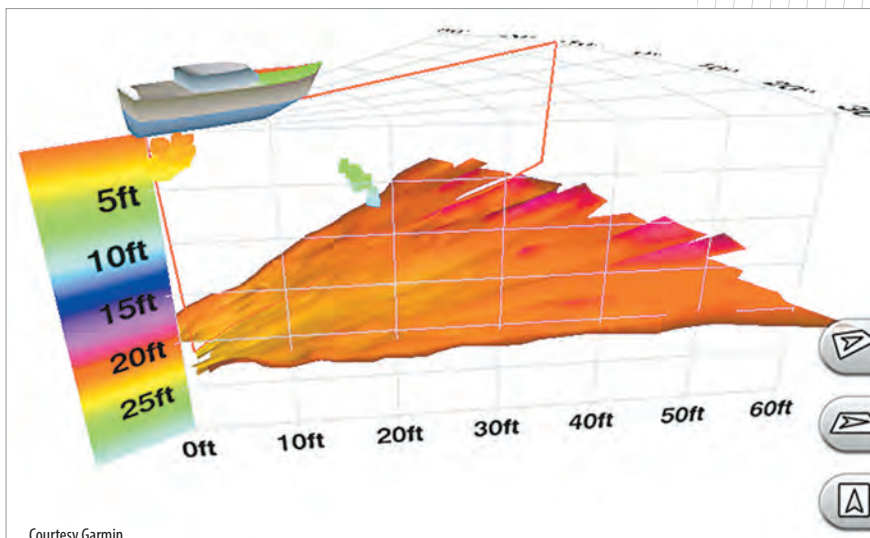
Another benefit of forward-view is the ability to see fish as they approach your offering and see how they react to it.

Getting a lot of follows but no bites? Time to switch baits.

The ability to see the action in front of you allows you to see a fish’s natural reaction, not how they react with having a boat overhead or just passed. No more spooking fish in

order to see what they’re up to.

Finally, Panoptix provides a 3D view of the bottom, structure and fish. The system also allows the angler to control how quickly the area is scanned to provide greater or less detail, making it very easy to identify both where the fish are and even what species they are. ■



Courtesy Garmin

TOP: John Harrison said pulling water through the flood control dams has sparked the bite on many north Mississippi reservoirs.
RIGHT: Garmin’s new Panoptix technology allows anglers to see where they’ve never seen before — in front of the boat.



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Tindle differs from most crappie fishermen in the way he sets up his boat for long-lining. He runs four rods from the front of the boat and four more from the rear. The center rods up front are 20-footers, while the outside poles on either side of the boat are 16 feet. Across the back, he runs four 12-foot rods to cover the interior pathway.

Aside from his four-up, four-back rod positioning, Tindle has a couple of other tricks up his sleeve for catching big Mississippi crappie, the first being line size. He uses nothing but 6-pound line. His reasoning is that 6-pound test provides the right mix of strength and small diameter so he can get his jigs to the proper depth when trolling.

The second is the jigs he uses. "I make my own jigs," Tindle said. "I got tired of missing fish on No. 2 or No. 4 hooks, so I started pouring my own heads using a dang 2/0 Aberdeen hook. When they bite that hook, they're coming to the boat. No more missed fish."

HARRISON LIKES CRANKING

Catching big summer crappie is a specialty for John Harrison, a Grenada Lake guide. Like Tindle, Harrison once sported a single pole when the heat turned on, but now he spends much of his time trolling crankbaits.

"I guess it's that rattle and the commotion of so many crankbaits coming through the water," Harrison said. "It causes a reaction bite because they've only got a second or two to either react or get out of the way."

Harrison uses Bandit crankbaits the majority of the time, swapping between 200 and 300 series baits depending on the depth he's trying to target. Despite the bite being a reaction bite, he said color plays a big role in whether you get bites or not.

"You'd think they'd just hit what-

Former crappie guide Torch Tindle nearly gave up on summer fishing until he learned about long-lining, crankbait trolling and power trolling.

ever color — and there are days they will — but other days these fish can get down right picky," Harrison said. "That's why I keep changing out colors and keep track with what colors are producing fish."

Harrison said the position of the sun and the water clarity has a lot to do with what color works best, and current can also affect crappie appetites.

"Another thing is if they are moving water through the dam," he said. "Most of these flood-control lakes have been up this summer, and the water authorities have pulled water through the dam a lot. When that current is moving, the fish bite better."

POWER TROLLING NEEDS HEFT

The third tactic is power trolling, which has been a moving target for a lot of crappie anglers for a number of years.

The tactic is very similar to slow, vertical trolling except at much higher speeds. To keep lines vertical at higher speeds requires more weight. To accommodate more weight takes a stouter fishing pole. That's where B'n'M pro staffer Kent Driscoll has the corner on the market.

"We've been working on this design for a while now," Driscoll said. "The rod is called the Pow-R-Troller. It's a heavy-action trolling rod designed to hold heavier weights, up to 3 ounces, with little bend in the rod tip."

Driscoll said whether you're summer fishing, pushing 3- and 4-ounce weights at up to 2 miles per hour, or dragging crankbaits behind planer boats to get your baits away from the boat, the new rod could get the job done. ■



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.



Torch Tindle



Grenada Lake guide John Harrison also discovered trolling tactics over single-pole fishing during the heat of summer.

Phillip Gentry

Making your own crappie jigs allows you to design lures for your exact needs.

Tailor your D-I-Y tackle to fit your needs

Making your own fishing tackle can be a rewarding hobby, while at the same time allowing the crappie angler to tailor his baits to what the fish want or to better catch what.

The first step involves a lead jig-head or body, obtaining a good, reliable mold and lead pot for melting lead. Custom molds can be made by purchasing blank molds and having them tooled at a machine shop. Existing patterns can be altered to accept wire hangers for blades, lips or other accessories.

A good melting pot will ensure even lead heating and pouring and can be obtained for less than \$100. Also, purchase pure lead from a plumbing-supply store rather than use scrap lead, such as old tire weights, which contain a lot of alloys and don't pour as well. It's best to pre-melt lead into smaller, easier to handle bricks. By-products will separate during the pre-melting and can be skimmed off before placing in your lead pot.

If tying material to leadhead jigs is your preference over simply plugging in plastics, tying jigs is not as tedious as tying trout flies. It does require a tying vise that will accommodate crappie hooks and a spring-wire bobbin for holding the thread used to wrap the material to secure it to the jighead.

Painting jig bodies can be an expensive business. Airbrush painting with high-cost paints is probably more elaborate than you'll need for making crappie jigs. Many anglers settle on hand-dipping jigheads in an exterior enamel paint or powder coat.

At this point, eyes can be painted on, or stick-on eyes with their own adhesive

backing can be applied. Eyes are a big selling point in commercially manufactured baits, and some fishermen swear that fish will strike a lure with eyes before a plain head.

For hair or marabou jigs, dipping the final clear coat after the dressing is tied on will help cover any imperfections in the wrapping. This additional coat, once dry, also helps hold the hair in place. ■



Torch Tindle

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• 132 Acres	\$2,651/AC	• 206.2 Acres	\$2,271/AC	• 32.4 Acres	
CLAIBORNE COUNTY		MARION COUNTY		• 20 Acres	
• 75 Acres & Camp	\$275,000	• 84.56 Acres	\$2,944/AC	• 17 Acres	
• 176 Acres	\$3,181/AC	• 113 Acres	\$2,876/AC	• 40 Acres	
• 360 Acres	\$2,950/AC	• 115 Acres	\$2,650/AC	• 239 Acres	
COPIAH COUNTY		PEARL RIVER		• 39,999,000	
• 339 Acres	\$2,651/AC	• 61.7 Acres	\$2,299/AC	East Feliciana	
• 166 Acres	\$2,100/AC	• 64 Acres	\$3,487/AC	• 479 Acres	
• 63.5 & Camp	\$289,000	• 67 Acres	\$3,450/AC	Livingston Parish	
COVINGTON COUNTY		PIKE COUNTY		• 38 Acres	
• 162 Acres Cabin & River	\$4,300/AC	• 9 Acres & Home	\$45,000	• 10,000/AC	
FORREST COUNTY		• 10 Acres & Home	\$168,000	Sabine	
• 80 Acres	\$3,125/AC	• 24.87 Acres	\$3,397/AC	• 21 Acres	
• 123 Acres	\$2,500/AC	• 28 Acres	\$4,625/AC	• 3,571/AC	
FRANKLIN COUNTY		• 31.57 Acres	\$4,497/AC	Tangipahoa Parish	
• 15 Acres	\$3,200/AC	• 40 Acres	\$2,475/AC	• 35 Acres & Home	
• 60 Acres	\$3,850/AC	• 40 Acres	\$2,950/AC	• 389,000	
GRENEADA COUNTY		• 77 Acres	\$5,181/AC	Webster	
• 160 Acres	\$4,000/AC	• 80 Acres & Home	\$209,500	• 958 Acres	
		• 132 Acres	\$2,401/AC	• 55 Acres	
		• 135 Acres	\$2,350/AC	• 113 Acres	
		• 140 Acres	\$2,350/AC	• 3,200/AC	
				Washington	
				• 150 Acres	
				• 3,993/AC	

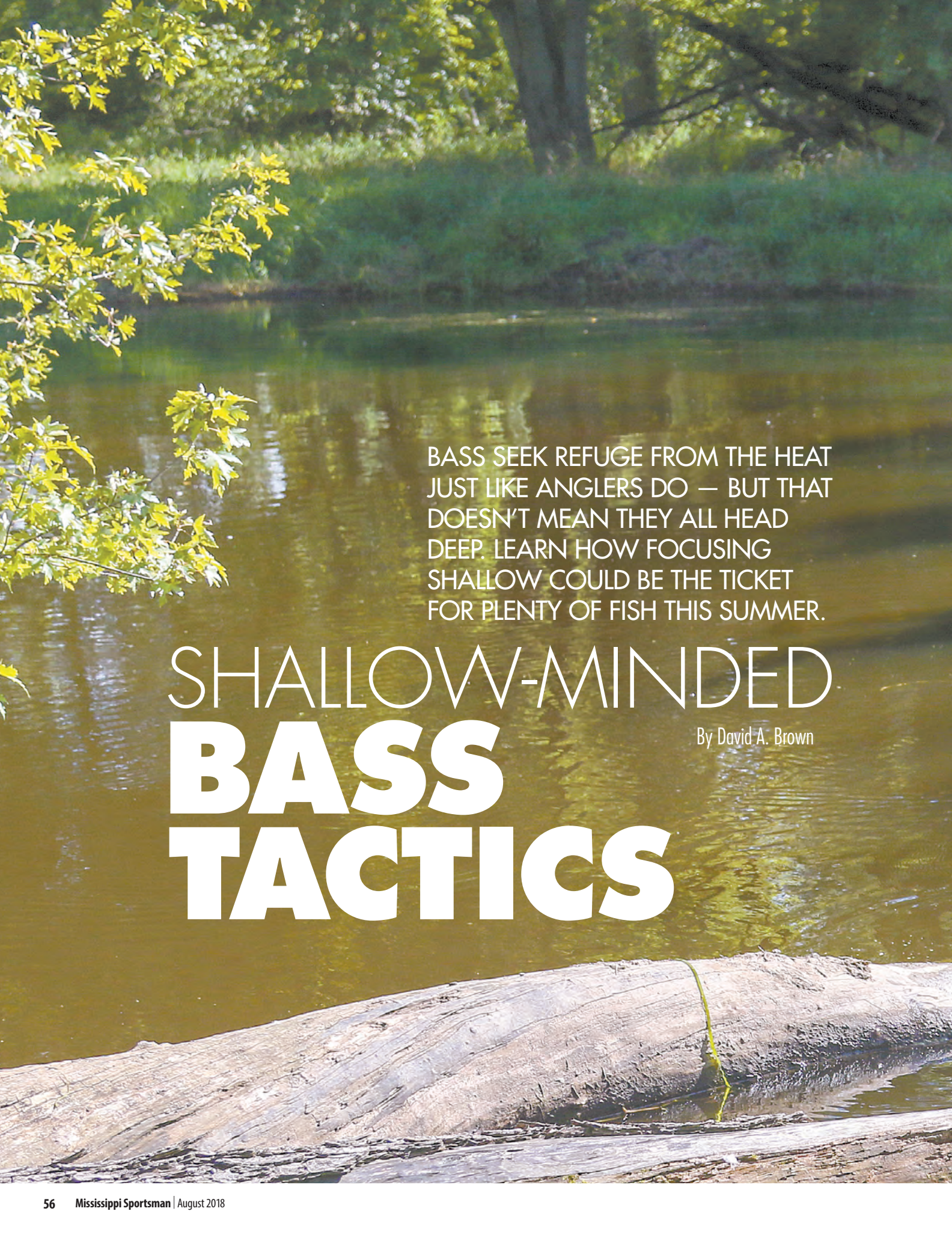


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BASS SEEK REFUGE FROM THE HEAT JUST LIKE ANGLERS DO — BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY ALL HEAD DEEP. LEARN HOW FOCUSING SHALLOW COULD BE THE TICKET FOR PLENTY OF FISH THIS SUMMER.

SHALLOW-MINDED **BASS** **TACTICS**

By David A. Brown



Nature is dynamic, and like a well-composed symphony, its performance comprises multiple complementary elements that rise and fall at the conductor's direction.

With summer bass fishing, there is a time for the fish to be directed offshore, but that movement doesn't always hold a steady note 'til fall's arrival.

After the spawn, skinny, stressed-out females will slip into deeper, cooler water to continue their recovery and to begin feeding more regularly. Once the males conclude their fry-guarding duties, they'll join the mamas for some deep-water R&R, with "deep" being a relevant term, depending on where you're fishing.

Regardless, there comes a point during the summer dog days when those humps, contour lines and deep trees just won't cut it. At the end of the day, a bass just wants to be comfortable and well fed — so expect them to go where they can fill this order.



There's just a point in the summer, it just gets so hot that there's not a lot of oxygen out in that deeper water and these fish will get up there in the shallows," said bass pro Jason Christie. "I've caught them in inches of water in the summertime. I think the waves from the boat traffic and the wind hitting the bank create a little more oxygen in the shallow water."

Of course, this is attractive for bass, but baitfish also find the slightly cooler and more-oxygenated water appealing. What's the old-school rule of bass fishing? Find the food, find the fish.

MADE IN THE SHADE

Now, ask yourself if you'd sooner patronize a hot dog cart out in the open under direct sunlight, or one with a big umbrella that creates a cozy shaded area for customers. If you like the second option, you understand why trees, docks, overhanging brush and laydowns are such great summer targets.

There, the bass find lower water temperatures with feeding opportunities created by the very cover under which they're lounging. If you need some perspective, follow Christie's hands-on — make that feet-on — investigative strategy.

"I've gotten out of my boat and walked down the bank, knee-deep in water in the sunshine, and it's like you're standing in a hot bathtub," he said. "And then you walk under the shade of a tree and it's instantly cooler. I think that's what those fish do; in the morning, when it's low light they get the fresh oxygen from the previous night and during the day, they try to stay in the shade.

"I like to fish these spots when the shade is as minimal as possible. At 8 o'clock in the morning, that shade could be halfway across the pocket off one tree because of low sun angle. But you come back at 11 and the shade will be much more limited. That makes your strike zone more defined."

BEST BAITS

Shallow summer bass will bite a mix of reaction baits and slower presentations, so fish the scenario. Early mornings, a buzzbait can be surprisingly effective, but once the sun gets up,

put that away and switch to more target-specific techniques like flipping laydowns with jigs or Texas-rigged creature baits, skipping docks and punching matted vegetation.

Hands-down, one of the most-consistent and entertaining



David A. Brown

ways of catching summer bass is staking out bream beds and picking off opportunistic predators. As Christie noted, bass form small wolf packs, which linger in nearby shade or hold in adjacent deeper water, only to rush forward and gobble a plump panfish when their bellies start to rumble.

"I treat that bream bed like a ledge; I want to sit as far off of it as I can before they know I'm there," Christie said. "Those bass may not be sitting directly over that bed, they may be cruising around it. I want my first cast to come right across that bream bed and then my third or fourth cast, I'm going to start fan casting to see if they're off the beds." >

ABOVE: Poppers will fool 'em during the summer — especially around bream beds. **BELOW:** Docks are one of the most promising summer habitat features to target.



David A. Brown

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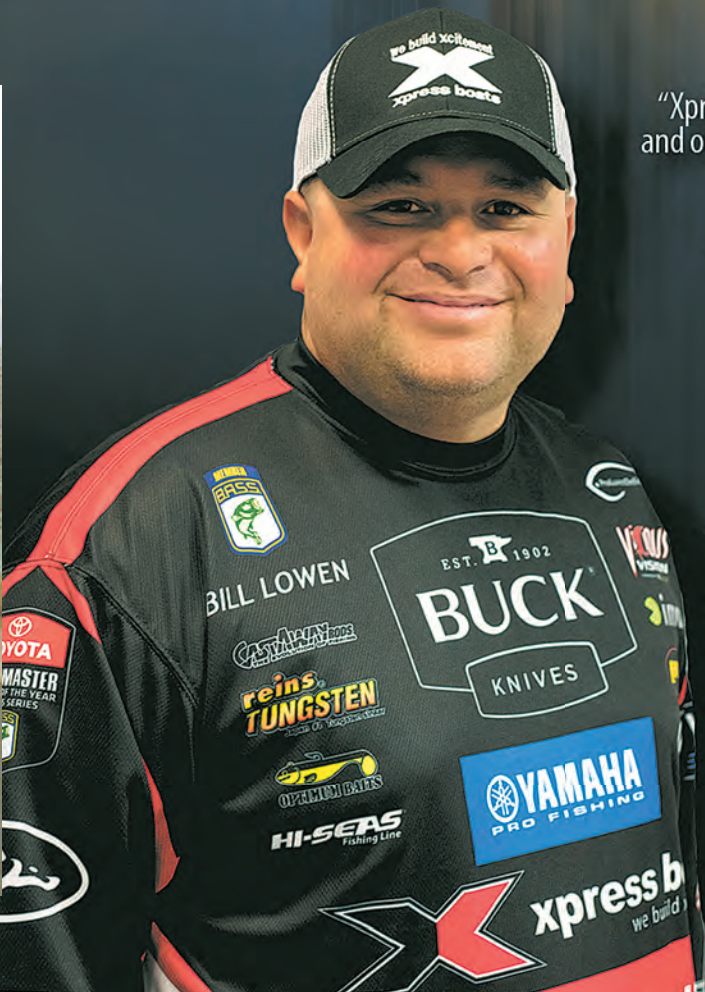
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Topwaters are the favored presentation and, while walkers and prop baits catch plenty of bream bed bass, a popper — dressed with a feathered rear treble — is a good choice when the fish are either finicky and/or heavily pressured. Reason being, poppers can make a lot of commotion without leaving the bedding zone. Sharp downward rod snaps make an intrusive blooping sound, but the bait remains on target.

Similarly, this time of year, bass pro Ish Monroe puts a frog to good use, as it skips easily under cover and allows him to hold position and work an enticing display without making much forward progress. Walkers or poppers will work, but the latter proves more versatile, by offering an attention-getting splash.



David A. Brown

ABOVE: Finesse rigs like the dropshot can be highly productive during the summer months. **BELOW:** Time invested in thoroughly probing laydowns is usually rewarded. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Rigging a Berkley Devil's Spear sideways creates a bream profile.

Bass pro Russell Cecil knows there aren't many wrong times to show a bass a bream imitation, and when he misses a topwater bite or if he only gets follows or boils, he'll toss a Big Bite Baits Warmouth in the hot zone. But rather than the traditional Texas-rigging that brings the hook through the bait's broad side, he rigs it elliptically (up and down) by bringing the hook through the narrow side.

Bass pro Mike Iaconelli employs a similar technique for when bluegill are near the beds, but swimming mid-water column. Using a VMC swimbait hook, either unweighted or 1/16-ounce for deeper water, he'll rig a Berkley Devil's Spear sideways. This allows him to swim the bait through the water column, only with a bluegill profile, not that of a shad-imitating swimbait. A steady retrieve with frequent pauses earns many of his bites on the fall.

And this is a great time of year to keep those chartreuse dye pens handy for touching up the tips of soft plastics. Mimicking a bream's tail accents may be just the thing to turn a looker into a biter.

On the point of bait coloring, bass pro Wesley Strader knows the value of adding such highlights, but he won't hesitate to

HOT TOPICS

When planning your summer bass outing, keep these points in mind:

Weather windows: Summer means thunderstorms, and while you'll often see a fierce bite just before the storm as the falling barometer and rush of cooler air makes everyone kind of goofy, don't let one of these big thunderheads sneak up on you or it'll be a rough ride to the ramp. We all love a good rally, but no fish is worth your life.

Hydration: Pretty straightforward stuff — drink lots of water. A busy bite can lead to one procrastination after another, so get in the habit of carrying a bottle of water to the front or back deck so there's no excuse. And if you notice that you've stopped perspiring on a hot day, stop immediately, find some shade and hydrate. Sweat stops when the body's dehydrated, and all kinds of bad outcomes are just around the corner.

Sun protection: Wide-brim hats, liberal doses of sunscreen, polarized glasses. Most anglers know to reach for these items on their way out the door. But you'll also benefit from neck and face protection like BUFF's multi-functional headwear. In collapsed form, these lightweight, UV-blocking items keep the sun off your neck, but pulled up to your desired level, you can cover your ears and face, or even lock your hat into place with full head/neck protection.

Limited opportunities: One thing worth noting about the shallow summer bass game is that it's a lot easier to fish out an area than it is when fish are deeper. The very fact that shallow fish are typically more spooky feeds this point. Beyond that, be aware that the idea of beating on a spot too much has a short shelf life.

"I used to win a lot one-day events fishing shallow for bass in the summertime, but it's hard to win four-day event because it's hard to do that four days in a row," said bass pro Jason Christie. "But for the weekend angler; absolutely — there are fish that live up there shallow, even when the water's 90 degrees." ■

— David A. Brown



David A. Brown

go heavy when the situation calls for it. If he's using a pearl/white trailer for a spinnerbait or bladed jig, intense sunlight might make the bait too harsh. In such cases, he'll use a chartreuse marker to basically paint the entire sides and tail of his bait with an overlay that tones down the white and adds a more tolerable color.

Elsewhere, bass pro Troy Broussard often swims a Texas-rigged Strike King Rage Craw across hydrilla and targets holes and lanes where bass hiding in the shady cover can spot passing meals. The flappers kick when pulled forward, but killing the bait and letting it flutter to the bottom can be a highly convincing move.

One of the most versatile baits you can keep on your deck is an unweighted worm, either a stick worm or a magnum finesse worm. Use a Yamamoto Senko, a YUM Dinger or a Strike King Ocho as a primary bait for skipping into shade pockets, a deal-closing follow up bait for missed topwater strikes or a quick-fire option for pinpointing a boil, bust or sporadic schooling activity.

Lastly, you'll cut yourself short if you don't have a drop-shot on your deck. Designed to hold a bait vulnerably in the water column, this rig is one of your best bets for coaxing tough bites. Alternate your bait size, shape and colors to dial in the fish's preference. ■



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



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By Jeff Burleson

HOT WEATHER, FISH HIGH WATER

A rising tide doesn't have to end your fishing day, especially during the summer, when water rushing into an estuary can set up a good bite in some great places.

Temperatures soar over the peak summer months across the southeast, with daytime temperatures in the 90s almost every day. Anglers looking to fish during the best conditions should look at tide charts and be ready to take advantage of rising water if they want to bust a limit of inshore targets.

Thanks to the moon's gravitational effects, the world's coastal regions are shaped by tides, periods of high and low water. A typical tide can bring several feet of change, but periods of high gravitational pull after a new or full moon can expand the range even more — a dramatic effect in many ways.



Jeff Burleson

FISH CURRENT SEAMS, INLET EDDIES, JETTIES ON AN INCOMING TIDE

For starters, the change in water depth will eliminate or open up available habitat in coastal bays and estuaries. But the greatest effect over the summer has little to do with water depth. Inshore fish — redfish, speckled trout and flounder — respond to a change in the water's physical properties during different phases of the tide.

Guide Jot Owens is on the water at all phases of the tide and every water condition, and he's paid to find fish for his clients — even on a rising tide that might send many anglers back to the boat ramp.

"I can't plan my trips around the tides, especially when I have clients on the schedule to be here every day," said Owens. "Fortunately, I can catch fish on any tide. The tide affects my locations I fish and sometimes the species I target.

"Water temperatures in the estuaries can easily reach 85 degrees in the summer, and fish become lethargic," he said. "But in the hottest parts of the summer, the ocean is always cooler than the inshore water, and a rising tide will flush cooler water inside and turn on a bite outside of the typical early morning and late-evening scenarios."

Owens looks for a spike in feeding activity on rising water from July through September. While incoming water can trigger a bite, the heavy flows also open up expansive regions of water where baitfish can go to escape predators. However, areas exist where baitfish and shrimp are vulnerable on periods of rising water, creating hot spots for honing in on reds, flounder or specks.

"Fish can get spread out on higher tides some, but if you find places where the bait can't hide — like hard banks and grass line banks that meet dry land — fish will be there ambushing bait," he said.

Baitfish, shrimp, and crabs will slide into shallow waters to avoid predators, and anywhere they can find structure or grass, they will move in for refuge and shade. Estuaries are covered with natural cover, from marsh grass and oysters to an entire gamete of man-made fea-

The armaments that prevent many of the nation's inlets from closing in always provide great fishing opportunities due to the very nature of how jetties are built and where they are located.

The large boulders that make up jetties are in places where water is constantly moving, pushing and pulling baitfish and shrimp and creating perfect spots for gamefish to ambush an easy meal. Fish learn places to set up when currents begin to flow out, and when the tide begins to flow back in, they reposition — anglers must follow suit.

Many fishermen move to inlets and jetties as the tide falls to catch fish waiting for the buffet as the water pours out. But when the tide starts to roll back in, bait being pushed in creates prime opportunities for more feeding. During the peak of hot, summer temperatures, the incoming current pulls in cooler ocean waters and makes jetties prime spots.

The best places to fish around jetties will change depending on the tide and the intensity of the tide. According to guide Jot Owens, fishing can be spectacular on an incoming tide if anglers set up in the right spots.

"The jetties are great incoming-tide places to fish during the summer," Owens said. "You have to find the current breaks and set up there for the best action."

Fish aren't going to sit in the main current flow on either side of the tide, because the current coming through the inlet between jetties can be brutal, and fish can't stand them very long.

"Fish will burn too many calories sitting in heavy current (but) they will be near these strong-current areas and usually right on the edge," he said. "You must find the current breaks along the jetty rocks and sand bars where the current is significantly slower and where it makes sense for the fish to set up to ambush bait."

Most of the time, current seams and areas of broken current are easily located. Fish looking to feed will be resting in light-current areas next to the heavy current, waiting for food to sweep past, and they're usually lying just off the bottom when the waters are at their warmest.

For best results, anglers should cast upcurrent and allow a bait or lure to sweep along the bottom on the edge of these current seams. It won't take long for a fish to try and snap up an easy meal coming its way.



Jeff Burleson

Rock jetties harness the current coming through an inlet on an incoming tide and often create great places to target gamefish in spots where they're set up to ambush bait.

tures. Those man-made features can be Owens' hot spots on rising water.

"Docks and marinas provide shade and plenty of hard structure where bait can't bury themselves in the grass. They are great high-water scenarios," he said.

While marinas can provide good places on higher water, areas along the coast are littered with docks and bulkheads. When the water rises, bait gets trapped up against bulkheads or along hard, muddy banks; they become great places for anglers to find feeding fish.

"As the water gets higher, move up a little closer to the bank around the dock pilings. The fish will move up shallow when they can to find bait," said Owens.

Throughout the summer, redfish, trout and flounder have plenty of foraging options, but the best opportunities on rising water will lie closer to shore in shallow sections of estuaries. As a result, anglers can experiment with lure selections and expect positive results.

Owens said a rising tide sets the stage for topwater lures because fish are cruising the shallow margins, and topwater is an ideal presentation in these areas.

"Many of the high-water places I fish are actually dry on lower tides. Redfish will be cruising the edges looking for baitfish that have pushed shallow. Topwater plugs are fantastic," he said.

In addition to topwater plugs, anything that can be retrieved slowly and just under the surface will grab the attention of a passing gamefish, too. Quite often, Owens will pull out a large spinnerbait with willow-leaf blade, make a good cast and retrieve it slowly.

"Spinnerbaits are very effective, especially when the water is stained or off-color in these shallow spots," he said.

An incoming tide often brings super-clear water into the marsh, and a less-intrusive



presentation may be needed. The bright, shiny presentations of spinnerbaits and topwater plugs can spook fish in clear water. That's when Owens turns to a popping cork and a scented, soft-plastic bait.

"Rattling and popping corks work real well, and rigged with a 3-inch Gulp shrimp are hard to beat to catch speckled trout, flounder and redfish on high water in shallow areas," said Owens, who'll use a 40-pound leader between 12 and 18 inches long and a light jighead.

Anglers can't always expect every day to bring perfect tides and weather conditions. But when the tides bring water into an estuary, they should never put their tackle away. Some of the day's best fishing can be during periods of rising water. ■

Guide Joe Owens said rising tides will push cooler ocean water into inside areas, making predators like flounder more active.



Jeff Burtson is a certified biologist and professional forester with a degree in fisheries and wildlife.

GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

Zebra mussels can boost the growth of smallmouth bass, but they may also keep you from fishing some places.

ZEBRA MUSSELS, FRIEND OR FOE?

SILENT INVADERS HAVE MOVED TO PICKWICK LAKE

The population of non-native zebra mussels has recently expanded in the Pickwick Lake and other Tennessee River impoundments. Although we will have to contend with this unwanted invader for a long time to come, some new information suggests zebra mussels may benefit fisheries as well as harm them.

THE BIOLOGY

Zebra mussels, native to the Black and Caspian seas in eastern Europe, arrived in the U.S. in ballast water of transoceanic shipping. First documented in the Great Lakes as early as 1988, they rapidly spread throughout the Great Lakes region and the Mississippi River Valley.

Zebra mussels are prolific; a single female can release 40,000 eggs during an annual spawn. They tightly attach to any hard surface and filter-feed microscopic plankton. Densities of adult zebra mussels commonly exceed hundreds per

square foot.

Zebra mussels tolerate a wide range of temperatures, thriving up to 77°F and persisting up to 86°F. They have been in the Tennessee River for at least 20 years, and the population has remained relatively small.

Why the sudden outbreak? Biologists speculate that summer temperatures reaching 90°F have suppressed the population. The summer of 2017 was relatively cool, maybe cool enough to allow high survival of young mussels that then grew during the cooler fall through this past spring. We'll see what happens after this summer.

PROBLEMS APLENTY

Their ability to tightly attach to hard substrates allow zebra mussels colonize and clog industrial and municipal water intake pipes and related equipment. At TVA dams, they interfere with the operation of gates that control water flow to

the turbines that drive electric generators. Keeping water flowing costs money — millions of dollars annually in the Great Lakes — and that cost is borne by people who use water and electricity.

Colonization of hard substrates also results in their selective attachment to native mussels, ultimately preventing the native mussels from opening their shells to feed and breathe. Native freshwater mussels are the most imperiled group of animals in the United States.

As filter feeders, they remove the microscopic plankton that is the foundation of the aquatic food web. A single, dime-sized zebra mussel can remove plankton from one quart of water per day. Removing this much primary production can affect the entire food web.

ANGLING EFFECTS

Filtering microscopic algae clears the water. The good news: with greater light penetration, this often increases

the growth of rooted aquatic plants. Although generally a good thing for anglers, this can also result in weed problems for lakeside property owners and other people who use lakes for recreational activities. This, in turn, invokes all the expense and controversy of aquatic plant control. The bad news: in lakes lacking aquatic vegetation, anglers generally will have to fish deeper, 10 or 20 feet deeper in some lakes, as fish move deeper to find preferred light levels.

Because of the problems caused by zebra mussels, nobody wants them. To prevent them from spreading, boaters in many states are required to clean, drain and dry their boats. In other areas, boaters are required to take their boat to an inspection and cleaning station; these stations may be a long way off the route to your intended fishing destination, and this regulation is obviously a major inconvenience. A far greater effect on anglers are bans on boat launching in some waters. Conceivably, this "solution" could be used to ban anglers who do not live on the lake.

BENEFITS TO BASS

No doubt, our aquatic ecosystems would be better off without zebra mussels, and any thoughts of spreading them around are unconscionable. But given that we are stuck with them in lakes and rivers where already established, it is fair to consider another benefit in addition to enhancing growth of aquatic plants.

In a conversation about smallmouth bass, accomplished angler Kevin Van Dam — whose career has spanned the colonization of zebra mussels in the Great Lakes — said he thought smallmouth bass growth had improved since zebra mussels became established. Available biological information supports his hypothesis. First, round gobies, another Great Lakes

CLEAN, DRAIN, AND DRY:

Please be a conscientious angler and don't contribute to the spread of zebra mussels or any other aquatic nuisance species. Clean, drain and dry your boat after every fishing trip. Clean: wipe the boat and remove any debris and aquatic plants. Drain: drain the bilge and livewells and lower the outboard motor to drain any water from the lower unit and prop hub. Dry: store the boat uncovered to dry the floors and carpet.



invader, eat zebra mussels. Although round gobies compete with several native fishes, smallmouth eat them like candy. Second, crayfish eat zebra mus-

sels, further enhancing a food source that benefits smallmouth bass growth and abundance. ■



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Bass feeding on sandbars often will take a deep-diving crankbait fished with a fast, erratic retrieve, stopping and starting your fast retrieve repeatedly.

HEAD TO THE TOMBIGBEE FOR AUGUST BASS

MAIN-RIVER SANDBARDS, SLOUGHS AND OXBOWS ARE PLACES TO FISH THIS MONTH ON BIG RIVER

I like to fish rivers for bass in August, because they always have some current moving, and fish like that. The Tombigbee River that divides Alabama and Mississippi is one of my favorite rivers for August bassing. I'll start fishing at the Columbus pool and also fish the Aliceville pool.

On most sections of the river, Mississippi and Alabama accept a reciprocal license, but in other areas, especially off the main river, you must have a license for the state in which you're fishing.

You'll have two options in August for catching bass on the Tombigbee River: the sandbars on the main river and the sloughs and oxbow lakes off the main river.

PRIMARY WEAPONS

• **Little George.** The weather's hot and bass at the mouths of creeks will be holding deep, so my first lure will be a ½-ounce blueback/pearl Mann's Little

George, a lead-headed bait with a tail-spinner, I'll fish it on a 7-foot, medium-action Shimano Expride rod with 18-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon.

I'll start fishing the sandbars close to the banks at the mouths of the creeks and down the sandbar to where it drops off into the river channel. The bass will be almost anywhere. You can see most of the river's often large, underwater sandbars.

I'll fish the Little George like a jig — jerking the bait up after it hits the bottom, letting it fall back to the bottom and using a yo-yo type of retrieve all the way out to the river channel. Then I'll reel it in and make another cast.

• **Mann's 15+ and 20+ crankbaits.**

After I thoroughly fish a sandbar with the Little George, I'll fish that same sandbar with Mann's 15+ and 20+ crankbaits in a brown back/chartreuse and shad-colors.

I'll fish both crankbaits on 20-pound fluorocarbon, a 6.4:1 Shimano reel and

a 7-foot, medium-action Shimano rod. Often, when you fish a crankbait on a sandbar, you'll fire up the bass and cause them to start feeding. I'll fish the 15+ on the shallow part of the sandbar, closest to the bank, and then the 20+ out in the deeper water toward the end of the bar and where it drops off into the river channel.

I use a very fast, erratic retrieve, stopping the lure and then fishing it fast.

• **Carolina-rigged Jelly Worm.** I also fish a Carolina rig slowly on each sandbar with a 7-foot-6, medium-heavy Shimano rod with a Shimano 7.5:1 reel, 50-pound bass braid, a ¾-ounce slip sinker with a bead under it and a barrel swivel underneath the bead. I'll tie 2 feet of 20-pound fluorocarbon leader to the other end of the swivel with a 6-inch Mann's Jelly Worm in green/pumpkin or junebug.

Even if the bass aren't actively feeding, or if you've caught most of the bass in the

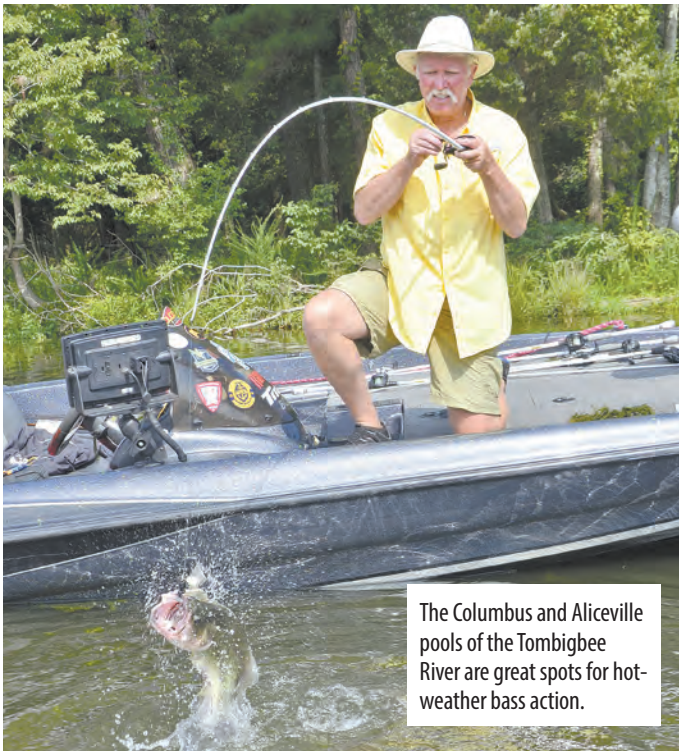
school on the Little George and the crankbaits, I have learned you may pick up a few bass using this Carolina rig and slowing down your fishing.

FISH FAST

You can fish the river fairly quickly. There aren't as many sandbars in the Columbus pool as there are in the Aliceville pool. After you've fished the Columbus pool, I recommend you lock through to the Aliceville pool, which has numerous creek channels. The lower end of the Aliceville pool is one of the better areas to bass fish in August.

SECONDARY TARGETS

Another tactic for August is to fish the sloughs and oxbow lakes off the main-river channel, where there's numbers of cypress trees in the water. I fishes a Super Frog there on a 7-foot, medium-heavy Shimano rod and a 7.5:1 reel spooled with 50-pound bass braid. I look for big clumps of vegetation



The Columbus and Aliceville pools of the Tombigbee River are great spots for hot-weather bass action.

that's either blown in to the bases of the cypress trees or has grown up around them. The cypress trees provide shade, and the vegetation provides cover for the bass.

You can catch bass around the bases of the cypress trees, but you'll catch more fishing the Super Frog through the vegetation and out to its edges. These areas will hold 5 to 8 feet of water, but the bass probably won't be that deep. Usually, they'll be holding right under the grass. ■



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.

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)		
FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	34" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	no limit
White marlin	66" LJFL	no limit
Sailfish	63" LJFL	no limit
Sharks (large coastal/pelagic)@	37" TL*	1/day or 3/boat
Sharks@	25" TL*	4/day
Cobia	33" FL	2 per day
Redfish (red drum)	18" minimum	
	30" maximum TL	3/day (1 over 30")
Flounder (state waters)	12" TL	15/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL@	4/day aggregate
Hogfish	12" FL@	5/day
Red, yellowfin grouper	20" TL@	4/day
Scamp grouper	16" TL@	4/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	no minimum@	1/day each
Gray/schoolmaster/cubera/mahogany/yellowtail/dog snapper	12" TL@	10/day aggregate
Mutton snapper	16" TL@	10/day
Queen/blackfin/silk/winchman snapper	none@	10/day aggregate
Vermillion/lane snapper	10"/8" TL@	20/day aggregate
Gray triggerfish	14" FL@	20/day
Golden/blueline/anchor/blackline tilefish	none@	20/day
King mackerel	24" FL@	2/day
Spanish mackerel	no minimum size@	15/day
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL@	3/day
Bigeye tuna	27" CFL@	no limit
Tripletail	18" TL	3/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	15"	15/day

@ For openings and closings of federally regulated fish and updated size limits, visit gulfcouncil.org.

FRESHWATER

FISH Species (Inland waters)	Minimum Size Limit	Creel Limit (per day)
Crappie/Panfish #	%	30 crappie, 100 bream
Largemouth, smallmouth, spotted bass	%	10 in combination
Channel catfish	No more than 1 over 34"	None +
Blue catfish	No more than 1 over 34"	None +
Flathead catfish	No more than 1 over 34"	None +
Striped bass or hybrid bass	15"	6 in combination
Mountain Trout (Lake Lamar Bruce)	No restrictions	3
Sauger	%	10
Walleye	%	3
Alligator gar/paddlefish	No fish over 30" in creel	2

TL=Total Length; LJFL=Lower jaw to middle of fork in tail; FL=Fork Length (tip of snout to middle of fork in tail); CFL=Curved Fork Length (measure of a line tracing contour of body from tip of upper jaw to fork of the tail).

+ In Lake Okhissa, 5 per day, in ReCon Lake and all MDWFP lakes, 10 per day

% For lake-specific regs, see MDWFP's Regulations Digest or www.mdwfp.com/

In Lake Okhissa and Percy Quin State Park, the creel limit is 50 per day.

* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

HAPPY TRAILS

Bill Garbo

If you want to consistently bag a buck like the author's, you should pay attention to the little details. **INSET:** The author keeps detailed records of his sight-in targets and how each weapon is sighted in.

TIME IS SHORT

WITH DEER SEASON JUST OVER THE HORIZON, IT'S TIME TO DO ALL OF THAT PRESEASON WORK ON TRAILS, STANDS AND WEAPONS



My goodness, where has the time gone? In another month, SEC football games will be playing live on television, and the opening of archery season for deer will be less than 30 days away. If you haven't already been working hard in your spare time to ensure that your hunting property, tree stands and weapons of choice are all ready to rock-n-roll, you are already behind the proverbial "8 ball."

As far as my own personal task or to-do list, it all starts during late summer with the mowing of woods roads, shooting lanes and food plots. As I've said before, the devil is always in the details, even when mowing and bush-hogging. Along woods roads and around the perimeter of food plot fields, always make note of where last season's communal scrapes and overhanging licking branches were located. A good number of these scrapes repeat from year to year, as long as the

critical overhanging branch or branches are not cut or run over. This is very important from the standpoint of trail-camera setup during the pre-rut and rut time frames. Always keep the best and most-used communal scrape sites under surveillance throughout the season. You will be amazed at just how many different bucks use them.

TREE STAND SAFETY

This is a topic that on which every one of us can improve. Most hunting properties have a varied inventory of tree stands and blinds that range from hang-on stands to ladder stands, box blinds, tower stands and everything in between. This means that scattered throughout a typical inventory of stands, the only thing standing between a hunter and serious injury, disability or even death, are nylon ratchet straps, screw-in tree steps, wooden ladder rungs, ropes, nails, bolts and any number of other fasteners

and supports.

It takes time for corrosion or rust to take their toll on metal objects, but it will happen, given enough time. It's a totally different story, however, when it comes to straps and ropes. Damage and weakening caused by UV light and weather can happen amazingly fast. For example, a hang-on or ladder stand can be perfectly safe when you climb down from your last hunt in January, only to become a death-trap by the next October or November.

ALWAYS CHECK

If it has been in place for even a few months, every stand and its straps and fasteners should be looked at closely before ever climbing in to hunt. Look at them, tug and pull on them, and if there is the slightest indication of stress, strain, and deterioration, replace them immediately. The wrong time to find out that there is a problem is at 0-dark-30, with

This photo shows typical fasteners, straps and ropes that could be the only thing standing between you and a wheelchair — or worse.

- Inspect every stand.
- Replace every suspect strap and fastener.
- Continue to enjoy this great hobby.



your rifle or bow slung across your back.

You may have to buy a case of straps each year, but hey, what is the alternative cost of being injured, maimed or even killed. I have learned this through the school of hard knocks and am exceedingly lucky to have come through the past 48 years of deer hunting relatively unscathed.

YOUR WEAPON

Regardless of what your weapon(s) of choice are, this is the time to double check everything and ensure that when you pull the trigger, what you intend to have happen, happens exactly as planned. This is another area where the school of hard knocks has taught me many lessons. I can see several impressive whitetail racks today only through my mind's eye, due to me having neglected to properly service and check my weapons beforehand in the past.

With a bow, it's a fairly simple exercise of checking your bow string for wear, checking screws for tightness, and above all, checking your sight and sight pins for accuracy. After the mechanical parts are confirmed to be in order, it becomes an exercise in practice at various ranges and from various heights and angles, to approximate actual hunting conditions.

Regarding a rifle or slug gun, when was the last time you checked to make sure that your gun's zero point at various distances matches your hunting conditions and expectations? Even though modern-era rings and mounts are way more positive and stable than in the past, dragging a scoped gun in and out of its case, up and down tree-stand ladders, and in and out of narrow blind entry doors, can potentially change the aim point.

Go to a safe place to shoot or an actual range and check it out. For example, a .30-06 sighted in dead-on at 100 yards may be fine if your shots are never over, say, 150 yards. But if you need accuracy to 300 yards, a 150-grain, .30-06 bullet should be 2¾ inches high at 100 yards in order to be about 3 or 4 inches low at 300 yards. Don't take chances. Match your sight-in parameters to what your anticipated hunting conditions will require. ■



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.

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 1-Oct. 7 (n), Sept. 1-Sept. 9 (s) Oct. 27-Nov. 7 (n), Oct. 6-Nov. 7 (s) Dec. 22-Jan. 31 (n), Dec. 15-Jan. 31 (s)	15	45
Quail	Nov. 22-March 2	8	
Rabbit	Oct. 1-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (fall)	Sept. 30-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (spr)	May 15-June 1	4	
Raccoon	July 1-Sept. 30	1 raccoons per party	
Rac/Opp/Bobct	Oct. 1-Oct. 31 (food/sport) Nov. 1-Feb. 28 (food/sport/pelt)	5/day, 8/party No limit	
Rails			
King & Clapper	Sept. 2-Nov. 10	25	75
Sora & Virginia,	Sept. 2-Nov. 10	15	45
Gallinules	Sept. 2-Nov. 10	15	45
Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28	8	24
Crow	Nov. 4 - Feb. 28	No limit	No limit
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31	3	9
Wild Turkey			
Fall season	Oct. 15-Nov. 15 (selected counties)	2 per season (may be either sex)	
Spring season	March 15-May 1	1/day, 3/season, longbeards only	
Youth season	March 8-14	1/day, 3/season, bearded birds only	

WATERFOWL SEASONS

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 15-30 Nov. 23-25, Nov. 30-Dec. 2 Dec. 5-Jan. 27	6 6
Geese	Sept. 1-30	5
(Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)	Nov. 9-25, Nov. 30-Dec. 2, Dec. 5-Jan. 27	Canada 3, Brant 1 Snow/blue/Ross 20 White-fronted 3
Light Geese conservation	Oct. 1-Nov. 8, Jan. 28-Feb. 1, Feb. 3-March 31	No limit

DEER SEASON

ZONE	ARCHERY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
Northeast	Oct. 1-Nov. 16	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 5-16 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 17-31 (archery/primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan. 16(dogs) Nov. 3-Jan. 31 (youth)
East Central	Oct. 1-Nov. 16	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 5-16 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 17-31 (archery-primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan. 16(dogs) Nov. 3-Jan. 31 (youth)
Southwest	Oct. 1-Nov. 16	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 5-16 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 17-31 (archery-primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan.16(dogs) Nov. 3-Jan. 31 (youth)
Southeast	Oct. 15-Nov. 16	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Jan. 1 (dogs)
	Jan. 17-31 (either-sex arch-primitive)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Feb. 1-15 (archery-primitive bucks only)		Dec. 24-Jan. 16(dogs) Nov. 3-Feb. 15(youth)
Delta	Oct. 1-Nov. 16	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Jan. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 5-16 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 17-31(archery primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan. 17(dogs) Nov. 3-Jan. 31 (youth)

A man wearing a dark cap with a logo, sunglasses, and a dark jacket is smiling while holding a large, silvery fish. The fish has a yellowish lure in its mouth. The background shows a body of water and a house on the shore.

**LURE
REVIEW**

Don Shoopman

**MISTER TWISTER'S
NIGHTCRAWLER**

UNIQUE COLORS OFFER FISH SOMETHING NEW

Mike Cork of Benton holds a good-sized bass that bit on a Tri-Alive 6.5 Nightcrawler made by Minden-based Mister Twister.

Glen Freeman of Zwolle, La. has a new weapon in his bass-fishing arsenal when he goes out to Toledo Bend. So does Zack Hughes of Quitman, Texas, who boated a 10-plus-pounder on the first day he fished with it at Lake Fork.

The two guides are catching bass on brilliantly colored, straight-tail plastic worms that hit the market in early June. Manufactured by Minden-based Mister Twister LLC, The Tri-Alive 6.5 Nightcrawler lives up to its name because, well, it looks exactly like an earthworm.

But the true calling card for the 6½-inch plastic worm is the color, or, in this case, multi-colors. There are 15 different hues available after approximately 25 were eliminated in the decision-making process by Chuck Byrd, Mister Twister's general manager, Darryl Laurent, the company's sales manager, and bass pro Clent Davis. At the request of many bass anglers, Byrd took the plastic-worm mold the artificial lure manufacturer had discontinued 12 years ago and had it adjusted to accommodate tri-colored plastic worms in January and February, Laurent said.

COLORS ARE KEY

"We started running colors in March. We ran about 40 to choose from to pick the 15 we have," Laurent said. "He sent the mold off to have it re-gated so we could shoot three colors at one time to get those laminated as clear as they are. We have colors for clear water and for off-colored water, also."

And they aren't just any colors, Freeman and Hughes agreed.

"Well, I just started fishing it this year. Their colors are pretty unique. That's the main thing.

That's the dominant deal. It's just the right size," Freeman said. "You can finesse or power fish it, either way. You can fish it deep or shallow. I love them."

He said his favorite colors — the ones triggering bite after bite at Toledo Bend — were watermelon fire and grape mist. "Here's the deal. They've got some colors fish haven't seen before. All the pressure this lake's seen the last two, three years, it's something the fish haven't seen. That's where the colors come in handy. Their colors are pretty unique. I love them," he said.

"There is not a color out there like it," Hughes said after returning from another successful fishing trip. He and his customers rigged Nightcrawlers on a football swing-head jig that day and caught 17 bass; Hughes noted that although none were lunkers, all were good-sized fish.

"I just got these a week ago ... and caught a 10.38 the day I got them," Hughes said. "That big bass fell for a drop-shotted Nightcrawler."

"It's my go-to bait this year.

"Obviously on a drop-shot, you always use a straight-tail worm. The fish haven't seen that. It gives fish something different. It gives customers something different to throw," Hughes said.

"We even Carolina-rigged it this week," he said, "but it's best on a drop-shot and football swing-head jig."

"I can see in the spring using it as a wacky worm," he said.

Mostly, Hughes fishes the Nightcrawler in deep brush piles and deep timber on his primary spot, Lake Fork.

And the Nightcrawler is tough, Hughes said, noting on his recently completed guide trip that day he caught multiple fish with it.

Freeman is fishing his Nightcrawlers differently, but with the same results.

A veteran guide and tournament angler said, Freeman he has been strictly Texas-rigging the new plastic worm in 15- to 25-foot depths, targeting everything from points to ridges to humps, "not around any grass or anything, sometimes wood, natural structure."

The biggest bass he's caught in the short time he has used it was an 8-pounder, he said.

HOLD THE SALT

Laurent said the plastic worm doesn't contain salt. Many shaky head-style specialists told him during its development stage they wanted plastic worms without salt because salt weighs them down.

For more information on Mister Twister's Nightcrawler and other Mister Twister artificial lures, go to www.mistertwister.com or call 318-377-8818. ■



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.

STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

Paper-shooting your bow is a big part of the process of getting your equipment ready for the season.



BOW PREP NOW IS TIME WELL SPENT

A TRUE-SHOOTING SETUP IS THE RESULT OF ANNUALLY TUNING YOUR EQUIPMENT

Sammy Romano

As we enter August, early archery seasons are around the corner in many areas. With that in mind, my thoughts always shift from fishing to bowhunting. It's time to prepare for the season, and what you do now could very well determine outcomes later this fall.

The first and perhaps most important step is checking your equipment and performing any preventative maintenance

needed, as well as tuning your bow for maximum performance and accuracy. Here are a few tips to help you get the most from your bow this season:

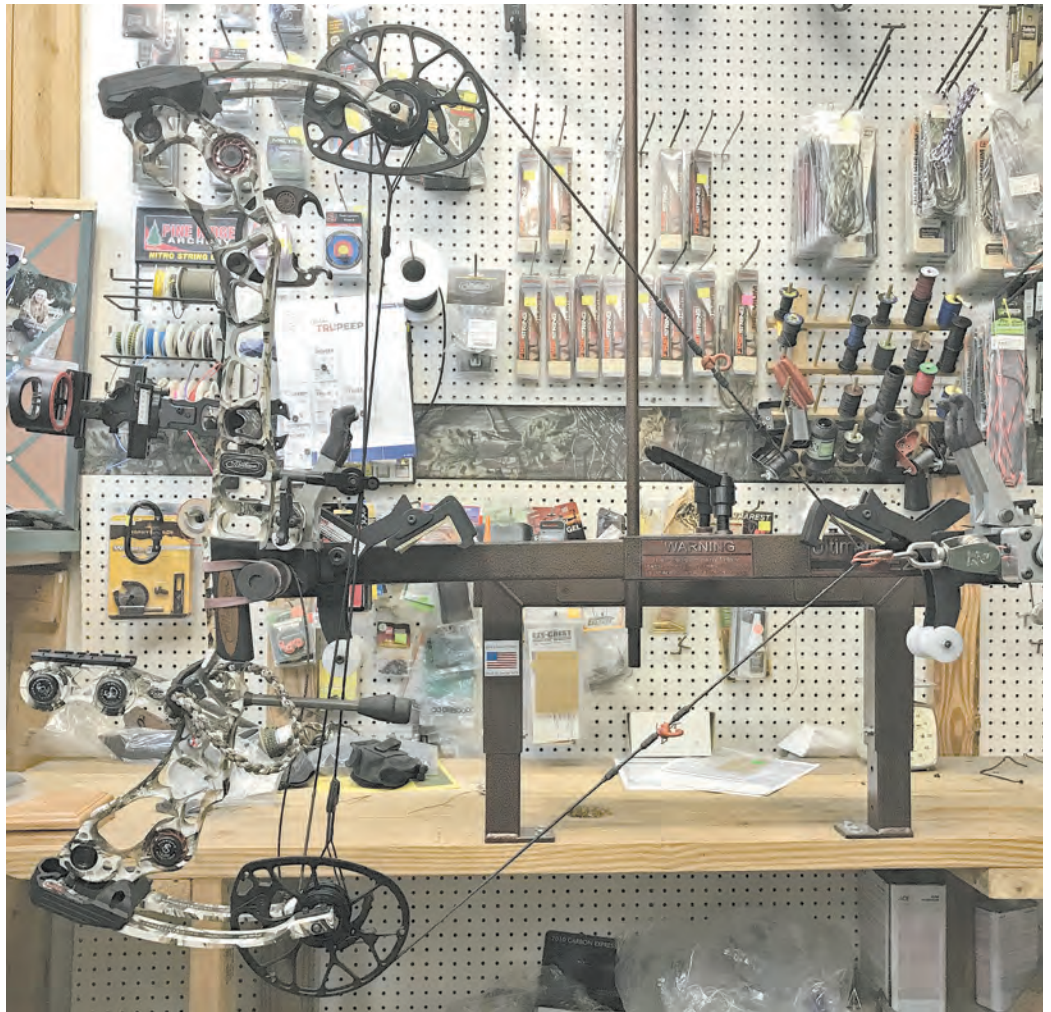
RUN THAT CHECKLIST

Although a lot of archers shoot year-round, for many people, this is the first time your bow will be out of its case since last hunting season. Before beginning the tuning process, check over

your bow's limbs, string, cables and cams. Check the limbs, looking for any cracks or fractures; although rare, these could lead to a catastrophic limb failure. Check your string and cables, looking for any nicks, frays, severe discoloration or extreme serving wear. Make sure you don't have any chips or dings in the cams that could cut a string or cable. If you find anything, have these parts replaced immediately. If you're unsure,

BACK TO THE DRAW BOARD

A draw board is a device that uses a winch to slowly draw back a bow, allowing you to stop the draw at any time and examine timing and cam length. Being able to look at those factors without holding the bow, you are able to be more precise — which yields better results. Adjustments can then be made to correct any issues, making your bow more accurate and efficient. I use a draw board from Last Chance Archery; it fits onto my Last Chance Bow Press and allows for micro-adjustments by adjusting the worm gear on the press itself.



consult your local pro shop. If your string set looks good and is less than 2 years old, apply a quality string wax to the unserved areas of both string and cables and rub it in gently. Wipe off any excess to prevent attracting dirt.

DO THE TWIST

The next step is to add twists to the string/cables to compensate for elongation, and return the bow to factory specifications for axle length and brace height. Modern compound bows are designed to exacting specs, and will perform best when they are correct. This requires the use of a bow press, and in most cases is best performed by a pro shop technician. Doing this will help to eliminate any excess noise and vibration caused by string over-travel, making the bow more efficient. It will also allow the bow to reach full poundage.

Once the string and cables are twisted to the proper length and several arrows have been fired through the bow, put the bow on a draw board to check for proper

cam timing and straightness. Once your bow is properly set to specs, timed, and the cams are straight, double check for proper peep rotation and arrow rest timing — if using a fall-away rest. Next, check both nocking point and center shot: If everything looks correct, it's time to paper-shoot your setup and check for proper arrow flight.

ALWAYS PAPER TUNE A BOW

By shooting a field-tipped arrow through a tight sheet of thin paper from 6 to 9 feet away, you will be able to evaluate your arrow's flight and make adjustments to correct any problems.

For a hunting setup, I always try to achieve a "bullet hole," of perfectly symmetrical rip with all three fletches visible — which indicates perfectly straight arrow flight. Once you achieve this, double-check by firing a broadhead-tipped arrow at a target, followed by a field-tipped arrow. If they fly to different

points of impact, you may need to repeat the previous steps. Once these arrows impact the same spot on the target, you are ready to sight your bow in.

After dialing in your bow's sight, all that remains is to practice and practice — then practice some more. Make sure to use proper form, as this builds good muscle memory, which is critical in clutch field situations. Remember, it's not the total number of arrows shot, it's the quality of the shots taken. With time at the range, you'll be ready when an opportunity presents itself. A little time spent now can lead to a full freezer and the trophy wall later. ■



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.

CAJUN COOKING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

TOUPS STAYS BUSY IN HOUSEBOAT KITCHEN



Trent Toups' seafood stuffed potatoes are hearty and filling, without losing the delicate taste of the crabmeat and shrimp. **INSET:** His houseboat has a modern, completely equipped kitchen.

"Tonight we do Cajun," proclaimed the rugged man's man with a flourish. "I'm a Coonass — but I'm really half-Italian and half-Cajun. My Momma was a Baldissaro."

Trent Toups was holding court on his 65-foot houseboat in the Red River South Marina, south of Shreveport, La.

"This houseboat is my fishing base, and it's a place for my kids to come swim and water tube," he said. "Not many people in Bossier-Caddo have houseboats. It must be a relic of my heritage. My great grandmother Champagne and her daughter, my grandmother Baldissaro, lived on houseboats."

Toups, 39, was born in Marrero, La., but has lived in Shreveport since he was about 10. He credits his family for his cooking skills.

"I watched my mother cook — Mom was a very good cook — one of the best cooks I know. One of things I like is she cooks oyster dressing two different ways: one rice and the other bread. I like the bread one 10 percent more than the other," he said, rolling his eyes and licking his lips.

"She taught me how to use seasonings — how to pair

them with dishes. And she taught me not to overcook seafood. A lot of people do that.

"Her momma, Dot Baldissaro, cooked Italian because her husband was Italian. She stuffed melatons (mirlatons) with shrimp. I remember stuffed bread crumbs. I like that with a spaghetti sauce on the outside and baked

a little.



continued >

"My Toups grandma is from Lafitte. They lived on the bayou. In the summer, me and my brothers would work on the family shrimp boat. Five uncles had shrimp boats. We would take a can of ravioli and set the closed can on the engine block. That was our stove.

"Grandpa liked white beans; that was his favorite. Legend has it that my grandma would soak the beans and then peel every one of them."

Troup readily admits that he cooks a lot, in fact, he's the cook of the house. "I fish and I hunt; that's what I do, but cooking is a passion. I would love to have a small hole-in-the-wall restaurant and cook for people." ■

TRENT'S SHRIMP AND CRABMEAT STUFFED POTATOES

Trent Toups is a totally spontaneous cook. He humorously mumbled in the kitchen. "I don't know where I got the idea for this. I think it was when I needed to make something at the deer camp. I love seafood, and I wanted to give a different twist to it."

Because he cooks off the top of his head, he constantly rummaged through the

houseboat's kitchen cabinets to see what he could try adding. Although the next time he cooks the dish, it may have different ingredients, this version is a guaranteed winner.

It is decadently creamy — and a must for baked potato lovers.

PREPARATION: Serves 6.

Wash the potatoes, wrap them individually in aluminum foil and place them in a 400° oven. Allow enough time for the potatoes to cook 1½ hours and be ready for the stuffing. Wash the shrimp and set them aside. Fry the bacon until it is done, crumble it and set it aside. Add oil and flour to a heavy pot. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly to prevent burning until roux is blond in color. Reduce heat to medium-low and stir in bell peppers, garlic and onion. Cook, stirring often, until the seasonings are soft.

Add the half & half and butter. Add liquid and powdered crab boil and Velveeta. Heat over low heat until the Velveeta melts and the sauce thickens slightly, about 15 minutes. Stir often. Add the shrimp and cook a few minutes until the water released by the shrimp cooks out. Stir in the crabmeat. When the sauce is thick, stir in cayenne pepper and Creole seasoning to taste. Split each potato and generously ladle the sauce on top. Sprinkle with bacon crumbles and green onions. ■

TIP!

Using ripe bell peppers instead of green ones creates a sweeter, less sharp flavor. Using three colors is simply for appearance. All ripe peppers taste alike, so for taste's sake, using one color is fine.

INGREDIENTS:

- 6 very large baking potatoes
- 1¼ pounds large shrimp, peeled, deveined and split lengthwise
- 3 slices thick-sliced brown sugar cured bacon
- ⅓ cup cooking oil
- ⅓ cup flour
- ½ cup chopped red bell pepper
- ½ cup chopped yellow bell pepper
- ½ cup chopped orange bell pepper
- 1 head of garlic, minced
- ¼ large onion, chopped
- 1 quart half & half
- 1 stick butter
- 1 jar cap of liquid crab boil to taste
- 1 tsp powdered crab boil
- ½ pound Velveeta
- ½ pound lump crabmeat
- Cayenne pepper to taste
- Creole seasoning to taste
- ¾ cup chopped green onion tops



Troup used the cap from the liquid crab boil's jar as a measuring device.



Jerald and Glenda Horst are the authors of six excellent books on seafood cooking — *The Seafood Bible: Shrimp*, *The Seafood Bible: Crawfish*, *The Seafood Bible: Crabs*, *The Seafood Bible: Oysters*, *The Seafood Bible: Fish: Volume 1* and *The Seafood Bible: Fish: Volume 2*. Jerald and Glenda may be contacted at jerald@rockinghorst.com.



WHITE PERCH
UP NEXT >

WHITE PERCH — WITH THE BARK ON

INGREDIENTS:

16 medium to large crappie fillets with skin and scales left on
2 sticks butter
2 tbsp Milani dill sauce
2 tbsp chopped parsley
3 tbsp lemon juice
1 tsp onion powder
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
Creole seasoning to taste

This recipe perfectly illustrates Trent Toups' willingness to boldly try new ingredients. Trent picked up a jar of Milani dill sauce out of curiosity at a Shreveport seafood market.

Dill is commonly used in Scandinavian seafood but is probably the last herb one would expect to be used along the Gulf coast. If this sauce isn't available where you shop, try mixing some dried dill weed into the butter sauce instead.

Troup grills catfish more often than crappie but is quick to admit that the mild, white flesh of crappie is perfect on the grill, as long as it isn't over-seasoned. The flesh is eaten right off the crisped skin with a fork.

PREPARATION: Serves 4.

Heat a barbecue pit to medium-low temperature. While pit is heating, wash the crappie fillets to remove any stray scales, lightly dry them and set them aside. Over low heat, melt the butter in a small sauce pan. Add the dill sauce, parsley, lemon juice, onion powder and Worcestershire sauce and stir to blend. Add Creole seasoning to taste. Spread the fillets, skin-side down, on a platter and dust them with more Creole seasoning to taste. Spread the fillets, skin-side down on the grill's grates and baste them with the butter mixture. Repeat the basting 3 or 4 minutes later. Cook until the flesh flakes with a fork, between 5 and 10 minutes total.

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KEEP YOUR TACKLE TANGLE-FREE

By Devin Denman

HOOK BONNETS AND ROD SOCKS ARE EASY FIXES FOR A FRUSTRATING PROBLEM

ABOVE: Rod socks (left) and hook bonnets are an easy and relatively inexpensive way to prevent your rods and reels from becoming a tangled mess. **TIP:** You can modify a hook bonnet with scissors to accommodate the treble on your rod's hook keeper to keep things even more tangle-free.

Courtesy of Devin Denman

How annoying is it when you grab one rod and two others are attached to it?

Time spent untangling rods is time spent not having a line in the water, which ultimately results in time spent not catching fish.

Use these easy tips to keep your rods tangle-free, and make your precious time on the water that much more productive.

KEEPING RODS UNTANGLED

It's the weekend, and you're on your way to the ramp with your rods in the back of the truck.

By the time you get there, all of your tackle has become a jumbled mess, and pulling the rods apart without breaking anything is like solving a Rubik's Cube.

Not only is it a total pain in the behind, but it's also an accident waiting to take out a guide or rod tip, nick up your fluorocarbon or mono, or even weaken your blank that might break on hook-set.

EASY SOLUTIONS

There are two items I use to prevent all

these problems: hook bonnets and rod socks.

Hook bonnets are a lifesaver because they're great for securing lures with treble hooks.

Popular lures like gold spoons, suspending lures and topwaters all have multiple treble hooks, with one being secured to the hook keeper and the other left dangling around. A hook bonnet will protect that second treble from snagging anything other than the corner of a fish's mouth, so it's a great tool.

Plus, they're great for storing those same lures in tackle trays, so they don't tangle with other hard baits.

Best of all, a bag of hook bonnets isn't expensive, usually around \$3.

Pro tip: They can be modified with a pair of scissors to accommodate the treble kept by the hook keeper on your rod. Snipping off one side of the bonnet exposes the one hook you need to keep the lure in place.

ROD SOCKS

My boat comes with a rod locker for safely securing my rods, but even then fishing line somehow snags reel handles

and rod guides ... you get the picture.

An easy fix is using rod socks to isolate each one, keeping tangling from happening in the first place.

But they're not good just for rod lockers. Use them when transporting equipment in the back of your truck — they're good to keep the blanks and fishing line protected from nicks and scratches.

Pro tip: Rod socks can be fairly inexpensive at \$6 to \$8 each. But that can add up pretty quickly, even if you're protecting just a few rods. A good place to shop is eBay or even Amazon, where you can get them direct from the factory for \$2 or less.

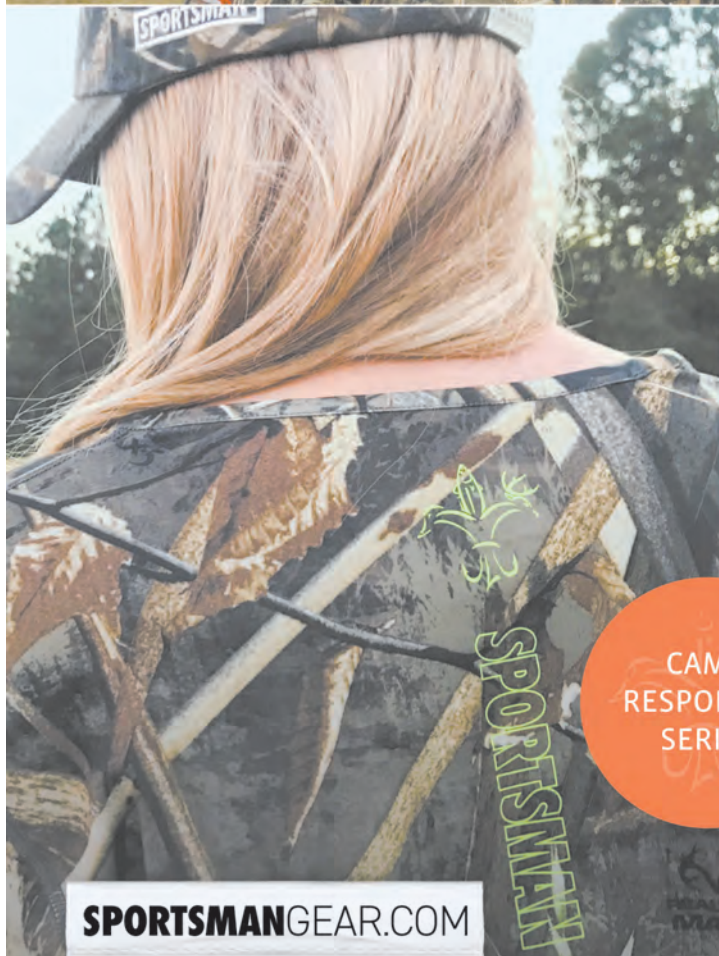
CONCLUSION

You're a good angler, and should take care of your tackle to protect your investment and execute your fishing trips more efficiently. Hook bonnets and rod socks are tools to aid you in that endeavor.

Tight lines, y'all. ■

Editor's Note: Capt. Devin Denman is an avid inshore angler who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com.

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GO 'SIGHT-CRABBING' TO TARGET MONSTER BLUES

By Josh Chauvin

Photo courtesy of Josh Chauvin

INSTEAD OF LETTING TASTY CRUSTACEANS COME TO YOU, GO AFTER BIG CRABS THIS WAY

ABOVE: Instead of putting out nets and simply letting them come to him, Josh Chauvin prefers targeting and hunting down jumbos by 'sight-crabbing' with a rod and reel in his 10-foot boat.

Nets, traps and other methods can easily catch numbers of crabs, but I really don't have any interest in catching small or medium-sized crustaceans. So instead of waiting for a crab to come to my bait, going out to hunt the crab is my preferred method.

On sunny days, I go to the clearest, moss-filled marsh bays, I can find with my small, aluminum flat boat. These brackish water crabs are the sweetest tasting ones, in my opinion.

I look for bays with 1½ to 3 feet of water, with the bottom being a mix of about half moss and half hard mud. When the bottom is all moss, the crabs are extremely tough to spot. And areas coated with scum make seeing the crabs much more difficult.

Oftentimes the ponds are filled with monster crabs, which seem to like shallow, hot water. Nearly half the crabs spotted are large selects — maybe small crabs stick to the muddier water to avoid predators. The bay crabs seem to be very fat and full, compared to bayou crabs, which are often skinny with less meat.

POLARIZED GLASSES ARE KEY

A small, aluminum boat works great because it gives you the stability to stand in the front and go into very shallow water. My 10-foot flat works great either solo or with a friend.

To get the best view, polarized glasses to see through the sun's glare are a must. The mirrored, coated lenses let in less light, which makes seeing crabs more difficult — so light grey or amber lenses work best. Also, standing or sitting high is important so a long paddle is needed.

Also, I often see redfish — so I keep a pole or my fly rod ready to cast out to any tasty fish I see during the trip.

I prefer to slowly paddle with the wind in my face, which helps keep the boat from running over the crabs. I often spot several large crabs together, but they usually won't leave unless the boat runs over them.

To catch these massive crabs, I use a simple rod and reel with a ½-ounce jighead baited with a slab of catfish skin. (Any bait will work, but the catfish skin covers the crab's eyes well and is very tough, and lasts for dozens of crabs.)

REELING THEM IN

Once I spot a crab, I toss the bait out in front of it. Then, I stick my paddle in the mud to anchor while the crab begins to feed. If the boat is moving with wind and current, the crab often gets pulled loose from swimming too fast or from sharp jerks caused by wave action. The crab can see the boat, so if it's not allowed to get a good taste of the bait, it'll swim off and hide for good.

While the boat is anchored, I slowly lift the crab from the bottom, with my net ready to scoop it up with my other hand. Crabs can strongly hold to grass, but once they're in the water swimming while feeding on the bait — it's game over.

The best part is not having to waste time or effort dealing with small to medium-sized crabs.

I much prefer a few dozen jumbos over a limit of 12 dozen mixed crabs, anyway. Though in the bays — when you spot a crab every 30 to 100 yards of slow paddling — a limit of large crabs in a day is very possible if you want that many.

So if you're looking for a fun workout to make crabbing more of a sporting challenge — where you actually hunt for the crabs instead of letting them come to you — try "sight-crabbing" for monster blues in the clear mossy bays along the coast. ■

Editor's Note: Josh Chauvin is a non-stop outdoorsman who also writes the Apex Predator column for LouisianaSportsman.com.



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A violet goby is a speckled trout favorite, and just might be the reason we have purple-colored lures. Keeping a close eye on what a trout throws up when you reel it in can give important clues on what it's eating that day — and might ultimately help you catch more fish.

MYSTERY BAITFISH REVEALED

KEEP AN EYE ON WHAT A TROUT THROWS UP IN YOUR BOAT — IT MIGHT HELP YOU CATCH MORE FISH

By Devin Denman

We were fishing Delacroix, La., when a speckled trout coughed up this weird thing shown in the accompanying photo. Read on to learn what exactly it is — and why it's important to you as an inshore angler.

THE MYSTERY BAITFISH

It was another spring day of targeting trout off of Oak River in Delacroix, and the specks were doing what they always do — holding in deep water with current and flowing bait.

Given this, the winning pattern was easy to discern: locate deep holes and fish bottom structure slack-lined, with a ⅜- to ½-ounce jighead.

But the trout were also doing something else they always do: Sliming up anything they touched, pooping everywhere and barfing up their food. I swear they aim for upholstery and GPS screens.

Given this, I have a habit of looking at what they throw up, because it could give me a clue to what they're eating. Even when half-digested trout favorites like shrimp, pogies, and mullet are easy to identify.

But a few trout that day coughed up something that we could not get an ID on. A quick glance might lead one to believe it's a mullet, but the shape of the tail ruled that out. And the face? Nothing like a mullet's.

We were stumped.

So, as a last resort, I took a picture and sent it to a marine biologist I know and trust to provide the correct answer And she did.

WHAT IS A VIOLET GOBY?

Violet gobies are ugly, bottom-dwelling fish that feed on organic detritus, a fancy \$10 word that means crap.

But they could also be the reason why we have purple lures.

The only ones I've seen in the marsh where coughed up by trout but those seen in a cursory image search online reveal a fish with a near-exotic color.

Look for yourself and see how radiantly purple this fish is: It sort of reminds me of a purple Sparkle Beetle. Take it a step further: The shape and size remind me of a queen-sized Sparkle Beetle.

And these weirdo fish feed on the bottom, right where we catch speckled trout on a jig.

This begs the question: Do trout bite purple on certain days because they best see that color in those water conditions? Or are they biting purple because that's the color of the gobies they are feeding on?

BEING A SMARTER INSHORE ANGLER

Of course, I'm making the assumption that violet gobies appear very purple in the wild. I don't know, but maybe a shrimper could tell us.

Either way, this is part of an inshore angler's journey: The learning curve.

When you learn, you ultimately catch more speckled trout and redfish — but the key is paying attention and knowing which questions to ask.

So keep a close eye on what that trout just spewed all over the bottom of your boat — it might actually help you put



Courtesy of Devin Denman

more fish in the box.

Tight lines, y'all. ■

Editor's Note: Capt. Devin Denman is an avid inshore angler who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com.

Watching a stationary object in the water — like these pilings at the Trestles on Lake Pontchartrain — will reveal which way the current is moving, and how quickly. Wind has a big effect on tidal movement, so no matter what your tide guide might say, there's nothing like real-time information on the water to plan your day.

GET REAL-TIME TIDAL CONDITIONS — RIGHT ON THE WATER

Patrick Bonin

CRAB TRAP BUOYS, PILINGS PROVIDE ACCURATE INFO ON WIND'S TIDAL IMPACT By Patrick Bonin

Windy conditions are pretty much a way of life, especially along the Gulf coast — and those breezes can have a big impact on tidal flow and the timing of high and low tides.

“Typically, the speed of the tide is relatively accurate on those tide charts everybody gets off the internet,” said Chas Champagne, owner of Matrix Shad soft-plastic lures. “But ... the wind changes everything all the time. Those charts are just five-year predictions off the lunar table, so that’s like if the world was in a vacuum. Now by the coast, lunar gravity does create an issue, because you’re dealing with the whole ocean, so it’s more accurate down around places (on the Gulf). But in any kind of bay or lake, the wind is such a big factor on it.

“If you get a big southeast wind, you’ll get a rising tide. If you get a northwest wind, it blows everything out and you get a fall in the tide.”

To get a real handle on a particular day’s conditions at his locale — in and around Lake Pontchartrain — Champagne simply keeps a close eye out as he starts his day. What he sees on the water goes a long way in determining where he might venture to target specks, or even sight-fish reds in ponds.

“What I do all the time, when we come out the pass first thing

in the morning, I’m looking for any stationary object to run my boat 5 feet from so I can see the way the current is breaking on a piling — or crab traps work real well, too,” he said. “Then, I can gauge the velocity around the break of the piling or the trap, and the direction of it, then I make my decision: I might like one area on a hard falling tide, so I’ll go there. If it’s lightly coming in, I might go somewhere else.

“For redfish, I have some ponds that hold a foot of water on average, and some that hold 8 inches of water on average — so if I see the tide is really coming in at Mach 3, then I’ll know I’ll be able to get into those skinny ponds that day,” he said. “But if I see it falling at Mach 3, I’ll know I need to stay away from the shallow ponds so I don’t get stuck.”

Just be aware of the wind’s impact on tidal estimates for your particular area, he said, then plan accordingly and get a good real-time reading using a piling or other stationary object in the water when you actually head out.

“If you have a 20 mph northwest wind and an incoming tide, it’s going to shake that tide up. It’s not going to be right on time,” Champagne said. “That water will drop a foot lower than a normal mean tide, and that goes for the whole state of Louisiana — northwest winds blow everything out.” ■



BIRCHWOOD CASEY'S BUSHWACKER RIMFIRE TARGET

By Dan Kibler

I inherited a .22 WMR rifle several years ago upon the death of my father-in-law, and until a few weeks ago, I didn't really shoot it very much, because I'm not all that keen on punching holes in paper just for fun.

That was before I discovered Birchwood Casey's Bushwacker Rimfire Target. In 30 minutes, my son and I sent 50 rounds downrange and had a blast; I could hardly get the gun out of his hands, particularly because he

kept trying to top my personal best of six straight hits at 50 yards with iron sights.

The heavy, steel target features two ¼-inch thick, 4-inch wide steel target paddles equipped with 3-inch Target Spots (stick-ons that are easily replaceable after each use). The paddles are rigged so they alternate between upright and down, one target popping up when the other is knocked down. After setting the Bushwacker up and securing it, we never had to waste time resetting it, even after dozens of shots.

The Bushwacker requires nothing for setup; it's ready to shoot right out of the box. MSRP is \$79.99.

More Info: www.birchwoodcasey.com

OFF GRID TOOLS' SURVIVAL AXE

By Dan Kibler

My son, the Eagle Scout, is in his late 20s now, but I can only imagine how he'd have been the toast of his troop 10 years ago if he'd showed up at camp with Off Grid Tools' Survival Axe.

This cool little multi-tool weighs about 1½ pounds, and at 11 inches long, it's small enough to carry on your belt or in your tool box. It has so many uses that it would have probably gotten worn out during a weekend camping trip — except that it's way too tough.

The base tool is a stainless-steel hatchet, but that just gets things started. Off Grid lists 31 different features, including the hatchet blade, a hammer head, nail claw, pry bar, a 6-inch reciprocal saw blade hidden in the handle, a handful of hex sockets, a cutting blade, a gas valve wrench, bottle opener and a hardened-steel glass breaker.

I understand that the Survival Axe would be a must for off-road camping, and with wood to cut and tent pegs to drive in the ground, it's a winner in that regard. But I love the idea of all the additional uses I could come up with for the hunting camp, several of them involving the rough butchering of deer or other big-game animals. I'm sure I could think up more — just maybe not 31. The MSRP is \$39.99.

More Info: www.offgridtools.com



SHIMANO'S CURADO CASTING RODS

By Brian Cope

Lightweight, strong, sensitive and affordable. Those are all great attributes of a bass fishing rod, but they don't always go together. Usually, the affordable part is left out when the other three are mentioned, but that's not the case with Shimano's Curado casting rods.

With Nanoresin blanks, premium cork handles, rubberized, soft-to-the-touch Fuji reel seats, a total of 10 guides (11 for the 8-foot model), the Curado series of rods are loaded with features that will keep you comfortably fishing throughout a fun day or a weekend tournament.

Available in a variety of sizes, power ranges, and actions, anglers can find a Curado to meet their needs. And with a price tag under \$160, they won't break the bank doing it.

You can purchase them from TackleWarehouse, which is the only retailer currently carrying every size: http://www.tacklewarehouse.com/Shimano_Curado_Casting_Rods/descpage-CDC.html

More Info: <http://fish.shimano.com>



New product submissions can be emailed to **Mark Boyd** at markb@lasmag.com or call 601-829-8080.



CULPRIT'S WATER DRAGON

By Dan Kibler

Soft-plastic lizards were all the rage 20 years ago when the Carolina rig ruled the bass-fishing world, but over the past decade, you haven't heard much about them. The creature bait has been the hot lure.

"A lot of people have forgotten about lizards with so many creature lures out there," said bass pro Dustin Wilks of Rocky Mount, N.C., a six-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier "There haven't been any very exciting changes in lizards in a long time."

So Wilks got together with one of his sponsors, Culprit, and after six months of design, a new bait was born, the Culprit Water Dragon.

A 7-inch bait available in 12 colors, the Water Dragon debuted at the recent ICAST trade show.

"We wanted to see what we could do to a lizard to catch bigger fish," said Wilks, who designed a bait with bigger, thicker rear legs and gills that come off the rear of the bait's head.

"You'd think the gills would make the most difference, but the thing I like best is the bigger, thicker back legs," he said. "That helps it float when you're Texas-rigging it. The gills have a bigger effect on it when you Carolina rig; it helps keep it planing a little better."

But Wilks likes two other, less noticeable features.

"The Water Dragon has a noticeable lateral line, which is perfect for guys who like to dye a bait's tail with chartreuse," he said. "And the back of the bait isn't smooth; it's got bumps. That makes it much easier to skin hook. If the bait was smooth, the tip of the hook would pop out more easily."

Culprit Water Dragons come eight to a pack, with an MSRP of \$5.29.

More Info: www.culprit.com

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OTTERBOX COOLERS

By Brian Cope

High-performance coolers have been around for several years, and it seems like more and more companies are making them. And while many are content with making clones of other brands, OtterBox has taken things a step further, making their own Venture Series coolers with unique features that allow you to mount many of their other products directly to the coolers.

One knock against all high-performance coolers is their weight, but that's what it takes to keep ice for days. OtterBox thought of that though, and makes the easiest set of wheels to add (and remove) whenever you want some help. An easy-to-mount pull handle helps, and can be used in multiple positions.

With 2-inch, refrigeration grade insulation, these coolers can keep ice up to 14 days and allow for the mounting of numerous accessories in multiple locations on the coolers. Mounted bottle openers, cup holders, a fishing rod holder, phone mounts, side trays, and OtterBox's signature series dry boxes to keep everything conveniently located.

Tie-down kits, ice packs, locks, trays, and cutting boards specifically designed and shaped for onboard storage and use with these coolers are also options offered by OtterBox. The Venture coolers are offered in three sizes — 25, 45 and 65 quarts, and the sizes are based on true interior capacities.

Otterbox also offers soft-sided coolers which are available in 20- and 30-quart sizes, and keep ice up to three days.

More Info: www.otterbox.com



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.

2018 Ultimate PrimeTimes software for PCs. \$29.95 (plus \$3 s&h, or no s&h if downloaded from web). The world's best forecaster allows you to fine-tune the peak times to your exact location, quarry, and even weather. Too many features to list here, including making your own App. For more details, please call us or visit our web site (see below).

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	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Wed 1					38
Thu 2					42
Fri 3					49
Sat 4					62
Sun 5					55
Mon 6					53
Tue 7					56
Wed 8					67
Thu 9					78
Fri 10					88
Sat 11					89
Sun 12					76
Mon 13					62
Tue 14					49
Wed 15					40
Thu 16					37
Fri 17					39
Sat 18					46
Sun 19					33
Mon 20					26
Tue 21					25
Wed 22					24
Thu 23					34
Fri 24					45
Sat 25					55
Sun 26					63
Mon 27					54
Tue 28					48
Wed 29					41
Thu 30					39
Fri 31					42

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		
11:12 pm	3:38 am - 5:36 am	10:38 am	4:03 pm - 6:01 pm		
11:44 pm	4:12 am - 6:28 am	11:35 am	4:37 pm - 6:53 pm		
12:17 am	4:50 am - 7:20 am ☀	12:34 pm	5:15 pm - 7:45 pm		HALF
12:53 am	6:12 am - 9:12 am ☀	2:38 pm	6:37 pm - 9:37 pm ☀		
1:34 am	7:01 am - 10:11 am	3:43 pm	7:26 pm - 10:36 pm ☀		
2:22 am	7:53 am - 11:13 am	4:49 pm	8:18 pm - 11:38 pm		
3:16 am	8:53 am - 12:15 pm	5:53 pm	9:18 pm - 12:40 am		
4:18 am	9:56 am - 1:18 pm	6:53 pm	10:21 pm - 1:43 am		HIGH
5:26 am	11:01 am - 2:17 pm ☀	7:47 pm	11:26 pm - Midnight		Perigee
6:37 am	12:08 pm - 3:10 pm ☀	8:35 pm	Midnight - 2:42 am		NEW
7:48 am	1:12 pm - 4:02 pm	9:17 pm	12:33 am - 3:35 am		
8:58 am	2:15 pm - 4:47 pm	9:56 pm	1:37 am - 4:27 am		
10:05 am	3:14 pm - 5:30 pm	10:32 pm	2:40 am - 5:12 am		
11:10 am	4:12 pm - 6:10 pm	11:06 pm	3:39 am - 5:55 am		
12:12 pm	5:08 pm - 6:50 pm	11:41 pm	4:37 am - 6:35 am		
1:12 pm	6:03 pm - 7:31 pm		5:33 am - 7:15 am ☀		
2:10 pm	6:56 pm - 8:14 pm ☀	12:17 am	6:28 am - 7:56 am ☀		HALF
3:07 pm	7:48 pm - 8:56 pm ☀	12:55 am	7:21 am - 8:39 am ☀		
4:00 pm	8:38 pm - 9:44 pm	1:36 am	8:13 am - 9:21 am		
4:51 pm	9:28 pm - 10:30 pm	2:20 am	9:03 am - 10:09 am		LOW
5:38 pm	10:14 pm - 11:20 pm	3:07 am	9:53 am - 10:55 am		
6:22 pm	11:01 pm - 12:09 am	3:58 am	10:39 am - 11:45 am		Apogee
7:01 pm	11:42 pm - Midnight	4:50 am	11:26 am - 12:34 pm		
7:38 pm	Midnight - 1:00 am	5:45 am	12:07 pm - 1:25 pm ☀		
8:12 pm	12:23 am - 1:51 am	6:40 am	12:48 pm - 2:16 pm ☀		FULL
8:44 pm	1:02 am - 2:40 am	7:36 am	1:27 pm - 3:05 pm		
9:15 pm	1:37 am - 3:33 am	8:33 am	2:02 pm - 3:58 pm		
9:46 pm	2:15 am - 4:23 am	9:30 am	2:40 pm - 4:48 pm		
10:19 pm	2:51 am - 5:17 am	10:29 am	3:16 pm - 5:42 pm		
10:53 pm	3:30 am - 6:10 am	11:28 am	3:55 pm - 6:35 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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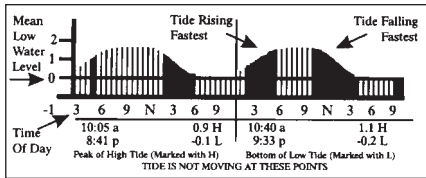
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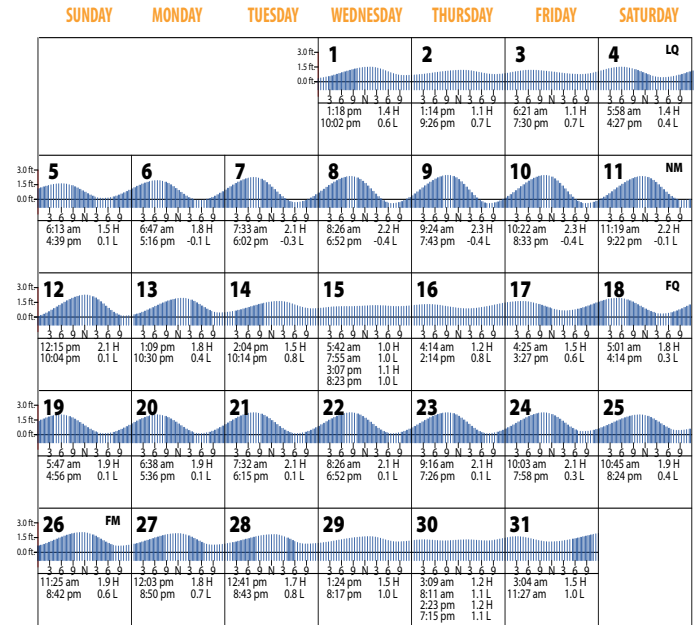
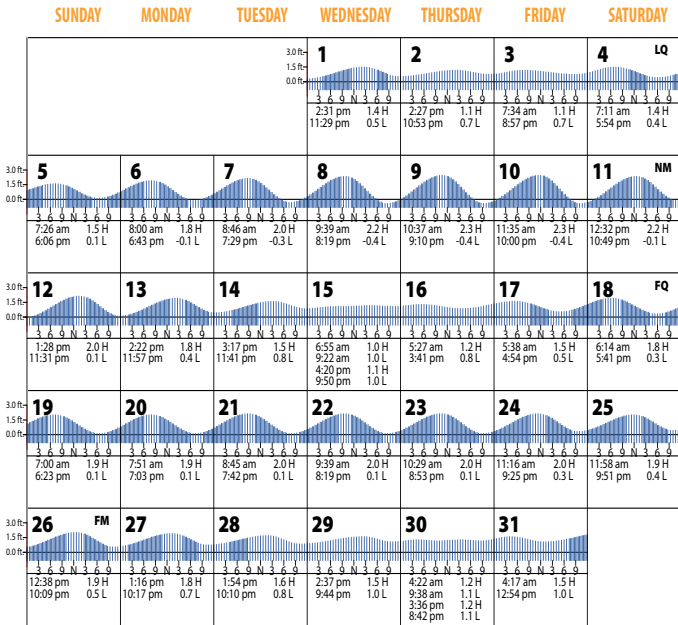
How to use the **SPORTSMAN** Tide Guide

Fish feed most actively when the tide is moving. The Mississippi Sportsman has made it simple to spot the most active feeding periods each day in the TIDE GUIDE. Just fish those times indicated in black.

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

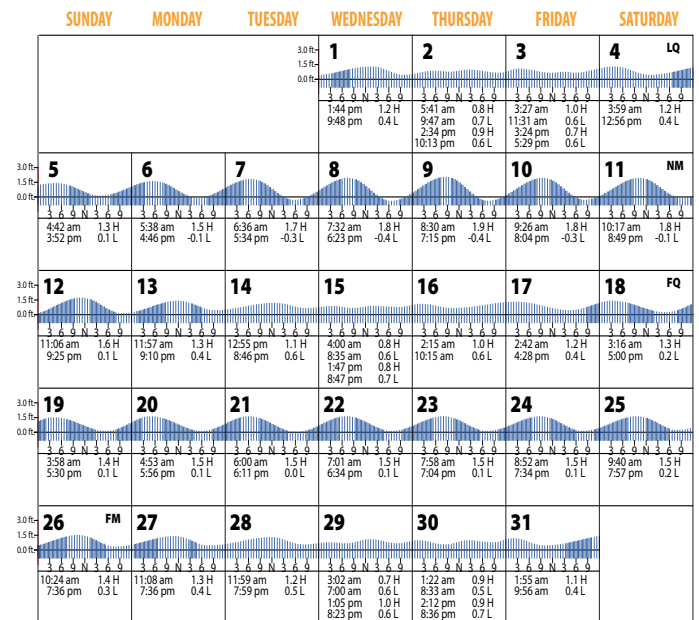
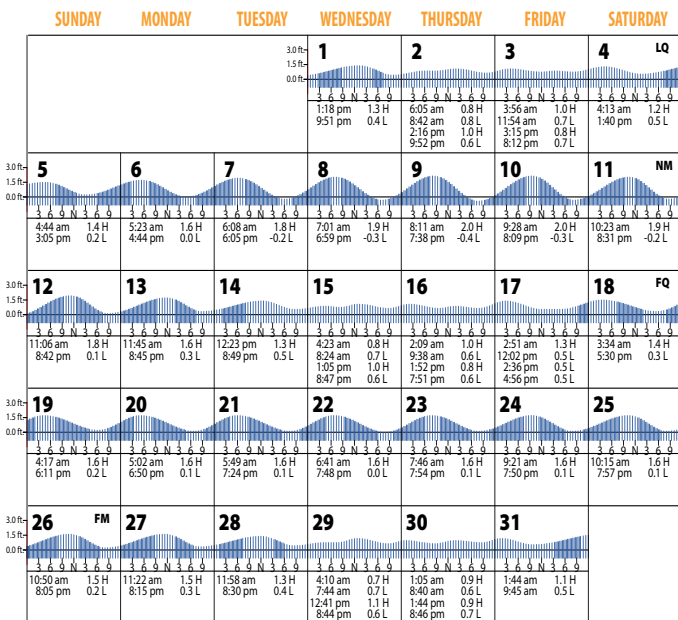
Bay St. Louis Entrance

Biloxi Cadet Point, Biloxi Bay



Horn Island Mississippi Sound

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