

CATFISH **NOW!** **DIGITAL MAGAZINE**

April 2018 - Issue #18



A Passion for Catfish



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PUBLISHER
Dan Dannenmueller

EDITOR/ SR. WRITER
Ron Presley

IN MEMORIAM
T.J. Stallings

WRITERS
Keith "Catfish" Sutton
Brad Durick
John N. Felsher

GUEST WRITERS
Glenn Flowers
Terry Madewell
Eddie White
Brent Frazee
Tim Huffman

LAYOUT
Eric Lambert

VALUED READER
You

Contact us at:
catfishnow1@gmail.com

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Catfish Connections

How can I become a professional fisherman!? What does it take to be one? These are just two questions I get when I meet people wanting to earn the pleasure of achieving this status. Mostly, I talk to people who just want to fish and not work for the companies they represent. Is this the way to achieve it?



The short version of the answer to this and other questions will not fit in this editorial, but I will give you some key points. In the future, I will address this subject in more detail.

The key is to understand that sponsors are clients with goals and requirements to sell products. This requires an aspiring professional, in any venue, and especially in fishing, to be able to communicate well with others; to be dedicated to their required information on the products represented. Just saying "it works" is only a fraction of the requirement. You must believe in the product and in fishing. It takes passion to push forward and light fires in others.

Many fishermen have won big tournaments, championships, etc. But few, truly capitalize on their success. This can, in part, be due to the lack of abilities to get in front of groups for seminars, shows and intuitively speak on their methods, techniques, products. The fishing part gives one credibility and then comes the work to help promote the sport as a whole.

Expanding the sport, grows the industry base. Teaching others how to fish effectively builds this base for others to enjoy the sport with their families, whether they intend to compete or not. Fishing relieves stress and bonds us with the outdoors and the true meaning of life. This passion rolls out of our bodies and shows our true hearts and souls. This passion grows the industry and all in it. True professionals are open to people, and share their knowledge.

As in any career one must hone their fishing, marketing, and promotional/selling skills; Produce pictures and videos and keep it clean and natural; Be ethical, honest, and humble. Keep in mind, this can be a long process or a short one depending on your dedication and attention to detail. Focus on the positives in life, lessons learned, future goals and the path to improving on all fronts mentioned.

I recommend joining the National Professional Angles Association (NPAA). I was always taught to join professional activities that are focused on relevant development. NPAA is one of these for all fishing.

Lastly, think beyond yourself and always try to help others. The good karma can help you in so many ways that you cannot see in that moment.

God Bless and Good Fishing,
Dan Dannenmueller, Publisher

Front Cover:

Once the fish are in the net the challenge from that fish is over. It's time to bait em' up and get em' back out there.
Ron Presley Photo

BELOW THE SURFACE

by Ron Presley

Passing it down from father to son.



Big John Sellers

John "Big John" Sellers became a catfish legend on Santee Cooper. Back in the day he was known for his ability to catch big catfish before catfish were in style.

It all started for Big John when he retired from Carolina Freight in Cherryville, NC. He moved to Cross, SC which is basically on the banks of Santee Cooper.

Eric Sellers learned catfishing from two generations of cat men that came before him.

Striper fishing was awesome back then and he started a business as a striper guide. He continued guiding for more than 50 years on Santee Cooper, but his last years of charter fishing was



as a catfish guide, until his death in February 2009.

Big John began his guiding career out of Lyon's Landing known today as Hill's Landing. His last 30 years of guiding were conducted out of Black's Camp.

Angler pressure and lack of regulations caused the demise of the striper fishery on Santee Cooper. The stripers had no limit and anglers could visit the mouth of the canal and catch 75 to 100 on any given day. Big John's striper business stuttered and he switched over to catfishing. No one guided for the whiskerfish back then. In fact, most folks thought he was crazy and would never find a clientele wanting to catch catfish. He proved them wrong.

His reputation as a guide and the

Gene Sellers still tournament fishes with Eric. He's pretty handy with a bait knife.

reputation of Santee Cooper as a big catfish lake began to grow. His notoriety landed him in the pages of Sports Afield several times.

At one time he was recognized as the 5th best catfisherman in the world. Big John put personal best after personal best in his pontoon boat for clients. He caught his own personal best 89-pound blue cat in December 1997.

As a pioneer in guiding for catfish his methods and equipment were what modern anglers call old school. He used a variety of bait, but there was one he didn't like.



CATFISHING IS A SELLERS FAMILY TRADITION

"John always loved to fish with those big spring herring, bream, white perch, and shad," recalled his grandson, Eric Sellers. "Today's anglers use a lot of mullet, but Big John didn't like them."

"Around 1995 or 96, Big John began fishing from a pontoon boat," said Eric Sellers. "It is a favorite of many Santee

"Bait em' up and throw em' out."

Cooper catfish anglers today, including myself."

A lot of the early fishing was on the rope with Carolina rigs and 2-ounce sinkers. When John and his daddy, Gene Sellers, started fishing the lake they didn't have a depth finder. They would use a rope and tie a knot every 2 feet. They simply tied a brick to the end of the rope, let it out to the bottom, and counted knots to check the depth of water.

"I remember back when Daddy (Gene Sellers) and John would drift," continued Eric. "They would use 5-gallon buckets with holes cut in them for drift socks to slow the boat down. They used Penn Peerless #9 reels and 9-foot rods. Circle hooks hadn't come out yet. They used 5/0 j-hooks."

As fishing equipment evolved and Big John adapted, he settled in on a favorite set of equipment. He outlined his choice in a Sports Afield interview. His favorite rig was a 7-1/2-foot Ugly Stik combined with an Ambassadeur 6500 reel. He filled the reel with 30-pound test mono. Big John thought this outfit would handle any of the big cats his clients would engage on Santee Cooper.

A story that surfaced, after Big John died, was a testament to his catfish knowledge and to Santee Cooper's productivity. As the story goes, some long-time clients met up with Big John for

one of their many trips. They had fished with him for some 20 years.

Big John wasn't feeling well. He took them out on the lake, set them up with the drift socks out, and said, "Here's the bait and rods. Bait em' up and throw em' out."

The next thing the guests knew, Big John was asleep. The group reported drifting all the way across the lake. They filled a 150-quart cooler so full that they couldn't close the lid. They woke John up and told him it was time to go, and that they had a cooler full. Big John responded with two simple words, "Good job."

In another story, reported in the July 1981 edition of Field and Stream, Big John caught 14 blue cats in the Diversion Canal that weighed 426 pounds. It was an average of just over 30 pounds each. The biggest weighed in at 50 pounds and would have been a new state record. Unfortunately, John was told by someone that the record was more than that so no attempt was made to claim it.

Those same kinds of stories are not told on Santee Cooper today, but it is still known as a big cat lake.

Gene "Catfish" Sellers

All the time Big John was guiding he was passing on what he knew about catfishing to his son Gene, who came to be known as Gene "Catfish" Sellers. He had the passion for catfishing just like his father had.

Gene earned his nickname, Gene "Catfish" sellers following a multi-boat catfish trip out of Canal Lakes Fish Camp some years ago.

"Dad was guiding out of Canal

Gene Sellers is shown here holding a nice Santee Cooper blue. They were prefishing for the Black's Camp Big Cat Shootout on Eric's pontoon boat.



CATFISHING IS A SELLERS FAMILY TRADITION

Lakes,” recalls Eric. “He and 4 other guides had booked a company party for a day of catfishing. It was one of those days when the bite was not great. Out of the 5 boats that went out, 4 caught very little. But dad came back in with 2 coolers full of nice catfish. That group gave him the nickname “Catfish.”

The success of that trip was not an accident. Gene knew his stuff when it came to catfishing. He made many memories for his clients and also for Eric.

“The fondest memory of my dad was a day we went out to Channel Marker 27,” said Eric. “We both got wore out from catching so many big catfish that day. When a rod would go down we would look at each and say, ‘You get it.’”

Just like Big John passed the catfishing passion down to Gene, Gene passed it down to Eric who is carrying on the family tradition as a catfish guide.

Eric Sellers

Eric owns and operates Big E Guide Service. He fishes Santee Cooper every month except July and August. His trips, just like his grandad and dad before him, originate from Black’s Camp and Restaurant.

“I learned a lot fishing with them,” offered Eric. “The main things I picked up are to pay attention to the fish patterns each year and to always keep the equipment in good shape. My catfish heritage keeps me thinking about catfish all the time. I am constantly thinking about new techniques that might help me and others catch more catfish.”

It was old school fishing when Big John was guiding and most folks kept the big fish for the dinner table. That’s just the way it was. That culture is definitely changing. As younger, observant, and conservation-minded catfish anglers are educated in the benefits of selective harvest and CPR more and more trophy catfish are returned to the water to grow and to breed.

“The Santee Cooper lakes has

been a part of my whole life,” concluded 52-year-old Eric Sellers. “I am a big supporter of CPR. We have to be big on conservation so we will have the big catfish for tomorrow.”



The Santee Cooper Drift Rig

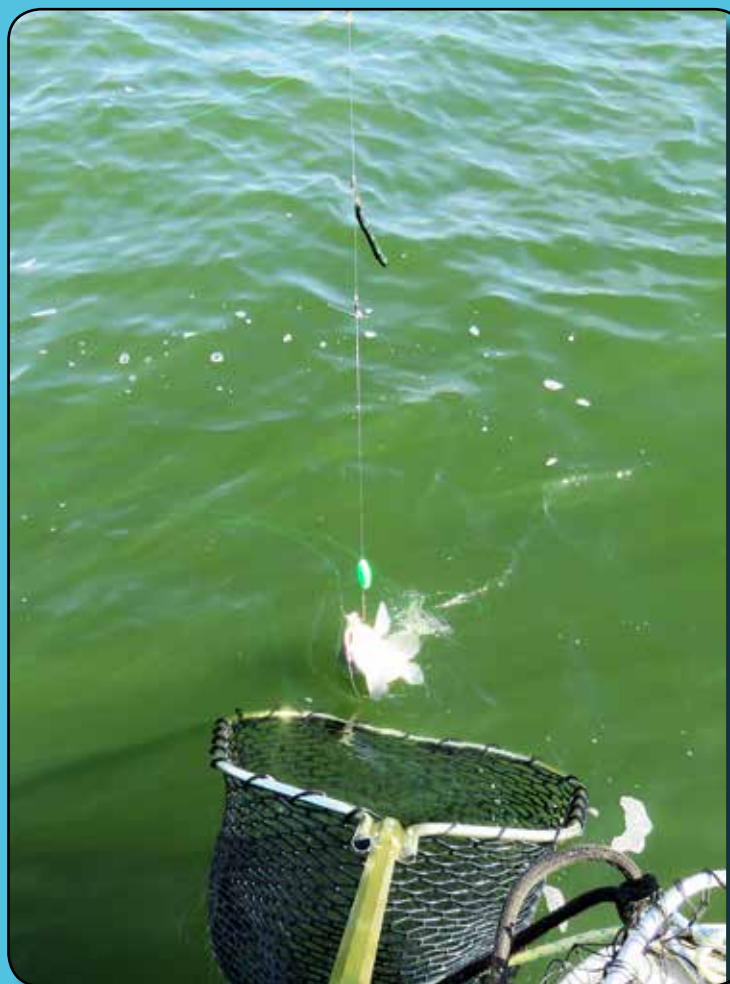
More often than not, catfish anglers on Santee Cooper lakes are drifting. The rig they use is known as the Santee Cooper Drift Rig. There are personal variations on the rig, but it commonly includes a three-way swivel, a hook leader, the individual angler's choice of hook, a pencil float (lately a lot of anglers have been replacing the float with Demon Dragons), and a slinky weight.

Eric makes his own dragging weights by filling a material similar to a shoestring with buckshot. Each end is heated and crimped. Then he attaches a snap swivel to one end. They can be made different weights by using different sizes of shot. A common weight will be around 1- to 1.5-ounces.

Eric begins his version of the rig by tying the mainline to a barrel swivel. Below that he adds about a foot of 50-pound leader material with a second barrel swivel on the end. Then he adds another 2 feet of leader with a pencil float. The rig is finished by tying on a 4/0 or 5/0 hook and snapping the homemade weight on the top swivel.

This rig or a variation on it is responsible for catching plenty of trophy catfish from Santee Cooper. Cut bait is preferred by most. Eric just likes to keep it simple and be efficient.

"Chunks of blue back herring and gizzard shad are the best baits when you are targeting big cats," Sellers says. "When it comes to bait size,



There are many variations to the Santee Cooper Drift Rig. Eric Sellers likes to keep it simple.

many anglers think that the bigger the bait the bigger the fish, but that isn't always true."

"The reason for this type of weight system is because of the heavy structure that anglers encounter," Sellers concluded. "This type of sinker seems to snake through the snags more easily with fewer hang-ups than other types."

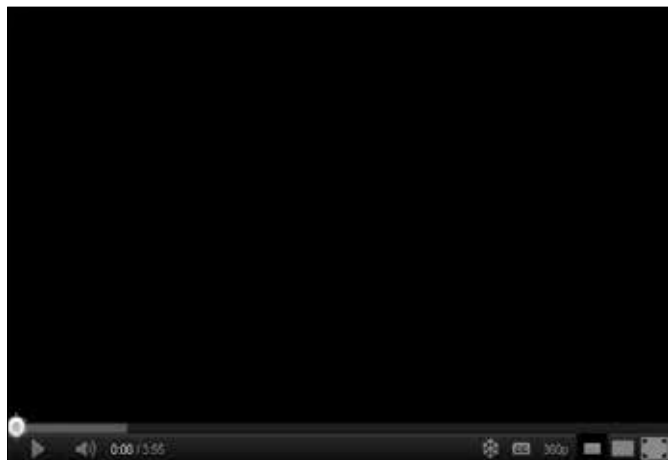
Catfish Basics #037

Slow Walk and Stop
Phillip Brown, Des Moines Iowa

I like to anchor and fish 2 poles in the rod holders while I walk a 3rd bait downstream. That way you are doing both. When I find a slack water hole, where your bait doesn't move anymore, I put the rod in the holder. Eighty percent of the time there will be a fish in that hole hiding out of the current.

After a short spell in the rod holder I will reel in and walk it back again. I like to do that three times before moving. And, you don't need \$2,000 trolling motor to walk baits while anchored!





B'n'M How To:
Using Sinker Slides
with Ron Presley

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Catfish Profiles

in Passion: John Adams

by Ron Presley

It's hard to beat flatheads.

At 34 years of age, John Adams rapidly became a recognized player in the sport of catfishing. Like many other passionate catfish anglers his love for the sport began with family.

"My passion for fishing comes from my father, uncles and grandfather," said Adams. "As far back as I can remember my father took me fishing. I honestly have no memories of my life where fishing was not a part of it."

The Baytown, Texas resident's fishing began as a "perch jerker" for his father. The perch were used to catch what he describes as the "ever-elusive flathead." In his early years the family fished for blues when they wanted food for the dinner table and flatheads when they wanted to catch a trophy fish.

"...nothing gets my blood pumping like the slow chess-like match between me and a flathead ..."

"I grew up fishing Lake Livingston and the lower Trinity River Basin in Texas," offered Adams. "Lake Livingston is about an hour north of Houston and is in my opinion one of the best lakes in the country for catfishing. Most don't know this but all of the brood stock for the state of Texas comes from Livingston. It's a big lake, about 90 thousand acres, and it does not get a ton of fishing pressure. The Trinity River that feeds it is also a great fishery

and home to some great catfishing. The Trinity is also well known for its monster alligator gar population and was actually featured on the TV show, River Monsters."

"I primarily fish the Trinity River and Lake Livingston now, but I also fish Lake Houston, Lake Conroe, and the San Jacinto River. My area is rich with options for places to fish. However, most of 2018 will be spent honing my flathead skills on the Trinity River."

Adams considers himself a student of the sport, with no particular specialty. He likes to practice every technique as he strives to be a well-rounded catfish angler. Nevertheless, those childhood encounters with trophy flatheads do tend to haunt him.

"I like all species," confessed Adams. "But nothing gets my blood pumping like the slow chess-like match between me and a flathead as I wait for him to commit and decide he wants to eat my bait."

"A monster takedown by a blue is fun, but it's almost automatic and doesn't always require the same patience or even decision making," continued Adams. "It's like BAM—they are there and the fight is on. With a flathead timing is everything. Commit to the reel down too soon and he is back in his home. You are left wondering how big he was for the rest of your life. Commit too late and he is in structure and getting him out is a chore. I just love the entire journey to catching a flathead."

Tournament fishing for Adams is fun, but more informal. It creates an opportunity for camaraderie that includes competition with a nonstress outcome.

"I do fish some small tournaments," offered Adams. "More than anything it's just another excuse to go fishing and hang



out with likeminded people. For me it's all about the competition not the money. I just like to be able to brag a bit with my buddies when I beat them until they beat me the next go around."

Adams says fishing with kids is a learning process for the teacher too. He believes it is very important that they learn what they are doing to catch the fish.

"As hard as it is sometimes, you have to be patient and teach when you are fishing with kids," advised Adams. "I have a bad habit of wanting to cast for my kids and do everything involved instead

Adams loves the challenge of flathead fishing. He describes it as a chess-like match between him and the fish.

of teaching them how to do it. I often forget that the way I learned to use a bait caster, tie knots, and everything else, was because my father made me do it myself. If I wanted to fish I had to learn. The other important thing is to make sure they are having fun. In the end that is what is most important whether you are a kid or an adult."





Adam's philosophy on fishing with kids extends to his stance on catfish conservation and preserving what he enjoys for future generations.

"I believe that nothing is more important than selective harvest and preserving our natural resources for our kids and grandkids to enjoy," said Adams. "I am the founder of the Texas Trophy Catfishing Association (<http://txtca.org/>). I spend as much time as I can, educating anglers on the importance of protecting our trophy class fish.

"I was very fortunate to grow up with a father that did not keep trophy fish," said Adams. "He always stressed the importance of releasing the big fish, especially flatheads."

His friends likely think of him as passionate about what he does and maybe a little hardheaded at times. But they also describe him as hard working and trustworthy.

"I would just like to be remembered as a good guy that took time to teach others and help grow the sport I love," responds Adams.

One of Adams' fishing partners is also his co-owner with Warrior Cat Tackle, Eric Gardner

"I just have a lot of respect for the fish and love the sense of accomplishment when I catch one. There's nothing better than seeing them swim off to grow bigger, knowing that I have the chance of catching them again. Catfishing is in my blood and I honestly can't imagine my life without catfishing as a part of it. It's funny, because I live on the coast near waters and species that many dream of chasing and I just have no desire to fish for anything but bait and catfish."

"As long as my heart is beating I will be chasing ole whiskers," concluded Adams. "And God willing, there will be plenty of monsters to chase in heaven when that time comes."

 - Ron Presley

Warrior Cat Rods/Texas Warriors Catfish Classic

When John Adams is not doing catfishing stuff he is working at ExxonMobil in Baytown as a Project Safety Advisor. Other times he works as President of R&D and Sales with Warrior Cat Tackle.

"My long-term goal is to be able to do Warrior Cat Tackle full time as well as become a trophy guide on Lake Livingston and the Trinity River," revealed Adams. "I organized a catfish tournament for veterans here in Texas last year called the Texas Warriors Catfish Classic. An episode of Gone Fishing Pro will air at the end of March on The Pursuit and Hunt channel describing the tournament and the great veteran cause the tournament supports."

Warrior Cat Tackle came into being as Adams searched for a rod that met his personal requirements for catfishing.

"I had used a lot of good rods that were on the market," stated Adams. "But most of the higher end premium rods on the market just didn't fit my fishing style. I didn't like the short, 14 inches or less, handles and I felt a lot of them were too stiff. I started playing around with the idea of creating my own rod. Initially it was just as a hobby. I quickly found out that there were a lot of other anglers that weren't happy with the options they had available. So in a nutshell, that's where the journey began."

Needless to say, the journey for Warrior Cat Tackle is far from over. The company has quickly become a producer of quality catfish rods and distributor of catfish gear and accessories. Their success has placed them in a position to strongly support the catfish community through tournaments and other activities.

One catfish related activity was



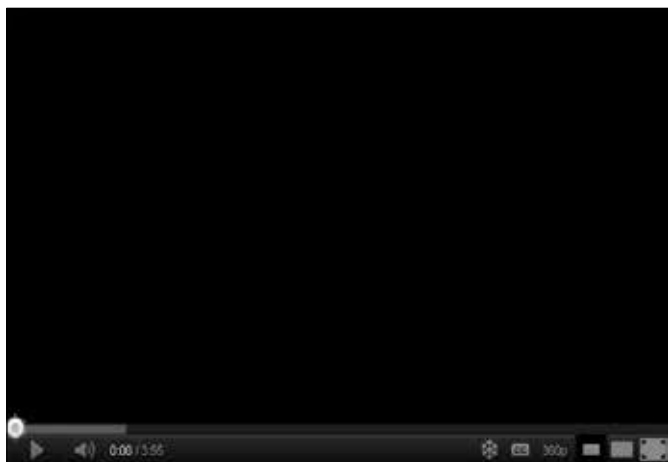
Adams organized this photo op at the 2018 Catfish Conference. All the attending rod manufacturers were gathered in support of the sport.

spawned from Adam's patriotic nature and personal experience with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

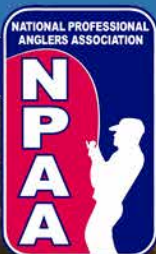
"My father is a Vietnam veteran who suffered my entire life from PTSD," offered Adams. "He struggled to sleep through the night and it was obvious he had issues from the war."

"As I became an adult and many of my friends and family members went to Iraq and Afghanistan it became clear to me that my generation was now suffering from many of the same things that plagued my father's generation after the Vietnam War," continued Adams. "So, I felt what better way to help the cause then doing it through the hobby I love the most."

Given Adam's love of catfishing and his recognition of a social problem, the Texas Warriors Catfish Classic was born. The inaugural event took place with a simple mission in mind—to raise awareness of the issues faced by veterans when they return home. The goal of the tournament was to raise money and help as many of these heroes as possible.



CFN How To:
Live Bait for Flatheads
with James N. Arwood
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CATFISH GEAR

Catfish Gear #001 - Team Catfish Gold Ring 400 Reel

Any serious cat man or woman will tell you how important a good reel is to them in their fishing adventures. Many of them are using the Team Catfish Gold Ring 400. This great little reel offers good value and dependable service.

The Gold Ring 400 features a 6.1 to 1 hi speed retrieval ratio and maximum drag pressure of 12 pounds. It also holds plenty of line for any application. It will hold 120 yards of 20-pound mono. The reel has a smooth operating 5 stainless steel bearing system and dual magnetic cast control with wind-age dial for tossing big bulky baits. If you like to hear the clicker go off you can set it and know it won't accidentally be turned off, since it is hidden from the palm of your hand. The reel also has a heavy duty reel seat and heavy duty handle with a soft grip power knob just in case you get into the big boys. This is a catfish reel anyone can be happy with.



Tennessee River catfish guide Ty Konkle, FV-Catfishing.com, uses the reels for very practical reasons. He wants his clients to have quality, dependable gear. A guided fishing trip is no place for equipment failure.

"I like them for their smoothness," offered Konkle. "I can cast an incredible distance with them. The clicker drag is really great with even pull. The thumb spool release is awesome for clients because they can learn to back bounce easier with just one hand needed for most of the work. And the price is still lower than most comparable reels. They are just one of the smoothest little reels I have used."

Visit the Team Catfish website at www.teamcatfish.com to view their full line of catfish gear.



A Passion for Big Cats

by Brent Frazee

Spring is a glorious time on Lake of the Ozarks.



When Anthony Ford casts into the shallows of Lake of the Ozarks in the spring, he isn't targeting bass or a crappie. He is looking for a big hit—the type of fish that puts off a wake when it goes for the bait.

“Some people think you have to fish fairly deep to catch a big blue cat,” said Ford, who has been guiding at Lake of the Ozarks for almost 20 years. “But when the water starts to warm up in the spring,

Anthony Ford, a guide on Lake of the Ozarks, is passionate about catching big blue catfish on his home lake. Anthony Ford photo

I've caught them in two feet of water. That's when things get exciting. You can see a big dorsal fin cut through the water toward your bait. It's like Jaws.”

“That blue cat will immediately come

to the top when it hits, and the fight is on,” continued Ford. “Topwater fishing for catfish? Well, not quite. But there are similarities.”

Some catfish anglers have never experienced the thrill of catching a big fish in water so shallow that their dorsal fins are barely covered. But it’s a regular occurrence for Ford, who has been chasing catfish at Lake of the Ozarks for most of his life.

Spring is a glorious time for him and other big-game fishermen at Lake of the Ozarks, a 54,000-acre reservoir in central Missouri. That’s when the reservoir’s biggest fish are stirring. Though Ford guides practically year-round, he starts getting busy in mid-March when the paddlefish-snagging season opens. He guides for both paddlefish and catfish during the spring months at Lake of the Ozarks, then moves to nearby Truman Lake starting in June to guide for catfish.

When he guides for spring catfish, he starts the day by netting shad. If he finds big schools of baitfish cruising the shallows, he knows where he will be fishing.

Ford looks for the water that will warm most quickly. Often, that means he will search creeks on the upper end such as Deer, Rainy, Turkey and Cole Camp.

He stays a long cast away from the shallows and uses his mud poles to stay in place. Then, it’s a matter

of waiting for that big one to come along. Once, that wasn’t such a long ordeal. Ford, 44, remembers his high-school days when he got hooked on catching big cats. He and his friends would use remote-control boats to transport their lines and baited hooks to the swirling water directly below Truman Dam.

“...we have to keep our eye on the future.”

“There were so many big catfish on that end of Lake of the Ozarks, it was ridiculous,” said Ford, who runs the Catfishingguide.com Guide Service. “A 50- to 60-pound fish was a weekly deal.”

But a no-fishing zone below the dam was established in 1997, ending the use of remote-control boats to transport lines to the water near the concrete structure where the fish stacked up. And over time, the number of big blue cats in Lake of the Ozarks declined.

“A 30- to 40-pound blue cat is considered a nice fish now,” Ford said. “We just don’t have the big fish we used to.”

The Missouri Department of Conservation agrees. Greg Stoner, the fisheries biologist who manages the reservoir, claims that overharvest of large blue cats has taken its toll over the years. That’s why a regulation establishing





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a slot limit for blue catfish at Lake of the Ozarks and Truman Lake was established in 2014.

New regulations call for blue catfish in the 26- to 34-inch range (roughly 7 to 16 pounds) to be immediately released. The daily limit of blue catfish also was doubled, from 5 to 10, in an attempt to thin the overabundance of blue catfish measuring less than 20 inches. Fishermen are allowed up to two blue cats 35 inches and longer.

"The blue catfish is a slow-growing fish," Stoner said. "It takes 18 to 20 years for a blue catfish to grow to 20 to 30 pounds. Our surveys showed that a lot of our mid-sized fish were being harvested before they could grow to bigger sizes. By protecting these fish, we hope to give them a boost toward reaching their potential."

Though no official surveys have been conducted since the slot limit was established, Stoner thinks the regulation seems to be working.

"In my own experience, I'm catching more blues in that protected size," he said. "Yeah, it stings to have to release

Rain or shine, hot or cold, Anthony Ford has the boat to withstand the elements.

a 16-pound fish. But we have to keep our eye on the future. We think this slot limit will go a long way toward bringing Lake of the Ozarks back to the days when it was known for big catfish."

The regulation has plenty of vocal critics, many of whom say the regulation prohibits fishermen from keeping the prime fish many seek for table fare. But the Department of Conservation remains resolute, and Stoner points to surveys that show most fishermen are in favor of the regulation change.

Ford is one of many who hope the measure will pay long-term benefits. He is a dedicated cat man, spending 225 days a year on the water. He concentrates on the water 20 to 40 miles below Truman Dam.

"That stretch has the biggest holes and the biggest flats," he said. "Plus, it always has a lot of shad."

The key at Lake of the Ozarks often

is the current. If hydropower is being generated at Truman Dam, the current sent into Lake of the Ozarks can stir the big blue cats into feeding. Ford likes a flow of 30,000 to 40,000 cubic feet per second to target big fish.

He likes to use fresh cut shad, and fishes saddles, ledges, breaks or humps on the main lake after the catfish move out of the shallows.

He uses big equipment to catch big fish. He utilizes a 7 ½-foot medium-heavy rod, a baitcasting reel spooled with 100-pound braid and a leader with 60-pound monofilament line. He uses a slip sinker, but puts a float on the leader so it floats up a bit off the bottom.

Ford tries to make sure his customers are comfortable, even in the cold, rain and wind. He guides out of a 28-foot boat with an enclosed cabin on it. It has heat and can accommodate up to eight fishermen.

"Some of my customers are getting old, and being out on an open boat in the cold and rain is no fun," he said. "I have one group of six that fishes with me. The oldest is 93, the youngest is 73. They'll come out and fish with me no matter how the weather is. They'll catch fish, then go in and warm up."

Ford goes to Alabama in the winter, and fishes famous waters such as the Tennessee River and Wheeler Lake. His friend caught and released a blue cat that weighed 97 pounds, and Ford had two fish to the boat that he estimated at close to 100 pounds.

He is a big believer in catch and release of trophy blue cats.

"Sometimes, I won't even weigh the big ones," Ford said. "I don't want to handle these trophy blue cats any more than necessary. These are rare fish and I don't want to kill one because it was handled too much after a long fight."



A catfisherman's dream: A throw net full of shad.



- Brent Frazee

Roger Aziz Jr. ***The Bullhead King***

by Keith "Catfish" Sutton

No man knows more about catching giant bullheads than the "Bullhead King."



Call him "The Bullhead King," or just plain bullheaded. Either way, Roger Aziz, Jr. of Methuen, Massachusetts, will take it as a compliment. Hundreds of thousands of people in this country love bullhead fishing, but no one loves fishing for these pugnacious little catfish more than Aziz.

No one knows more about bullhead fishing, either, a fact exemplified by the many record bullheads Aziz has caught. He has established International Game Fish Association line-class records for yellow bullheads four times and for brown

Roger Aziz, Jr. shows the 6-pound, 4-ounce yellow bullhead he caught, which was certified as a Massachusetts state record. This is one of the largest bullheads ever documented.

Photo courtesy of Roger Aziz, Jr.

bullheads twice. The National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame has recognized 10 brown bullheads he's caught as line-class and all-tackle records, plus five yellow bullhead line-class records.



Aziz's biggest bullhead to date was a 6-pound, 4-ounce yellow bullhead caught May 25, 2008, in 55-acre Forest Lake in Methuen. Twenty-three inches long with a 13-inch girth, that fish is the Massachusetts state record. (The currently recognized IGFA all-tackle world record is just 2 ounces heavier.) Aziz caught a previous Massachusetts record—a 3-1/2-pound brown bullhead—in 1985. To give you an idea how hard it is to catch a bullhead even that size, that record stood more than 20 years before being broken.

Aziz knows as much about catfishing, and particularly bullhead fishing, as any angler in the world. His tips will prove useful to anyone desiring to catch huge bulls.

Developing a Game Plan

"I started fishing for bullheads at an early age," says Aziz, who was born in 1961. "Like sunfish, they seem to show up on your line no matter where you're fishing. Most don't get very big—maybe

Bars of Dial soap rigged with home-made eye screws serve as weights and bullhead attractors on Aziz's fishing rigs. Photo courtesy of Roger Aziz, Jr.

a pound or two. A 3-pound bullhead is quite unusual—equivalent to, let's say, a 10-pound largemouth bass. When I started catching some bullheads that size, I knew I was on to something good. So I began my own research to learn more about the way these monster bullheads function."

Although bullheads inhabit a variety of waters, Aziz determined that ponds stocked with trout tend to be home waters for the biggest.

"In New England, trout are stocked in two basic types of ponds: those that are spring fed and those that are not," he says. "Most stocked ponds that are spring fed have a low fish kill rate. Trout thrive in these waters year-round. But ponds that



aren't spring fed tend to be eutrophic (rich in nutrients), with little or no trout survival due to oxygen depletion and other factors.

"The eutrophic ponds are best for bigheads," he continues. "Dead trout lay on the bottom of the ponds, and something is going to eat them. Most likely, that something will be bullheads, which often consume carrion. And the more trout the bullheads consume—the more raw protein they eat—the bigger they get."

In spring-fed lakes, natural trout die-offs are rare, but many trout still perish due to angling pressure and mishandling.

"Big bulls become more predator-like in these spring-fed lakes," Aziz says. "But they still can be caught if you use the right tactics."

Tackle

The tackle Aziz uses is unfamiliar to many American anglers.

"I use Euro tackle," he says, "the same stuff European anglers use for carp fishing. My rods are 13 feet long with a 3-3/4-pound-test curve. By American standards, this is a heavy-action rod with a fast tip, which provides enough loading power that I can catapult a bait rig great distances. My reels are bait-runner reels that allow the line to be pulled out by a fish without an open spool. These are loaded with 15-pound-test Berkeley Big Game Solar line tipped with a 40-pound-test, fluorocarbon shock leader 6 feet long."

Aziz typically fishes from shore, using multiple rod/reel combos supported on Gardner stainless-steel rod pods, carp-fishing devices that allow rods to lie horizontally and be tended hands-free. Each pod is coupled with Delkim electronic

It's not a huge fish, but this 4-pound, 4-ounce brown bullhead caught by Roger Aziz is a giant of its kind. Only rarely do anglers catch bullheads this large. Photo courtesy of Roger Aziz, Jr.





strike alarms that detect the slightest line movement and rod vibrations. When a bullhead bites, these sound an alarm “loud enough to wake anyone from a deep sleep,” says Aziz.

On the business end of each fishing line, Aziz ties a tandem bait rig.

“Each rig consists of a No. 2 wide-bend hook followed by a Kahle hook varying in size from 2/0 to 5/0. The hooks are connected to each other by snell knots, all following IGFA rules.”

Unlike most catfish anglers, Aziz uses no lead sinkers on his rigs, or very small sinkers. His baits—bacon, sunfish or minnows—are sunk to the bottom with a bar of soap. Yes, soap.

Soaping

“Soaping is a ground-bait technique I conjured myself,” Aziz says. “I take a bar of Dial soap, any exotic scent, and drive a home-made eye screw thru the whole bar. The soap is part of my fishing rig and acts as both a weight and an attractor. The scent is limited to a radius of a couple of feet in

Aziz fishes with this European-style carp-fishing tackle.

Photo courtesy of Roger Aziz, Jr.

lakes or ponds, but it’s a real big bullhead attractant.”

Experimentation helped Aziz refine this tactic. He knew catfish rely heavily on scent to help them find food items. But experience showed that scent didn’t have to be from something dead and rotten like a trout carcass.

“I figured if I could attract carp with ground bait, a concoction of bread crumbs and other household foods, why not bullheads?” he says. “The ground bait used for carp works OK but dissipates quickly in water. I wanted an attractor that would melt slowly and attract anything swimming by. Soap turned out to be that attractor. I tested a variety of scents to see which would work better, and it turns out they all work very well. I use Dial soap because it’s very inexpensive and very heavy. I can cast it long distances, and it sinks quickly to the

bottom. It comes in many sweet-smelling fragrances that attract monster bulls.”

To prepare the soap for rigging, Aziz takes a 6-inch piece of 40-gauge wire and grinds it flat on both ends. Then, using a wire-forming machine, he creates an eye on one end of the wire with a long wrap. The wire can then be pushed and screwed into the middle of the soap on one end. The wire wrap below the eye works like a screw to keep the soap secure.

“A 3-pound bullhead is quite unusual—equivalent to, let’s say, a 10-pound largemouth bass.”

The wired soap is attached to the main line via a swivel on a sliding fish-finder sleeve. The main line runs through the sleeve, with the sleeve held in place above the hooks using a small piece of plastic tubing crimped on the line. The hooks are then baited with pieces of bacon, small whole sunfish or minnows, or small pieces of cutbait prepared from the baitfish.

When fishing from shore, this whole rig is cast out, allowed to sink and sits stationary on the bottom while Aziz waits for a bite.

The Mad Monster Chase

Aziz’s monster bulls have been caught in several New England ponds and lakes. Waters in other states have produced giant bullheads as well, leading one to believe that an angler armed with the knowledge Aziz has shared here has a good chance of landing a new state, line-class, or world record somewhere within the range of these bantam brawlers.

“I’ve spent many years targeting bullheads,” says Aziz, “and find these fish, especially the big ones, are very fascinating. There’s much more to catching the big ones than many people think. I hope that by sharing some of what I’ve learned, others will be able to experience the thrill of catching a real monster bull. That’s an experience you never forget.”



- Keith Sutton



Catfish Basics #038

Start the day with change in mind:
Capt. Paul Blackwell,
Fish on Guide Service

When I am dragging, I like to start the day with several different baits in the water. For example, if I have 6 rods out I might have 2 with river herring, 2 with white perch, and 2 with cut shad. I also like to put the outside rods on Zakk Royce Planer Boards to get them further from the boat. A large percentage of my fish come off the boards.

Once the fish begin to sample the buffet they will tell me which bait they want on any particular day. Sometimes they want shad, but other times it may be perch. They really can be particular. Once we catch several fish on one particular bait, all six rods will get the same bait.



2018 Schedule

Columbus, MS	2/03/18
W. Tawakoni, TX	2/17/18
Cross, SC	3/10/18
Decatur, AL	3/17/18
Sunrise Beach, MO	3/24/18
Gallatin, TN	3/30/18 - 3/31/18
Loudon, TN	4/13/18 - 4/14/18
Chester, PA	4/21/18
Camden, SC	4/28/18
Hillsboro, OH	5/05/18
Gallipolis, OH	5/12/18
Mt. Vernon, IN	5/19/18
Dixon, IL	6/02/18
Carlyle, IL	6/09/18
Pekin, IL	6/16/18
Tell City, IN	8/04/18
Huntington, WV	8/11/18
Helena-W. Helena, AR	8/17/18 - 8/18/18
Paducah, KY	8/24/18 - 8/25/18

Cabela's King Kat Classic
Jeffersonville, IN - 9/14/18 - 9/15/18

The 2018 schedule is complete and all events have met final approval. Please visit our website for pertinent updates and news. Also follow us on Facebook...

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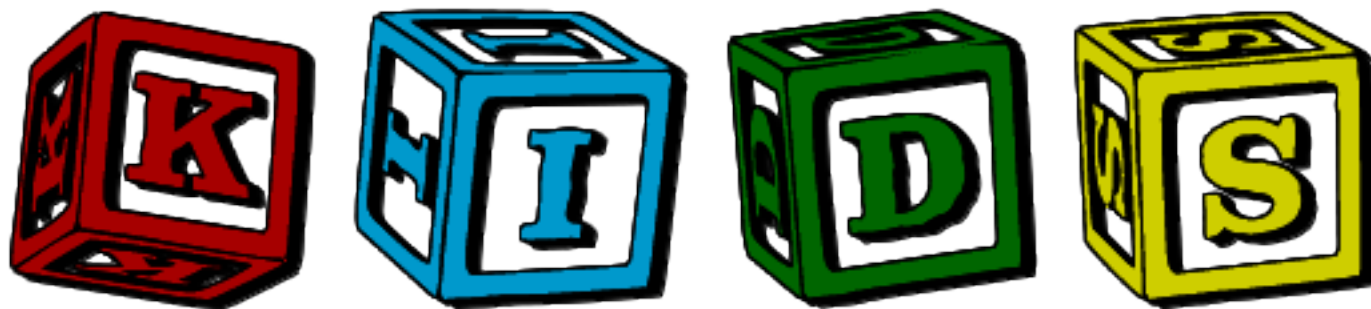
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CATFISH



by Ron Presley

The key words are fun, simple, and educate.

It is a known characteristic of the sport of catfishing that family is often included on the shoreline and in the boat. Social media posts, tournament weigh-ins, and dockside conversations confirm the observations because they often include kids. Importantly, for the sport, it's a very good thing. The catfish kids of today are the catfish leaders of tomorrow. Conservation issues, accessibility issues, and the general

health of the sport will depend on how today's catfish kids accept the sport and learn about it.

A survey of a few current leaders in the sport confirms the observation. They all recognize the importance of teaching kids about the popular pastime. They all emphasize the importance of doing it right. Their advice goes a long way toward having a successful outing with kids while developing catfish leadership for the future.



Tim "Doc" Lange

Doc's passion for teaching others about the sport extends to teaching kids. He says it involves a large dose of tolerance, especially with the young ones.

"You have to be patient with them," observed Lange. "And, you must be able to get them on a ton of fish to keep their attention. Put them on fish and you won't have bored kids on your hands. If they are bored, then they won't enjoy the time with you."

"Before I fish with my grandkids, we always have a safety talk before we get on the boat. It's a routine of mine. I let them help me with getting things ready and I let them reel in the fish. Now, as they have gotten older, they all are learning to net and hold the fish and remove the hooks. It's a progression and kids learn fast."



Larry Muse

Muse would like to see more kids introduced to the sport. He sees it as a good thing for the sport, but also for the teacher.

"Start by teaching them the right way," instructed Muse. "Pick times and places that almost guarantee success. Indulge their questions and reply with good answers. Let them make mistakes and learn from them. Let them actually catch the fish and praise them highly when they do things the right way. Having a child as a fishing partner now may provide a lifetime benefit for both you and the youth. You might just create a fishing partner for life."



James "Big Cat" Patterson

When it comes to fishing with kids, Patterson encourages it, and offers a simple rule to improve the adventure.

"Fish for the child and not for yourself," offered Patterson. "Use a lot of

patience when fishing with children, and don't keep them out all day unless they really want to stay."

Zakk Royce

Zakk Royce offers some straight forward advice for fishing with kids. His advice will pave the way for them to enjoy the sport and stick with it. Part of your success will involve your own behavior.

"Set a good example, and take the time to actually teach them, from an early age, the correct way to do things on the water. Safety should be the number one factor at all times."



Vicky Mathenia

Vicky agrees that kids are an important part of fishing's future. She thinks fishing with kids should be both fun and educational.

"I think it's important to get today's youth involved in fishing and conservation.

The kids are our future. Fishing with kids should be fun and at the same time educational. They should be taught the importance of respecting nature. Also, take plenty of food just in case they get hungry," joked Vicky.

Jason and Daryl Masingale

Jason and Daryl approach fishing with kids from a conservation view point. They understand fully that the future of catfishing depends on the kids. They suggest that it should be



simple and fun, and it doesn't have to be chasing trophies.

"There has been many a fishing trip with kids that turned into a rock skipping contest," stated Jason. "My point is that when we introduce them to the sport we should keep it fun and entertaining."

"Kids are our future fishermen," confirmed Daryl. "We need to introduce as many kids to fishing as possible. Keep it simple and keep it fun. Fishing for bluegill under a bobber is a guaranteed fun activity for any kid."



Roy Harkness

Roy Harkness also recognizes the importance of today's kids to the future of catfishing and to his own future enjoyment. Harkness is creating that possibility by taking his kids fishing now.

"I hope that someday my boys are helping me get in the boat, saying, 'Come on dad, let's go fishing.' These little guys I take fishing today are critical to the continuation of the sport. We have to start teaching them young for them to understand, and there is no better way to teach or lead than by example."

"The key when fishing with kids is to keep it fun and simple," instructed Harkness. "I try to run smaller baits, to get more bites. I try to fish for numbers versus size. My kids love to catch fish. Every bite they will say, 'Oh dad, this is the big one.' Also, bring plenty of snacks. My boys can eat a grocery store when they are out there fishing."



Chris Souders

Souders cites introducing our youth to the sport as a key element in the future of the sport of catfishing. He says to make each trip with a child a trip they will remember.

"Be creative and let them have fun, advised Souders. "Fishing with kids should be fun. Don't worry so much about catching fish. Worry more about just making it a fun experience. If you happen to catch fish, well that makes it even better!"





Concluding Remarks

All of these responses from dedicated catfish anglers lead to the same general conclusion. Especially in their younger years, fishing with kids needs to be fun and administered with a dose of patience. Small panfish are a great way to start. They are abundant and easy to catch. They also put up a good fight on light tackle.

It also appears that our panel of catfish anglers want kids to learn by doing. Today's kids are pampered, maybe a little too much and most spend way too much time at a keyboard and screen. Fishing and the outdoors provides a great substitute for the screen time.

They need to learn things the old fashion way—hands on. And, it doesn't hurt to let them fail. Sometimes failure can be life's great teacher. There is nothing wrong with learning from your own mistakes. Give them a hands-on experience when you take them fishing.

When the kids get older they can begin to grasp the importance of

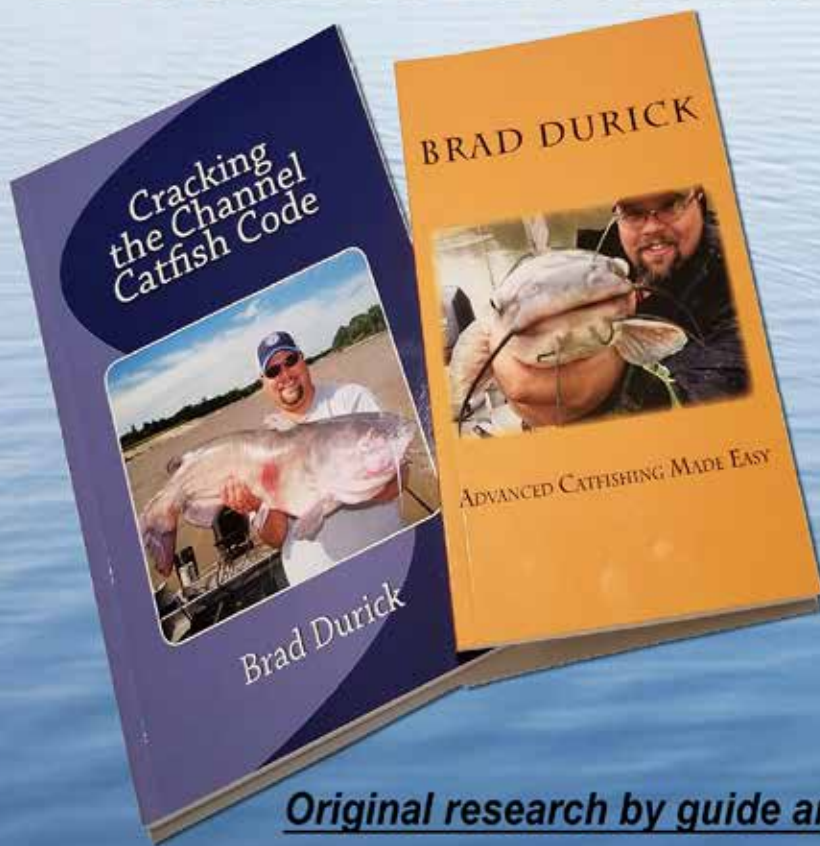
Anglers like Madison Atkins and Hunter Fussell are examples of young catfish anglers that are likely to impact the future of the sport of catfishing.

conservation and it is our responsibility to teach them. Being a good role model is the place to start. Practice selective harvest and CPR. Let them be involved with releasing the fish you don't keep and tell them why you're doing it.

Always keep them comfortable and know when to throw in the towel. Just keep it fun and simple and you just might create that experience that transforms them into the leaders that our sport needs in the future.

 - Ron Presley

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Original research by guide and educator, Captain Brad Durick



Fishin' and Fellowship

by Ron Presley

Me and Mr. Hayes



A lot of people have heard this story before, but it bears repeating. It is a story of simple caring, comradery, companionship and catfishing. It is a story of how two people that never knew each other before a chance meeting, one unplanned night, at a boat ramp, became friends. It would never have happened without one angler presenting another angler an offer he could not refuse.

It was a night to remember for two fishing partners that had never met before.

The chance encounter was then memorialized by a fish of a lifetime.

The evening started out as a normal Friday evening. Catfish angler Clint Gesling decided to go fishing. His mind was on the



last rays of sun from a cool October day.

"After the sun settles the dusk seems to linger over the fly-over states," reflected Gesling. "The colors of the Missouri sunset are vibrant and uplifting. There's no better example of paradise than the dwindling hours of dusk along the banks of the Missouri River."

"The ramp I fish, near the Miami Bridge, is only about 9 miles from my house," said Gesling. "I go fishing quite often. On this particular evening I decided to go fishing to relax and unwind from the stress of the work week. Little did I know on my departure what an epic night it would be."

It was on the bank of the Missouri River bank that Gesling spotted Mr. Kevin Hayes. Feeling captivated by his little slice of paradise

Kevin Hayes is shown here with the 91.6-pound blue cat that delivered a memory of friendship and success that he will never forget.

Gesling thought back on the Missouri River and days gone by.

"I found Mr. Hayes on the river bank," recalled Gesling. "I spotted his silhouette breaking up the outline of the Missouri River which was reflecting the early moments of a Friday night sunset. He was hunched over with one elbow on his knee. The silhouette conjured up an image of Rodin's statue—The Thinker. As I drew closer to the ramp where Mr. Hayes set in thought, I was drawn back





Gesling administered CPR to the giant fish so it could be caught again in the future by some other lucky angler.

to the fascination the Missouri River brings to me through all of it's speed and might and the undeniable treachery it brought to early steamboat captains. Yet, it brings an unexplainable gentleness in song, similar to those Siren ladies of Greek mythology singing men to a watery fate."

"Miami was one of the earliest ports on the central Missouri span of the river," offered Gesling. "The rocks, fashioned vertically near the eastward facing limestone bluffs, still give record of the port that originated back before the civil war era. After the river was channelized through the years the port was left on dry ground and a new ramp was placed on that new channel bank in an effort to aid in the building of the Miami Bridge. That night I left the truck in park on the updated concrete ramp as I readied a newer model of ship to

set sail."

"As I cornered the last bend of gravel drive down the face of the steep aforementioned bluff I was able to get a closer look at the gentleman I had spotted," explained Gesling. "I exited the truck at a tender pace to get the boat on the water as the sun started to slowly fade. That is the moment in time, I eased toward the gentleman's location."

"As I approached the ramp I could see the eddy he was fishing," continued Gesling. "I gave a quick acknowledgement of the beautiful evening and asked if he would like to join me on a quick troll downriver. His face brightened and mine followed as he smiled and nodded. He started to ready his gear as I prepared the boat for departure. I helped the older gentlemen aboard and we eased away from port."

"Aboard the craft, he seemed rather uneasy," observed Gesling. "But, as we spoke about the beautiful setting we were in, and the incredible fall evening, his uncomfortableness started to fade. Soon after, we gave each

other an endearing handshake and started trading stories of the fascination of the river and the fondness we both had of fishing."

Noticing his passenger's eyes searching around the boat, Gesling calmed his nerves by showing him the stowaway where the life vests were stowed. He nodded his head in acknowledgement as the new-found friends continued toward their destination.

"I noticed his eyes fixed upon the fishfinders on the dash," said Gesling. "He didn't have much experience with this latest technology, so I tried to give a quick tutorial of what they were and what I was looking at."

"...the rod on his side of the boat bent about three eyes deep..."

According to Gesling, Mr. Hayes showed interest in the boat and the technology, but his overwhelming state of appreciation of just being aboard took precedent over his inquisitive nature. The first stars of the evening were showing as the new friends idled along talking about catfishing.

"He had surely come to the river to catfish," said Gesling. "And it was upon that foundation I asked him what his biggest fish was. He didn't give a definitive answer, but merely stated that any fish we would catch that evening would be beyond enjoyable."

Gesling slowed the boat near the ledge of the old river channel and asked for Mr. Hayes' patience as the anchor was eased over the bow. The boat slowly drifted back in the heavy current until the desired spot was reached and the anchor rope tied off to stop the drift.

"We traded conversation of life," revealed Gesling. "He volunteered the fruits of his life, discussing his daughter and son that were already in their adulthood. Mr. Kevin was all smiles as we finalized our setup. As conversation continued, I learned that he was quite the chef and enjoyed cooking anything from fried chicken to pecan pies. Unfortunately, I had to tell him of my first tragic attempt at cooking chicken and

dumplings. He laughed and clarified the err in my ways as he explained the correct method of cooking chicken and dumplings."

"Amidst thoughts of perfecting my cooking skills we finally had a pole lean forward and ease drag out of a Penn reel," recalled Gesling. "Then, the sound of the drag abruptly quit and the pole came to rest with a loose line. The boat had gone silent for the moment as the sound of the drag took precedence over our activities. My shoulders sunk as the rod returned to its static state

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and quickly resettled into its original position. We pulled anchor and eased further into the darkness of the river valley. We arrived at a new location that featured extremely heavy current."

The anchor was set again and the boat settled about 120 feet above the targeted mark. Having seen the baiting ritual unfold one time before, Mr. Hayes was first to rods and the fishing partners began to methodically set out six lines of hope.

"The back lights started to emit brighter as the night drew darker," explained Gesling. "During discussions of politics and schools and poor nations in need, it dawned on me that Mr. Hayes was a man of the cloth. He assured me that he didn't judge me by my choice of adjectives as we contemplated the topic of Bruce Jenner and the epitome of masculinity he once was. During these moments of exclusive reclusiveness over my lack of professional vocabulary the rod on his side of the boat bent about three eyes deep before complete chaos took over."

"During the slight lean of the pole I rose to my feet with thoughts of approaching the rod," acknowledged Gesling. "As I neared the pole, it torqued down until the tip was below the hood of the motor on the back of the boat. Thread started to unwind at an increasing speed as the loud clicking of a bait sounder turned into a steady loud hum. I removed the pole and gave it to Mr. Hayes as the battle ensued."

Although, he was admittedly a river cat man novice, Mr. Hayes took command of the situation and continued to wear the fish down, which was undoubtedly something special. The situation unfolded in what Gesling described as "organized chaos" for nearly fifteen minutes.

"The final seconds of the situation are worth noting," said Gesling. "Mr. Hayes observed the fish was wearing out as I stationed myself toward the back of the boat. I was ready with the dip net as he pulled the fish close. The drag began to spin out more line as the fish started upriver into the current. Mr. Hayes gave one big final pull."

"As I stood on the back of the boat I

could see a pale silhouette surface above me," continued Gesling. "The fish was coming boat side, floating toward me. Before passing the end of the boat it was netted. Quite younger than Mr. Hayes I tried to lift the fish from the river. Failing my attempt to boat the fish I was forced to ask an old man for help in persuading the fish aboard."

Both men stood in amazement with the giant fish now resting in the boat. The two men took a quick seat for a short rest before retrieving the gear and dumping the fish into the livewell to be weighed.

"Embarrassingly, I admitted to Mr. Hayes that I didn't have a working scale in the boat to weigh the giant blue catfish," acknowledged Gesling. "In order to justify our inquisitiveness, I made a late evening phone call to Brian Saunders, a fellow catfisherman from further downriver. He came to help us in our time of need."

Saunders arrived shortly before midnight. Saunders and Gesling lifted the superlative specimen of a blue cat as Saunders' daughter, Morgan, watched the scale and read out the weight. Mr. Hayes took a vantage point behind Morgan and shook his head in disbelief as he read the scale at 91.6 pounds.

"Brian shook hands with the newest member of the 90-pound club," noted Gesling. "Then he added to our excitement with his uplifting personality and congratulations. Morgan, stayed to help save the memories for the future by taking a few photos."

"I eased out of the parking lot that night thinking it was just another night on the river," concluded Gesling. "But it felt like it was entirely different for me. That same river that offered up treachery to so many steamships as they labored up the Missouri River, was also the mother of the biggest thrill of Mr. Hayes' life."



- Ron Presley

CATFISH GEAR

Catfish Gear #002-

George Young Jr. Signature Chain Swivels from B'n'M Poles



Visit the B'n'M Poles website at www.bnmpoles.com to view the full line of George Young Jr. catfish gear. George has created a series products that will help anglers catch more catfish.

Are you looking for a small, strong, and dependable chain swivel to keep the twist out of your line? All three of those characteristics are available in the George Young Jr. Chain Swivels from B'n'M Poles. George designed the swivel to be small so it would cut down on drag, it is just over an inch long, but tests out at 125 pounds. It's small enough to cut through the water with ease, but strong enough to hold the big ones!

"I love to bump the Mississippi River," said George. "Most high pound test swivels are big. That's why I wanted this swivel to be small enough to give less drag and give a better feel for the bottom while still keeping the twist out of the line."



Catfish Conference 2018

by Ron Presley



I really have to wonder if Steve Douglas and Jim Hopper had any notion of where their idea to have a catfish community gettogether would go when they conjured up the notion a few years ago.

The underlying premise was simple, it was all about catfish. Catfish anglers, catfish vendors, catfish families, catfish boats, catfish seminars—if it had to do with catfishing it was welcomed with open arms at the inaugural Catfish Conference 2016.

The aisles were packed as attendees visited with vendors and each other. Catfish Conference has definitely become an annual meeting place for catfish enthusiasts.

Now, the organizers and cohosts, Monster Rod Holders, Jeff Jones Marine, and Business House, have three years of experience to build on for the future. Each year just gets better.



Catfish Conference 2018 – Louisville, KY

Louisville has proven to be a hospitable city to the catfish community. The nice facilities at the Crowne Plaza Airport in Louisville provided a professional atmosphere for the conference. Lodging, places to eat, and other attractions were in good supply and the people of Louisville were more than welcoming.

The first day of the two-day conference has always started off with a bang. Catfish Conference 2018 presented by SeaArk Boats was no different.

“There were 3,200 people that walked in the door on Saturday alone,” reported Steve Douglas, one of the founders of the event. “They came from 25 states to see what the conference had to offer.”

Needless to say, the vendors love the crowded isles as catfish fans browse and bought products, conversed with other anglers, and generally had a good time adding to their catfish knowledge. The previous conferences have been a learning

Catfish conservation was also a topic of conservation at Catfish Conference.

experience for vendors, and new vendors for 2018 were trying to grasp just what the size of the catfish market is.

“Saturday morning is always the busiest,” said Douglas. “Many vendors sell out of stuff before lunch. I think this is an indication of just how much the conference is a needed and popular event for the catfish community.”

“I think people look forward to this event each year because of the community interaction,” continued Douglas. “The conference is a place where catfish anglers from all over can mix and mingle while browsing the floor for new equipment. They find new ideas and they can put their hands on the rods and equipment they been viewing on the internet. It’s amazing how our sport is growing. The catfish conference is just a place for all levels of catfishing





experience.”

Jim Hopper, another founder of the event was pleased too, recognizing that the inclement weather did not keep many away.

“The conference is doing very well again,” observed Hopper. “I am a little surprised, given the weather, that so many people are here. They did not let it bother them, they come on in. It is interesting to note that there is a lot of interest in catfishing right now. It just continues to grow.”

Herve Drompt is director of the conference. He is the guy in charge of organizing the event. He too was pleased with attendance.

“I think we had a really good turnout,” offered Drompt. “Attendance is really good from where we started. Remember that first year, we did not think we would have all those people. We were expecting maybe 250 people and that is what we were

Vendors like Off Shore Tackle were pleased with the heavy traffic and buying attitudes of the Catfish Conference attendees. Planer board expert, Seth McCallister, was on hand at the booth to help anglers with questions.

planning for. It ended up being at least 1,100.”

“Now, here today we have over 3,000 bookings online,” reported Drompt. “That doesn’t even count all those that just walk in. The growth in attendance is incredible.”

“We may need a bigger venue,” continued Drompt. “We are working on it. We definitely need more space so we can add more people and more vendors. Just for the commercial aspect of catfishing we need to allow everyone in here, different manufacturers that do the same thing. We want enough space where everyone can

come and call it home.”

“It is really funny when we open the doors Saturday morning,” recalled Drompt. “Everyone knows we open at 8:30, but we have a line at 7:00 o’clock in the morning. It is like a rock concert. People are running to get to their favorite booth first and get the first product. It is incredible to see the visitor reaction. Some of the vendors, by 10 o’clock, have no product left. The vendors are happy and we are happy for them of course. People are here to buy and the vendors know it.”

“Everyone is welcome and that is what we want,” concluded Drompt. “Just the acceptance by the community is more than a blessing. All of us are very honored to be doing this for the catfish community. Personally, I just want to thank everyone who helped organize the event, and all the people who came.”

Jeff Jones, of Jeff Jones Marine, was watching the crowd to gage their acceptance of the conference.

“It is actually a little bigger than last year,” Jones commented with a smile. “The people coming in here seem so happy about



Catfish boats, like this SeaArk River Cat 20-footer, was popular with show goers. More and more boat manufacturers are building catfish specific boats.

doing this thing. People are glad to be here and be a part of it. The vendors seem to be very happy too. There is a lot of traffic and a lot of buyers.”

“Some of the vendors are selling out of stuff. I talked to a rod manufacturer who told me they sold 600 rods just this morning. Maybe we should get Guinness in here,” joked Jones. “We may have a world record for the number of rods sold in a morning.”

Seminars

Every year the seminar speakers draw big crowds of catfish anglers eager to learn. Some of the 2018 seminars attracted as many as 150 catfish enthusiasts. Attendees flowed back and forth between the conference floor and the seminar venue.

“The good attendance at the seminars tells me there are a lot of interested anglers still up and coming as the sport grows,” offered Douglas. “I pick the seminar speakers for their experience and involvement in the community. Up to now I have made it a point not to duplicate them year after year. I just like a variety of anglers with different subjects for the community to learn from.”

“Eventually I will have to duplicate



Catfish anglers could also get information on catfish tournaments. Several tournament trails, like Cabela's King Kat, and standalone tournaments, like Mississippi River Monsters, were present at the conference.



speakers,” stated Douglas. “However, the catfish Conference has a great video library of past seminar speakers now. That library offers a wealth of info on different topics.”

“I’ve already booked the 2019 seminar speakers,” said Douglas. “It should be a great one with a lot of diversity in topic matter, not to mention entertaining.” Douglas said he will be announcing that lineup of speakers for the 2019 conference soon. He said to keep an eye on the website at www.catfishconference.com.

Attendee Views

Catfish Conference attendees came from throughout the catfish community. From casual anglers to avid tournament fisherman, to catfishing YouTubers, the conference truly was for everyone.

Luke Hentges was a first-time attendee at Catfish Conference. He and his cohorts are well known for their YouTube channel, Backwoods Angling. Luke is both a catfish enthusiast and a YouTube creator.

“My feeling from the conference was very positive,” stated Hentges. “It was a true pleasure meeting folks with the same passions as me, whether that was another YouTuber or catfish guy in general.”

“My purpose for attending was to meet other creators,” offered Hentges. “I



Pro staff anglers like Joe Ludtke were recruited by manufacturers to man their booths and network with customers.

“It is like a rock concert.”

also wanted to check out all the vendors, and to spend quality time with others who have the same passion for catfish as me.”

“Some were commenting that they needed a bigger venue,” recalled Hentges. “I disagree. I thought the conference was great. Maybe they could have some drinks and snacks inside the site itself and maybe a bigger boat selection. Of course, more boats would mean the location would have to expand.”

“Overall, I had a blast,” concluded Hentges. “I can’t wait until Catfish Conference

2019 comes around. Northwoods Angling and Tomcat Rods will be getting a booth.”

“I had several purposes for attending the 2018 Catfish Conference in Louisville, KY,” said Joe Ludtke. “I attended to assist in the Tangling with Catfish booth, reconnect with some old friends and meet new friends. Everything at the Catfish Conference exceeded my expectations!”

Ludtke has attended Catfish Conference before. He provided one of the seminars in 2017. The long-time tournament angler has witnessed both the growth of the sport and the growth of the conference. Importantly, he sees the potential for even more growth in the future.

“I was amazed by how many new fishermen are getting into catfishing,” observed Ludtke. “Many were at the Catfish Conference purchasing catfish products and discussing catfishing in general. The

conversations with new catfishermen and women were a highlight of the Catfish Conference for me.”

“The Catfish market is growing by leaps and bounds,” continued Ludtke. “We need to spread the word about the Catfish Conference because there are many other vendors who could benefit from having a booth at this event.”

“The Catfish Industry is busting at the seams and I am excited to see where it goes,” concluded Ludtke.

The Future

“Our team learns something new about hosting this event every year,” offered Douglas. “We are listening to our guest’s suggestions and we work hard to improve our guest experience each year. Herve and I have spent many late nights coordinating the the conference while looking to the future, but it’s worth it. We always look forward to improving next year’s event.”

All of the cohosts agreed that the conference may need a larger venue in the future. It is just a matter of growth. More visitors, more vendors, more boats, etc. It simply requires more space.

“There is a lot of stuff going on right now,” said Jim Hopper. “Over the next year to year and a half you are going to see some changes in the conference. There are several projects in the works. It is time to



A good contingency of cat women was on hand at the conference too. Several gathered at the CatfishNow booth for a group photo.



Steve Douglas, Monster Rod Holders, convinced cat man Terry Rogers to help out in the booth. Both Douglas and Rogers are also YouTubers. A special gathering of YouTube creators met following the show on Saturday.

get this sport organized and move forward.”

“We would like to bring in more support from the outside,” continued Hopper. “Everyone within the industry does a really good job with product, but we have to reach out and bring in more corporate sponsorships. The interest is out there now. We need to bring in more money, we need to spend on conservation, and we want tournaments to pay further down the leader board.”

“Interest in catfishing has gone into warp speed,” suggested Hopper. “The interest from the outside business community is very strong right now. They kind of caught us a little off guard. If I could share some of that interest you would be surprised.”

“More people are starting to recognize the industry. Lots of things are getting ready to happen and I think we will be able to share that soon. I wish I was tackling this at 28 instead of 58,” joked Hopper. “We will do the best we can. It is going to be a fun ride.”



- Ron Presley

CATFISH CALENDAR

(Fishermen, check with club/association for exact dates, changes, cancellations and rules.)

APR	21st	CATFISH CHASERS TOURNAMENT SERIES	PERRY LAKE	CLUB
APR	21st	CABELA'S KING KAT	DELAWARE RIVER	CLUB
APR	21st	CATFISH MAFIA	CITY ISLAND	CHANNEL CAT SHOOTOUT/DAY
APR	21st	CHATTAHOOCHEE HILLJACKS	UCHEE CREEK	CLUB
APR	21st	FLATHEAD BLUES ON CHANNEL2	HOOVER RESERVOIR	CLUB
APR	21st	HOLD'EM HOOK	INGALLS HARBOR	CLUB
APR	21st	JKV CATFISHING	OHIO RIVER	CLUB
APR	21st	TRI-COUNTY CATFISH ASSOCIATION	CHILLICOTHE	CLUB
APR	21st - 22nd	FISHIN BLUES	TOM STEED	CLUB
APR	27th-29th	TUG-N-JUGS	OOLOGAH	CLUB
APR	28th	CABELA'S KING KAT	LAKE WATEREE	CLUB
APR	28th	CENTRAL TEXAS CATFISH TRAIL	GRANGER LAKE	CLUB
APR	28th	GET-N-HOOKED	OOLOGAH	CLUB
APR	28th	INDIANA CATFISH	MAYSVILLE	CLUB
APR	28th	KANAWHA RIVER CATFISH CLUB	POINT PLEASANT	CLUB
APR	28th -29th	MICHIGAN CATFISH ANGLERS TRAIL	SAGINAW RIVER	CLUB/Event #2
APR	29th	SOUTHWEST OHIO CATFISH CLUB	NEVILLE BOAT RAMP	CLUB #2
MAY	4th -6th	TUG-N-JUGS	FORT GIPSON	CLUB
MAY	5th	BIG SIOUX CAT ANGLERS	BIG SIOUX	CLUB
MAY	5th	CABELA'S KING KAT	ROCKY FORK LAKE	CLUB
MAY	5th	CATFISH COUNTRY	BIG BONE LICK	CLUB
MAY	5th	GET-N-HOOKED	FORT GIPSON	CLUB
MAY	5th	INDIANA CATFISH	LAKE MONROE	OPEN TOURNAMENT
MAY	5th	JKV CATFISHING	OHIO RIVER	CLUB
MAY	5th	MISSISSIPPI CATFISH TRAIL	GRANADA	KENNY BOWLING MEMORIAL
MAY	5th	SOUTHEASTERN CATFISH CLUB	LAKE WYLIE	CLUB
MAY	6th	CENTRAL MISSOURI CATS	WIGWAM	CLUB/DAY
MAY	6th	ICATS	CORALVILLE	CLUB
MAY	9th	RED RIVER VALLEY CATFISH LEAGUE	NORTH LANDING	CLUB
MAY	12th	CABELA'S KING KAT	OHIO & KANAWHA RIVERS	CLUB
MAY	12th	TRI-COUNTY CATFISH ASSOCIATION	PEKIN	CLUB
MAY	12th - 13th	MICHIGAN CATFISH ANGLERS TRAIL	KALAMAZOO RIVER	CLUB/EVENT #3

CLUB	FACEBOOK
BIG CAT QUEST	FACEBOOK
BIG SIOUX CAT ANGLERS	FACEBOOK
CABELA'SKING KAT TOURNAMENT TRAIL	FACEBOOK
CAROLINA ANGLERS TEAM TRAIL C.A.T.T	FACEBOOK
CATFISH CHASERS TOURNAMENT SERIES	FACEBOOK
CATFISH CONFERENCE	FACEBOOK
CATFISH COUNTRY	FACEBOOK
CATFISH NATION OUTDOORS	FACEBOOK
CATFISH MAFIA	FACEBOOK
CATHUNTERS ASSOC. OF THE SOUTH C.A.T.S.	FACEBOOK
CENTRAL MISSOURI CATS	FACEBOOK
CENTRAL TEXAS CATFISH TRAIL	FACEBOOK
CHATTAHOOCHEE HILLJACK CATFISHING	FACEBOOK
FISHIN BLUES	FACEBOOK
FLATHEAD BLUES ON CHANNEL 2	FACEBOOK
GET-N-HOOKED	FACEBOOK
HOLD'EM HOOK CATFISH TRAIL	FACEBOOK
ICATS	FACEBOOK
INDIANA CATFISH	FACEBOOK
J.K.V. CATFISHING TOURNAMENT TRAIL	FACEBOOK
KANAWHA RIVER CATFISH CLUB	FACEBOOK
MICHIGAN CATFISH ANGLERS TRAIL	FACEBOOK
MISSISSIPPI CATFISH TRAIL	FACEBOOK
MISSISSIPPI RIVER MONSTERS	FACEBOOK
MONSTERS ON THE OHIO	FACEBOOK
OHIO VALLEY CATFISHING	FACEBOOK
OHIO VALLEY RIVER CATS	FACEBOOK
OLD DOMINION CATFISH CLUB	FACEBOOK
RED RIVER VALLEY CATFISH LEAGUE	FACEBOOK
SCHEELS BOUNDRY BATTLE CATFISH TOURNAMENT	FACEBOOK
SOUTHEASTERN CATFISH CLUB	FACEBOOK
SOUTHEAST NEBRASKA MO RIVER CATFISH CLUB	FACEBOOK
SOUTHWEST OHIO CATFISH CLUB	FACEBOOK
TRI STATE KATS	FACEBOOK
TRI-COUNTY CATFISH ASSOCIATION	FACEBOOK
TUG-N-JUGS	FACEBOOK
TWISTED CAT OUTDOORS	FACEBOOK
WEST TEXAS CATFISH TRAIL	FACEBOOK
WEST TN CATFISH ANGLERS	FACEBOOK
WHISKY CITY CATFISH CLUB	FACEBOOK
WICKED WHISKER TOURNAMENT TRAIL	FACEBOOK

CABELA'S KING KAT

SANTEE COOPER

MARCH 10th

1. Trevor Nederhoff/Josh Brown	148.3
2. Richard Chaplin/James Girdler	144.1
3. Carl Morris Jr/Rob Parsons	138.28
4. Michael Passmore/Joshua Skinner	128.4
5. James Saxon/Richard Wimmer	123.24

BIG FISH

1. David Stanley/Travis Tilley	56.66
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CATFISH MAFIA

LOWER POTOMAC

MARCH 10th

1. Robert/Mike	88.8
2. Mark/Patrick	85.8
3. Glen/Dave	78.8
4. Chris/Don	78
5. Andrew/Cody/Zach	75

BIG FISH

1. Mark/Patrick	48.2
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JKV CATFISHING

LAKE BARCLAY

MARCH 10th

1. Rickey Eislet/Rob Benningfield	114.1
2. James Maynard/Thomas Hardy	106.9
3. Josh Vanover/Tony Weathers	96.3
4. Stephen Fancher/Henry Price	70.3
5. Casey Tuttorow/Andrew Haun	67.95

BIG FISH

1. James Maynard/Thomas Hardy	65.7
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CENTRAL MISSOURI CATS

COLUMBIA BOTTOMS

MARCH 11th

1. Gary Taylor/Jason Mathenia	136.5
2. Danny Salfen/Collin Salfen	123.8
3. Pat Muehling/Mike Whitlow	83.8

CABELA'S KING KAT

WHEELER LAKE

MARCH 17th

1. Mike Mitchell/Rick Sexton	145.1
2. Zed Moore/Josh Moore	131.04
3. David Shipman/Brett Nash	123.28
4. Ryan Lawrence/Mark Blauvelt	119.18
5. Trevor Nederhoff/Josh Brown	111.3

BIG FISH

1. Justin Cook/Tyler Moses	89.96
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CATFISH MAFIA

GOLDSBORO

MARCH 17th

1. Andrew Lentz/Justin	53.8
2. Randy Shoemaker	53.6
3. Keith/Lee/Ron	51.2
4. Jimmy Ewing/Mike Byrd	48.6
5. Craig Pryor/Roger Pryor	47.8

BIG FISH

1. Jimmy Ewing/Mike Byrd	13.2
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TUG N JUGS

KEYSTONE LAKE

MARCH 23rd - 25th

1. Whisker Warriors	59.14
2. Koolcats	50.28
3. Big Whiskers	45.48
4. Catfish Dynasty	44.52
5. Cat Daddy's	37.52

BIG FISH

1. Koolcats	20.74
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CATFISH CHASERS

LAKE MILFORD

MARCH 24th

1. Henning/Henning	77.2
2. Norris/Thelen	75.35
3. Burgett/Brodie	74.85
4. McCarter/Smith	74.85
5. Reynolds/Cheever/Thurman	53.9

BIG FISH

1. Neufeld/Postier	42.7
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CHATTAHOOCHEE HILLJACK

CREEK TOWN

MARCH 24th

1. Catbusters	66.35
2. Team Killer B's	50.05
3. Team Livingston	49.5
4. No-Fishing Polywog	22.8
5. Bait Bandit	20.6

BIG FISH

1. Catbusters	18.65
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GET-N-HOOKED

KEYSTONE LAKE

MARCH 24th

1. Catch and Release	67.36
2. Katastrophe	64.24
3. River Rats	59.46
4. Catfish Addiction	39.16
5. Sleeping Dawg	28.14

BIG FISH

1. River Rats	37.82
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HOLD'EM HOOK

ELK RIVER

MARCH 24th

1. Wayne Reed	97.4
2. Bryan Folsom	68
3. John Hogland	63.7
4. Cad Daly	58.3
5. Randy Bellew	52.8

BIG FISH

1. Wayne Reed	77.5
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TRI-COUNTY CATFISH ASSOCIATION

KUTCHIES

MARCH 24th

1. Phil Johnson/Tyler Sapp	38.2
2. Ron King/Craig Simler/Buddy W	37.3
3. Ken Luttrell/Bryan Espy	35.9
4. Tom Walsh/Tim Walsh	29.85
5. Mark Farrow/Jerry Cline II	19.75

BIG FISH

1. Phil Johnson/Tyler Sapp	9.75
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WHISKEY CITY CATFISH CLUB

TANNERS CREEK

MARCH 25th

1. Pelzel/Arnold	76.3
2. Cress/Bensman	69.1
3. Caldwell/Dehner	54.9
4. Willie Smith	37.9
5. Steve Wooley/Sue Wooley	27.3

BIG FISH

1. Pelzel/Arnold	37.8
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CABELA'S KING KAT

CUMBERLAND RIVER

MARCH 30th - 31st

1. Joey Pounders/Jerry Pounders	156.24
2. Christian Vittitoe/Samuel Cate	150.66
3. Scott Ludick/Dustin Cook	134.76
4. Donnie Fountain/Eddy Swafford	134.02
5. Carl Morris Jr/Rob Parsons	124.1

BIG FISH

1. Scott Ludick/Dustin Cook	60.76
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SOUTHWEST OHIO CATFISH CLUB

ROCKY FORK LAKE

MARCH 31st

1. Jerry Hite/Mark Anderson	55.2
2. Bink Fox/Janet Fox	53.4
3. Isaac Barr/Larry Braley/Cliff Meyers	52.9
4. Doc Lange/Daniel Vance/Shawn Dauphin	44.9
5. Tommy Long/Mike Waugh	43.1

BIG FISH

1. Isaac Barr/Larry Braley/Cliff Meyers

Never Let the Passion Die

