

Reel Solitude

Landowners turning private fishing holes into sources of revenue...

By Matt Felder
Field Editor

Few give a second thought to that lake, pond or tank on a Texas ranch. Its purpose may be strictly to water livestock. It may be simply nice to look at. Or it may provide a favorable spot to fish for the family. But what if that fishing hole was also a money maker, an untapped resource of potential? Turns out it can be just that.

There is a club—an elite club of bass fishermen—called Private Water Fishing (PWF) that offers a chance for landowners to lease out their lakes for a cut of the profits.

Fairfield farmer and rancher Lucas

Smith saw an ad for PWF ten years ago, signing up his 10-acre lake. He has been hooked ever since.

“The benefits are another angle on revenue,” Smith says. “Being a landowner, you’re looking at any avenue to create income. It’s income driven.”

Smith’s lake sits in the middle of a rolling pasture. It’s open and what it lacks in eye appeal, it makes up for with success on the other end of the line. There is a constant flow of visitors to his land. Bookings are placed once or twice a week year-round.

Outdoorsmen will tell you few things come close to the sounds of a peaceful ride on the water, dropping your line in for hopes the big one will rise. Members of PWF call it reel solitude™. It’s the club’s slogan and for good reason. When it’s time to go

fishing, that’s what members get—peace and quiet.

“When you come to a private lake of ours, it’s you and you exclusively,” says PWF owner Steve Alexander. “There will be no one else on the water with you. So there are no jet



Private Water Fishing offers Texas landowners an opportunity to cash in on the untapped resources of lakes and ponds on their property—renting out those spots to anglers.

skis. It’s just you and your son, or father or your daughter, your wife or two buddies. Just to come and have a good time.”

Alexander was a member of the club for eight years before purchasing it a year ago. He said goodbye to high pressure sales and traded in his pen for a pole.

Members are granted access to 62 private lakes across the state. They pay an annual fee to be a part of PWF and a daily fee once they book a reservation. A percentage of those fees goes to the club, but the majority goes back to the land owner, where some of it is invested back into the lake.

“You’ve got to keep the fish numbers at a good level based on the available forage,” says landowner Thomas Karels. “Deer are the same way. It’s not precise. You kind of go in one direction; it takes you a while to get a good balance and sometimes you overshoot. Then you’ve got to give it a rest for a while, come back and try again. It’s a continued balance. It’s never the same each year.”

Karels signed up his 100-acre lake with PWF seven years ago. His is one of the more popular bookings. The lake sits surrounded by a forest just outside of Buffalo. Lily pads border the edge and while you’re not getting lost in the serenity of the lake, you’re almost certain to hook a mess of fish.

Beyond dollars and cents, PWF

brings with it intangibles of lake management. The goal is to turn a lake into a prime breeding ground for trophy largemouth bass—the white-tail deer of freshwater fishing. When a lake enters into an agreement with PWF, the club brings with it proven management practices that will improve the lake’s ecosystem. The services and consulting come at no cost.

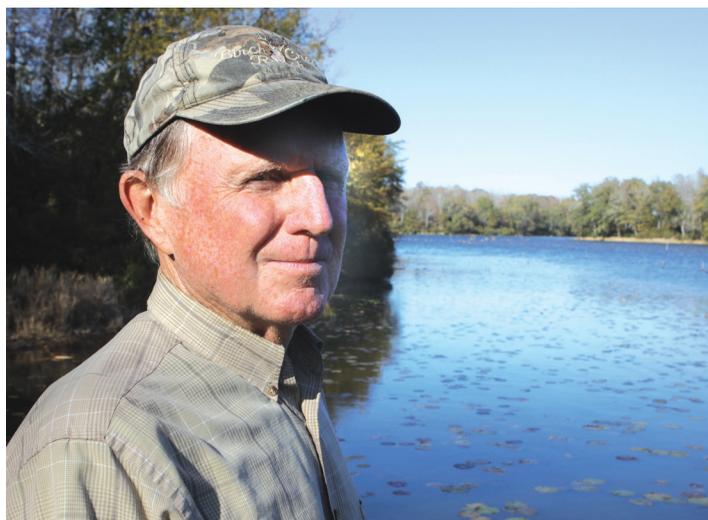
“That’s valuable because our knowledge of marine life and all of that is limited,” Smith says. “You go home with some confidence that you’ve got somebody helping you take care of that asset.”

Even forage fish can be supplied at a low cost. The goal is for the club to make money off the fishing, not the fish. The club is strictly catch and release, unless management practices call for a “thinning of the herd,” or in this case, school.

“Most farmers and ranchers understand deer populations and cattle populations. At some point you have to thin the herd and if you don’t, you have a lake full of small fish,” Alexander says.

Some landowners may seem a little apprehensive to allow complete strangers access to their property. However, both Smith and Karels are quick to point out there has never been an unpleasant incident with any of the members.

The club does carry an insurance



Thomas Karels says being involved with Private Water Fishing has proved to be a great resource in managing the ecosystem of his lake.

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