



VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1, 2001

# Fishing tough approaching spring

If you have been on Wilson Lake lately you can probably identify with the question the headline raises. To put it mildly, fishing on Wilson has been terrible for most bass anglers. The drought of 2000 did not do much for banner strings on Pickwick either. Wheeler did come around in October when the schools of shad begin to bunch-up on the flats.

Wilson, which typically has yielded decent fish throughout the year, earned the reputation, after the spring fling, as the "dead sea". Granted, this lake has seen difficult years in the past but this year seemed to be particularly barren. In biological terms, we may have just had a bad "class" year. Basically that means a poor previous spawn caught up with us this year.

Is Wilson being overfished? Discussions with area bass anglers have repeatedly lead to another speculation, "Are professional tournaments hurting the bass population on Wilson?" The reasoning is, most pro tournaments allow the competitors to lock-thru and fish Wilson. All the fish caught are then taken back to the weigh-in, usually at McFarland on Pickwick, where they are subsequently released. At one pro event in 2000,

over 70 boats were counted locking-thru to fish Wilson-that's 140 anglers. On the other hand, one would think such re-location would improve the catch of area anglers on Pickwick. Then again, Pickwick has a lot more shoreline than Wilson.

We asked a few anglers what their take was on how fishing fared in 2000 and the prospects for 2001.

## Rick Sharp

"Just like the stock market we are always looking for one primary factor to blame our lack of success on. It also seems that when someone has a good day it's because of their fishing ability or maybe they just got lucky.

The bottom line is, there are many factors affecting current conditions on Pickwick and Wilson. To mention a few; Weather: The last 3 winters have been warmer than normal (fewer shad killed); Tournaments; Of course, even though fish are released they do not always survive.

Live Bait Fishing; A great way to catch fish, but many are gut hooked, and some do not survive.

Technology; We are better fisherman than we ever have been, because we have more tools than ever to locate and catch fish.

I have two grandsons and even though I teach them well they will not see the quality and numbers of fish that I have seen. We can add ourselves to the blame list unless we all do our part to keep our waters clean, keep only the fish we need, and for tournament fisherman especially, take care of the fish that are taken to the weigh-in."

## Ronnie Leatherwood

"What a year for fishin' in North Alabama. We had the B.A.S.S., the FLW, W.B.F.A. and The Red Man Regionals on our area waters, not to mention numerous open and draw tournaments. A person who wants to learn to tournament fish could, on any given night or every weekend day, enter a tournament.



Ronnie Leatherwood photo

Ronnie Leatherwood is an avid local angler and guide on Pickwick and Wilson.

Nineteen-ninety-nine was one of the hottest summers that I can ever remember and even fishing late into the nights was a chore. But, it seems if you want solitude on the local hot spots on the lakes this is what you must do - fish longer later or earlier than the other people and never, but never let anyone see you land a good fish.

## ...will cause an argument with a lot of readers...

The question of fishing pressure on local waters has been the hot topic in all bait shops and ramps in the past year. With increased promotions by the tours that we have drawn to this area it seems that at times the bite has dramatically decreased. Which makes me think back to something that I was told when I first started bass fishing- ninety percent of the bass are in ten percent of the lake. I find that to be ever so evident as my fishing time goes on. With more people fishing the same ten percent of the greatest fishing areas of our waters it is evident that it will have a detrimental effect on how many keeper fish you can catch at any given time.

Now I would like to comment on something that will cause an argument with a lot of readers so please read all of the text before an opinion is made. Each person that buys a fishing license in the state of Alabama has a strict set of rules he/she must comply with to fish in this great state. One of those rules deals specifically with the amount of bass and the size limits he/she must abide by. Now, whether I fish on Pickwick or Wilson I have the right to keep in my possession a definite number of bass. Whether I weigh them in on another lake or keep them for my supper is my right.

A long time ago Ray Scott, who is a friend of mine, came up with catch and release and this was thought to be a good thing. And I agree, probably 99 percent of the fish that I catch are released. The bass anglers that come into the town have to do nothing but catch fish and get a check...and that pretty well caught on. The problem that I have with this is, someone is getting rich. Big money is being paid to the fishermen, sponsors are lining up, towns vie for the right to have them come in and hold a tourney on local waters. Everyone benefits...except the local fisheries.

Yes, the state is supposed to keep up with growth



Southern fishing photo

Rick Sharp began his pro status in 2000 fishing the Wal-Mart FLW and Bassmasters Invitational on Pickwick.

# Event Calendar



FEB 10 -11 - BASSMASTER University, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama, (334) 844-5100. Pros: Jimmy Houston, Larry Nixon, George Cochran, Joe Thomas, Randy Howell and Clark Wendlandt.

FEB 10 - American Bass Anglers, Wilson/Safety Harbor.

FEB 18 - Anglers Choice NW Team Trail, Wheeler/Riverwalk

**FEB 24 - Big River Bassmasters Open, Wilson/Fleet Harbor. 2001 All Star Bassin' Team qualifying tourney.**

FEB 25 - Mid-Central Pro-Am, Pickwick. (866-337-7626).

**MAR Quad Cities Bassmasters Open-Wilson/Fleet Harbor**

MAR 3 - Wal-Mart BFL, Lake Martin/Windcreek.

MAR 12 - 17 Bassmaster Eastern Invitational, Pickwick/McFarland.

MAR 17 - Fishers of Men Trail, Guntersville/Goosepond.

MAR 18 - Mid-Central Pro-Am, Guntersville.

MAR 25 - Anglers Choice NW Team Trail, Guntersville/Goose Pond.

MAR 27 - 31 Bassmaster Top 150 Joe Wheeler State Park

MAR 31 - American Bass Anglers, Wilson/Safety Harbor.

APR 7 - Wal-Mart BFL, Weiss Lake/Hogs Den Marina.

APR 8 - Mid-Central Pro-Am, Lake Martin.

**APR 14 - Belgreen Bulldog Bassin' tournament, Cedar Creek/Slickrock. 2001 All Star Bassin' Team qualifying tourney.**

**APR 28 - Boeing Bass Club Benefit-Wheeler/Riverwalk. 2001 All Star Bassin' Team qualifying tourney.**

APR 28 - Fishers of Men Trail, Neely Henry/Gadsden City Park.

APR 29 - Anglers Choice NW Team Trail, Wilson/Fleet Harbor.

**MAY 5 - Shoals Youth Bassmasters Open-Wilson/Safety Harbor. 2001 All Star Bassin' Team qualifying tourney.**

MAY 6 - Mid-Central Pro-Am, Weiss Lake.

MAY 20 - Anglers Choice NW Team Trail, Pickwick/McFarland.

MAY 26 - Fishers of Men Trail, Pickwick/McFarland.



**W**e begin another fishing season with great anticipation and eagerness to hit the water in pursuit of big bass during the spawn. A significant shad kill on area lakes and a rising water temperature may trigger an improvement on fishing results .

We also begin a new season for the All Star Bassin' Team competition which kicks off the last of February with the Big River Bassmasters open on Wilson. This year, the All Star competition includes eight open tournaments. A new Slider Top Star Award will sweeten the pot.

I would also like to welcome McDonalds restaurants to Southern Fishing. McDonalds will be featuring a youth or special young bassmaster in each issue.



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## There was a tournament but the bass failed to come

The final tournament in the Gray's Tackle Shop Fall Trail was held out of McFarland on Pickwick January 6. Eleven teams entered the event.

Southern Fishing showed-up to take a few photos of the fish and the winners. Alas, none of 22, of some of the area's best Pickwick anglers, weighed a fish-zero, none, not any. This was the first tournament in the memory of the contestants where not a single fish was weighed-in.

In fact, a number of the contestants reported the lack of even a bite all day. The Southern Fishing staff on the scene reported the same results with their casual fishing trip on Pickwick the same day.

Danny Gray, of Gray's Tackle Shop rescheduled the tournament to be fished again January 20.

Hopefully, the bass will get the word this time that there is a tournament underway that requires their cooperation.

## Wal-Mart BFL schedule

Lake Martin	Wind Creek State Park	03/03
Weiss Lake	Hawgs Den Marina	04/07
Lake Eufaula	Lake Point State Park	06/16
Neely Henry	Gadsden City Dock	08/25
Guntersville	Goose Pond	09/29

## Boeing Bass Club Hospice Benefit

April 28, 2001

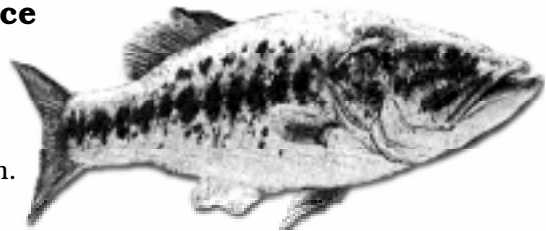
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Southern fishing photo

The icicles on a bluff overlooking Pickwick are a testament to the cold weather that has driven water surface temperatures down into the mid-thirties which evidently contributed to a near-dormant bass population.

### Fishing tough

rate, and stockings are made by the fisheries departments. But, why can't the people that are making the big bucks for the tourneys not re-invest in the local fisheries they so proudly set up their tents around?

Let's challenge the tours, no matter how many initials they use to spell their names, to re-invest in the local fisheries. Lets invite them to put money back into either building fishing structures, investing in stocking, or putting money back to the communities they visit each year. Ramps always need to be improved or even an official weigh-in stand would be nice. Many things could be used for our local fishing area".

#### Timmy Horton



Gerald Crawford photo

**B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year Timmy Horton.**

Horton said, "I do not believe tournaments on Pickwick are hurting Wilson. I do believe there needs to be more concern on the nightly tournaments in the summer months. The heat is tough on the fish if they are not taken care of properly.

A few rules that would help is that on 5 fish limit tournaments. There can not be more than the limit in the livewell at one time. When the 6 fish is caught, they have to cull before they can make another cast. Also there should be a minimum number of bags (5) that the tournament director hands out, and these are the only bags that can be used. This will keep teams from waiting in line, while the oxygen depletes in their bags. "

As you have seen, there are many opinions on the state of bass fishing in our area. But in this sport we participate in, there is only one constant-you never really know what the bass will be doing or where they are located. Finding them is half the sport. And the only way to solve the mystery is to go fishing.

### Seniors Club opens website

An area bass fishing club has announced the opening of their club's website. The club, which has a minimum age of 50 to join, opened the site in early January of this year.

The site is located at <http://proanglers.com/seniors>. A short section explains membership and another tells a little about the club. Tournament results and a photo page are also on the site.

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# Bassin' basics

## FOUR SEASONS OF LARGEMOUTH BASS

**B**ass are cold blooded creatures, meaning that their body temperature is directly related to the temperature of the water in which they swim. Thus the temperature of the water can have a great deal of impact on where bass will be and how active they are on any given day.

In general, bass in most lakes and reservoirs are most active when the water ranges from approximately 60 to 85 degrees. Bass will be less active in colder or warmer water. In cold weather, bass will usually seek out the warmest water they can find, provided they don't have to move too far to find it. The amount of cover (weeds, rocks, submerged wood, etc.) that exists in the water varies dramatically from one lake to the next. Some lakes are full of weeds, others have acres of standing timber, still others appear barren, with little visible cover at all. The amount, location and type of cover available to the bass will also help determine its location at any given time during the year.

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Cover is not as important to smallmouth bass as it is to largemouths, and is important to spotted bass only at certain times of the year. Perhaps most important, the bass is driven to new locations throughout the four seasons by its need for food and procreation. Bass will move to certain areas for spawning. Other areas may better serve their forage needs. Bass do not migrate in the same sense that waterfowl do. An individual bass may not move a great distance during the course of the year; rather, bass try to locate in areas where all their seasonal needs can be met without traveling long distances.

Some species of bass inhabit different depth zones than others. Largemouth bass, in most bodies of water, are shallow water creatures much of the year. Smallmouth bass spend most of their time deeper than largemouths. Spotted bass have been tracked at depths of 100 feet, but will also inhabit shallow water during the course of the year.

### **Seasonal largemouth bass location**

**Winter:** In most bodies of water, the largemouth bass will locate near the deepest parts of the lake, but usually not in extremely deep water. Many bass will navigate to the main lake and hold around bluffs, channel ledges and channel banks, and the ends and sides of deeper points.

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***Food is not a tremendous factor driving largemouth bass location during the winter months ...***

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Food is not a tremendous factor driving largemouth bass location during the winter months; bass consume far less forage in cold water than in warm water, and digestion takes much longer as well. Finding the warmest possible water can be a major key to largemouth location now.

**Early Spring:** The slowly rising temperature of the water and the lengthening daylight period are cues to largemouth bass that they should begin moving shallower. Look for ditches, channel banks, stump or fencerows and other structures leading from deep to shallow water in the prespawn period; these serve as pathways along which bass make a move to their spring locations.

Largemouths seldom stay in shallow water for extended lengths of time in early spring; rather they hold where deep and shallow water meet and make short feeding forays into shallower areas. Breaklines are critical structures during the prespawn period; here largemouths have access to both deep and shallow water only a few feet apart. By locating over a breakline, a dropoff at the end of a big flat from 25 to 8 feet in depth, the bass can hold in deep water when less active and travel up into the shallows to feed. Determining the timing of these short, infrequent feeding movements is critical to fishing success; check them several times throughout the course of the day.

**Spring Spawn:** Largemouth bass prefer to spawn in shallow water. They often bed in coves and tributaries protected from the chilling effects of a harsh north wind. The nest will usually be no deeper than the depth at which sunlight can penetrate to incubate the eggs; this is seldom deeper than 4 feet. Bass like a hard bottom condition for spawning, as opposed to mud or silt. But these fish are highly adaptable, they have been known to spawn in the tops of submerged stumps and on old tires.

**Post Spawn:** After spawning, many largemouth bass reverse their movements along ditches, channel banks and other migration routes and move back out to deeper channel structures. However, if there is sufficient cover in shallow water, they may not move far and may stay quite close to their spawning grounds for extended periods.

**Summer:** Convex structure in the form of humps, rockpiles, saddles and the like is a major key to largemouth location in summer. Bass will locate on these structures and tend to move shallow or deeper on them as their mood dictates. Many largemouths will move into shallower water at night to feed.

Tips courtesy of Bass Lures at <http://users.1st.net/basslures/lures.htm>

In reservoirs without much current movement, stratification occurs in hot weather. Lower layers of the lake may be poor in dissolved oxygen. Any flow, however insignificant, can increase dissolved oxygen levels and stack up largemouth bass; check for schools to be holding around channel drop offs and ledges.

**Fall:** Largemouths tend to follow their forage more in the fall than in other months, which can make them hard to locate. Rather than relating to structural breaklines or objects, they may be out in open water, chasing big schools of shad. Largemouth bass binge feed in the fall. Food is plentiful and they take advantage of the best feeding opportunities. Often small, scattered groups of bass suspend offshore or hold at the ends of long mainlake points waiting for the right opportunity to bust a big school of baitfish. These feeding binges often occur 2 or 3 times a day at scattered intervals.

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## Northwest Alabama Anglers Choice team claims national championship

By Ed Snyder

Changing weather patterns "could" mean changing bass patterns and as the anglers launched for their final day of Championship competition, the 3rd place leaders "malfunctioned" at morning start by "literally" loosing their outboard on take off.

The tournament finish was to provide the excitement for the day with a real "Nail-Biter" grand finale that would separate 1st and 2nd place by only 1/900ths of an ounce.



Ed Snyder photo

**Tony Baker and Gene Roberts of the Northwest Alabama region of Anglers Choice hold check for \$50,000.**

Day one became sandwiched between two cold fronts as 1st-team leaders- (5 bass-24.76 lbs)-Tony Baker and Gene Roberts of the Northwest Alabama region ran their Sprint/Yamaha bass-rig downriver to work 8' to 12' points and boat docks with homemade black/blue jigs with black/blue Mad-Man craws to catch an early bite which would also include the 2nd big bass of the day at 7.12 lbs.

A wide spot in the Brazos river system, Lake Granbury is 8700 acres of prime fishing waters that's 33 miles long. Within that boundary were 48 anglers from 28 states who were competing for the over \$100,000 in cash & prizes.

In a "nail-biting" finish the 1st place team weighed in one bass to finish with a six bass/26.92 lbs. The N/W Alabama Team, Tony Baker and Gene Roberts stated. "We only caught one bass today, frowned the leading team, "But, it was the one that counted they expressed with broadening grins.

The only threat to their 1st place win came from the 2nd place leaders, the Indiana region team of Mark Randolph and Michael Stetich who had just weighed-in 3 bass at 26.83 lbs, just 1/900ths of an ounce shy of taking the lead, giving them a 2nd place finish.

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Jason Buckalew is this month's featured angler. Jason is geared-up to fish in the Fishing for Kids tournament with BASSMASTER pro Timmy Horton.



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2000 Southern Fishing All Star Bassin' Team: Jimmy Robb; Randy Jackson; Donny Beck; Tony Datuin; Marty Hart; and Sam Parker.



# Slider STAR AWARD

## Slider sponsors new All Star award for 2001 season

Charlie Brewer Slider Company, Inc. is sponsoring a new award for the Southern Fishing All Star Bassin' Team for 2001-the *Slider Top Star Award*.

Charlie Brewer, Jr., President of Charlie Brewer Slider Company, Inc., Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, said, "We are pleased to increase our support of Southern Fishing's efforts to recognize area tournament anglers. The accomplishment of finishing with the highest weight on the All Star Team should not go unnoticed."

This new award will be one hundred dollar cash presented to the All Star competitor that finishes the year with the highest weight total. The award will be divided if the first place position is held jointly by a fishing partners.

The Slider Top Star Award is in addition to the \$250 Long-Lewis Top Hawg Award and the \$1000 Top Rod Award presented at the end of the season.

## New tackle shop opens

Quadcities Tackle is now open at 3378 Cloverdale Road. Owner, Fred Bevis, invites area fishermen to stop by and take a look at his shop and inventory.

Bevis is an avid bass angler and fishes in many of the tournaments held in the area. He is also an annual competitor in the Southern Fishing All Star Bassin' Team competition.

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#### Qualifying Tournaments

Big River Bassmasters Open-Wilson/February 24  
Quad Cities Bassmasters Open-Wilson/March 3  
Bulldog Bassin Open-Cedar Creek/April 14  
Boeing Bass Club Hospice Benefit-Wheeler/April 28

Shoals Youth Bassmasters Open-Wilson/May 5  
Florence Firefighters Benefit Open-Pickwick (night tourney)/June 23  
Skills USA Benefit-Wheeler/September 29  
Lakeside Garden Club Open-Pickwick/October 20

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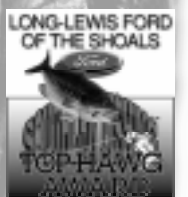
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