

Bass fishing club offers lure of solitude

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HENDERSON, Texas – Steve Alexander set the hook on a fat bass that nailed his soft plastic lure, then enjoyed the ensuing fight. He played the fish leisurely, secure in the knowledge that nearby anglers would not witness the action and move in to poach the fishing spot.

"I was fishing in a tournament at Lake Monticello recently and there were eight boats in an area the size of this cove," he said, indicating about five acres of water. "It's a relief to wet a hook in a nice, quiet, aesthetic place."

The Richardson resident recently bailed out of a high-pressure job and bought a private fishing club that started life as the Great Texas Bass Club. Alexander renamed the organization Private Water Fishing, but the club lakes and most of the rules remain unchanged. The club logo touts "Reel Solitude."

He's looking for additional private fishing lakes to join the mix, and the 25-acre lake near Henderson easily made the grade. Club members have access to 58 such fishing spots, most of them convenient to the Dallas area, where the club has always been headquartered.

"The man who owns this lake is a retired Baptist minister, and he manages it for big bass," Alexander said. "Anglers on this lake are required to keep every bass smaller than 16 inches. Bigger fish must be released. I don't expect to catch many fish here, but we might get a really big one. The lake record is 13 ½ pounds, and the owner has caught a lot of fish over 10 pounds.

"We have other lakes that are just full of small fish. You might catch 50 or 60 fish a day in those spots, though you probably won't catch a big one."

Texas is full of private lakes, large and small. The fishing ranges from good to great. Alexander's members have caught bass as big as 14 pounds. Why would a private lake owner open his gate to club members?

Most private waters don't get enough fishing pressure. They wind up with too many fish. Removing small fish benefits the overall population. Private Water Fishing lakes include waters owned by people who don't fish at all.

Fishing leases make more sense from a landowner perspective than hunting leases. Under the proper regulations, anglers improve the fish population. Big fish, the trophy catch of any fishing lake, can be recycled, caught and released numerous times.

A trophy deer, on the other hand, cannot be recycled. Load a deer in the back of a truck and his absence diminishes the property.

A Texas deer lease in an area where you can expect to see a whopper buck routinely costs \$10,000 a season or more. Memberships in Private Water Fishing are within the means of most middle-class sportsmen. Initial individual memberships cost \$295, with an annual renewal fee of \$225. A family membership is \$395 with a \$325 annual renewal rate.

There are reduced-rate memberships available for youths, students and seniors, as well as military personnel, police officers and firefighters. There are corporate memberships and group memberships.

Those rates provide access to the lakes. Members then pay a day rate for fishing. Most lakes charge \$25 per angler for half a day, \$45 for a full day. The most expensive day rate is \$150. Some lakes have their own guest facilities that can be rented for an additional fee. Others allow camping for a modest fee or no additional charge. Some, like the lake near Henderson, have a fishing boat available.

Alexander said most members fish from small boats that can be readily launched without a concrete ramp. He uses a two-man Buster Boat powered by an electric motor.

"For the difference in price between a boat suitable for small waters and a boat suitable for a big lake, you can pay all your membership fees and daily fishing rates for a long, long time," Alexander said. "We have members who fish from kayaks, canoes and even float tubes.

"A lot of experienced anglers are good at catching fish, but they have trouble locating the fish on a big public lake. Anyone who knows much about fishing can figure out the productive fishing areas and fishing techniques on a small body of water."

Details on Private Water Fishing are available at www.privatewaterfishing.com or by calling 214-871-0044.