

LONE STAR OUTDOOR NEWS

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Snapper season cut short

Fed waters cut to 11 days, could be even less

By **Conor Harrison**
LONE STAR OUTDOOR NEWS

Texas is about to have the shortest-ever red snapper season in federal waters — 11 days.

And that might be cut again after Louisiana opened their state red snapper season from three days each week to all seven days in response to a recent decision by a federal judge to retroactively hold the recreational red snapper anglers accountable for exceeding their allotted 49 percent quota in years past.

Texas allows red snapper fishing in state waters all year long, something that has infuriated the members of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, which sets federal quotas. The feds sued the state unsuccessfully last year to attempt to make Texas conform to federal standards in their state waters.

Texas state waters extend three marine leagues, or 10,357 miles off the coast.

Commercial red snapper anglers who say recreational anglers have been going over their 49 percent allocation for years brought the latest lawsuit against the feds to force them to change their management system to more accurately account for the total recreational sector catch. After a different formula was used to assess how many pounds of snapper recreational anglers catch, a judge agreed with the commercial sector that the old formula amounted to a de facto reallocation of snapper. "Basically, the National Marine Fisheries Service came back to the council and told them that last summer's sea-

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DROPPING DOWN: Offshore anglers are reporting lots of red snapper action off the coast while bottom fishing, along with amberjack and several species of shark. Photo by Scott Sommerlatte for Lone Star Outdoor News.

Salt on the table

By **Steve Schwartz**
LONE STAR OUTDOOR NEWS

After a slow few weeks, offshore guides and services are seeing an uptick in deep-water species as well as some sharks along the Texas coast.

"The fishing is definitely picking up and the sharks are starting to show up," said Crystal Oestreich, with Dolphin Dock Charters in Port Aransas. "Nothing wanted to bite in January and February, it was terrible."

Guides echoed that sentiment across the Gulf Coast in the deeper waters of Galveston. Jillian Williams, with Williams

See **OFFSHORE**, Page 15

On fire Lake Austin giving up huge sacks, but how long will it last?

Austin angler Brian Booker knows he could look back at this spring on Lake Austin and think, those were the good old days.

Booker, the co-owner of Texas Tournament Zone, which hosts night tournaments on the lake, has seen an explosion in big bass being caught this month.

"Austin is insane," he said. "We've been trying to keep it quiet, but that horse left the barn a while ago. It has always been a great lake, but it is really good right now."

Booker said the April 16 night tournament saw 50 boats compete, with 31 pounds winning and 22 pounds only getting sixth place.

"Almost everyone who came in had a 5- or 7-pounder," he said. "The big bass was 9.44 pounds. They are in all stages of the spawn,



NO GRASS, NO PROBLEM: Lake Austin guide Ryan Wags holds a nice bass caught recently in the crowded lake that has anglers flocking to it from across the country. Photo by Ryan Wags.

but the majority have already spawned. We are still seeing some big females cruising around beds, so I think the moon phase will kick off another round."

Booker said anglers have been using all sorts of tactics to pull in big fish, including slinging Senkos under docks, using Texas rigs and jigs to fish rock piles and bluffs and fishing around lighted docks at night.

See **LAKE AUSTIN**, Page 11

K9 unit on the hunt

By **Conor Harrison**
LONE STAR OUTDOOR NEWS

Freestone County Game Warden John Thorne has had a new partner since July, but not the kind you can have a two-way conversation with and a cup of coffee.

"Justin," named after Game Warden Justin Hurst who was killed in the line of duty in 2007, is a yellow lab and part of

the first five dogs in the newly formed Texas Parks and Wildlife Department K9 Unit.

Thorne and Justin spent eight weeks of intense training in Utah before they returned to Texas to work to find illegal wildlife, drugs and lost humans. Search and rescue will be the main focus of the dogs, although many are cross-trained to find fish and game violations, as well. All of the dogs in

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HAPPY FOR THE RIDE: One of the new members of the TPWD K9 Unit, Ruger, helps Game Warden Christy Vales look for potential violations. Photo by TPWD.

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Onto something

North Texas coon hunting club seeing an influx of competitive hunters.

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Game changer

Carbon-fiber stocks changing the face of rifle construction.

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FISHING

Baffin back on its feet

Black drum are seeing some recovery after a tough year in 2013.

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Open water

Giant salvinia clearing up around Caddo Lake thanks to high-water levels and a colder winter, fishing on the uptick.

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LSOnews.com

Project establishes first-ever genome assembly of bobwhite quail

In their pursuit to unlock the mystery of bobwhite quail decline in Texas, Park Cities Quail provided funding for a study of the bobwhite quail genome.

The project, which began in 2011 with the harvesting of a wild bobwhite quail test subject from the Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch in Roby, has been completed, and the work has been published in the current issue of the scientific journal PLOS ONE.

The genetic mapping of this wild bobwhite quail, named Pattie-Marie, could prove to be instrumental in helping researchers understand historic and future bobwhite population trends.

"This is an important piece of the puzzle. It is our hope that this once humble bird will provide the foundation for thousands of hours of independent research by scientists all over the world," said Joe Crafton, who also helped fund the study. "This is a classic example of hunters funding the research that will eventually result in population growth of key wildlife species."

"By sequencing and assembling the bobwhite quail genome, the team produced the most comprehensive resource currently available for cutting-edge interdisciplinary research in the bobwhite," said Dr. Chris Seabury of Texas A&M University School of Veterinary Medicine, who led the study. "We now have a more formal resource for studying the bird and identifying new, or perhaps even more specific reasons for its serious decline."

The bobwhite quail was recently named first on the "Top Ten Birds in Decline" in North America by the Audubon Society. With a population crash from 31 million in 1967, to only 5.5 million in 2007, the bobwhite quail has experienced an 80 percent decline over the past 40 years. With this groundbreaking research on the bobwhite quail genome, it is hoped that researchers can identify genetic factors that may play a role in their decline, and perhaps even quail "lineages" with higher resistance to disease and environmental stresses.

— Park Cities Quail

Local tournament trails bring in large bags

It's tough to look at a bass fishing tournament leaderboard in North Texas this year and not see Todd Castledine or Russell Cecil near the top.

The pair did it again at the Bud Light Tournament Trail on Lake Texoma on April 19.

Catching five bass for a total weight of 27.55 pounds, the duo took home the top prize of \$2,600.

Robert Brooks and Hollie Carrerra took second place with 25.91 pounds. The top seven teams all had sacks weighing more than 20 pounds.

It took 18.82 pounds to place in the money. Fifty-one teams fished the event.

Bass Champs on Belton

Thornton angler Charles Reagan and his partner, Hewitt angler Lowell Bennet caught three bass for a total of 12.62 pounds to win a new truck and

take home the title on Belton Lake on April 12.

Josh Cowie and Malcolm Kitchen, both from New Braunfels, took second place and won \$4,200.

More than 160 anglers competed in the tournament. The big bass was caught by the team of Brian Holmes and Paul Reynolds Jr — it weighed 7.45 pounds.



Photo by Bud Light Trail

Salvinia

Continued from Page 9

able to fish in the past five years."

Deaver said the bass are on beds and he has been catching good numbers targeting spawning flats and stump in less than 5 feet of water.

"They're right up shallow," he said. "It has been a late spawn this year but they are at it right now. We have caught a few postspawn fish, but most have not spawned yet."

The salvinia issue is one anglers are glad to see gone for now.

"The winter was a tough one on Caddo," said Lucas Gregory, project specialist at Texas A&M University's Water Resource Institute. "The cold did a pretty good number on the salvinia. We've gotten a lot of feedback that it is much reduced from what it was last

summer."

More than 7,000 acres of water was covered by the invasive plant last summer, but early estimates this year put it at a little less than 1,000 acres currently.

"Along with the winter, high water pushed it down the river," Gregory said. "That said, it was the same scenario three winters ago, then two summers later, it was back over 6,000 acres."

Gregory has distributed weevils to eat the plant and keep it under control, although the cold weather that killed the salvinia also killed many of the weevils.

"We were still finding some alive in January," he said, "but in February we didn't find any alive. We hope to have another batch ready to go in mid-May. At the end of last year, the weevils were really knocking out some complete areas of salvinia, so we are pretty encouraged."

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