

AIM THINK B

Top Rivers and Lakes for Bowfishing

BOWFISHING IS QUICKLY BECOMING POPULAR AMONG sportsmen in Texas as well as nationwide. It combines the thrill of hunting with the skill of archery as well as the sport of fishing.

The excitement of multiple shot opportunities, several species of fish you can shoot, and the flexibility of day or night-time bowfishing makes it an all around fun sport for everyone.

Bowfishing is legal on most rivers and lakes but it is important to check your Texas Parks & Wildlife Outdoor

Annual Hunting and Fishing Regulations or call your local game warden to ensure you are following the rules.

The basic gear you need for bowfishing is a compound, lever, recurve, or even long bow, a reel outfitted with bowfishing line, and a bowfishing arrow. Most sporting goods stores in Texas

LOW



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carry bowfishing kits and arrows, so getting started is easy.

The least expensive way to build a bowfishing rig is to purchase a used compound bow from a pawn shop or on the internet through websites such as eBay or Craigslist and outfit it with a bowfishing kit.

One of my closest friends and bowfishing mentors, Marty McIntyre, is a professional bowfishing guide and owner of GARQUEST Bowfishing Adventures (www.garquest.com). Marty's logo is simple, "Saving Game Fish, One Trash Fish at a Time."

Not all the species you bowfish for are "trash fish", but the impact bowfishers have on the ecology of a body of water is almost always beneficial to the area. Marty currently holds the world and state record for a largemouth buffalo, weighing in at 81.5 pounds, which was taken out of Toledo Bend Reservoir in the summer of 2011. It goes without saying that this lake is a top bowfishing destination. Since he is based in Central Texas, Marty does much of his guiding on Belton Lake and Lake Stillhouse Hollow. These two lakes offer ample bowfishing opportunities, and I have personally shot many fish with him every trip I have gone on with Marty.

Carp and buffalo are well known as invasive species for game fish such as bass, by feeding on eggs during spawning. I often refer to carp and buffalo as the feral hogs of fresh water. They can be found in most any lake in Texas and offer ample shot opportunities for bowfishermen.

Texas has many power plant lakes located in different parts of the state. Since cooling the power plant keeps the water warm, many of these lakes contain tilapia, which are a great mild-tasting fish. In lakes such as Brauning and Calaveras, located in the San Antonio area, bowfishing for tilapia is excellent. Tilapia is a smart fish with very keen eyesight so I equate bowfishing for them in many ways to turkey hunting. The minute you see a tilapia, draw back and shoot.

In some of these lakes, plecostomus, also known as aquarium algae-eaters, grow to the size of small catfish, and are an invasive species that has overrun lakes such as Calaveras. This makes for even more bowfishing opportunities on these man-made reservoirs. Gibbons Creek, Lake Fairfield, and Coletto Creek are also among top Texas bowfishing favorites for power plant lakes.

Many bowfishers travel long distances to



PHOTO: DUSTIN WARNOCK

The author with a carp he took while on a bowfishing trip with guide Marty McIntyre

Texas for trophy alligator gars. The main rule to follow for finding lakes with alligator gars is that most lakes (but not all) that have a prominent river system feeding into the Texas Gulf have them. One theory is that many decades ago, gars existed primarily in saltwater and migrated up freshwater rivers, especially during their spring spawning time. Many lakes were impounded on these rivers and bodies of water such as Lake Livingston, Lake Texoma, Corpus Christi Lake, Choke Canyon, Sam Rayburn, and Lake Houston are good examples of this and are great bowfishing lakes for alligator gars.

Long known for its excellent alligator gar fishing and bowfishing possibilities, the Trinity River and many of the lakes impounded along it make for great bowfishing opportunities. The Brazos River is one of Marty's favorite spots for bowfishing for alligator gars close to home, since it runs through North Central Texas.

Lake Ray Hubbard, Ray Roberts Lake, Lake Grandbury, Lake Grapevine, Lake Worth, and Possum Kingdom Lake rank among some of the best bowfishing lakes for North Texas. Possum Kingdom Lake regularly holds bowfishing tournaments and is a premier bowfishing destination in North Texas. Medina Lake, Lake Amistad, and Falcon are among some South Texas favorites for bowfishing, especially when it comes to trophy alligator gars.

One of the main tactics to follow when

bowfishing during the day or night, is to follow the edges of the lake or flats in the shallower water. Troll slowly, always being on the lookout for shot opportunities. If you are new to bowfishing, keep in mind that the refraction properties of the water make fish appear higher than they actually are. For this reason, I have adopted the saying when I am teaching new bowfishers the sport, "Aim Low, Think Big".

Most veteran bowfishers don't believe in using sights, lasers, or any other tools for aiming but, instead, shoot instinctively. Although I have used a laser sight before, I too choose this method of aiming down the arrow at the fish as I think you can hone the skill of instinctive shooting better this way rather than relying on a sight.

If you are new to bowfishing, or just need some pointers to get better at your game, hiring a bowfishing guide is an inexpensive way to get introduced or brush up on the sport. Most guides will have all the equipment you need for the trip. Since bowfishing is becoming more and more popular, there is most likely a full-time or part-time bowfishing guide service in your area.

Whatever lake or river on which you choose to go bowfishing, and whatever time of day or night you choose to go out, be safe and have fun out on the water.



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