

TPWD encourages anglers to 'go west' for prime fishing opportunities

With long summer holidays on the horizon, many anglers are looking for unique fishing destinations to explore with friends and family. This year, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department fisheries staff are encouraging Texans to try heading west to target a variety of fish species and enjoy the breathtaking scenery.

"West Texas lakes offer a true Texan feel with a more rural, frontier-like experience," said Michael Homer, TPWD Inland Fisheries District Supervisor for Abilene. "Although our lakes are prone to fluctuating water levels and drought, we have received much rainfall over the last three years and many of our lakes are full and producing record-setting fish."

Dozens of major reservoirs are located in the region, providing plenty of options for anglers to choose from when planning a weekend or holiday fishing trip. Below are a few high-quality fishing spots recommended by TPWD fisheries biologists in the Big Country, West Texas and Texas Panhandle areas.

Big Country

"Our Big Country lakes near Abilene may not be as well-known as some of the iconic East Texas fishing lakes, but that's changing," Homer said. "We've had several lakes in the Big Country making headlines this year with multiple double-digit lunker bass being caught. Within just a few hours drive from urban centers like Dallas-Fort Worth and San Antonio, our Big Country lakes provide great options for a weekend fishing trip any time of the year."

Fort Phantom Hill Reservoir in Jones County made waves in the fishing community in March when a local angler broke the lake record twice on the same fishing trip with two largemouth bass weighing in at over 11 pounds. The reservoir also has excellent hybrid striped bass, crappie, and catfish fishing. The lake is currently 100% full of water and boasts four open boat ramps, free shoreline fishing access and pier fishing access. Anglers visiting from out of town can find a variety of options for staying overnight or the weekend, including campgrounds, RV parks, and hotels in nearby Abilene. Abilene State Park is also a short drive from the lake for another enjoyable outdoor adventure.

Anglers hoping for the catch of a lifetime shouldn't look past Lake Leon in Leon County, which produced a whopping 13.00 lb Toyota ShareLunker Legacy Class largemouth bass in April. The lake also offers excellent channel catfish, white bass and crappie fishing and there are other amenities, including a bait shop and fishing pier with handicap

fishing access. Excellent camping and lodging facilities can be found nearby, including a resort that features exotic wildlife, a crappie fishing dock, boat ramp, and cabins, and hotels available in Eastland.

Lake Brownwood in Brown County is a popular bass, crappie and catfish fishing destination that is also home to a popular Texas State Park. Lake Brownwood State Park offers great access to the lake along with a variety of outdoor activities, kayak and canoe rentals, boat ramps, nature trails, and camping. The nearby City of Brownwood also offers a Texas Paddling Trail on Pecan Bayou at Fabis and Riverside parks, and the city has plenty of lodging, shopping and restaurants to visit after a day of fishing.

West Texas

"West Texas might not be your first thought when you think of Texas fishing, but our reservoirs have a storied history of producing trophy fish," said Lynn Wright, TPWD Inland Fisheries District Supervisor for San Angelo. "San Angelo-area lakes have produced more than twenty Toyota ShareLunker entries over 13 pounds in the last decade, so if you're looking to catch the fish of a lifetime this is a great place to spend your time."

At Oak Creek Reservoir in Coke County, anglers can take advantage of the highest numbers of white bass that fisheries biologists have seen in nearly 20 years. If that's not enough to convince you to plan a trip, in April the lake produced a whopping 13.68 pound largemouth bass that broke a long-standing water body record.

Two private boat ramps and one public boat ramp are open for accessing the reservoir, but anglers should keep in mind they will need a reservoir permit from the City of Sweetwater.

O.H. Ivie Reservoir in Concho, Coleman and Runnels counties is one of the top big-bass producing lakes in the state, and with recent heavy rain it is up to its highest water level in over a decade. Although it's best known for producing trophy largemouth bass, it also offers quality fishing for white bass and white crappie for rod and reel anglers, and blue and flathead catfish for jug and trotline anglers. Three public recreation areas offer concrete boat ramps, camping, picnicking, and large parking areas.

When other popular lakes are crowded with boats, anglers should try Winters-Elm Creek Reservoir in Runnels County for a relaxing and enjoyable day of fishing. Although the lake is a little smaller than others at 337 acres, it offers healthy populations of largemouth bass, blue catfish and white crappie due to an excellent shad prey-base in the reservoir. Camping, picnicking, and a boat ramp are available at a city park on the east side of the lake.

Texas Panhandle

"The scenic Texas Panhandle is home to some of the most unique fishing opportunities in the state," said Caleb Huber, TPWD Inland Fisheries District Supervisor for Amarillo. "Several state freshwater fishing records have been set here, and you can target game fish species here that can't be found in many other places in the state, like Alabama spotted bass."

Those looking to add a new species to their list should visit Alan Henry Reservoir, where anglers can find Alabama spotted bass. The Garza County lake also happens to be the number one largemouth bass

lake in the Amarillo district, having produced more than 27 Toyota ShareLunker Legacy Class largemouth bass over 13 pounds and many other reported double-digit bass since its impoundment. The Sam Wahl Recreation Area has an excellent dock and fishing pier facilities along with primitive campsites and places to park self-contained RV's.

No one would deny that the best walleye fishing in the state can be found at Lake Meredith, located less than an hour from Amarillo in Hutchinson County. The lake, which produced the state record walleye, is also home to an excellent smallmouth bass population. With clear water and steep shorelines, it's a great option for anglers looking for a change of pace. Camping and picnic facilities are available at 13 developed areas around the lake, including at Lake Meredith National Recreation Area, also known as the "Oasis on the High Plains."

Anglers hoping to catch a lot

of fish will find success at White River Reservoir in Crosby County. The reservoir has strong populations of walleye, blue catfish, channel catfish, largemouth bass and white bass. Visitors can enjoy picnic, camping and RV areas with water and electricity along with a fishing house, and cleaning station. Bank anglers can also find excellent shoreline access at the lake.

To find a full list of public fishing spots in Texas sorted by region, visit TPWD's Texas Lake Finder online. Each lake listing includes detailed maps, regulations, angling opportunities, public access facilities and more.

Boaters should remember to help protect West Texas lakes and avoid introducing invasive species like zebra and quagga mussels by cleaning, draining and drying all boats and equipment before visiting. More information on preventing the spread of the destructive invasive species can be found at tpwd.texas.gov/zebramussels.



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