



## Newsletter for the south Florida canal and urban pond angler

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

### Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration?

*By Bob Wattendorf, FWC*

Beginning an article with “Federal Aid,” which some people think of as an oxymoron, can be a tough sell. However, the **Federal Aid in Sportfish Restoration (SFR)** program has proven for more than half a century to be one of the best “user-pays, user-benefits” initiatives anywhere. Recently, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has received more



**SFR funding helped build and maintain over 200 boat ramps providing free angling access.**

than \$11 million each year from these matching funds to sustain and enhance public fishing opportunities that return a \$7.5 billion economic benefit to the state each year and provide 46 million days of recreational enjoyment.

In 1950, congressmen Dingell and Johnson created the original program in response to a request from the fishing industry and angling public. Under this program, fishing tackle is assessed an excise fee at the manufacturers’ level, and resulting funds are allocated to state game and fish agencies. The original “Dingell-Johnson” act was expanded in 1984 through the “Wallop-Breaux” amendment to include import duties on sport fishing equipment, pleasure boats and yachts, as well as tax revenue

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**Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission**

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from motorboat fuel sales.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determines how much of these taxes are returned to Florida based on the size of the state and the number of paid fishing license holders. Since we do not charge saltwater fishing license fees to resident shoreline anglers, nor require any youth under 16, or resident adult over 65 to purchase a freshwater or saltwater license, and many states do, we recover a somewhat smaller proportion of the funds than some other states.

SFR generated \$13.3 million dollars for Florida in 2008, of which 15% (\$2.0 million) provided for both fresh and saltwater boating access, including building and maintaining boat ramps, courtesy docks and trailer parking. Of the remaining, \$11.3 million, freshwater fisheries conservation received \$5.3 million (based on the estimated number of resident freshwater anglers versus saltwater anglers), and saltwater attained \$6.0 million.

Florida freshwater fisheries' SFR funding is used primarily to support the many programs that ensure Florida remains the Fishing Capital of the World. This includes evaluating key fisheries to determine the appropriate regulations, fish stocking, habitat enhancement, aquatic plant management and infrastructure needs (e.g., boat ramps, fishing piers, fish attractors). The funds also support applied research, outreach activities for youth, and communications programs to keep the angling public informed.

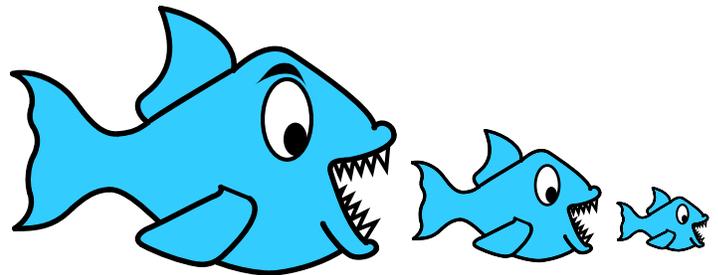
The bottom line is that fishing tackle and boating industry pay these taxes upfront and then pass the cost on to anglers and boaters. For each recreationist the share they pay is minor. However, the accumulated impact is one of the strongest forces helping ensure there will be fishing and boating access in the future, that aquatic habitats are protected and restored, and that our waters contain healthy and abundant sport fishes to sustain quality recreational fishing. In turn, sportfishing



not only provides millions of hours of healthy, relaxing enjoyment for anglers and boaters, but also provides a tremendous economic benefit to local communities and businesses. The angling public and fishing industry together serve as watch dogs to ensure that the user who pays into the system directly benefits. "Put, Grow and Take" is an expression that fisheries biologists use for stocking a small fish into a healthy environment, letting it grow and then be caught by an angler as a much bigger fish. Sportfish Restoration works the same way with a little money being put into the system being returned and expanded on to give the angler more than his or her monies worth.

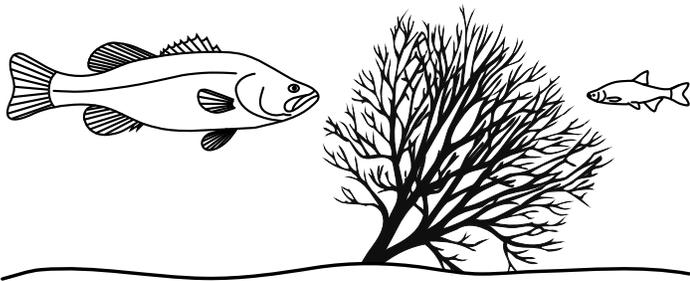
For additional information go to: [MyFWC.com/Fishing/](http://MyFWC.com/Fishing/) and click on the **Sport Fish Restoration** link. The US Fish and Wildlife Services' [WSFRprograms.FWS.gov](http://WSFRprograms.FWS.gov) Web site provides additional information.

### **Fish biology: Prey size selection**



"Big lure, big fish!" So the saying goes. It makes sense that a larger fish will want a larger meal. But there's a lot more to it than that. In fact, it turns out that fish can be pretty selective about the size of their food.

It's all in the calories. Nature provides many examples where a single meal might mean the difference between surviving until the next feeding opportunity arrives, or becoming too weakened to hunt by the time that occurs. Although a bass doesn't do it consciously, when a shiner swims past the predator will evaluate how much energy (calories) it will have to expend to capture that prey, compared to how much energy (again, calories) it will gain by eating that prey. If the biological



**Is this shiner worth the energy the bass will have to expend to catch it? Calories count!**

tally sheet shows an ending balance that's "in the red," then the bass will be better off letting that shiner go.

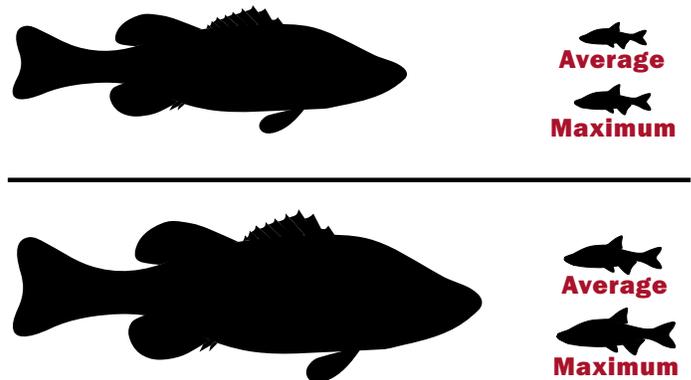
There are a few factors that might tip the balance one way or the other as our bass quickly decides whether or not to chase that shiner. If the shiner is injured, the playing field heavily favors the bass. Lure manufacturers and anglers alike agree that a lure that either looks or swims like it's injured has a much better chance of attracting a fish's attention! On the other hand, if the bass is still recovering from recent spawning activities, it may decide to wait for a slower meal before expending any energy. Of course, one of the most obvious factors is how big that meal is, with a bass getting more from a 10-calorie shiner than a 5-calorie shiner. This is where prey size selection comes in.

Most predatory fish will choose prey that is smaller than what they can theoretically eat based on their mouth size. There are several likely reasons for this. For one thing, a bigger shiner might be able to swim faster than a smaller one. It will also be harder for the bass to inhale it or grasp it in its mouth. With more muscle (which is what the bass is after), a larger shiner is also more likely to be able to wriggle free if caught. So the "bigger is better" theory regarding predator meals, while generally true, has its limits.

In various studies on fish, both the *average* prey size and the *largest* prey size tended to increase directly in relation to the size of the predator. For example, the largest shiner a 15-inch bass would eat will be bigger than the largest shiner a 10-inch bass would

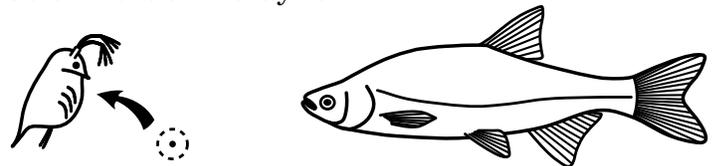
eat. And the average size shiner eaten by a 15-inch bass would be larger than the average size shiner eaten by a 10-inch bass.

However, a number of these studies showed that the *smallest* prey size taken was not very different between varying sizes of predatory fish. In other words, when it comes to smaller prey a bigger fish is just as likely to go after it as a smaller fish. Despite the fact that a smaller shiner doesn't offer as many calories to a bass as a bigger shiner, the smaller shiner probably represents a "sure bet," one that the bass knows it has a high probability of catching.



**A 15" bass will eat larger minnows than a 10" bass will, and the average size of the minnows eaten by the 15" bass will also be larger.**

Along with these interesting facts are some other prey-related relationships. As a fish grows larger, it will switch prey species in order to take food of an optimal size. For example, newly-hatched bass fry feed on microscopic zooplankton (see **Issue 25**) until large enough to begin taking minnows and insects, and then switch again to even larger prey such as shiners and crayfish.



**Microscopic zooplankton or foot-long shiner? The size of the meal depends on the size of the bass.**

Similarly, fish may switch prey species depending on what is seasonally available. This is probably best exemplified by trout, which tune in to specific insect hatches which are important to their survival. And while this

relationship isn't actually size-related, an experienced trout angler will tell you that there will be times when a fly only one size up or down from the "right" size will be completely ignored by actively feeding fish. "Matching the hatch" by making sure your lure size matches the prey size will yield more fish. Regarding food selection, both cold- and warm-water piscivorous (fish-eating) species have been found to prefer soft-rayed fish (such as shiners) over spiny-rayed fish (such as bluegill). Any angler that has ever been spined by a bluegill knows the reason for this!

There are some practical implications of all this knowledge for anglers. First, make your lure look like an easy target—this may be why slow-moving plastic worms have become "the" bass lure, if there is one. If the water is chilly and cold-blooded fish are sluggish, work your lure more slowly than usual. And finally, while the "Big lure, big fish!" theory has some application, too big a lure may be bypassing more fish than you realize. "Medium lure, big fish *and* more fish?" Maybe!

## **Fishing forecast January, February and March 2009**

**Osborne Chain-of-Lakes (Palm Beach County):** Many small largemouth bass can be found throughout the Osborne/Ida chain of lakes and canals, particularly near vegetation and drop-offs. Additionally, eelgrass and hydrilla provide good places to target larger bass moving out of shallow areas following the spawn. Largemouth bass will hit most popular lures such as topwaters, spinnerbaits, and plastic worms worked during early morning or late afternoon. Try fishing any structure or vegetation you can find since the fish will be looking for attractive ambush sites. As the weather warms, mid-day anglers will need to target deeper water using Rat-L-Traps or deep diving crankbaits. Expect less action with sunshine bass as waters start to warm and the fish move to the deepest areas of the lake. Bluegill and redear sunfish (shellcracker) fishing will pick up during the spring spawn. Nice size channel catfish can be caught through the summer from the bank using chicken livers or live worms. A few larger peacock bass were killed during the past months of colder weather; however,

## **City Fisher Photo Tournament results**

Thanks to everyone who participated in the Photo Tournament! A few of the entrants and their catches are shown below. Prizes included certificates and FWC literature.



**Ethan Rogge, age 5, has his hands full with a decent butterfly peacock he landed.**



**Alex Zapata and Jackeline Leon show off a brace of nice Midas cichlids, both caught in Miami-Dade.**

no serious weather-related fish kills occurred this winter, so fishing for the non-native species (Mayan cichlid and peacock bass) should remain good. Anglers will find most Mayans near shore, next to vegetation, using both live worms and small artificial lures such as beetle spins and jigs. Anglers should remember to use smaller lures when targeting peacock bass and retrieve them a bit faster than they would for largemouth bass. — *by Ralph LaPrairie*

**Everglades Water Conservation Areas (Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties):** The fishing is really heating up and now is the time to get on the water. As the water levels continue to drop, bass fishing is really good in WCA 3 and should remain so throughout this quarter. Falling water levels in WCA 2 should also lead to excellent bass catches. The ongoing creel survey on L-67A Canal has documented several 100-bass catch days for anglers; this indicates the fish are stacking up in the canals. Some of the best lures have been jerk baits: flukes, senkos, and hard bodied minnow imitations. Topwater lures including zoom frogs, buzz baits and hard bodied noise makers might get that “big bite” of the day. Don’t overlook fly rods and popping bugs for exciting mixed-bag topwater action. Look for bluegill and redear sunfish (shellcracker) to begin spawning over their characteristic plate-shaped nests. Live worms and crickets are time honored, and well proven, baits. Fish tight to the vegetation, and don’t be afraid to move around until a concentration of fish is located. Fishing for Mayan cichlid and oscars will pick up as the weather stabilizes and water temperatures warm. As of this writing, catches of large numbers of these scrappy fish are being landed by anglers fishing crickets in pockets of heavy vegetation. There is no bag limit on these exotics, with the exception to the peacock bass (daily limit is 2 peacock bass per angler, only one of which may be 17 inches or longer in total length).

**Please remember that displaying a 10x12 inch orange flag 10 feet above the bottom of the hull is required for all vessels entering the marsh.**  
— *by Melvin Burnside*

**Metropolitan Canals (Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties):** April is one of the best months to find butterfly peacock spawning in

shallow water areas, and this is a great time for anglers trying to catch one. It also provides anglers one of their best opportunities for catching a large butterfly peacock as they are highly aggressive when guarding their nests. Small (#5 or #7), minnow imitating lures by companies such as Rapala, Yo Zuri, and Matzuo in silver/black, blue/silver, and fire tiger are good choices for anglers targeting south Florida’s premier sportfish. The Fish and Wildlife Commission strongly encourages the catch and release of butterfly peacock year-round but more so during the spawning season to ensure the continued success of this very popular south Florida sportfish.

Butterfly peacock experienced some cold-related fish kills in January and February primarily in the northern and western areas of their range. Preliminary observations suggest peacock bass populations in some of these fringe areas were hit hard but not eliminated so their numbers should rebound quickly if we have mild winters for the next year or two.

Largemouth bass should be off their beds and ready to feed. Topwater lures such as Rapalas and poppers can provide some fast action. In weedy areas anglers may want to try swimming soft plastics such as Super Flukes, Bass Assassins, topwater frogs or lizards. Small (3-4”) shiners are a very effective bait for both largemouth bass and butterfly peacock, and larger shiners are the bait of choice for anglers trying for snook and tarpon in urban canals.

Bream will also be spawning during this period and wigglers, crickets or night crawlers fished under a bobber are an excellent way to catch bluegill, redear sunfish, Mayan cichlid and oscars. Small poppers, beetle spins and small jigs in white, green, or chartreuse are great for bream.

Anglers wishing to fish in Miami-Dade County should consider the Tamiami (C-4), Cutler Drain (C-100), Black Creek (C-1), Parkline (L-31W) and the eastern section of Aerojet (C-111) canals; in Broward County the North New River Canal (G-15), Griffin Road Canal (C-11) and Cypress Creek canals; and in Palm Beach County the Boynton, West Palm Beach and Erdmann River canals. All offer opportunities for exciting fishing action. — *by Kelly Gestring*

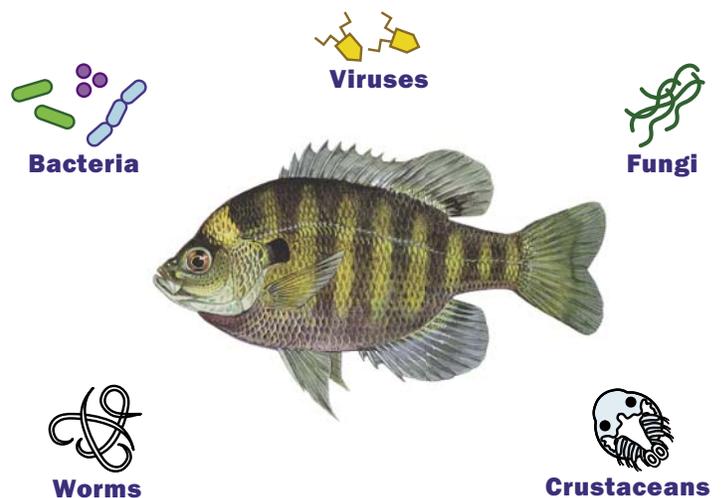
**Lake Trafford (Collier County):** Water levels are still holding and should allow access throughout the coming months, but with littler or no rain keep an eye on accessibility later in the season. No serious weather-related fish kills occurred on Lake Trafford during the past few months with the exception of the non-native sailfin catfish and should not impact any of the sportfish. Anglers have had to work a bit harder to come up with nice stringers of black crappie recently, but for the determined angler with the right pattern, a day on the water can still produce a good catch. Plenty of small crappie are in the system and with a good forage base present, should produce some action even as we head into the beginning of summer. Bluegill and redear should provide additional species to target as the water continues to warm. Angers should contact the Lake Trafford Marina (239-657-2401) for the most up-to-date information. — *by Ralph LaPrairie*

### Sick fish

This is the time of year when FWC begins receiving the most calls about fish with lesions, sores or other abnormalities. There are several reasons why spring and summer are the usual peak for these reports. Spawning activities not only result in direct abrasions that can turn into sores, but the stress of spawning will weaken fish and make them more susceptible to diseases and infections. Warmer water holds less dissolved oxygen, and low oxygen can also stress fish with similar results. Also, many diseases seem to grow in individual fish and spread between fish more quickly during spring and summer than in winter. The good news is that anglers, whether simply handling a fish to release it or taking the fish home to eat, have little to worry about. In fact, anglers can help fish they plan to release by wetting their hands before touching them; this will reduce the chances that some of the fish's protective slime coating is removed, making it susceptible to infections. For any catch destined for the frying pan, commonly encountered parasites of Florida fish won't infect humans; cooking any fish you eat further eliminates any possibility of infection. Listed below are some parasites or diseases anglers might see in or on their catch:

- Nematode (roundworm)—One of the commonest and most easily observed parasites. Visible as semitransparent, coiled (almost spring-like) worms inside the abdominal cavity of fishes. May be present in large numbers.
- Ich (say "ICK")—Appears as a white growth on the fish's body. Common in aquarium fish as well as in natural populations.
- Fish louse (Argulus)—An external parasite; actually a crustacean. Often seen on largemouth bass. The transparent creatures may be hard to spot, but once noticed resemble a clear, shelled amoeba.
- Cysts—Caused by a variety of parasites. Visible as tiny black specks about the size of a period [.] on the fins, near the mouth, or within the muscles (fillets) of fish.
- Yellow grub—Appears exactly as the name describes, just under the skin or within the muscle tissues of fish.
- Viruses, fungi and bacteria—These can be hard to distinguish between and are too small to see, but the result is often very similar: white or reddish sores, infections or lesions on the body of the fish. Any abrasion or wound might be infected by one of these three.

Again, there is little to fear from handling infected fish, and properly cooking fish will do away with the danger that parasites might be transferred to people. Thus, the angler detecting a hitchhiker on his catch has little cause for concern when he properly cooks his catch before eating it.



**A variety of diseases and parasites may affect our freshwater fish, and this is the time of year when they're most likely to put in an appearance.**

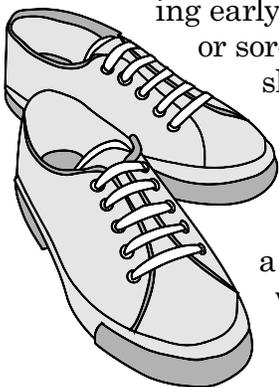
## Hoofing it



There are many reasons to bank or wade fish. The first and most obvious is not owning a boat, either due to cost or storage limitations. Another is that many waters don't have ramps and are only accessible by foot. Additionally, you may not always have the time to hitch up, launch, and retrieve a boat. But whether your boat-lessness is permanent or temporary, most anglers will find themselves working their feet instead of a trolling motor at least some of the time. Here's how to take advantage of those times.

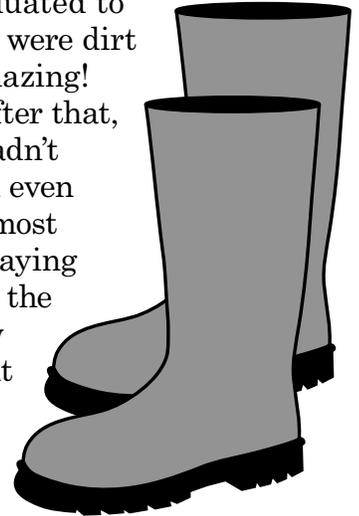
### Footgear

Your footgear is second only to your rod and reel when it comes to wading equipment. In fact, it could be argued that even your rod and reel won't matter much if you quit fishing early because your feet got wet or sore. **Tennis shoes** (or "tenner shoes" if you're old enough to remember the name) are the cheapest and easiest wading shoes, mainly because you probably already own a pair. I bank fished for years with nothing more advanced than "sneakers" adorning my fish-searching feet. With

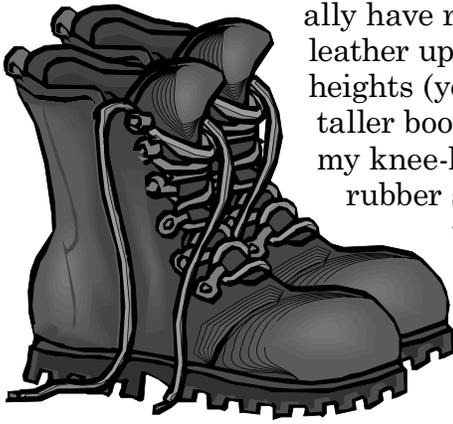


our mild south Florida climate, tennis shoes can be quite comfortable, even when wet. But that's their main problem: they're not waterproof, and even during warmer weather having to change out of wet socks and shoes is inconvenient. During cooler weather, wet sneakers can be downright cold; no matter how hard I tried to stay dry, it always seemed like my sneakers still got wet.

I eventually graduated to **rubber work boots**. They were dirt cheap and absolutely amazing! My feet rarely got wet after that, and I wondered why I hadn't switched earlier. I could even wade a bit into water almost a foot deep, while still staying dry! I remember this as the best thing about my new togs: being able to go out even a little bit into the water often let me cast around or past bushes or other shoreline vegetation. I also found myself just a little closer to offshore vegetation or cover that I "knew" was harboring entire schools of ten-pound bass. The disadvantages of plain rubber work boots, however, are several. They're hot. They'll fill with water like a pair of five-gallon buckets if you go too deep. They don't fit your feet very well, which can accidentally leave a boot behind when wading in deep mud, or cause heel blisters when covering harder terrain.



Years later, I finally laid down close to a hundred dollars for what I, at the time, called "fancy boots." Finally heeding the unanimous advice of dozens of outdoors writers, I purchased a quality pair of **outdoors boots**. There are numerous options available, but I went with knee-high, form-fitting rubber boots that lace up. I also duck hunt, so I really needed something that was entirely waterproof but easier to clean caked mud off of than leather. The close-fitting ankles on these boots made sure they stayed put, even when sucking a foot back up out of three-foot-deep mud. For less rigorous use, most anglers would be more comfortable in waterproof leather boots which are cooler than rubber with more "breathability." These usu-



ally have rubber soles, with leather uppers of various heights (you'll pay more for taller boots, as I did for my knee-highs). Normal rubber soles with a deep tread will handle most lakeside terrain; felt or studded soles designed for northern rocky

lakes and rivers are useless down here. While definitely easier on the feet, these boots require some maintenance, mainly of the leather uppers to keep them waterproof and supple. Even with care, they will eventually start to leak. Be aware that many boots come insulated or lined against the cold of northern climates; Florida sportsmen will want to make sure they buy *uninsulated* versions.

**Waders** deserve mention. I own a decent pair of chest waders, but they see use when chasing ducks rather than fish. Due to the size of the alligators I've seen many places I fish, I'm content to go no deeper than my knee-highs, and am pretty cautious about doing even that. Anyone near water should stay alert and exercise due caution at all times.

## Other equipment

Unless you're fishing obstruction-free waters, medium rather than light tackle will be best-suited for bank angling. In a boat, you're usually working fish away from cover out into open water, but from shore you'll often have unavoidable obstructions to deal with. I prefer longer rods, which give me more reach and better control when I don't have the option of dashing from one side of the boat to the other.

You'll need some way to carry your lures and other fishing gear. A smaller **tackle box** works well; what I'll do is transfer a basic selection of lures for whatever I'm after from my "main" tackle box into my "carry" box. A **fishing vest** or **fanny pack** works well if you'd prefer to wear your gear rather than carry it, though you won't have as much space. However, vests and fanny packs loaded with extra pockets are available that will give you more room than is normally available. The new soft-sided tackle boxes and tackle packs work well for stuffing into a vest pocket or fanny pack. Note that wading staffs, a must for wade

anglers up north, won't provide much support in Florida with its soft, mucky bottoms.

## Tactics

Most of the same principles will apply equally to bank or boat fishing. You'll be targeting obvious structure, and ideally you'll try to line up your casts so that your lure spends more time in the strike zone than it does in "dead" water. However, the latter can be hard to accomplish from shore. Wading out slightly past shoreline brush, or closer to the far edge of shoreline weeds, will often help you place a cast parallel to the shoreline that will cover likely territory. Bank anglers also need to keep stealth in mind, keeping a low profile and walking softly in order to get close to their quarry without spooking it.

Flipping-style casts can be very important. If the shoreline is fairly brushy and you can't wade past it, the only way to get a cast out may be to stick your rod tip past the brush and swing-cast left or right to likely spots along the shoreline. This is another reason I prefer a longer rod—preferably seven feet—for bank fishing. Another helpful technique is bouncing a lure off the surface so it can skitter farther under overhanging cover.

Weedless lures are more of a necessity when bank fishing. Shoreline structure and trees will be harder to avoid, and anglers more coordinated than I am are still going to snag them occasionally. You'll have a better chance of getting a weedless lure back than one with multiple treble hooks.

Playing a large fish will be more challenging from shore, because there will usually be more obstructions to deal with. Again, a longer rod will give more control, allowing you a bit more leeway in "steering" fish around or away from vegetation or shoreline brush. On the other hand, it may be easier to actually land a fish from shore, because you're closer to the level of the fish, especially if wading. Wading also puts you closer to the action, and it can be quite exciting to have a large fish boiling the water right next to you before you manage to land it. A word of caution, however: yet another reason to make all your hooks barbless is the possibility of having a large fish brush you with a mouth full of trebles.

So whether you always fish from shore, or you're just giving the bass boat a break, bank angling can provide some rewarding experiences. These tips should help you to make the most of the experience!