

INSIDER REPORT: Shallow Water Shootout Predicted for Toledo Bend



Toledo Bend is setting up for exceptional fishing, with some locals predicting record-breaking weights

Diverse Options Await TXTT Anglers by Brett Carlson Many, LA. --

With major momentum after paying out a 300-boat field at the 2015 season opener, the Cabela's Texas Team Trail sets its sights on Toledo Bend for the second of four qualifiers. The tournament, slated for Feb. 21, features the biggest team payouts in the state of Texas and a slew of impressive sponsor bonuses. Like Sam Rayburn, Toledo Bend is a massive Sabine River reservoir that is expected to produce some huge stringers. In fact, the fishing could be even better as the field spreads out more and the bass continue their shallow-water migration.

"If everything sets up like it's supposed to, it's going to be scary good," said Lucas Oil pro Stephen Johnston, who has guided on Toledo Bend for over 20 years. "In fact, it could break some Texas Team Trail records."

Johnston's partner, Dicky Newberry, echoed his teammate's sentiments. "I love fishing Toledo Bend this time of year because it can hold so many different patterns," said Newberry, the accomplished Ranger-Mercury pro. "It also has a ton of fish in it. I think it has more fish per acre than any place we go to. And it's so huge you can have 300 boats and not be crowded whatsoever. It's a phenomenal lake."

Johnston said at 185,000 acres, Toledo Bend really breaks up into three distinct sections that act almost as separate lakes. While he believes all the bass are likely to stay in prespawn mode, that could differ depending on the section.

"On the north end, the water is shallow and it generally warms up the fastest. Mid-lake is kind of the same with a bit better clarity. On the south end, there are no flats so that water stays a lot cooler; there is usually about a 5- to 6-degree difference. That means there will still be some fish out deeper in that 15- to 25-foot staging range. In the other areas of the lake, the fish will be fat and juicy, just waiting for the right time to go up to the bank."

Johnston explained that two factors are holding the bass back from completing their annual spawning ritual - water temperature and moon cycle.

"The water is just still too cool. It's been colder here lately and we've had a lot of rain. I think the first real wave of spawners will come on the full moon in March."

In terms of prespawn patterns, Johnston thinks teams will use ChatterBaits, lipless crankbaits and shallow-water jigs on the north end. In the mid-lake region, Strike King 5XD's and 6XD's will be fished over the top of the grass, along with Carolina rigs. Beefier jigs, deeper-diving crankbaits and Carolina rigs will be employed on the south end. The lake's primary cover is hydrilla, but hay grass will likely also play a role.

Johnston and Newberry both cautioned that the lake is still down 3 or 3 1/2 feet (from full pool) despite the recent rains. As a stump-filled lake, anglers will need to exercise caution.

"They've been pulling water with both generators running 24 hours a day," added Johnston. "They've ran about 2 feet out of it and it's been real muddy. By tournament time the clarity should be back to almost normal. But guys are going to have to be careful; you can't run around on Toledo like you can on Rayburn."

Johnston said several 10-pound bass were caught before the rain arrived and the water got dirty. If the clarity improves, as it should, Johnston is convinced it will take over 30 pounds to win the tournament.

"It would not surprise me at all to see five to seven sacks over 30 pounds," he said. "I think it will take 20 pounds just to get a check. These lakes are cyclical, but right now Toledo Bend is definitely fishing better than Rayburn. And unlike in years past, there are big ones in Toledo Bend now too."



Veteran TXTT anglers Stephen Johnston and Dicky Newberry expect a variety of techniques to play at Toledo Bend, with 30 pound sacks a definite possibility