

Aggie Outdoors

By JIMMY GUILLOT
Contributor

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of weekly columns on the outdoors by Guillot, a senior majoring in agricultural journalism.

Where is the best bass lake in the nation? Florida? California? Everyone has heard of the giant Florida bass, and many people claim that the next world record bass will come from the state of California.

Despite this, however, the nation's top fishermen pick Toledo Bend, on the Texas-Louisiana border, as the best bass lake in America. This information was included in the 1976 Bass Master Fishing Annual after the top 30 anglers fishing in the world finals were surveyed.

Not only did Texas have the number one lake, but several others were mentioned by the fishermen. Sam Rayburn Reservoir, only a few miles from Toledo Bend, was ranked fourth. This lake is one of the highest producing lakes anywhere, especially during the cold winter months.

Lake Livingston is another Texas lake named by fishermen, although it was not ranked in the top ten.

Still another favored fishing hole is Lake Texoma, on the Texas-Oklahoma border.

It's not hard to understand why Toledo Bend ranks so high with the nation's professional fishermen. The huge impoundment (184,000 acres) is filled with trees and the kind of habitat that bass love. There are numerous creek channels, roadbeds, submerged islands and moss beds that encourage the bass population to expand. Toledo Bend has more than its share of big bass, also,

which make it even more appealing to fishermen.

Although most of the anglers who fish Toledo Bend are in search of the black bass, this lake offers another bonus—striped bass. The lake was stocked with stripers some time ago, and many are up to good fighting size. These fish are reputed to give a harder fight than even the black bass, and will hit the same lures used in black bass fishing.

Since the lake is so large, it's advisable for a newcomer to study a map of the lake, and keep in touch with the marinas and other fishermen on the lake as to where the fish are and what they're hitting.

Most people rate the lake at it's best during the winter and spring months when the bass frequent the many brush-filled coves found on the lake.

Bass can be taken during these times on spinner baits and crank baits thrown toward shore and worked through the brush. Summer time fishing, however, is also very productive. Working the creek channels and other structure with dark-colored worms and deep diving lures usually produces excellent catches.

Toledo Bend is about 180 miles from College Station, taking highway 21 to Crockett, then Highway 7 to Lufkin. From there, Highway 103 runs to the lake, but there are dozens of small towns in the area to choose from once you get there.

Sam Rayburn is between here and Toledo Bend, and Lake Livingston is just about 30 miles east of Huntsville on highway 30.

We've got some of the best bass fishing anywhere right here in our area of Texas, so if you haven't tried one of these top lakes, make plans to fish 'em some weekend.

Exotic deer, muzzle loader hunts slated

AUSTIN — Hunting of exotic deer and use of muzzle-loading weapons at state wildlife management areas are two innovations for this coming hunting season.

Harvest of sika and axis deer at the Kerr Area in Kerr County, and use of muzzle-loading weapons in deer and coyote hunting at the Chaparral Area in Dimmit and LaSalle Counties were approved by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission.

These management areas, which

encompass thousands of acres, serve the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as outdoor laboratories in wildlife management research on a variety of game species. There are 10 such facilities scattered around Texas from the Panhandle to the Rio Grande Valley and from the Trans-Pecos to the pineywoods of deep East Texas.

The Kerr Area exotic deer hunt will mark the first time such species will be hunted on a state-owned area. Exotics will be hunted along

with a number of white-tailed deer that have been determined as being surplus to the population.

Wildlife biologists currently are studying the relationship between whitetails and livestock in certain pastures. P&WD big game program director Charles Winkler said exotics at Kerr have increased to the point where they are interfering with the whitetail/cattle study in these pastures.

The public firearms hunt at Kerr runs Nov. 13 through Jan. 2, but may be stopped sooner if the pre-

scribed quota has been harvested. Hunters with muzzle-loading rifles will have their chance to bag a deer or coyote at the Chaparral this year. Half of the 200 permits will go to muzzle-load hunters. Muzzle-loaders cannot have telescopic sights.

Some 50 permits will be issued during each of the four weekends when hunting will be allowed, with 25 permits being available to muzzle-loaders only. The other 25 will go to conventional weapons hunters. Hunting dates at Chaparral

will be Nov. 15-16, 29-30, Dec. 13-14 and 28-29.

Applications to hunt the two areas will be available in the fall. A public drawing will be held sometime in October to select hunters.

Also, the commission approved a staff recommendation that all deer and javelina hunters on wildlife management areas, except archers during archery only hunts, be required to wear bright orange safety vests. Hunters must furnish their own vests.

Careful handling can reduce bass deaths

BEAUMONT — Largemouth bass are schooling on many of Texas' large reservoirs, with numerous undersized fish being caught.

A good portion of the small bass released by anglers will die. In one study conducted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, mortality

of bass hooked and released was 33 per cent. A bass mortality survey during one Toledo Bend bass tournament this summer put the death rate much higher.

Fish usually die from deep hooking, gill damage and injury to the fish from improper unhooking and delayed mortality from stress and handling.

But inland fisheries officials at the Parks and Wildlife Department say with proper technique bass can be hooked and released with good chances of survival.

The best way to land an undersized bass is not to land it at all but to release the fish while it still is in the water. This is especially important in the summer since bass are more affected by heat than are most other species.

Use of a landing net is a good means of controlling a fish in the

water until it can be unhooked and released.

Without a landing net, the angler should grasp the fish by its lower jaw and keep it partially submerged until unhooked.

If the fish must be handled, the angler should wet his hands since any dry surface removes the bass' protective body slime and makes it more susceptible to bacteria.

Careless hook removal kills many fish. Use of a pair of long-nosed pliers is more effective than a pair of clumsy fingers. If the fish is hooked in the lips or outside jaw, the fisherman can use pliers to grasp the hook and shake it free without removing the fish from the water.

Single hooks embedded deep in

the gullet or gills should not be removed. Clip the leader or hook as close as possible and release the fish. According to one expert, tests show these hooks will rust or be covered with a cyst and the fish usually survives.

Any fish that floats belly up or floats on the surface when released probably will not live. In such cases, it is possible to administer first aid by holding it by the tail and gently moving it back and forth in the water. This forces water through the gills and induces the fish to breathe again.

Many bass boats are equipped with live wells. However, many still die if kept in wells for long periods of time during hot summers.

Brazos area park okayed

AUSTIN — A tract of land containing more than 4,000 acres and located within 50 miles of the largest city in Texas has been approved for purchase and development as a state park.

The site in Fort Bend County is less than one hour's drive from downtown Houston. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission recently approved purchase of the 4,158 acres which contains woodlands, lakes, creeks, Brazos River frontage and an abundance of wildlife.

The area, located south of Houston, is known as the Hale Ranch. Sale price of more than \$6 million

has been agreed upon by the property's current owners, two Pennsylvania residents.

Preliminary surveys show the property is rich in wildlife, containing a healthy white-tailed deer and alligator population. According to Parks and Wildlife Department surveys, there are an estimated 4,600 deer in the county, or one deer to every 13.7 acres of deer habitat.

Additionally, the future state park contains numerous oxbow and man-made lakes, one of which covers more than 100 acres. A four-mile-long creek also traverses the site. The eastern boundary of the property abuts the Brazos River, assuring a variety of water-related

recreational opportunities for the public.

Although a master plan of the area must be drawn before development of the site can begin, it is likely a portion of the area will be preserved in its natural state to provide for nature study, outdoor recreation and wilderness use.

"A master planning team will begin work immediately to analyze the various resources and how best to develop the site for use by the general public," said William Gosdin, P&WD parks systems planning head.

It will be several years before the park site is developed and opened for public use.

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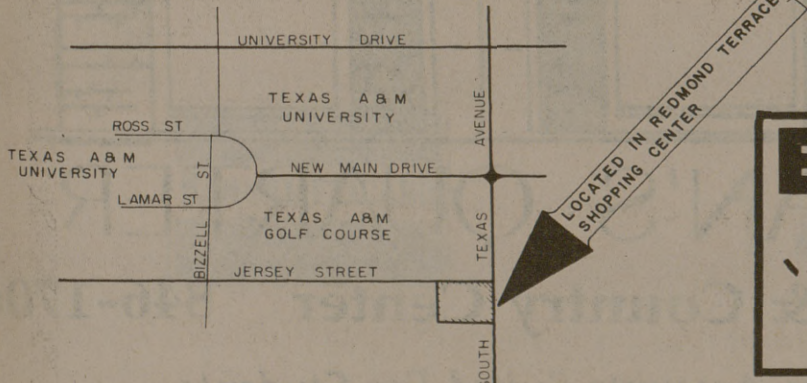
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