

Private fishing group offers high-quality bass opportunities

Mike Leggett, Commentary

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The quartet of lovesick gobblers scattered around the lake, doing their best Hill Country yodeling for coy Rio Grande hens, were making it difficult to concentrate on the bass fishing at hand.

Steve Alexander and I had been on the lake south of Brownwood since before noon and at least two of the four had been hard at it all day.

Noses to the ground (in a turkey kind of way), they'd wandered the thick live oaks and scrub brush on the Waco Creek Ranch in a competition to see who could lure the best hens to watch them strut and prance.

Despite the bass we had been catching, I was considering going back to the truck to pick up a mouth call, just to see if I could call a turkey down off the hill and because turkey season was only a few days away.

But then I flipped a giant, marabou-tailed spinner bait down along a shallow grass bed that grew along the fringes of a little feeder channel into the 40 acre lake. Though the water was off-color because of recent rains, I could see a thick, heavy bass roll out of the weed line and inhale the lure. Inhale is a nice way of saying "gobble in one swallow."

A bass fight never lasts as long as we think and only a few seconds had expired before I swung a meaty female aboard the boat. "Four pounds, 10 ounces," Alexander announced when the digital scale quit flickering and settled on a number.

I sort of heard the weight but I had already forgotten the turkeys and had the spinner bait back in the water where it was being attacked by another largemouth, a carbon copy of the first, working on a bed of her own 20 feet down the grass line. I landed her almost before the first fish was back in the water. "I think we may have found a pattern," Alexander said.

Actually, it was maybe the third pattern we'd found on the lake that day, which is to say the bass were there, they were biting, and we would catch them on pretty much everything we threw.

"This is really our signature lake. We expect it to be good. The club record here is 13.5 pounds," said Alexander, owner and manager of Private Water Fish, a bass-fishing club operating out of Dallas.

Alexander was already a member of the club when he decided he needed a change from a high-pressure lifestyle and bought the whole thing. Now he's looking to add to the more than 50 private lakes and 300-plus members scattered around Texas.

Members pay an initiation fee — \$295 for an individual or \$395 for a family — and then daily use rates that vary from \$45 to \$150, depending on the lake, Alexander said. Some lakes provide boats, but most members have small boats and trolling motors and still others prefer to fish from kayaks or canoes.

"It's an opportunity for people who don't want the hassle of trying to fish large public lakes to go fishing, in solitude, and they know they're going to catch fish. We only let people fish a lake three times in a week, and that keeps the pressure down," Alexander said. "We have a number of properties where there are cabins or houses where our members can spend the night, too." Lodging comes with an additional fee.

As part of the agreements with landowners, Alexander can help with fisheries management, as well.

The club offers harvest aid to keep populations in check, as well as cost-sharing on stocking to improve genetics and size, he said.

Many of the lakes already have bass that are true trophies, and members get the benefit of light pressure on trying to catch those fish. And they get to do it without having to invest \$30,000 in a bass boat or \$400 a day for a guide on public water. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Alexander and I ended our day with a fish count of about 30 bass, the largest of which was over six pounds. We caught maybe 10 fish between 4 and 6 pounds, and most of them were in the 2-3 pound class.

And we did it without seeing another angler and hearing only the noise of wild turkeys and migrating sandhill cranes. That's a good day.

For information about Private Water Fishing, see www.privatewaterfishing.com or call 214-871-0044.

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