

Monthly Fishing Report – March 2010 Central and Northwest Louisiana

CENTRAL

The March fishing report for Saline/Larto will depend on whether Mother Nature still has a burr under her saddle. If she does, look for more rains and nasty weather to totally foul up fishing conditions, just as she's done since October. However, Alexandria guide Jerry Mitchell is keeping his fingers crossed that the water will be in good condition this month. "I don't really think this area will be in bad shape come March," he said. "I really hope not because there is usually some really good fishing here that time of year." Mitchell says the bass will be on the main-lake cypress trees and on the points and he fishes these areas with a V&M 5-inch tube in junebug, watermelon red or black/red flake. He also slow-rolls a Cyclone spinner, white or white/chartreuse. If the water is stained, he likes a crawfish color. Crappie fishing should really start to take off in Larto and Shad Lake and the connecting bayous. They'll likely be concentrated at the mouths of the sloughs and bayous. Mitchell offers a tube jig and experiments with colors until he finds what they want. He also said that if the weather and water temperatures warm sufficiently by the end of the month, the chinquapins will start to move onto shallow humps to bed hitting small crawfish and cold worms.

From Shell Beach north, you'll likely find Mitchell giving bass a try in March. "The upper end of Cane River Lake usually works best for me in March," he said. He likes to fish around the grass and pads with a Fluke in pearl white or watermelon or a floating lizard with a 1/16-ounce weight. Colors that work best in March are blueberry, watermelon red, and gourd green. Crappie fishermen will start dunking shiners or jigs around sunken brush and the fish should become more active in March, depending, of course, on the weather.

The heavy incessant rains with resultant run-off has kept Red River South high for several months. If rains continue as they have, Mitchell says launch ramps along the river could be closed; fishermen should check with LDWF officials to be sure the ramps are open. If the water isn't too high and muddy, he heads for the oxbows after bass that will be in a pre-spawn mode. Mitchell says the bass should be fairly shallow and he likes to use a Fluke, green pumpkin or white and concentrates on fishing the edges of grass. He also slow-rolls a Cyclone spinner or a War Eagle spinner, mouse or silver shiner in color in a 1/2-ounce weight. He likes the double willowleaf combo, one leaf small and the other larger. Mitchell also reports that crappie fishermen usually have better luck this time of year fishing the ditches in the oxbows with shiners or jigs.

NORTHWEST

According to Sid Havard, Evinrude pro-staffer and owner of Local Lakes Guide Service (318-247-6884), Kepler Lake bass will be on the shallow flats in March. "Spinnerbaits, swim jigs, soft plastics and the old standby Rogue will work on these fish," he says. "If you put in at J.J.'s Landing and head south to the first big pocket on the left, you will be in Garner Branch. There is a very large shallow flat from the point on the left to the east." Fish will pull up on the flat and set up on the stumps and logs in this area. Havard starts with a Stanley swim jig in bream pattern. This bait has out-fished spinnerbaits for him. The paddle offers a ton of vibration as you reel it and bass cannot let it pass. If the sun is right and the beds are visible, Havard says dragging a bream-colored Stanley jig into the bed is asking for trouble. The new Itzabug fished Texas-rigged in a watermelon red should play a big part this time of year. Pull the bait into the bed and let it sit. A female bass will not allow this bait to stay there. At times, you'll have to be quick on the draw because she will suck the bait in and blow it out of her bed. He says you can also get these fish to eat a black lizard fished Texas-style. If you're looking for numbers with a good fish or two added to your creel, a gold Rogue is hard to beat on the lake after the water has warmed, say by 11 a.m. or so. There are a couple of different ways to fish this bait. Make a cast, let the bait sit, then pull your rod from 10:00 to 12:00, then allow the bait to follow up repeating back to the boat or just cast and reel it back. Havard reports that this is a super-good lake to learn to sight fish. He recommends a good pair of sunglasses and to be on the lookout for bright spots on the bottom. These spots are where the fish have cleaned out a bed. Another way is to fish a Side Winder weightless in this kind of area. Allow the bait to free fall to the bottom. If you learn to fish the flats near the deep water, you are more likely to get a big bite. This is a well-kept secret on Kepler. However, the lake also has land mines in the form of submerged stumps and logs from one end to the other, so take it slow and wear your PFD when under power.

Havard says that the bass for the most part will be shallow this month in Black Lake. "Jigs and soft plastics will rule the lake, but there are those who will load up with a spinnerbait or Rogue," he says. Covering lots of water is the name of the game in March. You may fish a mile without a bite, and then every tree has a fish on it. If you want to see what the lake has to offer, Havard suggests attending one of the many weigh-ins for a bass event and you will see five bass tipping the scales at 25-plus pounds. The good thing is these stringers come from one end of the lake to the other. The south end is shallow and will warm first. The mid lake can be very good; just fish a little deeper off the bank. Above the bridge has both deeper and shallow water to fish, the same as the middle of the lake. Havard says he is a Stanley jig man by trade, and he's going to hit as many trees in a day as possible. Color depends on water color. You can't go wrong with black/blue most of the time. Dress the Stanley ½-ounce jig with a

matching trailer, and you're ready. When using soft plastics, a lizard in junebug with a chartreuse tail is a super color. The new Side Winder by Stanley will be a force to deal with also, fished either Texas rig or weightless. Let the bass tell you what they want. Two of the biggest stringers Havard has ever seen from this lake both came from guys who could not get their engine to start and just fished around the bridge area at Chandler's. Stanley has a new bait out, the Itzabug, and it's getting the job done on the lake fished Texas-rigged around shallow trees. "There are some really good local guides around the lake that you might want to hook up with if you've never fished the lake before," says Havard. "It is very easy to get turned around on this cypress-tree lake." Catfishing will be good on trotlines baited with cold worms as Black Lake has a teeming population of channel catfish. Crappie should begin moving to the shallow flats, where they'll hit jigs and shiners fished around brush. By the end of the month, provided the weather and water temperatures have warmed sufficiently, look for chinquapins to begin moving to shallow humps close to deep water where they'll bite cold worms and small crawfish.

Guide Sid Havard says Lake Claiborne offers many areas to catch bass in the spring from the pockets starting at the dam all the way to the north end. "For the last couple of years, the Stanley Ribbit has been a super bait for me and my clients on the lake, and watermelon is the color," he said. "If you're new to frog fishing, you need to leave a little backing of mono on your reel and fill the rest with 50-pound Power Pro." Havard says this might sound like a really big line, but its diameter is no bigger than 10-pound mono. Use the new Double Take frog hook by Stanley and a good frog rod. Hit the back of pockets fishing the bait on top, and you're going to have some fun. This is hard to do, but try waiting until you can't see the frog to set the hook. If you do this, you will be fishing the bait the right way. "I was guiding a man last year who wanted to fish the Ribbit. He never fished it before, and when I got a bite I hit the button on my reel and showed him how a bass will swim 30 feet with this bait without letting go. After seeing that, he was able to catch 13 bass that afternoon without missing a fish." Havard carefully states that the bass may not eat this bait every time; it's just his preference. Soft plastics are a good choice along with Stanley spinnerbaits in chartreuse/white. Springtime is more about finding the warmer water; then you can fish the style bait you like. Havard's team partner fishes a jig year round and makes you get one out or keep one rigged and ready to go. But, he says, there is just something about an old bass busting a Ribbit on top that I can't get enough of and this bait has added to his bank account this time of the year.

It seems like only yesterday that the 2009 Bassmaster Classic anglers were fishing the Red River North and weighing in big sacks of bass. Then came the rain, high water and unsafe conditions that stayed for most of 2009, and now they're here for 2010 commented guide Russ McVey. With the conditions like they have been lately, careful planning should be taken prior to hitting the river.

Make sure someone within your family knows what area of the river you are fishing. Keep your cell phone in a dry box that is waterproof. The main responsibility is to check in with your family members during the day, let them know if you move to a different area of the river. This could be the most important thing you do during the day. Conditions on the river have kept most anglers away for many months. If the river settles down by March, the bass should be ready to eat. They have two things on their mind: eating and spawning. McVey fishes a black/blue or black/red 7/16-ounce Southpaw jig tipped with a craw in matching colors rigged on 17-pound-test line around the stumps and laydown logs. If the spinnerbait doesn't produce, slow down with a Texas-rigged dark colored creature bait rigged with a 3/16- or ¼-ounce Tru-Tungsten. The best depths are going to be from the banks to about 7 feet of water. The 100-series chartreuse/blue back and crawfish-colored Bandit crankbaits fished in and around the stumps on the flats and along the edges of the flats will sometimes work. McVey noted that shiners and small crappie jigs tipped with shiners fished along the edge of the ridges in the oxbows should be a good place to start for crappie. Four to 7 feet of water with standing timber are good areas to target. Russ McVey's Guide Service can be contacted at southpawguide@msn.com or (318) 464-2277.

Caddo Lake is known for producing some heavyweight bass and, according to guide Russ McVey, March is a good month to tie into a wall-hanger. "One of the best patterns for Caddo in March is flipping the trees on the main lake," he said. He likes to flip a 7/16-ounce black/blue or black/blue/purple Southpaw Jig tipped with a black/blue craw rigged on 17-pound line. If the jig bite slows, Texas-rigged black/red creature baits rigged with ¼ -ounce Tru-Tungsten weights will hopefully pick up the slack. If the bass are suspended, a white 3/8-ounce Picasso spinnerbait and Bandit Footloose crankbait in chrome/blue or red crawfish rigged on 15-pound-test line over the grass flats will produce. From the bank lines out to 4 feet of water will be the best depths to try. The crappie should be staging on the edges of deep water where they'll often hit shiners or jigs. Later in the month as water temperatures warm, look for the chinquapins to begin moving to shallow spawning grounds, where they'll hit cold worms or small crawfish.

There are no reports from Lake Bistineau for March. The gates are open and efforts are being made to lower the lake to address the serious problem of giant salvinia.

Just like other North Louisiana lakes, Grand Bayou will be primed for some great springtime fishing, provided the weather cooperates. Heavy late-winter rains have continued to overload Grand Bayou with excessive water that could make fishing in March an interesting proposition. By March, should things settle down, the lake will be full and virtually grass-free. The fish will also be making their way into the creeks and streams preparing for the spring spawn. Fishing

the mouth of the creeks where they empty into the main lakes will allow bass anglers to take advantage of the pre-spawn fish that will be setting up prior to moving onto the shallow flats for spawning. One of the best lures for targeting these fish is a jig with trailer fished slowly around the structure in these areas. As the fish begin moving into more shallow water later in March, soft plastics such as Texas-rigged lizards or Carolina-rigged finesse worms will pick up some fish on the shallow flats. Crappie will also be staging for the spring spawn, and early in the month, will likely be suspended around sunken brush in deeper water. As water temperatures warm by the end of the month, look for the fish to begin moving in around shallow structure, where shiners or jigs should begin picking up some slabs. If water temperatures warm sufficiently, the bream should begin moving onto shallow flats getting ready for the spawn. Crickets and night crawlers will begin picking up some bedded bluegills and chinquapins around spawning areas.

SOURCE: Louisiana Sportsman, March 2010 issue.