

Contributed by: Captain Tom Blackburn

Thank You Tom!!!!!!!

Targeting Big Fish

The first rule in targeting big Stripers is you must have a significant amount of patience. Some of you will be forced to change your thinking and strategy when pursuing a trophy. Your success rate - especially in the beginning, will probably be very low. Can you live with the possibility that you might fish for seven days without catching a fish?

Now that you have agreed to change your thinking, strategy, and fishing plans in order to hook-up with a thirty-plus pound fish, let's get down to some basics. Let's first address tackle. Will your rods and reels live up to your expectations? Probably so. What about terminal tackle and your base line? Remove the 20lb line from the reels and replace it with at least 30lb line; the color will not be a major issue. Tie on a six to nine foot fluorocarbon leader with a minimum strength of 25 lbs.

If you remember a previous chapter, it is imperative that the hook match the bait. Yes, to catch a trophy we are going to use a live bait. Targeting a big fish will require a big bait. Remember this rule: a fifteen pound striper can and will eat a live bait fish weighing two to three pounds; so, be sure to use some of the biggest live baits available. Match your hook to the big baits; we recommend using a number eight or nine octopus hook. Use the biggest Trout and Gizzard Shad available.

Your best chance to hook a trophy is between December and early May. The water temperature should be 50F. to 60F. and the quality of the water can range from stained to clear. Some of the most popular places to catch a trophy include the following creeks: Wahoo, Ada,

Sardis, Johnson, Latham, and Gainesville. Of course, one of the highest ranking places is the River channel above Clarks Bridge.

The preferred techniques include flat lines and planer boards. Now here is where it gets good. Pull your boards as close to the bank as possible. The big fish will be in one to five feet of water. He or she is for the most part a lazy fish; otherwise, it would be out in the middle of the creek chasing Threadfins in 40 to 60 feet. Once a big fish decides to pursue a bait fish in shallow water, the probability of it catching the bait is good. After all, the chase is occurring in five feet of water depth versus 50 feet. One more time - make sure your board is "on the bank". Also, consider running a total of three boards on the side of the boat facing the bank. Remember that the trophies are in shallow water close to land looking for an easy meal. With your boards on the bank, try to keep your boat as far from shore as possible and keep the boat and human noise to a minimum. Alternate trolling speeds - big live baits can be trolled up to three miles per hour.

As with every fishing method, depth control and water temperature play important roles. Shallow water trolling in 55 degree water with a large and lively bait presented by a crew of patient folks will result in catching trophies!

Tom Blackburn