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## Bow Fishing

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# Coastal BOW Fishing

**B**OWFISHING IS by far one of my favorite outdoor pursuits. It combines many elements into one

relatively simple sport of arrowing non-game fish of many varieties.

Two of the most important things to keep in mind are aiming low at your intended targets and shooting the correct species of fish. There are many laws

on the books about bowfishing, but the main thing a law-abiding bowfisher needs is a saltwater or all-water fishing license, which you might already have if you fish with a rod and reel on coastal waters.

Fish such as flounder, mullet, sheeps-





# WHAT'S LEGAL TO STICK WITH AN ARROW and How to Do It

story  
by  
**DUSTIN  
VAUGHN  
WARNCKE**

head, and gar are all fair game in the saltwater realm. This includes all different kinds of rays, with sting rays being the most popular.

Bowfishing for these species follows

the same rules and regulations as rod and reel fishing for them. However, sticking fish and rays with an arrow can prove to be more challenging than getting them to bite a bait with a hook in it.

Following the rules and regulations

means that if you're not sure what you're shooting, don't draw back and shoot it. This can prove to be frustrating at first, but the more experience you gain, the better you will be at identifying your target when it counts the most.



Keep in mind the size and bag limits for bowfishing and do your research before you hit the water. Remember, ignorance is not an excuse in the eyes of the law.

The main gear you use to shoot carp, buffalo and gar in freshwater can be pressed into service when you hit the marsh or other coastal waters. Keep in mind that saltwater is corrosive and can wreak havoc on your gear if it isn't properly cleaned with fresh water after your bowfishing trip.

You don't need a whitetail deer or feral hog-hunting bow either. A draw weight of 40 pounds or so should be all you need to penetrate even the toughest or largest underwater brute.

Under Texas Parks and Wildlife rules, you can use compound, recurve or long bows—and even crossbows for bowfishing. One of my personal favorites is the lever bow.

This bow combines the power of a compound with the fast action and let off of a recurve bow. Many just starting out in the sport prefer a compound bow such as the Diamond Edge Sonar, which we here at *Texas Fish & Game* used in the Bowfishing 101 digital special program that ran last sum-

Stingrays are favorite saltwater bowfishing targets.



PHOTO: DUSTIN WARNECKE

mer. This is a great bow for the money and, if outfitted with the full AMS bowfishing pack-

age, will have everything you need to start sticking fish the day you get it.

## IT ALL ADDS UP TO MORE FISH IN THE BOAT.



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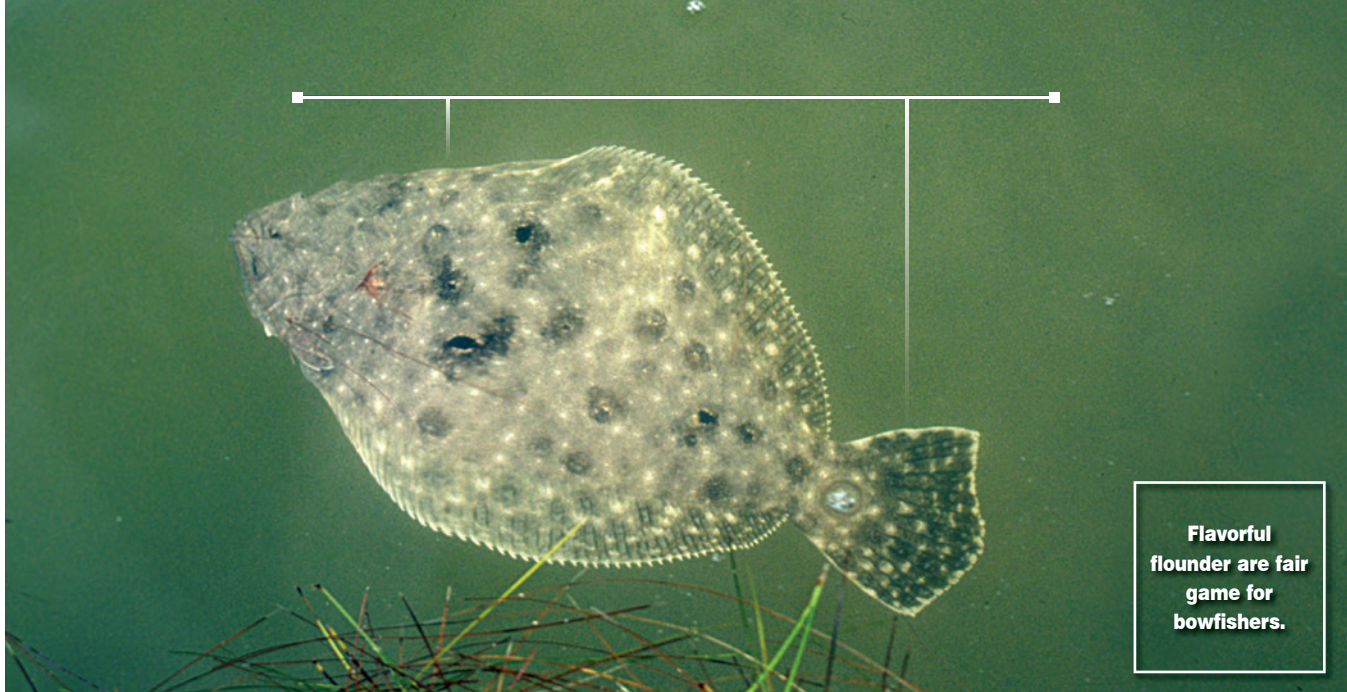


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game for  
bowfishers.**

I personally prefer spin-cast style reels specially made for bowfishing for hard fighting fish in brackish or saltwater environments such as the ones made by Muzzy. This style is easy to retrieve in a moving boat and will also be better when you stick a hard hitter that thrashes your arrow and line.

I often say that I don't play checkers, I

play chess, and I play to win with whatever I am after. You want to use good quality gear as it will be put through its paces when it counts the most.

You can choose to hire a saltwater bowfishing guide, who should have a captain's license to be legal, or you can outfit your own boat for bowfishing. Many bowfishing

excursions happen at night or at least in low light conditions, so a good lighting system and generator to support it is a good idea. I have seen many bowfishing trips in airboats and deck boats, but at first, you should use what you already have. You can then decide whether to invest in more dedicated gear such as a shooting platform, a fish receptacle

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If a personal watercraft is your preference, such as a kayak or a round boat from Roundabout Watercraft or other companies, you will be able to get into areas that bigger boats can't. That is a great advantage, especially if you are rolling solo.

Flounder, stingrays and gars provide some of the best table fare in the saltwater realm and are key target species to eat. Many bowfishers like to "core out" the fine meat from a stingray with a cookie cutter or other such tool. The result is a meat with a consistency similar to a scallop.

I don't need to tell you how good flounder is to eat. Many people don't believe you can eat gar, but I have found this prehistoric fish to be some of the best eating fish around. Simply cut into their armor plating with a reciprocating saw with a good blade or even a pair of tinsnips. Then, simply fillet out the two large rows of boneless meat that run along each side of the backbone. Clean that up, removing as much "red line" as possible, chunk it up, batter and fry it just as you would any fish.

Don't believe me? Try it for yourself!

Believe it or not,  
if prepared  
correctly,  
alligator gar can  
be very tasty.



PHOTO: GRADY ALLEN

However you approach this sport, be safe and have fun. I got hooked on bowfishing my first time out. If you've never tried it, you're in for an outdoor adventure that the whole family can enjoy.

I highly recommend aiming low, thinking big and stickin' and reelin' in some fish with your bow!



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