

Record-sized fish expected from smaller lakes



Anglers report trophies

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is on the lookout for trophy-sized largemouth black bass.

Fishermen who catch bass 10 pounds or larger are asked to report their catch to the department via its statewide toll-free number, 1-800-252-9327.

This is not just idle curiosity by the department, said inland fisheries management coordinator Bob Bounds, but rather an attempt to monitor the progress of the Florida strain of largemouths, which are growing to trophy size and being caught with regularity from a number of Texas lakes.

He said so many Floridas in the 10- to 12-pound range are being caught that optimism is growing among the ranks of state biologists that the long-standing record for largemouth bass of 13 pounds, eight ounces will fall this year.

The confirmed report of a 12-pound, four-ounce Florida bass caught from Lake Monticello in East Texas last month added fuel to the fire.

This is the largest Florida bass caught in Texas so far, Bounds said, and its presence lends credence to the speculation that there are probably others in Texas lakes which could surpass the magic 13-pound, eight-ounce mark.

The fisherman who reports a 10-pound-plus bass will receive, in addition to the adulation of his peers, a "Big Fish Award" certificate issued by the department.

Bounds said a fisherman who catches a large 10-pound-plus bass should go to the nearest certified scale and weigh the fish in the presence of two disinterested witnesses. Then, he or she should contact the department either through the toll-free telephone line or a local department fisheries biologist or field office. The fish may be gutted, but should be preserved with the head and scales on for identification.

"It's very difficult to tell the difference between a Florida bass and one of our native bass," Bounds noted, "but if a fisherman will notify us of his trophy catch, we will send a biologist to identify it."

The Big Fish Awards are given to fishermen who catch one of 15 eligible species of fish, as long as that fish is heavier than the minimum weight set for that species.

The species and minimum weights are: spotted seatrout, seven pounds; redfish (from the Gulf) 25 pounds, (from the bay) 10 pounds; black drum, 35 pounds; southern flounder, six pounds; largemouth bass, seven pounds; crappie, three pounds; white bass, three pounds; striped bass, 15 pounds; striped/white bass hybrid, six pounds; channel catfish, 12 pounds; blue catfish, 35 pounds; flathead catfish, 50 pounds; walleye, six pounds; and rainbow and brown trout, two pounds.

Application forms may be obtained by writing to Big Fish Award Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX, 78744.

Anglers who are new to Texas, or those who are thinking about taking up the sport, may be wondering where to try their luck in 1979.

Although fishing success in a state as large as Texas depends on a myriad of factors, here are some general tips on the state's major fresh and saltwater sport fishes, and where to find them.

FRESHWATER

Freshwater fishermen in Texas have plenty to look forward to in 1979, not only from the traditional native species such as largemouth bass, but also from the rapidly growing non-native fish stock. Stockings of the Florida largemouth strain have resulted in a number of catches of 10-plus-pounders, and there is widespread speculation that the 35-year-old state record of 13 pounds, eight ounces will fall some time in 1979.

But don't look for the new record to come out of traditional hotspots Sam Rayburn of Toledo Bend. These two lakes are still nationally prominent for bass fishing, but now they appear to be good producers of medium-sized fish rather than the trophy variety.

Instead, get out a Texas map and find some smaller lakes like Blundell, Palestine, Murvaul, Lake O' the Pines, Conroe, Calaveras, Monticello, Welsh, Brautig or Medina. These are the true trophy bass hotspots, and one reason these smaller impoundments are producing ever-larger lunkers is the Florida bass introduction program. Both "pure" Floridas and hybrid native/Florida bass are turning up in these small lakes in the eight- to 10-pound range, and Texas fishery experts feel that the state's trophy bass picture is on the verge of a "California"-type boom, with the Floridas' superior growing ability helping rewrite the record book.

A state record also is anticipated for smallmouth bass, which have been stocked in a number of lakes and rivers. The record is currently "open," awaiting a fish of at least four pounds to qualify for the record book. The record fish will probably come from Lake Meredith in the Panhandle, the Guadalupe River below Canyon Reservoir near San Antonio, or from Canyon reservoir itself.

Striped bass fishing has truly exploded in Texas, with heavy strings being taken consistently from lakes Texoma, Whitney, Spence, Toledo Bend and Amistad. The current state record striper of 30 pounds, six ounces was taken from Toledo Bend, but a bigger one doubtless will be caught in 1979, and it could come from any of the above-mentioned lakes.

are taking hold in Texas. Lake Meredith has produced two state records over 10 pounds, and a number of other lakes are producing "keeper" walleye after a relatively recent stocking program. These include Canyon, Lake Nasworthy near San Angelo, Stillhouse Hollow and Belton in Central Texas, Ray Hubbard near Dallas and Sam Rayburn in East Texas.

Springtime fishermen in Texas should try the white bass fishing in the Trinity River above Lake Livingston and the Colorado River above Buchanan Reservoir during the annual spawning run, and also tailrace areas below the "Highland Lakes" chain which includes lakes Buchanan, Inks, Marble Falls, LBJ and Travis. The Brazos River system around Lake Granbury and Lake Whitney is also good.

Catfish fishing is good throughout Texas, but in particular anglers who go to Toledo Bend or Sam Rayburn after bass would do well to do some catfishing as well since those are two of the best catfish lakes. Lake Livingston and Lake Corpus Christi also score high as catfish holes.

SALTWATER

Bay fishing for the two most popular species — speckled trout and redfish — has been on the decline in recent years, but 1979 may see an upswing, particularly for reds.

All the major bays should have a good population of five- to seven-pound reds by this spring. Fall is the best time to pursue the Gulf Coast redfish, however, because of less wind and clearer water.

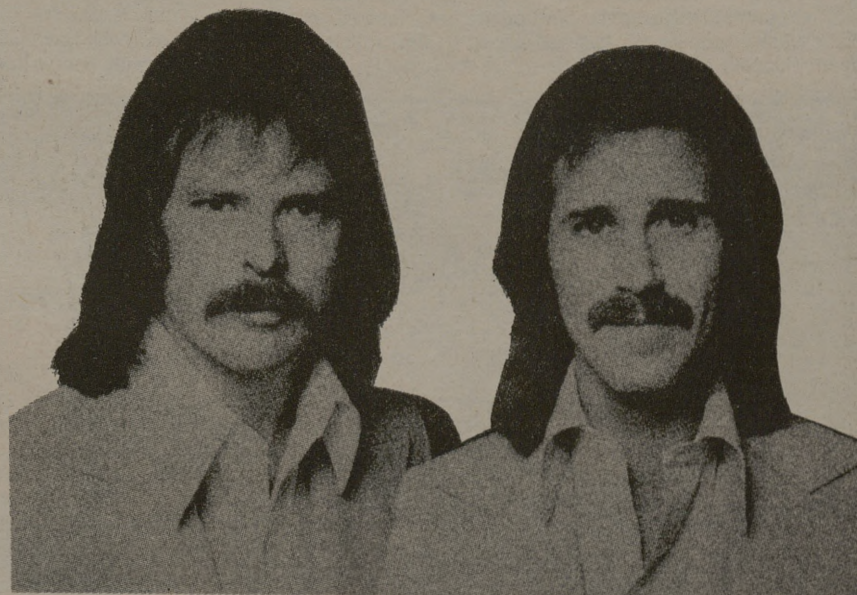
For trout, Galveston Bay appears to be picking up in catches of small trout, but Aransas, Matagorda and San Antonio bays are showing low populations. Trout fishing is a year-round activity on the Texas coast.

One bright spot is the flounder situation, which is looking great coastwide. The top flounder spots may be Port Mansfield and Port O'Connor. Flounder fishing is best from the warm months through the early heavy "northers" in November and December.

Offshore, billfish appear to have declined in the past decade, although more broadbilled swordfish were brought in during 1978 than usual. This is attributed more to increased pressure and improved fishing techniques, namely night fishing with illuminated lures.

Kingfishing should be good out of Port Aransas and Port Arthur, from the 50-mile line outward, and reef fishing also is consistently good around oil rigs, with amberjack and jewfish being the top species. Snapper fishing will be fair to good from all indica-

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