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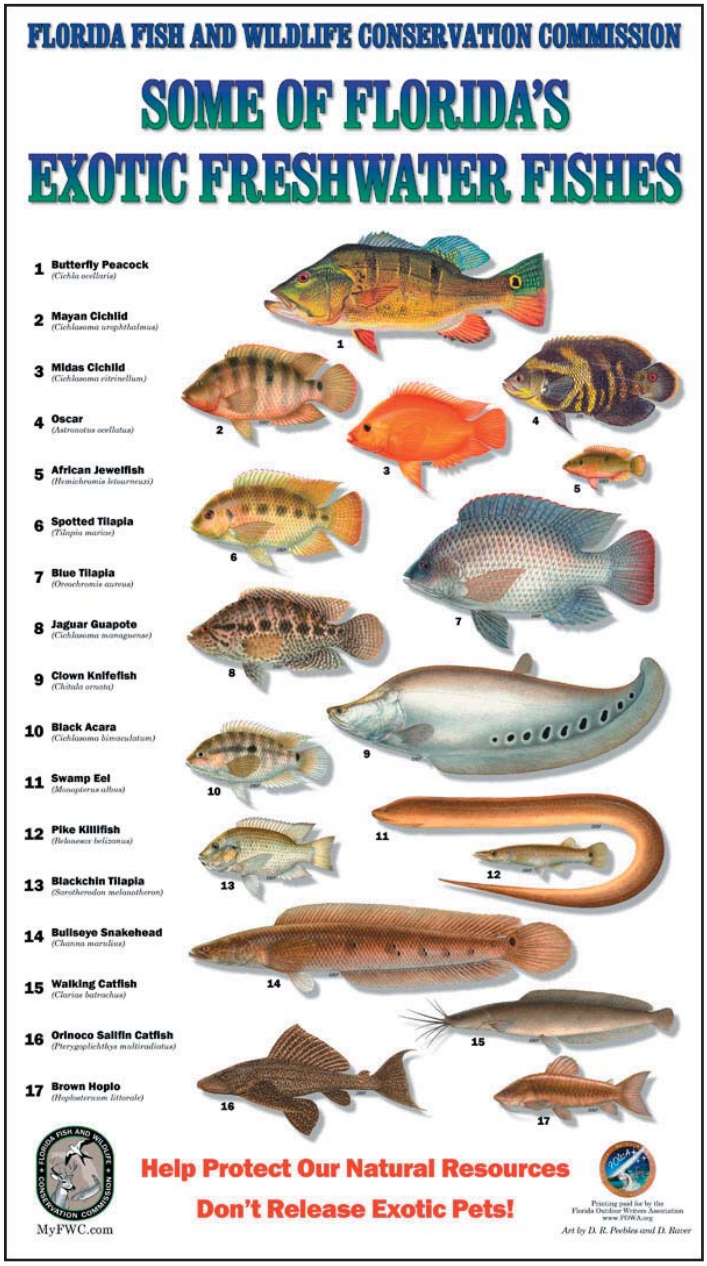
The City Fisher

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.

Exotic fish poster now available

"Don't release exotic pets!" That's the message behind a colorful new poster available through a joint effort between the **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission** (**FWC**) and the **Florida Outdoor Writers Association** (**FOWA**). The 20"x36" poster, titled **"Some of Florida's Exotic Freshwater Fishes"**, displays 17 species of nonnative fishes currently established in Florida. These exotic species were introduced by man from foreign countries, and with a



This newsletter is a publication of the **South Region Fisheries Management Section** of the **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission** (**FWC**), and is paid for in part by **Sport Fish Restoration** funds. To contact **The City Fisher**, e-mail john.cimbaro@myfwc.com or phone John Cimbaro at 561-625-5122. You can also write to: John Cimbaro; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; 8535 Northlake Boulevard; West Palm Beach, FL 33412. Back issues are available. You can visit us at **MyFWC.com**.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

MyFWC.com

single exception, are unwanted residents in the Sunshine State.

There are currently 34 reproducing exotic fishes established in Florida, according to the FWC's **Division of Habitat and Species Conservation**. The poster depicts the most widespread or commonly caught species. Wildlife artist **Diane Rome Peebles** produced 15 illustrations used in this poster, along with two others illustrations done for the FWC several years ago by well-known wildlife artist, **Duane Raver**. University and federal government researchers familiar with the exotic fish advised the artists to help create attractive, detailed and accurate depictions. The new "Exotic Freshwater Fishes" poster was designed as a sister-publication to the FWC's "Freshwater Fishes" poster.

"FWC actually initiated this project several years ago," said FWC biologist Paul Shafland, who along with biologist John Cimbaro created the poster's design. "Without FOWA's generous funding, it would not have come to fruition at this time. We are very grateful for their contribution."

FOWA provided $2,500 for printing of 9,300 posters, which are being made available to the public at no cost.

"It is illegal to release any non-native fish or any other non-native organism in Florida," said Scott Hardin, FWC's Exotic Species coordinator. "The only way to really stop exotics is to let people know they should never release them."

Moreover, some people consider releasing exotic pets inhumane because most will die shortly after being released. However, those that survive could have detrimental environmental effects.

FWC has a three-pronged approach to exotic fishes: *prevention* of illegal exotic fish releases through education, development of specific regulations, and law enforcement; *assessment* of those exotic fishes already present in Florida to understand what their effects really are; and *management* which aims to reduce the abundance of these unwanted residents. One management approach is to encourage people to fish for exotic fishes they can eat. The only exceptions to this are the Butterfly Peacock Bass which was purposefully released by FWC to eat other exotic fishes, while increasing recreational angling opportunities in metropolitan Southeast Florida canals; and the Triploid Grass Carp which have been introduced to eat exotic vegetation.

The "Exotic Fishes" poster is available in a reduced printable size at:

Myfwc.com/images/Conservation/FW_Exotics_Poster_Small.jpg

or a full size poster can be picked up at any of the FWC's regional offices. More information about exotic species in Florida can be found at: **MyFWC.com/WildlifeHabitats/Nonnative_index.htm** In the meantime, remember: **"Help protect our natural resources – Don't release exotic pets!"**

Saltwater shoreline anglers need to buy new license

Florida's resident saltwater anglers who fish from shore or a structure affixed to shore need to buy a new $7.50 (plus administrative and handling fees) shoreline fishing license, **unless they have a regular resident saltwater fishing license**.

The new license applies only to Florida resident saltwater anglers who fish from shore. Resident anglers may prefer to purchase the regular recreational saltwater license that covers them, no matter where they fish for saltwater species in Florida.

Florida has always required nonresidents to have a license when fishing from shore, and they will still need to purchase a regular nonresident saltwater fishing license.

The new shoreline saltwater fishing license for residents went on sale July 15. It provides all of the same exemptions as a regular license, including senior citizens, children, disabled people who meet certain qualifications, active-duty military personnel while

home on leave, and anglers who fish from a licensed pier.

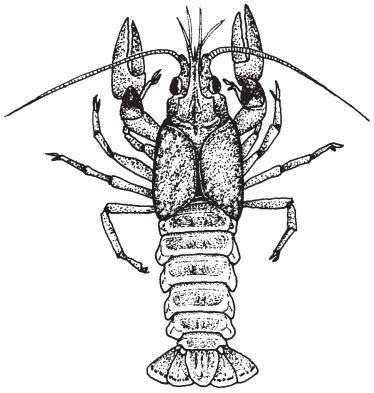
In addition, the shoreline license requirement includes exemptions for anglers drawing food stamps, temporary cash assistance or Medicaid. Also anglers, fishing in their home counties, using poles or lines not equipped with a fishing line retrieval mechanism are exempt from license requirements.

At the request of the FWC, the Florida Legislature passed the new license requirement to head off a federal registration requirement that will go into effect Jan. 1, 2010, and will have a $15-$25 fee beginning in 2011. Florida's new shoreline license exempts this state's anglers from the federal license requirement.

Obtain licenses, 24 hours a day, via **MyFWC.com/License** or by calling toll-free **1-888-FISHFLORIDA** (**1-888-347-4356**).

Freshwater fishes, turtles, frogs, crayfish and molluscs—expand your horizons

by Bob Wattendorf



Florida requires anyone between the ages of 16 and 65 to purchase a recreational freshwater fishing license (unless you are legally exempt) to take or even attempt to take freshwater fish. There are other animals you can take from fresh water recreationally without a license for consumption or to use as bait, provided you know and follow the rules. They provide another way to appreciate the great outdoors and delve deeper into nature.

Freshwater fish is defined as any cold-blooded animal that lives most of its life in fresh water and typically has scales, gills and paired fins. In Florida's fresh waters, there are 20 species or hybrid fishes designated as game fish that have bag and size limits, and many other species of nongame fish, such as catfish and pickerel, that don't typically have bag or size limits. Obtaining a recreational freshwater fishing license is easy—just call 888-FISH FLORIDA, or visit **MyFWC.com/License**—and is a great value. An average angler fishes 17 times a year and spends about four hours per trip on the water, so that works out to a cost of a quarter per hour for healthy outdoor recreation—and perhaps a free meal.

But what about taking turtles, frogs, crustaceans, such as crayfish and grass shrimp, or mollusks, such as mussels and clams? To take these species recreationally or for personal use, you do not need a fishing license. However, it is very important to understand that specific regulations apply, most of which focus on protecting imperiled species. A sale license, such as a commercial fishing license or Class III exhibition and sale license, is required to sell these species.

Freshwater turtles are shelled reptiles that lay eggs on land but primarily live and feed in fresh waters. Recent reports of large harvests of several species because of demand in Asian and other foreign markets caused the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to step in and prohibit all commercial take or sale of wild native freshwater turtles, of which there are 18 species in Florida. It is anticipated that aquaculture facilities will provide an alternative source for these animals without endangering natural public resources. Harvest of alligator snapping turtles and regular snapping turtles, Barbour's and Escambia map turtles, and cooters is prohibited. Other freshwater turtles (chiefly softshell turtles) are restricted to one per person per day for personal use. They are typically caught by hand, dip net, minnow seine or baited hook and used for human consumption. These flattened looking turtles with leathery shells can inflict a painful bite and have sharp claws, so be careful if you choose to harvest one.

Red-eared sliders are a common nonnative freshwater turtle in Florida's waters, but they are a conditional species, meaning they may not be caught and kept as pets. While red-eared sliders can be taken and used for human consumption, once removed they cannot be released back into Florida's waters. Sale of nonnative turtles (such as painted turtles) not listed as conditional species requires a Class III exhibition and sale license; however, sale of red-eared sliders requires an additional permit and is only allowed to permitted recipients within the state or to out of state recipients.

Among the most common frogs taken for consumption are pig frogs and bull frogs. There are no seasons, bag or size limits. Most are taken using gigs at night (some specific areas prohibit this, so check the local regulations). Sale of frogs or frog legs requires a commercial fishing license.

Mollusks include mussels and clams that are also known as bivalves because of the two hard shells that are joined together with a hinge. These animals are filter feeders and generally sedentary—living on or in the sand at the bottom of rivers and lakes. Certain species of freshwater mussels may be collected for personal use. However, seven Florida mussel species that occur from the Suwannee River system north and west throughout the Panhandle are federally protected. Possessing or disturbing these protected species can result in substantial penalties, so be sure to do your research first. The daily bag limit for unprotected mussels, such as Florida spiney spike and paper pondshell, is 10 per person (or 20 half shells), and they can only be taken by hand-picking. Freshwater mussels may not be sold. Species of freshwater mussels from families other than Unionidae or Margaritferidae, such as the Asian clam, have no daily bag or possession limits and are often taken for bait. The tough body is removed from the shell and placed on a bait-holder style hook.

Crustaceans are arthropods, with exoskeletons rather than a spine and segmented bodies. In the aquatic environment, they include crayfish and shrimp. There are more than 50 species of freshwater crayfish in Florida and many are imperiled and may not be taken. However there are no seasons, gear, bag or size limits on the more abundant "crawdads." These critters look like little lobsters and are sometimes taken with small traps or dipnets either for use as bait, or to be boiled or steamed and used in various meals —especially Cajun style stews or Creole recipes. Red swamp and white river crayfish are the most common species used for these purposes and are found in ditches and vegetated areas with clear water and often around algae covered rocks. Traps are baited with abundant amounts of fresh or frozen fish parts, but the bait can't be spoiled. Leaving the trap overnight is normally important but remember to tag it with your name and address and be sure it is placed legally and safely. Red swamp and white river crayfish are listed as conditional species, so while they may be personally used for human consumption, they may not be kept alive or sold without special permits.

Getting outdoors and learning about nature is a great way to have fun, get exercise and get away from the stress of everyday life. Learning more about other aquatic species and ways to take them either for your own dinner or as baits for your next fishing trip can add to your enjoyment. To learn more and to check local rules visit **MyFWC.com**.

Visit **MyFWC.com/Fishing/** for more **Fish Busters'** columns by Bob Wattendorf.

Quarterly fishing forecast

Everglades Water Conservation Areas (Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade Counties): Water levels in the Water Conservation Areas typically peak in October. The high water tends to disperse fish by giving them access to the extensive marsh areas. Some fish will, of course, remain in the canals, but anglers should not expect the same catch rates they enjoyed during the spring and early sum-

mer. However, this same high water allows anglers to utilize the numerous FWC-created marsh access trails off Alligator Alley and the L-67A Canal to pursue bass in the marsh ("the flats"). **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.** Anglers may also be able to gain access to marsh fishing in areas of WCA 2, although no marsh access trails are maintained there. Fishing in this typically dense cover requires weedless presentations. Floating soft plastics such as trick worms or frogs are good choices. Alternatively, pitch a large heavy-weighted Texas-rigged 10" worm or a ¾-1 oz jig-and-pig into openings in the vegetation. Anglers seeking panfish should probe deeper pockets along the vegetation with crickets or worms, moving frequently until fish are located. Those preferring lures should make long casts with beetle spins or tiny crankbaits parallel to shoreline vegetation. Regardless of species targeted, don't continue to fish unproductive water—keep moving until fish are located. Consider fishing early or late in the day, or even at night, for best results.

Osborne-Ida chain-of-lakes (Palm Beach County): Hydrilla is beginning to make a comeback and is presenting thicker patches to target throughout the system. Anglers have been catching lots of bluegill and numerous small bass along the shoreline edges. Grass shrimp, crickets, and small jigs have been the preferred baits for bluegill that should remain plentiful through October. Expect to take bass in the early morning with topwater lures and later in the day with plastic worms, crankbaits, and live shiners. Shiners have worked particularly well near heavily vegetated areas. As water temperatures begin to drop in late October, live shiners free-lined in deep holes will be an excellent producer for sunshine bass, as will fresh shrimp fished in areas such as the 6th avenue pass that funnel migrating fish. Black crappie anglers can expect more action as water temperatures start to decline, particularly around fish attractors and other brush piles in late October or early November. Jigs and live minnows should be excellent producers. Nice size channel catfish can be caught using chicken liver or live worms. Warm days should continue to provide anglers with peacock bass action as long as we avoid any sustained period of cold weather. Small shiners or lures retrieved quickly will be the preferred presentation for peacock bass. Mayan cichlids continue to be prominent in the lake and can be taken near shore next to the vegetation using grass shrimp, live worms, crickets, and small artificial lures such as beetle spins and jigs. They will become less prominent as water temperature drops below 70º F.

Metropolitan Canals:

■ **Miami-Dade County—**Butterfly peacock can often be found schooling in the fall and this should be a great time for some morning topwater bites. Anglers should watch for butterfly peacock breaking the surface then throw a Husky Jerk Bait, Heddon Torpedo, or small (3 inch) floating, gold or silver Rapala for some fast action. In the afternoon or if you lose the school, try switching to subsurface lures such as Rapalas, Rat-L-Traps, and Pro Traps for continued success.

Largemouth bass fishing should improve as the water temperature cools off and they can also be found schooling in the morning. The same lures will catch butterfly peacock and largemouth bass and if anglers see some surface action, they should cast close to the school. If a largemouth doesn't hit, then reel in quickly with some good rod action and a butterfly peacock may! Soft plastics like Bass Assassin, Flappin Shad, or Flukes in watermelon or salt-and-pepper are all effective largemouth bass baits this time of year. Live shiners are a top choice for butterfly peacock and largemouth bass no matter what time of year, especially for inexperienced anglers.

Wigglers or pieces of night crawler fished under a bobber are an excellent way to catch bluegill, redear sunfish, Mayan cichlid, and oscar in urban Miami-Dade canals. Small Rapalas, Roostertails, and beetle spins

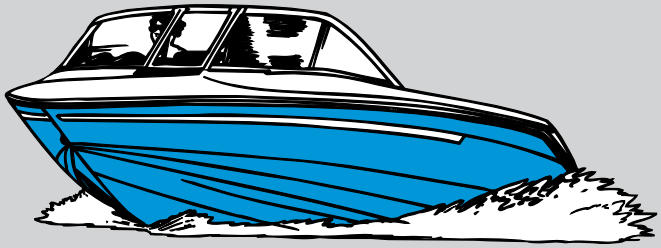
are also effective lures for bream fishing. Anglers may want to try Parkline (L-31W), Cutler Drain (C-100), and Snake Creek (C-9) canals for some great fall angling opportunities.

■ **Broward County—**Cooling temperatures should improve the largemouth bass bite and make it a more pleasant time to fish. Rapalas in gold/black or silver/black fished early in the morning are a good bet for some fast action. If the bite slows down or you start fishing later in the day, you may want to try 8-10 inch rubber worms in black or red shad, 4-6 inch lizards in watermelon seed or cotton candy, or watermelon seed colored Flukes.

Butterfly peacock often school during the fall and can provide some fast action. In addition to minnow-imitating lures life Rapalas, Rebels and Torpedoes, anglers may want to try green and yellow Roostertails late in the morning through the afternoon for some fast action. Live shiners are a very effective bait for largemouth bass and butterfly peacock no matter what time of day.

Many Broward waterways contain good bream populations and wigglers or crickets fished under a bobber is a great way to introduce kids to catching bluegill and redear sunfish as well as the non-native Mayan cichlid. Black, chartreuse, and white beetle spins and crappie jigs are also effective lures for bream and small bass. Cypress Creek Canal (C-14), Hillsboro Canal (G-08) and the lake in Plantation Heritage Park are just a few of the great places available to anglers to wet a line.

Lake Trafford (Collier County): Water levels are near normal on Lake Trafford, which should make launching a boat easier. However, sand buildup around the Annie Olesky Park ramp has still kept this area relatively shallow. Reports from the marina indicate anglers are taking lots of nice bluegill and Mayan cichlid as summer winds down, and a few small crappie are showing up in angler's creels. Most anglers use minnows for crappie and crickets for bluegill, but those experienced anglers that use artificial lures such as jigs and small beetle spins can expect to catch fish as well. Anglers can expect crappie fishing to pick up as the first cool fronts drift south through mid October. Largemouth bass are still difficult to come by and supplemental stocking is scheduled for spring of 2010. Anglers need to be aware of the new 18-inch minimum length limit established last summer for largemouth bass. This new regulation is designed to protect young bass that will be stocked until they have had a chance to spawn at least once and hopefully produce a more robust bass population. Non-native species such Mayan cichlid and blue tilapia should provide anglers with two additional species to harvest and there are no restrictions on the number of these species each angler can harvest. Brown bullhead catfish can be caught using liver or red worms fished on the bottom. Phase III dredging is currently underway but should have no impact on anglers' ability to access the fishery. **However, boaters should navigate with caution in the vicinity of the dredge and marked pipeline.**



New boating safety education law passed

The Legislature modified Florida's boating safety education law this past session. As of January 1, 2010, the law will require that any person born **after January 1, 1988** will have to take an approved boating safety class and possess a **Florida Boating Safety Identification Card** in order to operate a vessel powered by 10 horsepower or more. Previous exemptions apply, with the addition of one exception for persons operating a vessel within 90 days after the purchase of that vessel provided the operator carries a bill of sale with the information specified in s. 328.46(1).

Picking the perfect rig

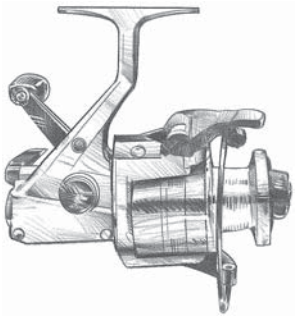
No matter how much you spent for your boat or your new waders, when a fish bites it all comes down to your rod and reel. Your fishing rig has a lot to do with how enjoyable—and successful—your fishing trips will be. Here are some pointers on picking out a rod-and-reel combination that you'll be comfortable with and that will help you land more fish.

The fish and the philosophy—Before choosing your outfit, you have to consider the fish and how you want to pursue it. What do you want to catch—largemouth bass? Sunfish? Both on the same combo? And do you want to go after your chosen quarry with a standard rig for that species, or do you enjoy the challenge of light tackle angling or even IGFA record-chasing? For an all-around combo that you might use for bass and sunfish, you'll probably want to select a rod and reel that are slightly on the light side for bass, but not too heavy to take the sport out of bream fishing. If you're picking a rig strictly for one species, decide if a standard outfit will meet your needs or if you prefer light or ultra-light angling.

There are a couple things to note here. First, don't confuse rod ratings (light, medium, heavy etc.) with whether that same tackle is considered "light" or "heavy" for a specific species of fish. It's all relative. For example, an ultra-light outfit would be *super* ultra-light for a trophy bass shiner fisherman, but would probably be considered "medium" or even "heavy" if that same person were a dedicated spotted sunfish angler (a fish that seldom reaches a half-pound). So rod ratings will be relative to the size of the fish. Second, quality gear becomes even more important when light-tackle fishing because you're pushing your gear closer to the edge of its capabilities. You'll want to spend more on an ultra-light rig for peacock bass fishing than you might on a "standard" rig for the same species.

The reel—Its hard to say that one part of your combo is more important than another, but if you were to pick the "heart" of your fishing system it would have to be the reel. Quality is more significant whenever moving parts are involved, so be prepared to spend a bit more for the reel than the rod if your budget is limited. Thankfully, modern technology puts decent-quality reels within reach of almost anyone's wallet or purse. I use primarily spinning gear, but most of these points will apply to other types of reels as well.

When selecting a reel, the more ball bearings it has the better. Ball bearing assemblies in the rotor, handle or drag system will help the reel perform smoothly. Strikes are much easier to detect when you're retrieving your lure with a reel that's smooth as silk, rather than one that generates small bumps or wobbles as you're turning the handle. An oversized or bearing line roller will give you smoother retrieves and improved drag performance. Certain spool designs will help you cast farther by minimizing line coiling and friction, and this can be especially helpful if tossing nearly weightless ultra-light lures.



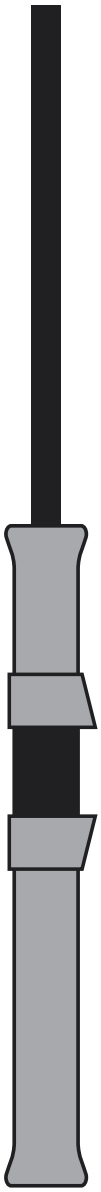
I usually select a reel with the pound test line I expect to use most labeled as the minimum size. For example, if I plan to use 6-pound test line most often I'll pick a reel labeled for 6- to 10-pound test lines. This gives me more line capacity, since I do a lot of light-tackle fishing and expect some of my fish to make long runs. Also, the larger spool helps reduce line curl (or "memory") in monofilament lines, and can increase casting distance. Finally, since I have a preference for longer rods, a slightly heavier reel helps to offset the extra rod length to make the outfit balance comfortably.

Corrosion-resistant materials are a major factor in how much maintenance your reel will require, or how long it might last with little to moderate care. Pay special attention here if you fish brackish water or expect your new bass rig to pull double duty as a light snook outfit. Stainless steel is at the top of the list here for bearings and internal components. Aluminum is great for housings and spools, but graphite and even some plastics are acceptable.

The rod—If you can, spring for a graphite rod; it will probably run you only ten or fifteen dol-

lars more than fiberglass in the cheaper rods. Graphite will significantly enhance your ability to feel lighter strikes, especially if bait fishing, and I like the crisper action both when casting and setting the hook. The one downside to graphite is that it is more fragile than fiberglass, so watch those car doors!

I always prefer a longer rod if I can find one still matching my other criteria. A longer rod lets you cast farther and gives you more control over the fish, especially up close. If you fish from the bank, an extra foot or so of rod will often let you cast over or past shoreline brush that a shorter rod can't bypass. The extra length will add a bit more weight, which is part of the reason I usually choose a slightly larger reel than needed to handle my preferred line test; the extra rearward weight will help balance the longer rod.

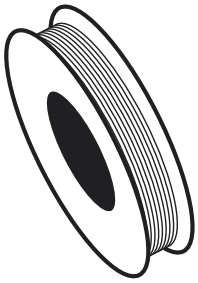


If you always fish from a boat and can stow your rods there for travel, then you don't need to worry about one- or two-piece rods. However, if you ever transport your gear by car or truck consider sticking exclusively with two-piece rods. A one-piece rod won't stow in a trunk or behind the seat if you have passengers or want to keep it out of sight. One of the most expensive rods I own spends all its days in a rod tube, simply because it's too inconvenient to transport by car. I won't make that mistake again. One piece rods do give you a bit more sensitivity, an advantage when bait fishing. They also provide added strength, although this isn't nearly as important for freshwater fishing as it is for saltwater fishing.

I prefer single-foot rod guides that are either aluminum oxide or contain ceramic or other super-hard inserts. Single foot guides will reduce the overall rod weight a little, letting you fish longer before your casting arm gets tired. Hard inserts won't be grooved by line wear (like cheap chrome guides will), and are also less likely to be damaged or scratched in a way that will cause line fray.

When it comes to the rod grip, less is more. A heavy, cumbersome grip will make the whole outfit feel awkward, no matter how good the rod blank or fine the reel. On the other hand, a handle and reel seat made of light but durable materials will contribute a great deal to the overall sensitivity of the fishing rig. The only exception I've found are rods with sliding rings for the reel seat—I've got a couple nice little rods that are in this category and are a pleasure to use, except every ten minutes when I have to snug the rings back in place. Such rings can be taped in place, but the result will eventually be sticky and messy. Handle materials are usually either cork or high-density foam. I prefer the feel of cork, although it is not as durable or as easy to clean as foam handles.

The line—This is one place where the difference between a cheap product and a top-of-the-line offering is only a few dollars. Don't sell yourself short—buy good line. I still use monofilament, and prefer the limper, no-memory lines for my light-tackle fishing. They cast farther with light lures and also add an aesthetic feeling of finesse to my light-tackle experience. If your primary angling technique is free-lining shiners around submerged brush, though, then look for one of the "tough" lines that utilize abrasion-resistant coatings. They don't cast as smoothly, but are less likely to abrade to the breaking point when a lunker wraps you around a stump.



Braided lines have come a long way since the pre-mono days, and modern offerings can boast smaller line diameters, higher spool capacities, and farther casts than equivalent test monofilaments. Keep in mind that you'll be using an entirely different set of knots, though. Although thicker, clear monofilament lines still offer less visibility when trying to fool wary fish, although there are some clear braided lines on the market.

Put it all together—Following these guidelines should help you piece together decent fishing outfits for most freshwater fishing needs. Customize your selections to your personal preferences and fishing techniques if you can do so without sacrificing quality or performance. Then all you'll have left to do is test it out on a real fish!