

## Where the Black Bass Grow & Grow & Grow

**A**nglers in pursuit of large-mouth black bass are known to enthusiastically debate the merits of favorite lure types. Some like plastic worms over jigs or have a penchant for crank baits over spinners. Others are keen to use live minnows, nightcrawlers or crayfish. And the list goes on. So whether one uses a Hula Grub or a Woolly Bugger, one thing will brook no argument: Lake Fork has a sterling reputation as a premier destination for bass fishing enthusiasts and the statistics to make anglers put their money where their “largemouth” is.

The 27,264-acre Lake Fork is in the heart of East Texas, located on the Sabine River in Hopkins, Rains and Wood counties. Just 5 miles northwest of Quitman, and best known for trophy bass, current records show Lake Fork as the producer of 35 of the top 50 Texas bass. Notably, the top six of those are all from Lake Fork. Over the years, this lake has steadily been named as the producer of 70 percent of the bass that make up the top 50 list.

None of this is happenstance or natural phenomenon though. It took multiple partnerships with many hands and great minds to develop and manage a reservoir as fishable and notable as Lake Fork.

David Campbell, a 42-year employee of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the ShareLunker program manager, says that good timing also had much to do with it. He said that about the time construction on the lake was finishing up, the folks at TPWD had begun to import Florida bass, a southern subspecies that tends to do much better in reservoir settings than the Texas-native northern bass, which are more suited to streams.

In the early 1970s, the builders and managers of the lake, the Sabine River Authority (SRA), turned to TPWD to collaborate to develop the lake into a premier fishery. First, they introduced Florida bass fingerlings, and then TPWD implemented slot limits to help protect the fish and give them a chance to populate. The current slot limit dictates that bass 16 inches and shorter or 24 inches and longer can be harvested with a daily limit of five, with only one fish over 24 inches. Along with that good management, phased stages of lake flooding and the excellent nutrients in the



**David Campbell, the ShareLunker Coordinator, stands ready at a moment's notice to drive the outfitted aquarium truck he uses to take custody of bass weighing 13 pounds or greater.**

water, the fishery got a jump start that most man-made lakes don't ever see.

At the core of Lake Fork's success is the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center (TFFC), an Inland Fisheries Division facility of TPWD. TFFC is located in Athens and is one of TPWD's five production fish hatcheries, which are vital to managing and maintaining quality fishing in Texas. This hatchery alone produces 3 million to 4 million Florida largemouth bass fingerlings annually. There are many facilities and programs that make up the TFFC, including indoor and outdoor hatcheries, a genetics laboratory and a very special program that is now called the Budweiser ShareLunker Program.

That program, initially established in 1986 under another name, was specifically created to promote the catch and release of large fish and to selectively breed largemouth bass. The first fish ever entered into that program was a state-record 17.67-pounder that was caught in none other than Lake Fork. The program evolved over the years, with Anheuser-Busch becoming the official sponsor in 1996.

Since that time, more than 400 largemouth bass have been entered into the program, coming from more than 50 public and private lakes. And ShareLunker coordinator Campbell says that he has seen as few as five and as many as 36 in one year. To be a ShareLunker, a fish must be a

largemouth bass weighing 13 pounds or more and have been legally caught in Texas waters from October 1 through April 30.

Of his job, Campbell says it can get right hectic at times. The ShareLunker program includes the whole state of Texas, and there have been times when he's gotten almost simultaneous calls from both ends of the state. He is on call 24/7 with a cell phone and pager. During the season, he keeps his specially outfitted ShareLunker truck, with aerated and climate-controlled fish tanks, ready to roll. Calls come in at all hours. At times, he gets help from other hatcheries; if he is on another call, they may hold a fish for him while he is across state transporting another.

Campbell recalls one very active day when there were four ShareLunker calls across the state with one south of Austin, one near Goldthwaite and two at Lake Fork. And, for the record, on another single day in March 2003, there were three Lake Fork ShareLunkers registered ranging from 13.9 pounds to 15.65 pounds. But that's not so surprising when you look at the total statistics from the program. To date, out of the 442 bass that have been officially entered, a phenomenal 236, or 53 percent, came from Lake Fork.

When you suspect you have a ShareLunker candidate, Campbell says one of the most important things to do is to properly care for the fish. He emphasizes that an angler should remember that the fish has already been stressed from its struggle on the line. An angler should try to keep the time the fish is out of the water to a minimum. Optimally, the fish should be immediately put into a live well. Secondly, it can be kept in a large cooler with fresh water. Campbell says, "I can't emphasize enough to keep the fish in quality water." And, he also explains, nearly all marinas will let an angler put a ShareLunker in their minnow tank.

The next important step is to get the fish's certified weight as quickly as possible. Campbell says, "Nearly all the marinas

## TO ENTER A BASS AS A SHARELUNKER

- It must be a largemouth bass of 13+ pounds, certified.
- It must be caught legally in Texas between October 1 and April 30.
- Transfer to TPWD must take place within 12 hours of capture.

## BENEFITS OF SHARELUNKER PARTICIPATION

The angler will receive:

- A Lake Fork Taxidermy fiberglass replica of the fish.
- Budweiser ShareLunker clothing.
- Recognition at an annual awards banquet held at TFFC.
- Fish returned at the end of spawning season.
- Any Texan catching the largest entry of the season is awarded a lifetime fishing license.

## SHARELUNKER 24-HOUR HOTLINE

- **Pager** 1-888-764-0600  
(enter your telephone number, including area code)
- **Mobile** (903) 681-0550

around Lake Fork have certified scales, and they have really stepped up to be partners in this program." The next step is to call Campbell and handle the fish as little as possible until he arrives. He says, "We realize it is a special event in an angler's life, but it is also a special contribution to the program." To that end, a focus should be kept on keeping the fish as stress-free as possible. When Campbell or another TPWD representative comes to get the fish, they will take the time to set up a photograph with the angler and fish, while minimizing the time the fish is out of the water.

Then, the fish will ride in the "aquarium truck" to the



## TOYOTA TEXAS BASS CLASSIC

Lake Fork, Texas • April 18-20

Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC), along with Farmers Electric Cooperative, is co-sponsoring the Family Fun Zone at the 2008 Toyota Texas Bass Classic. Many of our employees will be acting as volunteers alongside the wonderful men and women of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in the Fun Zone, where there will be entertaining and educational fun. We'll also have a booth, and we hope all of our members will drop by to see us. Just look for the 10-foot inflatable Touchstone Energy balloon decoration. And, on Sunday, weather permitting, Touchstone Energy's full-sized hot air balloon will make an appearance, and we hope members will enjoy seeing it and meeting U.S. National Hot Air Balloon Champion Cheri White.

Lake Fork is one of the region's most important tourist attractions. Tourism accounted for 10.7 percent, or just more than \$25 million, of all sales in Wood County in 2007. The Bass Classic is estimated to generate \$520,000 in annual sales taxes alone. That is why the employees and management of WCEC are pleased to support the tournament, as it serves to showcase our region to the world.

TFFC where it will live in the “Lunker Bunker,” a cadre of 22 tanks used to care for the large sows until they are stable and ready to be used for breeding. The term sow is used because all of the ShareLunkers have been females, as males of the species seldom exceed 16 inches in length. For example, Campbell says the biggest male he has ever seen was right at 6 1/2 pounds, and this male was considered such an impressive size that he was brought in to the TFFC to be used as a sire. And where do you think that big boy was caught? Well, Lake Fork, naturally.

Once fish arrive at the Lunker Bunker, science takes over. Each fish is microchipped, pedigreed and cataloged. If there is any evident stress, the fish gets medical attention. Campbell says this is all due to the generous sponsorship by Anheuser-Busch, which he says “has added a whole new dimension to the program.” The program now has state-of-the-art research equipment, giving it the technology to identify, through DNA, the offspring of ShareLunkers. And, this genetics lab also helps identify species, as some of the bass may be a cross. Microchips help to identify particular fish, like the one that after having been released into the wild came back to the program three years in a row. Up until now, no known ShareLunker spawn has been entered into the program, but Campbell says, “I am waiting on that day.”

In talking about fish management in general, Campbell holds Lake Fork up as a shining example of success. He says, “There has been a lot learned from Lake Fork, and that is one of the highlights of having the Toyota Texas Bass Classic here. We are working together with the tournament organizers to showcase our fishery management efforts at Lake Fork and to promote a new conservation-minded tournament format that was designed around the special size limits we have on the reservoir.”

*Wood County Electric is co-sponsoring the Family Fun Zone at the upcoming Toyota Texas Bass Classic, to be held at Lake Fork on April 18-20.*

## BEHEMOTH LAKE FORK PROJECT ADDS RELIABILITY FOR WCEC MEMBERS

**A**s part of the Dallas Water Utility project located at the Lake Fork Reservoir, which includes a conveyance system to move water to a water treatment plant, a complex construction project to provide electricity to the system has been in progress since this past fall.

The design for the system, which Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) has been instrumental in developing and constructing, called for a large transmission line installation as well as a new substation to feed the pumping station. WCEC secured the services of Texas Power Construction (TPC) to do the bulk of the transmission construction. Most of the cost for installation of the supporting equipment was paid up front by the city of Dallas, but many of the residents living in the area will reap benefits.

For example, WCEC’s part of the project included installing a dual-purpose line that will not only serve the pumping station but also will add reliability to the system that feeds the Yantis area and sections surrounding Alba and the Pilgrim Rest community. This job completes a transmission tie, which had been in WCEC’s long-range plan, but was accelerated due to the construction pace of the Dallas project.

The electric load drawn from the pumping station will depend on Dallas’ need for water. The city’s plan will be to use this reservoir, along with many of the other lakes from which it can draw water, when needed. Revenue from that significant electric load should also help WCEC and its members by

allowing the spread of operational cost over a larger sales base.

“Our team’s work on this project has been rewarding in many ways, including seeing this long-anticipated engineering marvel come together,” said WCEC CEO and General Manager Debbie Robinson. “More important though, for us, was the economy of scale that we reaped for our members. The project allowed us to piggyback on the current construction, which helped to accelerate improvement plans of WCEC’s distribution system at great cost savings to our members.”

**A helicopter crew was employed to speed the construction time. The skilled pilot and an intrepid lineman working from the skid used the chopper to hang insulators and also to attach ropes used to pull the power transmission lines.**



# Play Up Outdoor Electrical Safety to Children



Warm, sunny days beckon the child in all of us to head outside and play. Wood County EC (WCEC) recommends that families review and stress to children to follow simple electrical safety rules for safe outdoor play.

Help keep your kids out of harm's way when they play outdoors. Children often do not understand the dangers of electricity. Make them aware of overhead power lines and electrical equipment, and emphasize that they should never climb or play near them.

We recommend children be taught to follow these rules:

- Never climb trees near power lines. Even if the power lines are not touching the tree, they could touch when more weight is added to a branch.
- Fly kites and model airplanes in large open areas such as a park or a field, safely away from trees and overhead power lines. If a kite gets stuck in a tree that's near power lines, don't climb up to get it. Contact WCEC for assistance.
- Never climb a utility pole or tower.
- Don't play on or around pad-mounted electrical equipment.
- Never go into an electric substation for any reason. Electric substations contain high-voltage equipment that can be deadly. Never try to rescue

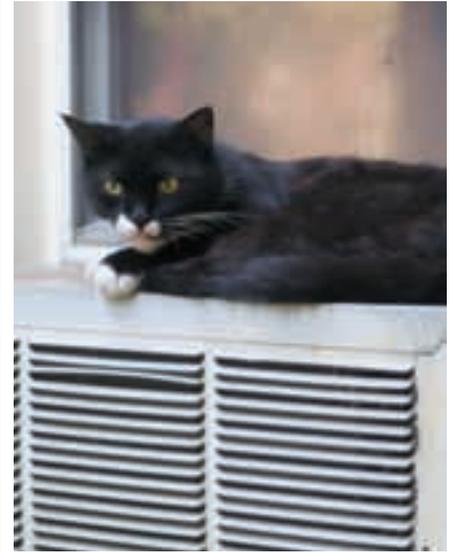
a pet or retrieve a toy that goes inside. Call WCEC instead.

When designing an outdoor play area for your children, do not install playground equipment or swimming pools underneath or near power lines. Protect all family members from serious shock and injuries by installing and using outdoor outlets with ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Use portable GFCIs for outdoor outlets that don't have them. Be careful when using electrical appliances outdoors, even if plugged into GFCI-equipped outlets.

Water always attracts kids, but water and electricity never mix. Teach older children to exercise caution before plugging in a radio, CD player or any electrical gadget outdoors, and keep all electrical appliances at least 10 feet away from hot tubs, pools, ponds, puddles and wet surfaces.

Spring showers bring more than tempting puddles for kids to splash in, they can also leave behind electric hazards. Flooded areas are never safe spots to wade or play in, and may be in contact with energized electrical equipment or fallen power lines.

Make sure all of your family members know to stay away from downed power lines and wires, and tell children to report to an adult any fallen or dangling wires.



## WAYS TO SAVE ENERGY THIS SPRING

Warmer weather has finally arrived, so here are some things you can do now to improve your home's energy efficiency in the months ahead:

**WINDOW AIR CONDITIONER.** Seal around the unit so cool air cannot escape.

**CENTRAL AIR CONDITIONER.** Hose off the outdoor condensing unit to remove dirt and leaves. Get professional service for your central air every two years. Choose a qualified contractor.

**FILTER.** If it's dirty, replace or clean it before running the air conditioner. Check it every month or more often, if needed.

**WATER HEATER.** Lower the thermostat to medium, or 120 degrees, to use less energy and reduce heat loss.

**AIR-DRY LAUNDRY.** Put up a clothesline for hanging laundry outside to dry, rather than using your clothes dryer, which heats up the house.

**SHADE.** Reduce your air conditioner's energy use by planting deciduous shade trees to the south or west of your home.

**FANS.** On mild days, use fans to keep you cool. Ceiling fans are ideal, but portable fans can inexpensively do the job.