



Find the Fish!

Bruce David Tracy

If you can't find the fish, you probably won't catch many of them. This may sound like a simple statement, but if you stop to think about it, finding fish is the most important part of fishing. In general, we spend far too much time fishing waters where there is little chance of a fish hanging out. We need to understand why bass do what they do to get a feel for where they are at various times throughout the year.

Structure

We all know that fish like structure, but most of us don't really know what structure is. We often confuse cover for structure. Cover includes reeds, lily pads, tree stumps, and the like. Cover is a great place to find bass, but structure is just as important. Structure is a change in bottom contour which results in an irregular pattern on the lake's bottom. Structure could be the extension of a point that continues down under the waterline or a channel that is a few feet deeper than the rest of the lake bottom around it. Fish love structure! Any time there is a sudden elevation change on the bottom, there is a chance that fish will be holding there.

Water Temperature

The biggest mistake that I made when I started fishing for bass was that I always pounded the shore line. I thought that fish liked shallow water, and that is where I spent most of my efforts. Bass do like shallow water ... when they are spawning in the spring. The rest of the year, you are not likely to find a lot of fish sitting up in the shallows. The main reason for this has to do with temperature.

Bass are not warm blooded, so they can't regulate their temperature to match the conditions. When the water is too warm or there is a lot of direct sunlight on the fish, they move deeper to get to cooler water where they are more comfortable. That is also why bass like cover, since it is a way to get out of the direct sunlight. Bass like to live in water between 68 and 72 degrees, so in order to find the fish, you need to know where the water is that they are most comfortable in. As a general rule, bass move deeper in the winter when the surface of the water is cooling down and hold to structure that is a little steeper in its drop offs. In the summer, bass tend to hang out on structure at the top level of the thermocline.

Thermocline

The thermocline is a tangible barrier in the water column in which temperature changes more rapidly with depth than it does in the layers above or below it. You can actually see the thermocline in a body of water with a good fish finder. The top portion of the thermocline is a good spot to locate fish in the summer because the water below it (called the hypolimnion) has less oxygen and the water above it (the epilimnion) tends to be too warm for the fish. The upper end of the thermocline and the water just above it seems to be a comfortable place for bass to hang out.

Weather

There are countless theories on how weather effects fishing, with some more commonly accepted than others. Many fishermen check the barometer to determine if they are going to have a successful outing. Bass have lateral lines which sense the increase or decrease in pressure brought on by a frontal passage. Dropping pressure usually means winds and storms which cloud the water, making feeding more difficult. This seems to lead to bass feeding more prior to the passing of a storm front. Fish seems to like consistency as well. When a weather pattern settles in, the fish seem more comfortable feeding.

Wind also seems to play a roll in catching fish. The three reasons that I have heard the most often are that the ripple on the water caused by the wind makes it harder for the fish to see us, which makes them more likely to take our bait. Secondly, the ripple on the water helps oxygen to mix with the surface water, and finally, the ripple cuts down on the direct sunlight, which makes the water more comfortable for the bass to swim in. All three of these seem plausible to me. To be sure, I have had more luck when there has been some ripple on the water than I have had when the water is completely calm.

Develop a Fishing Pattern

Whatever the season or weather pattern is, you need to develop a fishing pattern during the day if you want to catch fish. If you start the day fishing your favorite spot, but don't catch anything move! This was another of my early mistakes when I started bass fishing. I would fall in love with a spot and then had a hard time leaving it.

Once you catch a fish, think about the conditions that existed around that catch. How deep was it, what lure were you using, what was the retrieval speed, what type of cover was there? These are all important considerations. If you catch several fish in an area, try to find other areas on the lake that are similar to it. If you are catching fish in twenty feet of water off of a submerged point, find other areas that are similar. Fish are in specific locations for reasons. Your job is to figure that out during the day and develop a pattern for it.

Get Out and Fish

If you sit around waiting for all of the ideal conditions to show up, you will never fish. The more time you spend on the water, the easier it will be to establish patterns. If you want to catch more fish, then you are going to need to put in the time, so stop reading this article, and get out there and fish!