

Article published Apr 11, 2010

Posted on

Sunday, April 11, 2010



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Club Opens Private Lakes To Anglers

VAN ZANDT COUNTY - The West Texas-like wind that began to blow through East Texas a week ago continued to howl Tuesday, turning what otherwise would have been a quiet, 17-acre lake into angry waters.

Fortunately Steve Alexander had a plan B. Across the dam, through the woods and down to a twin, 17-acre impoundment. Alexander, owner and manager of Private Water Fishing, an organization that opens the gates to private lakes to members, launched the two-man boat and began to run the north shore.

On his second cast to the bank, a big bass swirled and took Alexander's spinner bait. He stood to set the hook and pop, the line broke.

It wasn't an omen though. It was just the start of one of those afternoons fishermen dream of - somewhere between 50 and 60 bass up to 7 pounds. And this was a lake that had just been fished the day before and produced about an equal number of bass.

"The record for this lake is 12 pounds. It is 13 on the other," Alexander said of the two lakes located down an isolated lane west of Edom.

As we worked around the lake it wasn't hard to detect a pattern. The bass were definitely on shallow-water beds and more than willing to take the weightless soft plastic bait that drifted down to them.

"It's definitely on," Alexander said of the lake.

Technique didn't matter. Neither did color. Green/chartreuse, bream, electric blue all produced fish. If anything, the bushy pondweed that grew along the bank was the biggest key when it came to locating the fish.

This is the first year the two lakes have been enrolled in the Dallas-based Private Waters program. They are two of 19 located within 90 miles of Tyler.

"This is about average for our lakes," Alexander said of the lake's size.

While these lakes have had little management since being built, Alexander said they show potential, but more importantly offer what fishermen want.

"Our fishermen really want to fish new waters," he explained.

Private Waters has agreements on about 50 lakes across the state ranging in size from 1 to 100

acres. Some are highly-managed trophy waters, while others just give fishermen access to waters that are lightly fished and promise an experience that is a rarity on public waters.

"We might fish a lake three times a week. We like to rest them a day or two between trips, but we will let them fish Saturday and Sunday and then one day during the week," said Alexander, who took ownership of the company three months ago and has been getting a crash course on both its members and its lakes.

A member of the organization before leaving his commercial printing job to become Private Waters' owner, Alexander said most of the fishermen use traditional tackle, but there are some who use the lakes for fly fishing. Bass are typically the target, but Alexander said the club has some lakes known for their quality bream and other fisheries.

The organization currently has about 300 members, most of whom repeat year after year. Alexander said he has enough water under contract to accommodate three times as many, but is constantly on the lookout for more lakes.

"I am looking for high end lakes as much I am fisherman," he said.

Alexander works with the lake owners who are interested in managing their water. That might include surveys, fertilizing and in some cases harvest.

Private Waters has a number of annual membership levels ranging from \$295 for individuals, \$395 for families and a corporate membership for up to five employees for \$1,250. Fishermen then pay a day fee ranging from \$45 to \$150 a day depending on the lake.

While most members have a small boat to fish from, some of the lakes have boats available for members. In some cases the fishermen are required to bring their own trolling motor and battery. Fishing is also allowed from the bank on most lakes.

Lodging is also available at some sights.

For more information, go to www.privatewatersfishing.com or call 214-871-0044.
