

BASSIN TEN

Josh Sikes
Fisher Of
Men

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THE BOOT

June 2019
Volume 102

Bryan's MARINE



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FROM THE EDITORS

In our second edition we are excited to bring you more content from all over the state. We traveled from the northwestern most parish to the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain, and covered plenty in between. Along the way we have met and visited with countless individuals excited about bass fishing and excited about what we are trying to do at Bassin' In The Boot. Our goal is to grow the bass fishing industry in Louisiana, and for us to grow with it. We have a huge water-based culture living in the Sportsmen's Paradise, and no shortage of dedicated individuals contributing in big ways to the bass industry. Many of these people are in our own backyards working hard at their hobbies and in many cases earning a living by contributing to the local industry. We hope to tell you the story of all the "little-guys" in the industry in hopes that you will know about the opportunity to spend your dollars on quality products right here at home, rather than at the big-box retailers on the big name brands. No doubt the big brands will always have their place in the industry, in your tackle box, and in the community, but ensuring the survival of the small businesses and hobbyists that continue to push the envelope and innovate locally is equally important. In no way do we expect to take away from the big guys, but with the growth of the industry we hope to ensure we can give back to the "little-guys" in the industry right here at home, in the Boot. As our original mission statement says:

Bassin' In The Boot will serve as a digital and print resource for all things related to Bass Fishing in the State of Louisiana, including everything from Louisiana Bass Tournaments, Tackle, Bait and Lure Companies, Anglers, and all things Louisiana Bass!

We hope you like what you see, and hope you stay tuned for more, as we explore all that is Bassin' in the Boot!

- Charles Anderson & Jeffery Anderson



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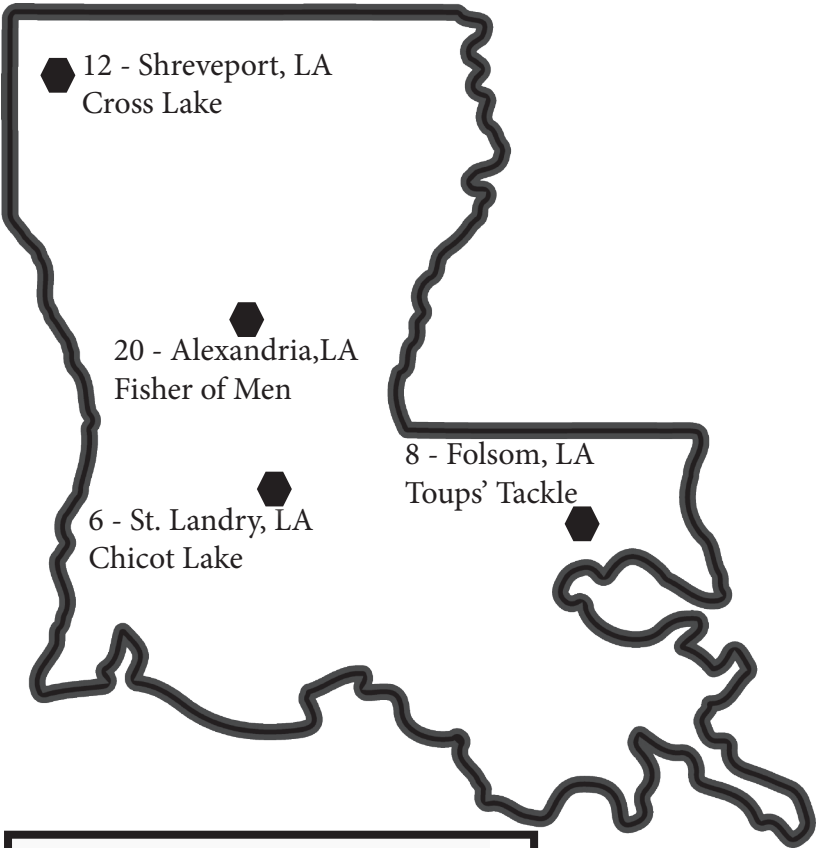
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Bassin' In The Boot

June 2019
Volume 102



On The Cover
Josh Sikes
Fisher of Men

Servant, pastor, husband, father,
 basketball coach, fishing coach,
 guide - Josh Sikes wears many
 hats, he truly is a Fisher of Men.

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Faith: When You Close Your
Eyes & Open Your Heart

Grey's Bass Bash

The worst possible thing I can imagine would be to lose a child. The devastation, pain, and agony associated with losing a loved one must only be surpassed in grief when it is a child that is taken from the world all too soon. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) are to blame for the death



of nearly 3,500 children each year according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These untimely and often unexplained deaths usually occur during sleep or in the baby's sleep area. The following is the account of the Sebastien Family. "In January of 2016 we were surprised, yet elated, to discover we were expecting a new bundle of joy. We proudly announced our pregnancy, letting everyone know our then 5 month old was going to be a big sister. Two babies, 13 months apart, gave us a bit of anxiety but we prepared ourselves for the adventure!" For all purposes the pregnancy was normal and with each month, the Sebastien's grew more and more ready to meet their new bundle of joy. August 29th finally arrived and Greyson Myles Sebastien made his debut. Weighing in at 9 lbs and 1 oz; mom and dad knew he was simply perfect. "Little by little he began to cry less and smile more. His big sister adjusted well to her "bubba" and adored him, as we all did. His daddy and I loved showing him off!"

Then on a day unlike no other, November 21st came with the normal morning routine of dressing the kids, dropping them off at day care and off to work. This was just a normal day - until the most horrific phone call came that changed everything. "The next few days were a blur. Our perfect, handsome son had passed away and there was no real cause, just SIDS, as they

referred to it." SIDS is definitely something you hear of but never once imagine happening to you or to your family. Mom remembers "People called, texted, and visited. To be honest, I didn't really know what people were telling me anymore. It's something you

can't really relate to until it actually happens to you. It was like a nightmare that I couldn't wake up from." Katie recalls someone telling her, "Just remember, when you feel yourself looking down, look up." That's when she knew she couldn't let herself or her family drown in this tragic nightmare. She knew she wanted to do something; something to keep her sweet boy's memory alive and help other families from possibly enduring the pain they were going through. Katie says "I would not let Greyson's precious life be for nothing. Losing Greyson would not be our reason to give up, but instead our reason to strive for greatness in his name." That's how The Grey Effect Foundation began. The Grey Effect Foundation strives to raise enough money to purchase Owlet Baby Care Monitors for new moms and dads before they leave the hospital. The Owlet Company has agreed to match donations by giving two free monitors for every monitor that The Grey Effect Foundation purchases. Fundraising includes the Annual Grey's Bass Bash held at Chicot State Park every year. With a guaranteed first prize of \$1000 it's about more than prize money. Anglers fish the event to raise awareness and money to help ensure no family has to go through the devastating loss of a child to SIDS. The first year of the bass tournament saw 60 boats take the water growing slightly last year and increasing to nearly 150 anglers fishing this year. The bass tournament was held at Chicot State Park in



Pictured to the left are the Sebastiens, top to bottom, left to right: Oliver Grey, Brian, Katie, and Rynn Elise.

This year's bass tournament was held at Chicot State Park in Saint Landry on May 25, 2019. With over 6,400 acres of rolling hills and water in Central Louisiana, Chicot is located between Saint Landry and Ville Platte. With 3 boat launches, meeting rooms, primitive camping sites, and endless hiking trails and woods to explore, the scenery is second to none in the area; a beautiful venue for a beautiful cause. I was talking with a few local anglers before blastoff and most weren't expecting to catch many fish or big ones during the tournament. "The bass just aren't in here like they used to be", according to one older gentleman. He went on to add "We aren't fishing it for the fish though, we are fishing it for that fine family raising money for those babies."



Well as it turned out the bass showed up for the event as well. Out of the 78 boats, 1st place winners, Jeremy and Drake Guidry managed a 16.15# sack to take home the top money prize of \$1000 and a guided Sac-A-Lait Trip. Other winners included second place for \$500, Otis Johnson with 15.08#, 3rd place for \$250 John Powell and Chet Dardeau with 14.72# bag and Big Bass, a 7.14 pound greenback hauled in by Shawn Fontenot for \$790 plus a Hook Em Master's Custom Rod. The yearly event has nearly outgrown the venue according to Katie. Even still, the event continues to grow, as does the support the community offers to the cause.

Pictured below, left, first place winners of the 3rd annual Grey's Bass Bash, Jeremy and Drake Guidry. Bottom right: big bass winner Shawn Fontenot.



Activities at the event this year included fun jump, face painting, BBQ, cold drinks, and door prizes; it is truly fun for the whole family. The foundation has donated nearly 550 monitors to families with newborns since being established. If you are interested in donating to the cause or would like more information visit the website at www.thegreyeffect-foundation.com. As with all things Bassin' in the Boot covers, this is good Louisiana people doing great things in the state. Helping children and bass fishing; I can't think of two better ways to spend a Saturday.

CUSTOM COLOR, QUALITY PRODUCT

Lance Toups' "Southern Made, Fish Approved" Plastics



On a rainy Sunday morning I set out with my four-year-old daughter in tow at about 5:45 a.m. headed south. The day would have been absolutely miserable for fishing. It wasn't much better for driving. Luckily, I had my daughter to keep me company, and man was she excited. Normally when I wake her up at this time it is to go fishing, but she knew we weren't going fishing. Instead we were going to be on the road all day talking bass fishing with some of the industry talent in South Louisiana. While we made a couple stops and talked to a couple of different people, it was deep in the woods west of Folsom, Louisiana, around the small community of Uneedus, Louisiana that we found what we were looking for. Through mutual connections we had heard about a small soft plastics manufacturer located in Tangipahoa Parish.

Lance Toups, a career law enforcement officer, and former Army servicemember spends his time protecting and serving, and then serving the bass fishing industry. In addition to instructing law enforcement officers at the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office, Lance spends his time making tools of the bass hunter – soft plastics. What started out with "one mold, eight ounces of plastisol, and one little jar of glitter" has blossomed into quite the hobby for Lance. Although starting out he says he "could only make one color," color is now what he specializes in. Now with over ten molds of just the one crawfish shape he started with, and a whole shelf of assorted colors and glitters, matching colors and matching older, hard to find baits is what he specializes in. If you have a soft plastic you used to fish and just can't find it anymore, talk to Lance to see what he can do. Acknowledging that "you can buy anything off the internet these days" he says you can get a close match for nearly any shape you want, and if all else fails, he is hooked up with others in the industry that can make a custom mold.



Lance Toups at work above with his "mad scientist" approach to mixing colors as he makes a custom green-pumpkin-red flake crawfish shown middle and below.





From there his specialization in colors and glitter patterns enables him to match those older, no longer available styles.

He started making baits for family, friends, and work associates, and realized one day when he “came home from fishing a tournament and had a pocket full of \$5-bills” that this could be something. His wife asked what the heck all the money was, and he said, “I paid my entry fee and still came home with this” from selling his baits. From there he started growing. It was tough going at first and due to startup costs, time challenges, and workload, he took a one-year break. Now, after a fresh restart, and covered startup costs, he’s making another go at it with greater success. With an all business approach dedicated to serving his custom market, he enjoys small market success. If you need 5 baits, he has stock made up and can



supply you. If you need 500 baits, he can tool up for long runs of custom colors and can cover that size order too. Being a large order, it may take some time for production to get it scheduled in, but for the customization offered, what’s a couple weeks’ time? If you are looking for “off-the-shelf” stock, Toups Tackle is currently only in one store (V.J.’s Cranky Corner on Louisiana Highway 40 near the Tangipahoa/St. Tammany Parish line) but he does plenty of online business, especially through his Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/Toups-Tackle-LLC-322193598594741/>).



Lance started out fishing as a young kid when he moved to north Louisiana for a job his dad had running a thoroughbred horse ranch. One of the ranch hands loved bass fishing and started teaching Lance the basics of bait selection, water quality, seasons, and times of day to hunt bass. With every bit of knowledge, he dedicated his time riding his bike from pond to pond, “pond hopping” to put his knowledge to use chasing bass. Overtime with friends, this grew to be an exchange of who had permission to fish where and sharing their pond hopping rights with one another. As he grew up, the pond hopping continued, now with a truck to go farther and farther, Lance branched out to fishing more and more local

ponds. His pond hopping days are what started his interest in custom soft plastics. While pond hopping Lance recalls they would stop “at a local convenience store and get a little sandwich, a cold drink, a candy bar, and you’d go by and say ‘oh look some worms’ and you would buy them and try them” at that pond. “You didn’t care they were \$1 more than you would pay at K-Mart, you didn’t care, you bought them because that is where they were,” he said. Yeah, he said K-Mart!

Above are a few creations laying around the Toups’ Tackle workshop. Some stick and trick style worms, a custom “water dog” lizard style bait, and a magical purple stick.

Nowadays, those wanting to make plastics can just get online, order some molds and equipment, and start making plastics. Lance says go ahead, “go knock yourself out.” He knows the years of experience and knowledge he has gained will continue to separate his product from “homemade” baits. Aside from the time, knowledge, experience, and artistry, there’s also the high dollar equipment. There are bulk plastisols, hopper and injection systems, molds, colors, scents, glitters, and more, Lance

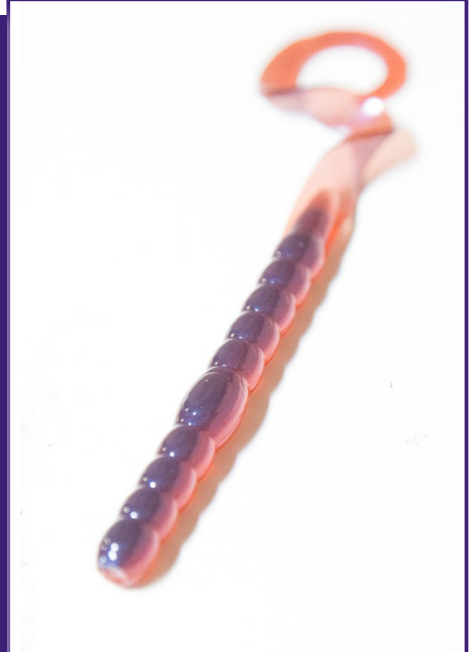
estimates he has over \$10,000 in stock, equipment, and materials alone. That just scratches the surface. To make effective plastics, you have to know how to blend the different strength plastisols to get the supple plastic action you want with the lunker catching durability today's soft plastics have. You have to have a taste for just the right scent blends to turn the fish on and not drive them away. You have to develop the artistry of blending just the right shades; a process complicated by the phase change of the plastisol creating color shifts as they set. Did I mention to salt or not to salt? To float or not to float? The glitter combinations take time to perfect, and then there's the expense of developing your own mold to get your own unique baits, and it goes on and on.

Mold design alone is a costly venture, with single cavity molds sometimes costing in the thousands of dollars to develop. With today's technology of CAD programs and CNC prototyping machines these costs are coming down, but you still have the development time and equipment expense. Lance invested his time and money to develop his own custom paddle tail swimbait he calls the Mayday Minnow. Now he has his custom Mutant Shrimp and Mayday Minnow molds to complement his stock molds.

Ever working on the next great color mix, or mold design Lance stays as busy with Toups Tackle as he does with his full-time job. In all that hustle, he is still a big family man, ensuring his family time doesn't suffer at the price of his success. Appreciated by his peers, Tangi Rods owner Patrick Engerran says of Toups' Tackle: "I can honestly say you made the best soft plastics I've ever thrown. . . It takes a fisherman to truly make a good fishing tool." If you want a custom plastic shape, color, or scent, check out Toups' Tackle and let Lance put on his "mad scientist hat" and design something just for you. Another example of what makes the bass fishing industry in Louisiana a one-of-a-kind, Lance Toups customizes the way you go Bassin' in the Boot!



Top: Building up the Toups' Tackle inventory of various styles in their take on Tequila Sunrise, including the 7" ribbon tail worm shown at right. Below are more examples of Toups' handiwork including beaver style baits, and their very own design, the "Mutant Shrimp".



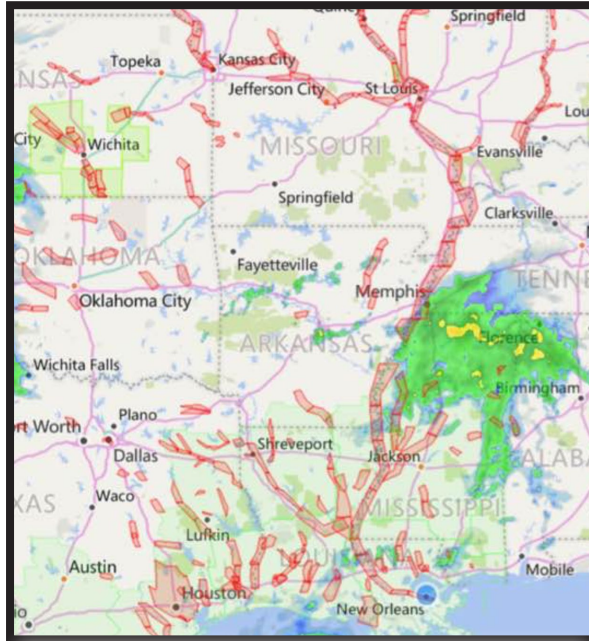
BASSHOLE

Flooding The Boot

Every month we feature a “bass-hole” section and this month we thought the biggest pain in the bass angler’s fishing day recently has been none other than the excessive rain and high water. All too many tournaments and days on the water have been cancelled or altered because of “no wake” and “idle only” lake-wide zones. With an increase in rainfall throughout the Mississippi River Basin and the spring melt yet to flow downstream, this will continue to be a constant issue for bass fishermen in the state.

The high waters of the Mighty Mississippi give rise to many concerns for the State of Louisiana as a whole. Years of trying to tame the river led to the building of the Old River Control structure, an engineering feat rivalling any of the 20th century, the Army Corp of Engineers accomplished, even if temporary, a task deemed impossible to some like Mark Twain, who said you “.....cannot tame that lawless stream.” The purposes for such an engineering marvel had but one goal in mind, and that was keeping the Mississippi River on course and headed through Baton Rouge and New Orleans before emptying into the Gulf of Mexico some 350 river miles south of the control structure. Old Man River would prefer to take the shorter, steeper route of 150 miles down the Atchafalaya. That’s a fight for the Corp of Engineers and will no doubt affect South Louisiana and the many fishing industries, industrial facilities, shipping routes, ports, and the United States economy.

As the swollen rivers of the Red River basin, the Arkansas River basin, and the Mississippi River converge and flow south, historic flooding continues to occur in the northern portions of these basins. As this water makes



The Mississippi River Basin has seen more days at or above flood stage at many of its river stage gauges than ever previously recorded in modern history.

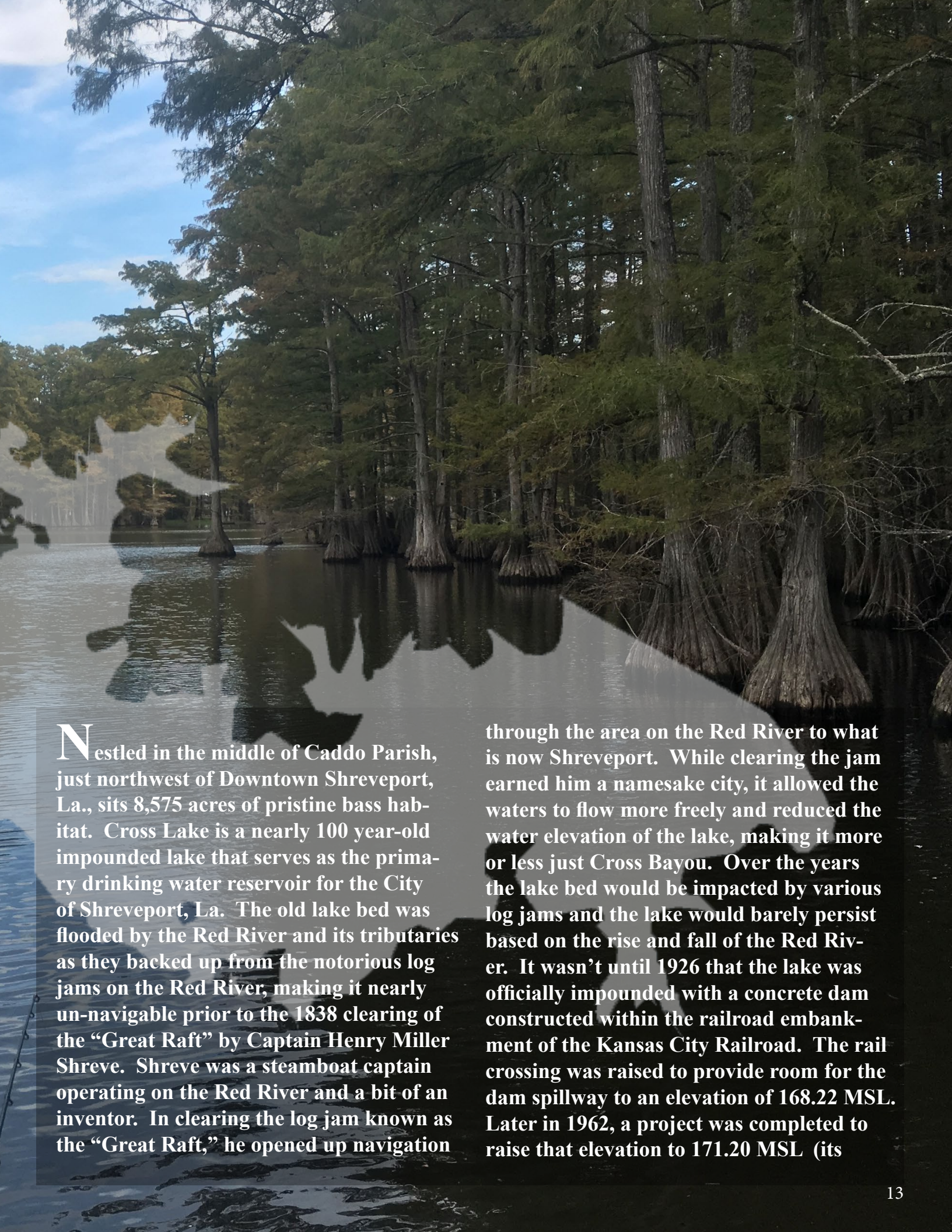
its way south, unprecedented flood fights remain. For the first time in its 90-year history the Bonnet Carre’ Spillway has been opened twice in the same year. In another first, the Morganza Spillway is set to be opened in early June for the second time this decade; previously the spillway has only been opened twice in its 65-year history (1973, and 2011). At the time of this writing the opening is scheduled to occur on June 6th. These historic openings are the result of unprecedented rainfalls dating back to at least last September with some areas experiencing over 300% of average rainfall through these periods, coupled with the now melting snow

pack from the northern Mississippi River Valley. Preparation work for opening the Morganza Spillway continues, including notifying the impacted population, sinking barges on backwater channels to prevent the diverted flow from further backing up into the tributaries, and emergency declarations and aid preparations.

Until the recent flood of water on the many lakes, streams, bayous, rivers, and other bodies of water recedes to normal pool stage all the bass hunter can do is be patient, be careful, and be mindful of how the extra water is being dealt with in different areas in different ways. Some local lake governing boards have some limited authority, and parish police juries exert some control over boat traffic, but the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will continue to be the predominant enforcement agency in most areas. Be safe and patient on the water, lend your fellow fisherman a hand when needed, and try to stay high and dry as we hopefully return to normal water levels by the end of June.

BASSÍN' RESERVOÍR: CROSS LAKE





Nestled in the middle of Caddo Parish, just northwest of Downtown Shreveport, La., sits 8,575 acres of pristine bass habitat. Cross Lake is a nearly 100 year-old impounded lake that serves as the primary drinking water reservoir for the City of Shreveport, La. The old lake bed was flooded by the Red River and its tributaries as they backed up from the notorious log jams on the Red River, making it nearly un-navigable prior to the 1838 clearing of the “Great Raft” by Captain Henry Miller Shreve. Shreve was a steamboat captain operating on the Red River and a bit of an inventor. In clearing the log jam known as the “Great Raft,” he opened up navigation

through the area on the Red River to what is now Shreveport. While clearing the jam earned him a namesake city, it allowed the waters to flow more freely and reduced the water elevation of the lake, making it more or less just Cross Bayou. Over the years the lake bed would be impacted by various log jams and the lake would barely persist based on the rise and fall of the Red River. It wasn’t until 1926 that the lake was officially impounded with a concrete dam constructed within the railroad embankment of the Kansas City Railroad. The rail crossing was raised to provide room for the dam spillway to an elevation of 168.22 MSL. Later in 1962, a project was completed to raise that elevation to 171.20 MSL (its

current pool stage) by installing three Tainter gates and stop plates to provide for control of water elevation within the lake. The lake can be drawn down to a minimum elevation of 168.22 MSL by releasing water through the gates. Further drawdowns are not possible, nor desired due to Cross Lake serving as a drinking water reservoir for the third largest city in Louisiana.

The lake is fed by multiple tributaries, including Cross Bayou, Paw Paw Bayou, and Shettleworth Bayou, among others. The lake itself sits within the old valley bed created by Cross Bayou and Paw Paw Bayou. From the tributaries, the lake's watershed encompasses a drainage basin of just over 253 square miles reaching as far west as Marshall, Texas. The lake discharges into Cross Bayou which flows out into Twelve-Mile Bayou near its confluence with the Red River. While Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) certainly has jurisdiction on the lake, Cross Lake is unique in that it is owned, operated, maintained, and laws on it are enforced by the City of Shreveport. This is the result of Act 31 of 1910, and Act 39

of 1926, which transferred the lake bed (below the 172' MSL contour line) to the City of Shreveport with full plenary control of the lake and surrounding areas, so long as it remains in use as the city's drinking water source. As it is owned by the city, it does require boat permits (\$20 per year, available at the Cross Lake Patrol Unit), and does have "hours of operation" enforceable by the City of Shreveport's Cross Lake Patrol Unit of the Shreveport Police Department. The lake is off limits to watercraft between the hours of 1:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M., unless permitted (including houseboats from 12:00 A.M. to 6:00 A.M.). Additionally, watershed management regulations

are enforceable by the City of Shreveport within 5,000 feet of the lake.

The lake is accessible by at least four boat ramps, at least two of which are public launches with no launch fee. The southern shore is accessible by three boat launch locations along S. Lakeshore Drive, which includes the Public Launch at 5926 S. Lakeshore Drive, Barron's Landing & Marina at 7024 S. Lakeshore Drive, and Ark-La-Tex landing at 7574 S. Lakeshore Drive. The only public access anywhere on the northern shore is on the northwest end of the lake at Richard Flemming Park, located at 7919 W. Lakeshore Drive. For convenience you may prefer



2019 saw Cross Lake reaching over three feet above pool stage. Shown here the spillway with gates open, discharging water into a plunge pool that is nearly the same elevation as the spillway thanks to flooding along the Red River backwaters of Twelve-Mile Bayou and Cross Bayou.

to launch at the Public Launch on S. Lakeshore. During times of the year with a predominant north wind, launching here can be difficult due to the open water and wind out of the north. This can be quite a choppy launch. When it is windy, or particularly hot, you may prefer to launch on the NW end of the lake at Fleming Park. It is generally a longer drive from the Shreveport area, but provides a launch protected from the wind, as you actually launch in Shettleworth Bayou. Both public launches have at least two ramps reducing wait time at peak hours. Most bass anglers could comfortably launch four boats at once at the Public Launch, and two boats simultaneously at Fleming Park. During peak season, parking can be slim at the Public Launch, so I usually make the extra 5-10 minute drive up to Fleming Park, as it has ample parking, much of which is shaded. Additionally, as it is a park, the launch at Fleming Park does make for an ideal tournament weigh in location, but the registered scales on the lake are located at the Shreveport Cross



The I-220 bypass loop around Shreveport, LA passes directly over the eastern portion of Cross Lake. Along the bridge piers on the southwestern portion of the bridge, artificial reefs were sank along the even numbered piers from pier 20 through pier 42.

Lake Patrol office near the Public Launch.

The fish population on the lake is maintained in cooperation with LDWF, and includes the operation of an on-site fish hatchery by the City of Shreveport. The Cross Lake Fish Hatchery is run by the Environmental Services division of the Engineering Department for the City of Shreveport. The hatchery is funded in part by the city, and by the various orders it fulfills for supplying other water bodies with viable fry. Other partnerships exist, including with private groups, namely Bass Life Associates. In years past there was a slot limit imposed on Cross

Lake of a 14"-17" protected slot. The efficacy of this slot limit was studied from 2010-2012 and it was determined to be effective, but would require further harvesting of fish outside the slot to be any more productive. There is currently no slot limit on Cross Lake, as it was removed due to reaching its maximum benefit to the fishery. As of publication, the only limit on Cross Lake for harvesting Black Bass Species (Largemouth, Spotted) were a daily bag limit of 10. Even without a slot or harvest limit, the population of the lake appears to remain healthy based on published catches, primarily due to a strong catch and release practice on the lake.

The black bass population has experienced no major fish kills in recent years. There have been an occasional kill associated with poor handling practices for tournament releases and with some pollutant discharges, but each instance was small and isolated. The population continues to thrive and has been supplemented through the years with extensive stocking of fingerlings. Since the late '70's over 3,000,000 Northern and Florida Largemouth fingerlings have been stocked in Cross Lake, nearly half of which were Florida Largemouth. Despite the extensive numbers stocked, pure Florida Largemouth remain in the single digits of percentage of overall largemouth population. With nearly 80% remaining as Northern Largemouth and the other nearly quarter being a hybrid strand of largemouth. These bass have an extensive forage to choose from across the Minnow, Killifish, and Sunfish families, including bluegill, various sunfish, crappie, topminnow, and various shiner and shad families.

In recent years the increase of giant Salvinia on the lake has required annual herbicide specific to Salvinia, in

addition to other herbicides for other aquatic vegetation. The City of Shreveport spends approximately \$400,000 a year in herbicidal management of nuisance aquatic vegetation. Additionally, through a partnership with the state, LDWF sends sprayers out several times a year to keep the Salvinia at bay. Various organizations researching the various insect means of Salvinia control, mainly weevils, have released and continue to monitor the population of weevils in the Salvinia pods on the lake.

With an average depth of just less than eight feet, and a maximum depth of about 18 feet, Cross Lake fishes like a much smaller lake. During certain times of the year, most fisherman will be hunting the bass in the mouths and shorelines of the various tributaries.

Year	Number Stocked	Species
1978	41,600	Northern Largemouth
1979	105,500	Northern Largemouth
1980	55,000	Northern Largemouth
1981	25,000	Northern Largemouth
1982	100,000	Florida Largemouth
	25,000	Northern Largemouth
1983	50,000	Florida Largemouth
	30,000	Northern Largemouth
1984	135,000	Northern Largemouth
1985	82,000	Northern Largemouth
	10,000	Florida Largemouth
1986	88,000	Northern Largemouth
	26,000	Florida Largemouth
1987	34,000	Northern Largemouth
	11,000	Florida Largemouth
1988	19,000	Northern Largemouth
	17,000	Florida Largemouth
1989	24,000	Northern Largemouth
	3,000	Florida Largemouth
1990	22,000	Florida Largemouth
1991	37,200	Florida Largemouth

One favorite method is to crank some of the bridges where the tributaries and side pools on the fingers of the lake narrow. During the spawn and in hotter times of the years the many groves of cypress trees and grass lined areas can be productive.

These are primarily located on the west end of the lake. During mid-summer, the many docks can offer shaded bass retreats and ideal flipping targets for anglers. If you are after artificial reefs to fish, look no further than the bridge pilings for the I-220 bypass that cross-

Year.	Number Stocked.	Species.
1993	34,500	Florida Largemouth
1994	72,000	Florida Largemouth
1995	108,000	Florida Largemouth
1996	156,000	Florida Largemouth
1997	132,260	Florida Largemouth
1998	118,880	Florida Largemouth
1999	70,118	Florida Largemouth
2000	133,186	Florida Largemouth
2001	49,060	Florida Largemouth
2002	22,465	Florida Largemouth
2003	150,470	Florida Largemouth
2004	68,003	Florida Largemouth
2005	79,183	Florida Largemouth
2006	76,385	Florida Largemouth
2007	130,490	Florida Largemouth
2008	87,085	Florida Largemouth
2009	127,935	Florida Largemouth
2010	89,085	Florida Largemouth
2011	202,397	Florida Largemouth
2012	204,494	Florida Largemouth
2013	28,227	Florida Largemouth

8-8.99 pounds, and 75% funded for 9-9.99 pounds), while a 10+ pounder will get you a fully funded replica. The fish must be weighed at the certified scales using best handling practices, measured, photographed, and a documented live release performed. You

Cross Lake provides a beautiful bass habitat with a well maintained black bass population. During summer months you may wish to avoid the open water areas due to recreational boaters, skiers, and party barges. During duck season it may be best to avoid the west end of the lake altogether as this is home to many permitted duck blinds and sees plenty of birdshot rained down on it. Regardless of season, it is well worth a trip to enjoy a little Bassin' in the Boot on the waters of Cross Lake. While you are in the area, be sure to check out one of our partners, Flying Heart Brewing and Pub, located just across the Red River in downtown Bossier City. They're sure to serve you up one of the finest craft pizzas, and some of the best craft beer around.

es over Cross Lake. From piers 20-42, along the even piers, you can fish approximately 200 artificial reef structures along the southwest end of the bridge.

When you catch a big one be sure to look for the registered scales to get the weight recorded and potentially cost sharing towards a replica. Through the Trophy Replica Programs provided by Bass Life Associates, a lunker tipping the scales between eight and ten pounds will yield a partially funded replica (50% funded for

must also notify the patrol staff prior to bringing the fish in from your livewell to have the process readied, ensuring the fish is handled for the shortest period of time. For more information on this program check out the Bass Life Associates website at <http://www.basslifeassociates.org/>.





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Downsize Your Box, Upsize Your Storage

If there is one thing all bass fisherman have in common, it is the need for another piece of tackle. It doesn't matter if you already have a very similar 3.5 squarebill crankbait with #2 hooks, this one has a pearlescent shimmer that will absolutely drive the fish wild. And since we are getting new baits, lets get a new box to keep them organized. Sound familiar? I know it certainly follows the thought process I catch myself falling into when out picking up just one or two things I need for the weekend or an upcoming tournament. The problem come tournament time, or even just a weekend outing, is you can never take ALL your tackle, there just isn't enough room. Modern bass boats are overflowing with storage areas but most bass fisherman I know could fill them all with tackle trays full of tackle and bags, binders or boxes full of soft plastics, and still not bring "everything". With the ever present need to outsmart the fish, whose brain is barely the size of a pea, we often think "man I better pack this, never know when this super top secret, never fished it before, but I saw it work once so I better take it with me." This leads to the need to stay organized (and simplified!) to get the gear you actually need on the water with you.

As counterintuitive as it may sound, I have found downsizing my tackle trays, boxes, and bags has actually helped me pack more of those "must haves" out on the water. I have done this in a couple of ways. For my tackle trays, I keep a rotation of about 20 boxes. About 6-8 of those boxes are full 3700 sized, standard depth boxes. About 4 are 3600 standard depth boxes. The rest are either 3700 (2 each) or 3600 (6-10 depending on needs) thin

boxes. By packing in the thin boxes I am able to increase my selection while only minimally reducing my storage volume. Now obviously this doesn't work for all your tackle. No matter how hard you try, you simply aren't going to squeeze a mag-diver crankbait into a slimline tackle tray. But when it comes to your everyday plastics selections, the thinner boxes allow you to keep more of a selection on hand, with almost as many of each selections as a standard bag or a standard depth box would hold. Bulk plastics of course store easier and last longer in their own packaging, and these I usually store in bags, but I keep the heavily used ones organized in trays/boxes for easier access and better organization. I just refill them as needed.

Your jigs, bladed jigs, terminal tackle, standard size cranks, lipless, jerks, and most swimbaits will actually fit quite well in the slimmer tackle trays. Additionally, if you step down to the 3600 boxes instead of the 3700 boxes, you can usually stack them the opposite direction in your storage bins as the 3700 boxes fit, allowing for twice as many boxes to fit in the same space. Not only does this get more of your tools on the water with you, they are generally packed more snugly, better protecting your tackle from the jostling around it does when its in a box with extra "room to roam." This decreases wear on your baits, keeps your hooks sharper longer, and increases the lifespan of your costly cargo.

So the next time you are looking to squeeze in a little extra tackle for those finicky fish, remember to downsize your box to upsize your storage. Stay organized to catch more fish!



PRODUCT REVIEW:

BOOMERANG TOOL COMPANY

SNIP FISHING LINE CUTTER



I love when a product proves me wrong. I have spent the past two years avoiding purchasing The Original Boomerang Fishing SNIP. The snips made by Boomerang Tool Company msrp for about \$13. In my world that's a new crank, new bag of plastics, and maybe a spinnerbait or chatterbait. Why would I spend \$13 on a pair of line snips I'll likely lose anyway? Well I did it for you guys. Not really; mostly for me, but nonetheless I pulled the trigger and bought a set. I am the kind of person who believes in having the right tool for the job, no matter the job. My garage barely fits one car, so I live by this mantra. Even with it being supposedly THE TOOL for the job, \$13 seemed just too much.

I can tell you I have spent \$13 a time or two over on the cheap braid scissors, and fingernail clippers, regular scissors, special braid scissors, and split ring pliers with a braid cutter, all because my teeth don't possess the natural line shearing ability. Yeah the scissors work great, at first, but tend to dull and lose their effectiveness when cutting braid. But let's face it, anything will cut mono or fluoro so why else would I need to carry snips but to cut braid? And yes, my pocketknife is handy and can do the job, but it's tough to operate with one hand and hold and cut the flimsy braid without catching a hook (not good). The scissors always end up laying on the floor, getting dropped or kicked overboard, or rusting. Even if I go that extra mile and put them on a lanyard, they usually wear out after what seems only a handful of trips on the water. But after a few trips out with the tool from Retractable Outdoor Products, I may have finally accepted defeat in my rationale of them being overpriced. The snips have a nice feel of quality and are a one hand

operation tool. They lock in the closed position to keep them from getting snagged on things. The retractable clip/cord combination allows you to attach the snips to your belt loops, lanyard, or nearly any other piece of clothing. The one handed operation and automatic retraction ensures they stay ready and out of the way. This tells me these may actually last since they stay dry, off the deck of the boat, and can't be dropped overboard without taking a dip myself; and even then they're securely attached! After a few trips out with them where I intentionally changed baits a lot to really put them to the test they show no signs of wear and are still as solid and sharp as the day I bought them. The one drawback to them is the short cutting blades makes it a little challenging to get the snip lined up if it's windy or if you are a little challenged seeing. Both of these drawbacks have been addressed with other versions of the tool, including longer snip blades and built in magnifying glasses. The magnifying glass looks a bit "gimmicky" but would undoubtedly be useful if my vision was any worse. The longer snipping blades would definitely be a welcomed upgrade. But overall the tool functions better than any of the scissors I own and stays handy, but is light enough you barely notice it is there. Overall I would give them about an 8.5/10 and consider them worth the buy. If they were made in Louisiana they'd be a must purchase item.

From time to time we will review items not made in Louisiana that are in the "mainstream" bass fishing industry and let you know what we think. Hopefully this helps some of you on the fence about certain purchases. Get on the water, the Bass are calling!

FISHER OF MEN



LIVING IN THE NOW,
LIVING THE DREAM

Colossians 1:16 says “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth...all things were created by him, and for him.” Creations are meant to serve a purpose. For Josh Sikes, his purpose is to serve his creator by serving others. To say Josh is busy is like saying water is wet. Josh is a full time youth minister at Longview Baptist Church in Deville, La. That would constitute a full schedule in itself; however, Josh is also the Buckeye Junior High Boys Basketball Coach. Now that is a full schedule, but Josh squeezes in bass fishing guide trips on Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn on Fridays and the occasional Monday each week. That doesn’t leave much time but he manages to fill the roles of father to his two children and husband to Jennifer, his high school sweetheart and wife of ten plus years. Did I mention Josh is also the Bass Team coach for Louisiana College?

It was at Louisiana College (LC) that I met up with Josh to steal an hour or so out of his schedule. Josh attended LC where he majored in Religious Education. Now this was not his original plan or path he had mapped out in high school. His plans to attend the University of Louisiana at Monroe to play basketball and major in physical therapy were all changed when he surrendered his life to the ministry his senior year of high school. With great influence from his youth pastor, Ben Hackler, Josh made a commitment to follow Christ into the ministry. In reflecting on this decision, Josh

said, “What better way to show your love for Christ than to show love to His bride, the church?” His new found path in life took him away from his first love, basketball, and steered him to Louisiana College where he met Andrew Upshaw and rekindled his childhood passion of fishing.

No longer playing basketball, Josh found himself missing the competition it had provided. To satisfy that competitive itch Josh joined the Southern Boys Fishing Club and started fishing bass tournaments in college. While fishing in college, he fished with Andrew Upshaw who also attended Louisiana College before transferring to Stephen F. Austin to bass fish competitively on the college circuit. Andrew’s later win of the 2011 FLW College National Championship was the point Josh used to convince Louisiana College to add bass fishing as an official club sport at LC. Josh was able to make his point to LC by simply implying that if Andrew had stayed at Louisiana College and been able



to bass fish competitively, they’d already have a national championship. With that point well impressed on the president of LC, the college granted Josh the opportunity to head up the first bass team at Louisiana College. Now in its second year, Josh is pleased that the team is able to basically fish for free thanks to various sponsors and fundraisers. All the gas for travel and tournaments, tournament fees, baits and tackle, and other expenses were paid for each angler. Josh has lofty goals for the team this year fully expecting to take a shot nationally with several new recruits

adding to the already solid lineup.

I asked Josh exactly what is it like to “coach” bass fishing. He says, “It’s more of management of time, schedules, tournament fees, hotels, travel receipts, and discussion of fishing and fish patterns and tendencies.” Josh helps the guys with all aspects of their journey in pursuit of big bass, but feels his greatest role is similar to his role in the ministry, to simply “invest in people.” Josh feels his ability to use electronics to locate and find fish is a tremendous help to his team. Talking through scenarios of weather conditions, times of the year, pre/post spawn seasons and anything else that may come up keeps the guys on the team sharp to compete; Josh is there to serve in any way possible.

When not coaching bass fishing, Josh guides for bass on Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn. Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn rank in the single digits on the list of greatest bass lakes in the United States and perhaps in the world. When people pay for guided trips on these lakes they have one expectation – to catch plenty big bass. Josh has honed in a skill that many guys seek as much as the big bass experience.



ABOVE: MEMBERS OF THE LOUISIANA COLLEGE WILDCAT FISHING TEAM SHOW OFF THEIR BAG AT A TOURNAMENT WEIGH-IN.

BELOW: JOSH SIKES WITH HIS WIFE JENNIFER, PICTURED WITH THEIR TWO KIDS.





ABOVE: JOSH AND MEMBERS OF THE LONGVIEW BAPTIST CHURCH YOUTH GROUP.

They want to know how to read and interpret that \$3000 electronic investment used predominately to measure water depth and temperature. Often finding himself in someone else's boat setting up their electronics and teaching them to read and interpret the various models, Josh doesn't mind serving. Of the non-traditional guide role he plays, he says, "we still catch fish and those guys will now catch more on their home lakes."

As if juggling all the fishing and coaching responsibilities aren't enough, Josh Sikes, youth minister and coach, somehow finds time to be a full-time father and husband. He says his son is just like him, while the daughter no doubt is her mother made over. Family is important to the Sikes, evident from the many support roles Jennifer plays including serving right alongside Josh in the ministry. Of their partnership in life and

in service to the church Josh says "we just complement each other." Paying their way forward is an understatement. In everything they do, service and giving back is at the forefront. Josh serves in the same church he grew up in, coaches basketball in the same gym he played in, coaches bass fishing at the same college he attended, and in this service he says he is "living the dream." Josh says "if you had asked me my senior year at LC what I wanted to do in life, this is it, I'm doing it." Blessed with family that is gracious, patient, and supportive, gives Josh the base he needs to serve in the many capacities he serves in. Josh and Jennifer will undoubtedly raise their kids in church, in a small community atmosphere, near a lake or river teaming with bass.

Josh Sikes is a servant. Whether he is doing the Lord's work as a youth pastor at Longview Baptist Church, coaching basketball at Buckeye Junior High, guiding on Toledo Bend or Sam Rayburn, or pouring his knowledge of bass fishing into his team at Louisiana College, he is serving his fellow man. So many times we are all focused on that next step, the next goal, that we often miss living in the now, and

he sees this in his youth and in his teams. That is one of his focal points in serving is to show others what they may be missing in the now. In his words for his plan in life, "I'm focusing on today and just living the dream!"

Josh Sikes – bass fisherman, coach, husband, father, and pastor – is truly a Fisher of Men!



ABOVE: JOSH PICTURED WITH HIS BEST CATCH, JENNIFER, AND THEIR CHILDREN. BELOW: JOSH PICTURED WITH A NICE 5 FISH BAG.



Interested in helping Josh and the rest of the Wildcat Fishing Team to grow the sport? Have a Louisiana product you'd like to supply for the team, or want to help sponsor their season? Let us know so we can get you connected with Josh and his Wildcats!



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