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texas parks & wildlife news

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT • AUSTIN, TEXAS 78744

EDITORS: Due to problems in the print shop, a news release packet was not sent out last week. Also, several alert birders pointed out that the sparrow pictured in the June 18 packet most likely was a lark sparrow instead of a vesper sparrow as indicated in the cutlines. We apologize.

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DROUGHT, HOT WEATHER HURTING WILDLIFE

AUSTIN -- White-tailed deer are dying in significant numbers in portions of five South Texas counties as an unrelenting drought and heat wave continue to sear the thirsty state.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists report deer losses in Dimmit, Kinney, LaSalle, Maverick and Zavala Counties.

Dozens of other counties in a broad band from the Trans-Pecos south to Brownsville also appear to be entering a severe dry spell which could become critical for wildlife if rains don't occur in the next few weeks.

Biologist Jerry Cooke of Pearsall said Kinney County may have less than half the deer population this fall compared to fall 1979. "A year of extremely dry conditions combined with outbreaks of anthrax in some areas last fall have really reduced deer populations," Cooke said.

"Texas historically experiences a severe drought about every 20 years," Cooke added. "We had one in the 1930s and one in the 1950s. We got through the 1970s without one, but it looks like it has finally arrived."

DROUGHT, cont'd.

DROUGHT, cont'd.

The parched region of western South Texas has not had a significant rain in more than a year. "During May, it rained in the northeast corner of Dimmit County and parts of Frio County, but that's about it," Cooke said. "It may take a tropical disturbance in the Gulf of Mexico to break the drought."

Deer are not the only wildlife species hurt because of the drought. "Normally during July we see plenty of quail with chicks," said Cooke. "This month the birds already have gathered into coveys, and we're not seeing many young quail."

The Trans-Pecos region of West Texas is always arid, but veteran biologist Sam Brownlee of Alpine said he cannot remember conditions any drier than they are now. "We haven't had a significant rain since Aug. 10," Brownlee said. "In fact, we have had a total of 1.23 inches since then."

Brownlee said pronghorn antelope fawn survival is expected to be very low this year, and he also feels certain some losses of mule deer are occurring.

The Black Gap Wildlife Management Area, located adjacent to the Rio Grande and Big Bend National Park, is a good indicator of Trans-Pecos Region habitat conditions. "We had no reproduction of quail at all on the Black Gap this year," Brownlee noted. "Since about 75 percent of the quail taken by hunters each year are yearling birds, you can guess what the hunting season prospects might be for this season."

"If we don't get some rain by the end of July, we're really going to be in bad shape," he said.

Biologists point out that dry weather and resulting poor range conditions in mid-summer are critical for deer because does are stressed to feed fawns and bucks need substantial amounts of protein to produce antlers.

The dry conditions appear to ease a bit in the most southerly counties of South Texas, according to biologist Mike Hobson of Laredo. "We haven't yet had a significant deer die-off, but doe deer are in what I would describe as only fair condition and I certainly don't expect a good fawn crop," Hobson said. Bucks appear to be faring well for the present, and antler development should be about average in the areas from Webb and Duval Counties south, he added.

Nesting success for quail and turkey generally has been poor throughout Texas, biologists said, and unless rains come soon there will be only marginal survival of the young by this fall.

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In the popular deer hunting areas of the Edwards Plateau, deer are not in immediate danger, but Wildlife Regional Manager George Litton of Waco said he expects antler development to be below average. "It looks like there will be only a marginal production of turkeys in the Plateau as well," Litton said. He said a wide area between Waco and Brownwood is becoming "critically dry" and the possibility exists for wildlife losses there.

In the eastern half of the state, record high temperatures and dry weather are causing stress similar to that in West Texas, but not quite as severe. Regional Director Bob Van Cleave of Tyler said: "We don't have a clear-cut indicator of losses yet, but we do have a possible loss of fawns if it doesn't rain soon." He said the quail hatch in East Texas is "about average" and some turkey reproduction was noted. Squirrel reproduction also may be hurting, although carryover populations may keep populations at acceptable levels this fall, he said.

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FOUR NEW SALTWATER FISH RECORDS SET

AUSTIN -- Texas fishermen have set new state records in four saltwater categories, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. They are swordfish, southern stingray, blacktip shark and lemon shark.

A 317-pound broadbill swordfish caught a year ago near the Flower Garden Reef off Galveston has set a new mark for that species.

J. P. Bryan Jr. of Houston caught the fish July 21, 1979, on 80-pound-test line. It was 11 feet, 10 inches long and three feet, 11½ inches in girth.

The swordfish displaces a 286-pounder caught by James Lee Culver of Matagorda off Port Aransas in 1978. The world rod and reel record swordfish is a 1,182-pounder caught off Iquique, Chile in 1952.

A southern stingray weighing 200 pounds earned a state fish record certificate for Laurie Londrigan of Galveston. She caught the ray June 21 in Galveston Bay.

The stingray was 63½ inches long and 59 inches in girth. It beat the old record, caught in 1978, by only three pounds.

Richard S. Gologar of Missouri City caught a 166-pound blacktip shark June 2 off the Port Aransas jetties. The former record blacktip weighed 136 pounds.

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Gologar caught the shark while drift fishing from a party boat. It was 86 inches long and 41½ inches in girth.

A 357-pound lemon shark caught east of the Buccaneer Field off Galveston June 7 is a new record for that species. L. J. Schaper Jr. of Hitchcock caught the shark on 80-pound-test line.

The former record lemon shark, caught in 1978, weighed 323 pounds.

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CONTRACTS IMPORTANT
TO HUNTING LEASES

DALLAS -- With hunting season drawing nearer, many Texas hunters are trying to find a hunting lease.

For those interested in a place to hunt deer, turkey, quail or dove, it is not too soon to locate a lease. In fact, it may be too late for some choice areas, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

A hunter should not assume he can hunt the same place he hunted last year without a written lease. Many will be looking this year and they will be willing to pay the price for a good lease.

A hunting lease simply defined is an agreement between a landowner and a hunter whereby the right to hunt under certain conditions on a specified piece of property is granted for a certain time and fee.

Generally, there are four different types of lease agreements: year-round, limited duration, day hunting and guided hunts for a few days.

Year-round leases usually include hunting privileges on all species and are made by a group of hunters. Leases of limited duration vary from an entire season to one week within the season.

Day hunting accommodates large numbers of hunters unable to devote extensive time to the sport and is most common in areas which can stand high hunting pressure. Guided hunts are usually specialized ones for big game but also include other species as well.

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For hunters' and landowners' protection, a written agreement should be used because it spells out conditions and prevents misunderstandings. A good hunting lease should state what is leased along with the name and address of the landowner or his authorized agent. A description of the tract, size and boundaries should also be included. Maps are especially helpful.

A hunting lease should also address payments, terms and deadlines, especially if there are special provisions.

The contract should specify in detail how many hunters will be allowed on the property and in some cases, the names of the hunters. The landowner may wish to reserve hunting privileges for his family or friends. This should be included in the agreement as well.

If hunting is limited to certain species or if the bag is restricted to less than that of current laws, be sure to have the provisions spelled out. The document should also cover any game reports the landowner requires.

In some instances, the landowner may furnish extras like cabins, electricity, water, vehicles, blinds, guides or other services. This should be in the contract along with special privileges such as fishing and picnicking during off season or with visiting nonhunters.

The final paragraph should outline the procedures for amending your contract after it has been signed.

A written lease when properly acknowledged can be recorded in county records and is binding on the landowner should he decide to sell his property.

For information concerning the proper legal form, the hunter should consult an attorney. The fee charged will be well worth the hours of enjoyable hunting.

To carry protection a step further, an agreement should be made with other hunters on the lease. Although this need not be a legal document, it should set rules and guidelines for the safety of the group and proper conservation of the wildlife.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recommends that all hunters complete the Texas Voluntary Hunter Safety Training Program. It is an eight-hour course instructing proper handling of firearms, hunter ethics and basics of first aid, survival and care of game.

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEASE

DIVER REPORTS FISH
AT ARTIFICIAL REEF

DALLAS -- It happens every year. Unsuspecting or first-time hunters look for a deer hunting lease, see something that looks like a good deal and pay their money. Then they may never see a single deer on the property.

This scenario occurs every year to a surprising number of Texans, partly because of the shortage of hunting leases.

"The really prime leases are hard to come by, although it is fairly easy to get on a fringe area," said Horace Gore, Parks and Wildlife Department deer program leader.

Some of the fringe areas have good populations of deer, others are marginal and some never have any deer. Gore's advice to all hunters considering a new lease is to investigate the property thoroughly. "I would want to walk the lease and look for evidence of deer and adequate food," he said.

Hunters should also ask why the lease is available. Often it is because the previous lessees became dissatisfied and found something better. If a landowner has as 100 percent turnover of lessees from year to year, the prospective hunter should be wary.

"There is no way to tell someone how good a deer lease is going to be," he said. "Many factors come into play, such as the acorn supply. I've seen deer populations vary by as much as 50 percent on a lease from year to year."

In addition to the on-site inspections, hunters should check the landowner's references and talk to persons who already have leases on the property.

"For hunters who don't know where to find a lease, I would suggest they talk to their friends and try to locate a group that needs an extra hunter," Gore said.

Another method is to place an advertisement in the classified section of newspapers in the areas where the hunter would like to secure a lease. The ad should include whether the hunter prefers a year-round lease or a lease limited to deer season only. It should also mention whether the hunter is interested in obtaining deer permits.

In some areas of the state with high deer populations local chambers of commerce routinely provide lists of landowners who accommodate hunters.

"It's not too late to find a deer lease for this fall," Gore said. "However, it will be increasingly difficult as deer season approaches."

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DALLAS -- Fishermen might wonder as they cast a line over an artificial fish reef just how effective the structure is.

During a recent survey at Possum Kingdom Lake in North Texas, biologist John Moczygamba of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department decided to get a first-hand look at some reefs installed in late 1978.

Using scuba gear, Moczygamba dove in the areas and identified several species of fish before they darted from view.

"I was surprised to see so many small bass ranging up to two pounds," he said. "There were lots of sunfish, along with a three-pound flathead catfish and a two-pound channel catfish."

The department recently compiled two leaflets identifying the locations of fish reefs installed in the eastern half of the state. To obtain copies of either, write P&WD, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744 or call toll-free 1-800-252-9327.

TG 7/16/80

COMMENTS SOLICITED
ON WATERFOWL SEASONS

AUSTIN -- Hunting season framework dates for waterfowl in Texas are about the same for 1980-81 as they were in the previous year.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission will take final action on the proposed seasons in its August meeting, to be held during the last week of that month.

Hunters still have the opportunity to comment on the proposed seasons and bag limits during the remainder of July and August.

Written comments may be directed to Bill Brownlee, Migratory Game Program Director, Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744.

The seasons are set by the Parks and Wildlife Commission within frameworks established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The proposed split season for ducks and coots in 1980-81 for most of the state is Nov. 8 through Nov. 30, and Dec. 13, 1980 through Jan. 18, 1981, from one half hour before sunrise to sunset.

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WATERFOWL SEASONS, cont'd.

For the High Plains Mallard Management Unit in the Texas Panhandle area, the proposed season is Oct. 28, 1980, through Jan. 18, 1981, from one half hour before sunrise to sunset.

For goose hunting west of U.S. Highway 81, the proposed season is Oct. 28, 1980, through Jan. 18, 1981.

East of Highway 81 the proposed seasons are Nov. 1, 1980, through Jan. 18, 1981, for snow, blue and Ross geese; and Oct. 27 through Nov. 30, 1980, and Dec. 13, 1980, through Jan. 18, 1981, for Canada and white-fronted geese.

Sandhill crane hunting is limited to only two zones in West Texas. The Zone A season is proposed for Oct. 30, 1980, through Jan. 30, 1981. The proposed Zone B season is Dec. 4, 1980, through Jan. 30, 1981. Shooting hours are to be one half hour before sunrise to sunset in both zones.

As in the past, a free sandhill crane hunting permit obtainable from the department will be required of all crane hunters. Again, there will be no limitation on the number of permits issued, and the permits are valid only in the two zones where sandhill crane hunting is allowed.

Duck bag limits are proposed to remain the same as last year, at one to 10 ducks in the aggregate based on a 100-point system. Each duck species and sex is assigned a point value, and the hunter must stop hunting when the last bird taken added to the total point value of all other birds taken reaches or exceeds 100 points. The possession limit is the maximum number of birds of species and sex which could have been taken legally in two days. Proposed point values are the same as last year.

Brownlee also reminded hunters they still have time to comment on the proposed expansion of the nontoxic shot zones for the state in the 1980-81 and 1981-82 seasons.

The 1980-81 proposal calls for nontoxic (steel) shot to be used in all gauges of guns only on the J. D. Murphree Wildlife Management Areas, Sea Rim State Park and the Sea Rim and McFaddin Marsh National Wildlife Refuges, all in Jefferson County. Last year the requirement applied only to the Murphree area and Sea Rim State Park, and nontoxic shot was required only for 12-gauge guns.

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WATERFOWL SEASONS, cont'd.

The recommendation for the 1981-82 seasons would expand the zone to include all the area south and east of Interstate Highway 10 from the Louisiana state line to Houston, thence south on Interstate Highway 45 to its junction with State Highway 35, thence south on State Highway 35 to its junction with the Brazos River, thence east along the east shore of the Brazos River to the shoreline of the Gulf of Mexico, thence southeast to the three marine league limit.

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TELEPHONE SURVEY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION IN TEXAS

AUSTIN -- The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department will conduct a telephone survey of Texas citizens during July and August.

The survey will randomly question some 12,000 Texans about their participation in a variety of outdoor recreational activities. Information from the survey will be used in developing the 1985 Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan (TORP). The TORP is used to plan future parks and recreation facilities for Texans. The survey information will also be used to determine the number of people using the state park system.

For further information on the survey call toll-free 1-800-252-9327.

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HEARING SET TO CONSIDER CALAVERAS BASS LIMIT CHANGE

AUSTIN -- A public hearing will be held July 21 in San Antonio to consider a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department proposal for a special "slot limit" for largemouth, spotted and smallmouth bass in Lake Calaveras.

The hearing will be held at 7 p.m. in the U.S. Naval Reserve Training Center, 311 E. Arsenal St.

The proposed limit would make it unlawful to retain bass between 14 and 18 inches in length. However, anglers would be allowed to keep any bass not in that category, including fish under 10 inches long, which are protected in all other lakes in the state.

Daily bag and possession limits would remain at 10 and 20 respectively.

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Biologists recommended the change after investigations showed an overharvest of bass in the 14- to 18-inch size range in the power plant lake near San Antonio.

Inland Fisheries Management Coordinator Bob Bounds said recent catches of trophy-sized largemouth bass have caused a dramatic increase in fishing pressure at Calaveras. "There has been considerable speculation that a new state record largemouth would be caught there, especially since an 11 1/2-pounder was caught in 1978 and a 13-pounder was taken six months ago."

The current state record fish which broke a 40-year drouth is a 14-pound, 1 1/2-ounce fish caught at Lake Monticello on Feb. 2. The previous state record, set in 1943, weighed 13 1/2 pounds and came from Medina Lake near San Antonio.

Bounds said largemouths in the 14- to 18-inch class are the primary predators in Lake Calaveras, and adequate numbers of these fish are required to control populations of rough and forage fish.

If adopted, Calaveras will be the first Texas reservoir with a slot limit on largemouths. However, Bounds noted that intensive fishing activity on such small reservoirs may necessitate more such regulations in the future to protect certain segments of the bass populations.

Persons unable to attend the hearing may address written comments on the proposal to Phil Evans, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744.

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CONTACT: Lee M. Green
(512)729-2328

BLACK DRUM
WELL-TRAVELED

AUSTIN -- Of all the popular marine fish species found on the Texas Gulf Coast, the black drum has the most relatives in foreign waters.

The range of black drum exceeds that of red drum (redfish), spotted seatrout (speckled trout), sheepshead and southern flounder. Black drum are found from Argentina to Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologist Lee M. Green of Rockport said redfish range from Tuxpan, Mexico, to New York. Sheepshead range from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to Cape Cod. Southern flounder are found from northern Mexico to North Carolina.

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"About 70 percent of the known shore fishes of Texas and the northern Gulf of Mexico also are found on the Atlantic Coast from Florida to North Carolina," Green said.

Green pointed out that marine life in the waters from Cape Rojo, Mexico, to Cape Romano, Florida in the Gulf of Mexico and from Cape Kennedy, Florida to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina on the Atlantic Coast is very similar. This region is referred to as the Carolina Province, and its waters are classified as warm-temperate.

Waters around the southern tip of Florida are part of the Caribbean Province, and they are classified as tropical, Green said.

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CONTACT: Joe Kraai
(806)655-4341

WHITE RIVER LAKE:
A WEST TEXAS OASIS

AUSTIN -- Motorists traveling east from Lubbock on U.S. Highway 82 notice a radical change in the terrain as they leave the flat tablelands of the South Plains and enter the rocky canyons of Crosby County.

Few of them may realize that as they pass Crosbyton a sparkling reservoir is shimmering in the West Texas sun just a few miles to the south.

Anglers in the Panhandle-South Plains area have become familiar with White River Lake during the past decade, since it is a productive fishing lake in an area not overly blessed with reservoirs.

Largemouth bass and catfish have been the dominant species for sport fishing at White River, but recent stockings of walleyes and smallmouth bass by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department may make the clear, rocky reservoir even more attractive.

Walleyes already have a firm foothold in the lake, having been stocked four times since 1975. The later stockings, however, involved much higher numbers of fry per acre. Almost eight million walleye were stocked in 1979 and 1980.

Smallmouth bass are newcomers to White River Lake, with initial stockings in 1979. Like walleyes, the smallmouths are expected to reproduce in the lake's ample rocky habitat.

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Fortunately, White River offers a combination of habitat types for a well-rounded fishery. In addition to the deep, rocky areas, the lake also has many acres of shallow shorelines dotted with flooded mesquite, cottonwood and brush species. Aquatic vegetation has spread in several sections of the lake to provide feeding and hiding areas for largemouth bass, crappie and catfish.

Biologist Joe Kraai of Canyon said largemouth bass fishing is best from May through August, with the prime spots being coves, creek channels, brushy areas and along the margins of weed beds. Many largemouths are taken on topwater lures early and late around weed beds, and crankbaits and plastic worms are effective in the deeper areas.

White crappie also are important sport fish, and they are found in many of the shallow areas at the mouths of tributaries and wherever there is submerged brush. They are caught still-fishing with minnows, and on small jigs and spinners.

Spring usually is the best time to fish for crappie, Kraai said.

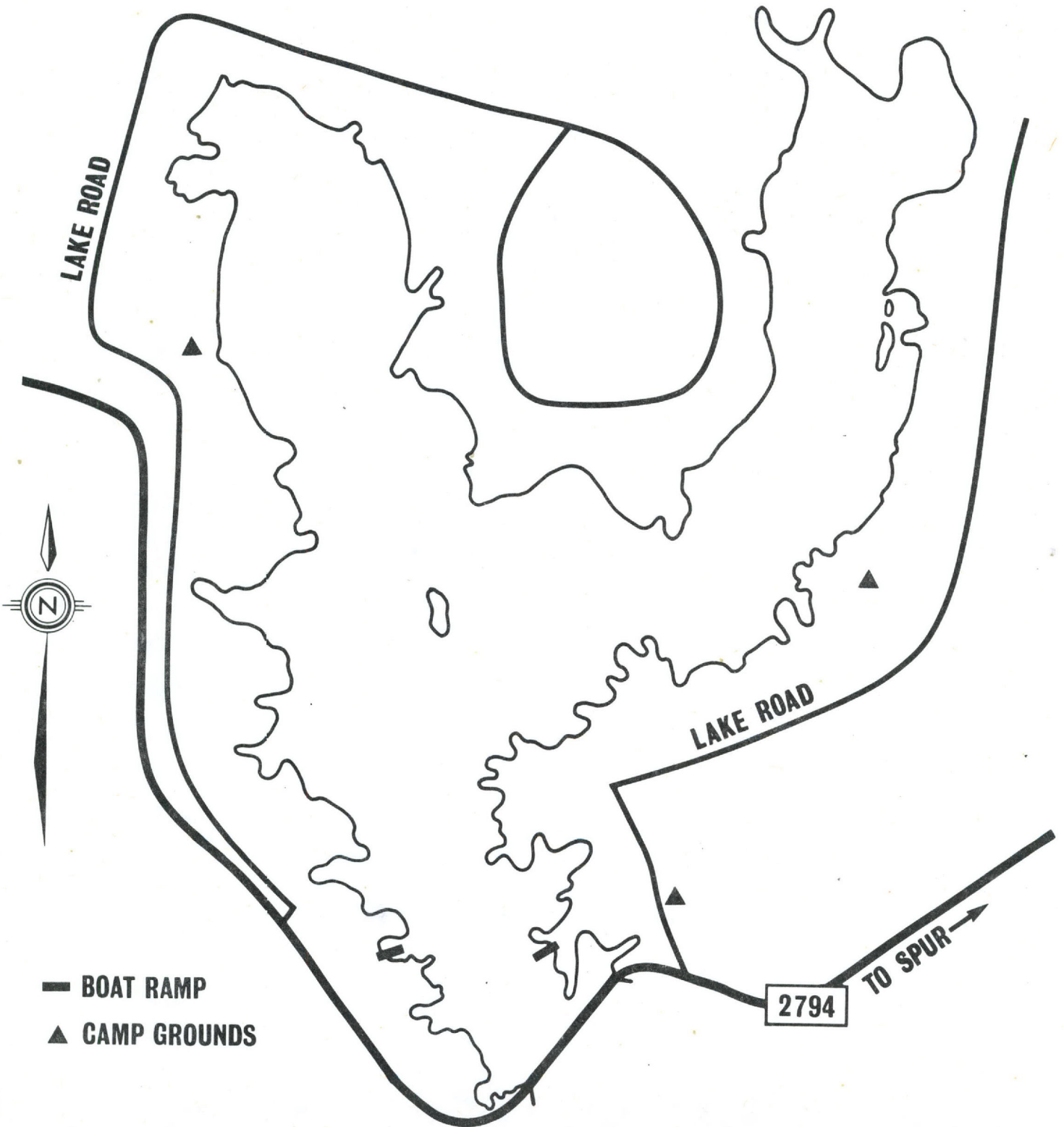
Channel catfish are caught in virtually all parts of the lake on a wide variety of baits. Warmer months are best for catfish, Kraai believes.

Walleyes are caught most easily in the spring when they are in shallower waters, Kraai said, but they can be caught year-round in fairly deep water. Live minnows fished close to the bottom, and small jigs and spinners fished deep and slowly are effective when the fish are located.

The lake is controlled by the White River Municipal Water District, and access fees are charged. The lake serves as water supply for Crosbyton and several other area cities.

To reach the lake, drive south of Crosbyton on Ranch Road 651 and turn east. On Ranch Road 2794, or drive west from Spur on 2794.

LAKE WHITE RIVER



- BOAT RAMP
- ▲ CAMP GROUNDS