



# Florida Freshwater Angler

## Newsletter for the Florida freshwater angler

*Our Purpose: To identify excellent Florida freshwater fishing opportunities and to provide anglers with relevant information that will enhance the quality of their outdoor experience.*



# TrophyCatch

## My trophy swims in Florida

### **TrophyCatch launches!**

TrophyCatch is Florida's newest and most rewarding angler recognition program. It rewards anglers for documenting and releasing 8-pound and heavier bass. This helps promote ecological, economic and social values while supporting conservation efforts and providing

valuable data to scientists. Largemouth bass are the most popular recreational fish in North America, and trophies over 8 pounds take a while to grow (typically six to eight years, although some fast growers may attain this weight in four years, while others may never reach that size).

Since TrophyCatch helps promote Florida as the Fishing Capital of the World and



Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission

MyFWC.com

generates business, industry partners provide incentives to encourage anglers to recycle and report their catch. The data provided helps identify environmental variables and FWC conservation efforts, such as habitat enhancement, stocking, vegetation management and regulations, which support trophy fisheries. Since accurate data is needed to manage trophy fisheries and to reward anglers, the verification process is more stringent than for other angler recognition programs.



**Lunker Club (8-9.9 pounds)**  
Reward value: \$15+



**Trophy Club (10-12.9 pounds)**  
Reward value: \$100+



**Hall of Fame Club (13+ pounds)**  
Reward value: \$1,000+

There are three “club levels” and for each the bass must be legally caught in Florida and released. For **Lunker Club** (8-9.9 pounds; reward value greater than \$15) and **Trophy Club** (10-12.9 pounds; reward value greater than \$100) verification photographic documentation showing entire fish with weight and length discernable is required. For **Hall of Fame Club** (13 pounds or greater; reward value greater than \$1,000) the bass must be certified by FWC staff, and verified on certified scale. This option is closed down from May 1 through September 30 due to the need to hold the fish alive until certified. Consequently, until Oct 1, 13-pound bass should be photographed and submitted for Trophy Club level rewards. Whatever your age, wherever you fish in Florida, remember:

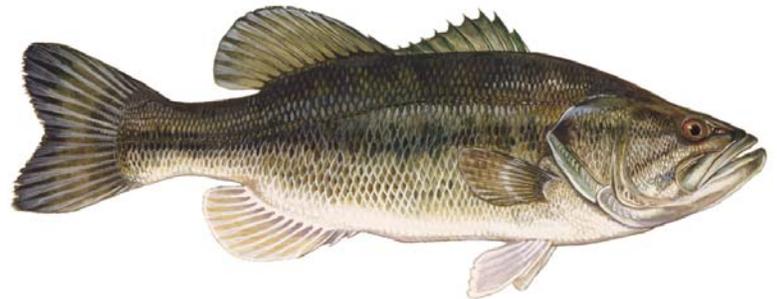
The FWC is ready to help commemorate and immortalize your memories.

*To learn more and register, visit:*

**[www.TrophyCatchFlorida.com](http://www.TrophyCatchFlorida.com)**

Registering makes you eligible for a Phoenix Bass Boat powered by Mercury. Once registered, you can submit photos of your catch for TrophyCatch. Be sure to friend us on **FaceBook.com/TrophyCatchFlorida** and “like” us at **YouTube.Com/TrophyCatchFlorida**.

## **Featured fish: Florida largemouth bass**



**Size:** The state record of 17.3 pounds was caught in Polk County in 1986. Tournament data as well as information from FWC’s new **TrophyCatch** program show that most of the state’s trophy bass (8 pounds or greater) come from Lake Okeechobee northward.

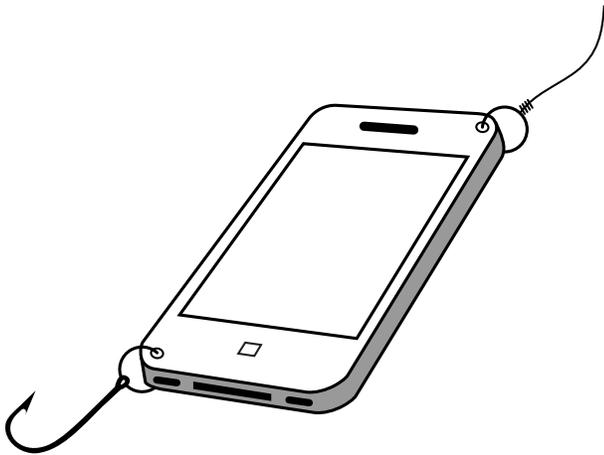
**Identification:** The streamlined body and large “bucket” mouth of this popular sport fish make identification simple. Color is green with a dark, broken band running along the side.

**Similar species:** **Shoal, Spotted, and Suwannee** bass can be found in or northwest of the Suwannee River basin, and require careful examination to distinguish them from largemouth bass.

The Florida largemouth bass and the “Northern” largemouth bass belong to the same species and interbreed freely. These two subspecies can only be differentiated by genetic testing in the laboratory. The “pure” Florida largemouth bass subspecies is found primarily south of the Suwannee River basin. It grows larger and is more challenging to catch than Northern largemouth bass. Many of the record largemouth bass from other states are at least partly Florida largemouth bass, from bass

taken from Florida and stocked around the rest of the country.

**Angling qualities:** Florida's premiere freshwater sport fish has a well-deserved reputation for providing exciting strikes, a good fight, and a great angling challenge. This aggressive fish will strike almost any artificial, but soft plastic baits, minnow imitations, crankbaits, spinner baits, and various topwater lures account for most catches. Flipping with jigs or soft plastics in heavy vegetation will often take bass when other methods fail. Although this ambush predator is usually found prowling vegetation or other cover in the shallows, bigger (and warier) fish often prefer deeper water. Large golden shiners are by far the best live bait, but smaller minnows and live worms will also yield results.



## Fishing with your phone

So your fishing buddy has just picked you up and you're both tooling down the highway headed for a day's fishing on Lake Catchabigun.

"Holey moley!" your partner suddenly shouts, sitting bolt upright in the driver's seat. "We gotta go back!"

"Oh, no!" you moan. "What'd you forget this time? Your rods? Your tackle box?"

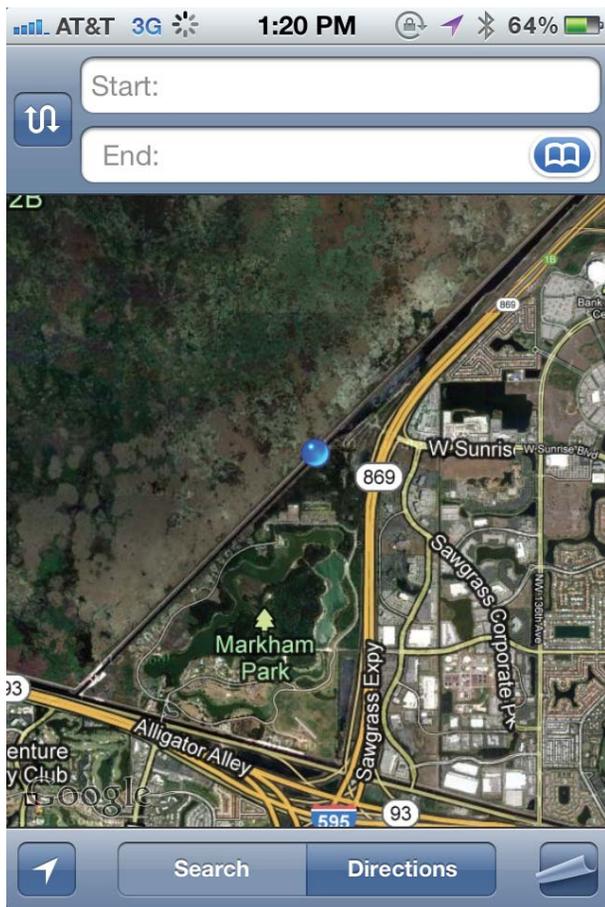
"Worse!" he says. "My *phone!*"

An ancient Chinese curse states, "May you live in interesting times." If that's true, then anyone reading this in 2013 is very well cursed, indeed. We live in an era where people casually walk the streets with more advanced technology in their pockets than our nation sent to the moon back in 1969. A person can

hold in their palm more processing power than room-sized computers used to be able to generate. I'm speaking, of course, of modern "smartphones." These amazing gadgets aren't just for talking any more, and with increased capabilities and added features can today do some pretty amazing things. But the *really* important question is, can smartphones make it easier to get more fish on the line? I'm here to tell you that the answer is "Yes!"

But first, it's time for "Smartphones 101." Loosely defined, a **smartphone** is a cell phone that has added capabilities, essentially the marriage of a cell phone to a camera, GPS, and PDA (personal digital assistant). Currently, several of the most popular smartphone platforms are **iPhone**, **Android**, and **Windows Mobile**, although there are a number of others including the **BlackBerry**. Features and capabilities vary widely, as do the various cell phone service providers and the hardware and service plans they offer. We won't go there, but be aware that in addition to basic cell phone service, you'll also need to sign up for a **data plan** if you want to take full advantage of all of your smartphone's capabilities. The last thing you need to know is that these smartphones are essentially miniature computers, and just like computers they can run a wide variety of programs. These programs are called applications, or **apps** for short. Certain apps may only be available for certain platforms, but many of the most popular apps have very wide compatibility. The good news is that apps are dirt cheap compared to computer programs, usually only costing a few dollars apiece.

Now on to the good stuff! There are a number of smartphone features we'll be discussing, but one of the most helpful for me has been the built in GPS with mapping. Whether you're trying to find the boat ramp, a tackle shop, or your secret fishin' hole, you almost always have mapping capabilities with you as long as you have your smartphone and a good signal. Here's a recent example: An angling buddy and I were fishing a series of short canals along a major urban road in southeast Florida. We also planned to hit a nearby lake tucked away behind some buildings, which we soon realized wasn't visible from the canals. When we began to suspect we



**That blue dot in the center of the screen is the author, fishing the L-35A Canal out of Markham Park. Photo from iPhone.**

might have overshot the lake, I whipped out my phone and discovered that, sure enough, it was behind the buildings adjacent to the last stretch of canal we'd just fished. I figure my phone saved us at least ten minutes' scouting time, and that's assuming we started off in the right direction. I've also found the phone quite handy for navigating my way around the many little canals and lakes in the areas I fish—more than I can easily keep track of by memory. Most mapping systems feature several views: standard (roads), satellite (topographic, similar to GoogleEarth satellite photos), and hybrid (both, with roads as well as natural features shown). I'll switch to standard when I'm driving, and to satellite or hybrid when I'm actually on the water. You can even buy car brackets that will let you mount your phone on the dash or window, just like a regular car GPS. One thing to keep in mind is that anglers (and other outdoors folk) often go where cell phone coverage is absent. Depending on your phone and service provider, you might still be able to

have GPS capabilities even when no cell phone coverage is present. In fact, for some locations it's possible to download maps ahead of time so that you still can have GPS mapping, even where you can't pick up a cell phone signal. My cell phone allows me to take screenshots, just like a computer, and I've used this feature to record photos showing important locations on some of the waters I fish.

One of the handiest gizmos included in smartphones is the camera. I've now got a pretty decent point-and-shoot camera with me wherever I go, without the need to remember to throw one in my fanny pack when I head out the door. I've gotten some great pictures in situations I never would have brought a camera to, and am always ready to snap a shot of "the big one," no matter where or when he bites. Some phones have excellent cameras with outstanding exposure control built in, suitable for magazine quality picture-taking. And while I do most of my digital photo editing on my computer, there's a dizzying array of apps that will let you edit, modify, or add captions or other graphics to photos right on your phone before messaging them off to jealous fishing buddies, right from boat or shore. It's great not having to wait until after you get home and park the boat to share your great catch with a friend or family member. So-called "E-tournaments" are beginning to use smartphone technology so that an angler can photograph his fish right on the water, release it almost immediately, and then multimedia message his photos to the tournament coordinator for entry. One of the really nice features of phones with built in GPS is coordinate tagging of the photos you take. On my computer (or with yet another app installed on my phone), I can open a picture of a bass and then see where I caught it on a map as well as the date—pretty handy for keeping track of the where and when of all those fishing trips.

Another really helpful app that I've found for my phone is Doppler radar. This gives you real-time rain information wherever you are. Various apps are available, but those touting high definition will be much more helpful. Time-lapse display allows you to guesstimate the direction and size of rain patterns. Mine paid for itself the day after I bought it: The forecast predicted scattered showers, but I had rain the

entire drive to my fishing hole and it didn't let up when I got there. After a miserable hour of fishing in heavy rain, I finally pulled out my phone and could see that the rain pattern had stalled over my entire fishing area. I called it quits and went home to do indoors stuff for the



**The author spent six hours safely nestled between two large storm systems, catching fish the whole time. Photo from NOAA Hi-Def Radar.**

rest of the day. On the other hand, there have been times when I've kept fishing rather than throwing in the towel because I could see that threatening rain was bypassing my location. On a recent outing, I spent six hours fishing in a narrow band of clear weather nestled between two major rainstorms immediately north and south of me. It was actually one of my more productive fishing days, with a five-pounder thrown in to top it off, and I'm certain I would have stopped fishing sooner—and missed a great day—with the constant threat of heavy rain visible all around me. Of course, rain is one thing and lightning another; always exercise caution near thunderstorms and leave the area or seek safety if lightning threatens.

A safety-oriented option with some

smartphones is an individual phone tracking feature (called "Find Friends" on the iPhone). I often fish or hunt alone, and as a result am pretty careful to tell my significant other where I'm headed in case of alligators, lightning, grizzlies, or other things that might cut my trip short and leave me unable to get back to my car on my own. (Just kidding about those grizzlies, by the way.) I rest a little easier knowing that my spouse can check my location at any time if she needs to. (If your phone doesn't offer this feature, another thing you can do is periodically message someone a screenshot of your phone's map, showing your current location.) A cheerier use of this feature is to meet a fishing buddy at a big outdoors show or in separate boats out on the lake; for this purpose, the tracking can be enabled for only an hour or two. Of course, for security purposes you have to allow permission for your friend's phone to track you, and vice-versa, and the tracking can be turned off whenever desired.

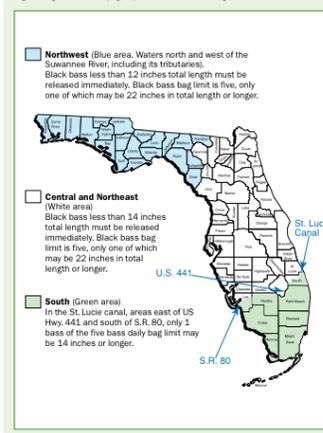
Another thing I use my phone for is as a small-screen digital reader. Any digital document that I can find or convert to PDF



**FRESHWATER**

**Black bass fishing zones**

Note: These are general black bass fishing zones. See the Specific Fish Management Area, and Special Bag and Length Limit sections (Page 14) for more local rules, including details about Lake Okechobee.



**Make sure there are fish for tomorrow**

Only half of Florida's anglers are required to buy a license, but their license fees are a vital source of funding for fish and wildlife conservation. Seniors, youths and others who are exempt can contribute to fish and wildlife conservation simply by voluntarily buying a fishing license. License fees help with scientific management, habitat restoration, fish stocking, fishing and boating access, law enforcement, and outreach programs.

Each license bought also captures more Federal Aid in Sportfish Restoration money and brings tackle and motor boat fuel taxes home to Florida. In addition, when you buy your license, you may now make a voluntary donation to youth fishing and hunting programs in Florida (License.MyFWC.com). Thank you for supporting our youth!

**Fish Photo Replicas**

Count the hours. Preserve the fish.

**Buy Clean** and TrophoLink anglers recognize program participants are eligible for special discounts from FishPhotoReplicas.com for the year of the Buy Clean program or the October 1, 2012 go to [www.TrophoLink.com](http://www.TrophoLink.com) to participate in Florida's new catch-and-release program for trophy and bluegill bass.

**Buy Clean** participants receive a 20% discount and TrophoLink participants receive a 20% discount on any purchase of these two web stores. Certified Mail of Proof (then longer than 17 pounds) can qualify for a Sea Brite Annual (\$100 value for 2012 only).

Subject to the terms and conditions of the program. Offer is only available to those participants who are certified as of 10/1/12.

**Good Fishing Depends on Clean Water**

Many of our rivers, lakes, and coastal areas are experiencing algae blooms that cover our favorite fishing spots with green slime and cause fish kills and "dead zones" where no aquatic life can survive. The cause is usually nitrogen and phosphorus pollution that comes from farm and lawn fertilizers, septic systems, animal waste, and sewage treatment plants. Everyone can do their part for clean water by reducing fertilizer use, preserving plants along shorelines, and picking up pet waste. Supporting water quality protection supports great fishing! Learn more at: [www.epa.gov/nutrientpollution/](http://www.epa.gov/nutrientpollution/)



**So the South zone limit is five bass, and only one can be 14 inches or longer? Got it!**

(Adobe Acrobat portable document format) can be stored and viewed on most smartphones. Examples of documents that I carry digitally with me wherever I go include the fresh and saltwater fishing regulations, FWC's "Fishing Lines" magazine (which includes a saltwater fish identifier), FWC's South Region canal maps collection (see our Fishing Forecasts at MyFWC.com), and the local Water Management District's canals and structures map. With my phone in hand, I'm a walking fishing encyclopedia!

Besides general-use apps that just happen to be useful for fishing, there are also specific fishing apps available. Solunar tables, tide information, fish identification, fly fishing references, fishing spot maps, fishing trip advisors—there's quite a bevy of helpful apps out there. Too many, in fact, to cover here, but you can search your cell phone provider's listings for any of these or other keywords to find what might be helpful to you. Most providers have a system for users to rate apps, and checking an app's rating and reading some of the reviews will give you an idea if an app will really do what you want and is worth the purchase. Of course, there are dozens of fishing games available as well, but in my opinion these are best for when you're home with two broken legs, or waiting out a hurricane in the fishin' cabin. I'd rather be after real fish!

While smartphones themselves are small computers, you'll need a home computer to take full advantage of most of the features mentioned here. Connecting a phone to your computer will allow you to download and store the photos you've taken, put handy reference documents or other information on your phone, or perform less important non-fishing functions (like load music or audiobooks for those long drives to the lake).

A bevy of accessories are available for smartphones. Note that many will be *very* specific to your model number, so be aware of that when shopping. The most important accessory, hands-down, is a good case. Delicate electronics and the rugged (and watery) outdoors don't always mix, and protecting your phone from the elements is a must. There are literally hundreds of styles and colors, but I recommend a case that is made of a non-slip



**Yours truly, with a nice little Everglades bass. This solo photo was taken using a mini tripod and a photo app with 30-second camera timer. The flexible mini tripod and iPhone bracket (with phone removed) are shown mounted on a small slash pine.**

material such as silicone so that it's not easily dropped (some phones come out of the box with a finish that's as smooth as teflon). If you're a kayak or wade angler, a fully waterproof phone case is recommended. If your case doesn't include a screen cover of some kind, then a screen protector is the next most important thing you can get for your phone. A car charger is a good accessory to keep in your glove compartment, for that day when you get two flat tires and are fifty miles from the nearest wall outlet. (Cell phone batteries share a common technological bond with printer ink: they'll both run out at the worst possible moment.) On the more cheerful side, some great photo accessories are available, too. My wife bought me a snap-on tripod mount and a mini tripod for my phone.

With these in my fanny pack, plus a photo app that includes a 30-second timer, I'm able to take pretty decent self-portraits with my catch even when fishing solo. The mini-tripod has flexible legs that can be wrapped around a stationary object, and I've found that a small shoreline slash pine makes a perfect camera mount. Tiny add-on lenses for telephoto or macro (super close-up) photography are also available for the more popular phone models. There are many other accessories out there, but these are some of the ones I've found to be most useful.

Keep in mind that features, capabilities, apps, and accessories will vary in function and availability depending on your cell phone service provider, phone platform, and the hardware you are using. However, similar functionality to everything discussed above is available on most recent smartphones, and they can all do some pretty amazing things. I've been using a smartphone for a couple of years now, and have to admit that today I would have a hard time getting along without something I didn't even own three years ago.

So maybe, suffering under an ancient Chinese curse by having to live in these truly interesting times isn't all that bad!

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## Basic fish identification

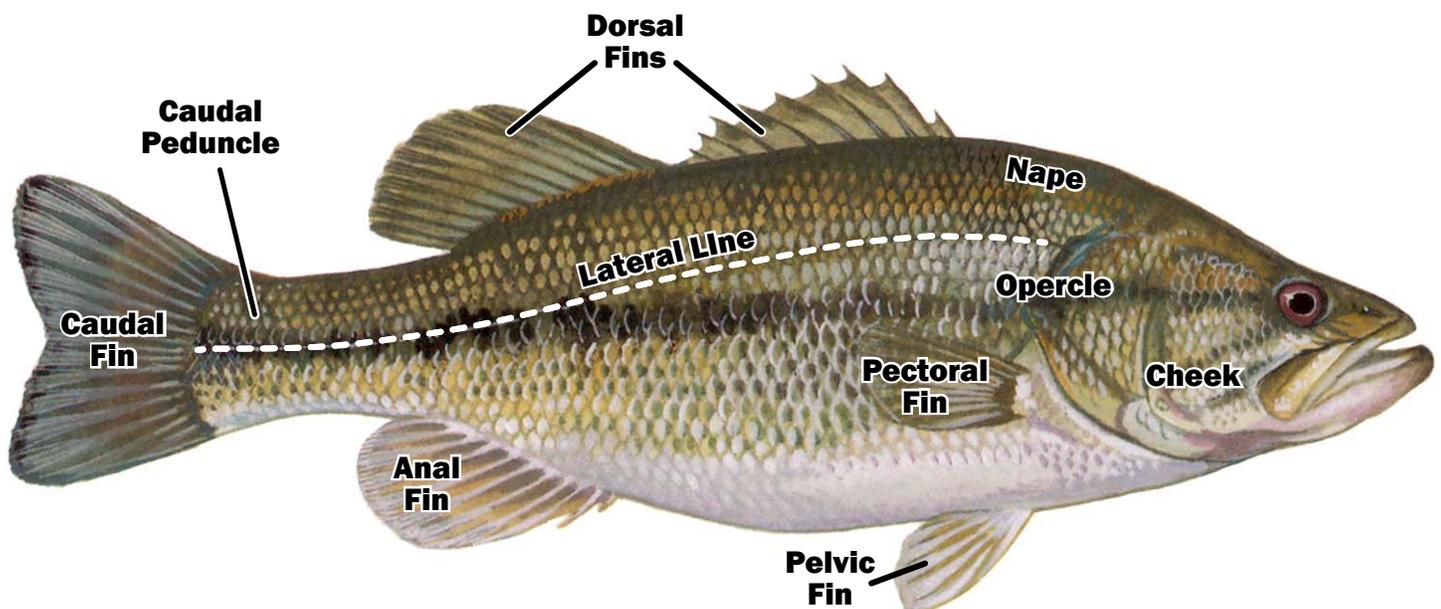
It's one of my most common fisheries office calls: "I caught this fish. It's got purple fins and an orange tail. *What is it?*"

Now, the descriptions aren't usually that bizarre, but sometimes they're about that helpful. Proper fish identification can be a real challenge. It's no wonder that most anglers at one time or another find themselves looking at something dangling from the end of their line and scratching their heads.

Fisheries biologists (call us **ichthyologists**, or "ick-thee-AW-law-jists") will readily admit that fish identification can be difficult, and even trained scientists have been known to occasionally misidentify fish. However, with a good reference or two and some patience, the average angler can differentiate most Florida freshwater fish they are likely to encounter. Below are some of the basics of fish identification, plus some recommended references for the budding ichthyologist.

## But first, a word about color

Color is the most fickle mistress of the fish identification world. The basic rule about it is this: use color as an identification aid when applicable, but don't rely on it too much—especially not for anything other than freshly-landed fish. Colors fade rapidly once a fish dies, and can even change dramatically on live fish (especially for certain fish, such as cichlids). Check coloration first for ease of reference, but if in doubt verify it by checking a character that doesn't vary as much—fin arrangement or other physical features that are not color-dependent.



## Meet the fish

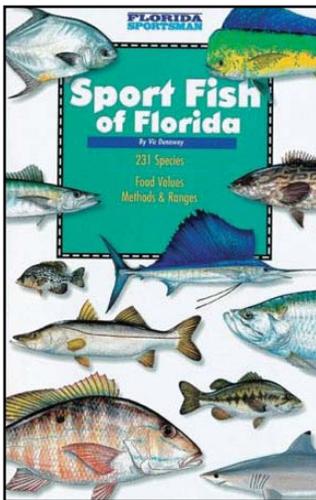
If you've set your sights on that "Fish Identification" merit badge, you'll need to be able to talk the talk. As soon as you open a fish identification book, you'll be confronted by some new terms. On the illustration on the previous page are the ones you'll use most often. Learn these parts and you'll be able to follow along with the description in most fish identification books.

## Counting cards

When fish identification gets tough, the tough get counting. One of the common characteristics used in serious fish identification is the fin spine or ray count. These simple counts can often distinguish between similar fish. Another common measure used to differentiate similar fish is a count of the number of scales along the lateral line or other part of the fish's body. Both fin and scale counts require concentration and practice.

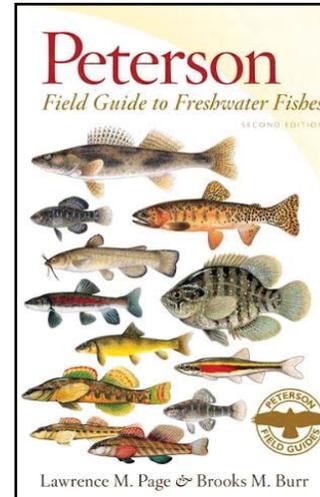
## Recommended references

Unfortunately, no single book covers all the native and exotic fishes to be found in Florida. The two guides below together cover all the native sportfish as well as most of the exotics. To round out your collection, an aquarium fish identifier may also be helpful, especially for south Florida exotics.



**Sport Fish of Florida** by Vic Dunaway—Most Florida anglers will recognize this author's name; his local writings, in both book and magazine form, are extensive. This popular book covers fresh- and saltwater sportfish, a number of our exotic species, and most popular

baitfish. Full-color illustrations accompany notes on fighting ability, fishing techniques, and edibility for each species.



**Peterson Field Guide to Freshwater Fishes** by Lawrence Page and Brooks Burr—This advanced guide is part of the very popular Peterson Field Guide series and includes all the native freshwater fishes of Florida. It also covers many (but not all) of our exotics. For those who want to put a name to almost everything they could possibly catch (and every native minnow they might use for bait), this is the guide to get. Provided identifications are very detailed; however, no angling information is given. Illustrated with black-and-white and color plates as well as some line drawings.

## We've changed our name!



This newsletter, previously circulated as **The City Fisher**, is a publication of the **Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management** of the **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)**. This publication is paid for in part by **Sport Fish Restoration** funds. To contact **Florida Freshwater Angler**, e-mail [john.cimbaro@myfwc.com](mailto:john.cimbaro@myfwc.com) or phone John Cimbaro at **561-882-5721**. You can visit us and find back issues online at [MyFWC.com](http://MyFWC.com).

