

## Old Lakes Like New Again

By: Ron Henry Strait – Express News Columnist

DEL RIO — There are two new lakes on the U.S.-Mexico border, both of which have familiar names and have been around for decades.

What has created new lakes from familiar old trophy-bass haunts on the Rio Grande is water, lots of water.

Amistad Reservoir is resting deep and blue in the desert this morning at 101 percent of its conservation capacity. As recently as mid-September, the lake was more than 15 feet lower and at 75 percent capacity.

Falcon Reservoir, down the Rio Grande at Zapata, is resting at 100 percent conservation capacity. On Sept. 1, it was at 47 percent capacity.

The sudden surge of water that filled the giant lakes originated with Pacific storms that carried into Northern Mexico's Concho River drainage in August and September. As the Mexican reservoirs west of Big Bend spilled with over-capacity, the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission began flood operations on Sept. 5 as water was released into the Rio Grande.

On Sept. 16, the flow reached 53,000 cubic feet of water per second. To get a feel for the volume, that is the equivalent flow of about 40 semi trailers of water per second.

The water filled the two lakes to their current combined 162,600 surface acres and flooded miles of shoreline that had become overgrown in drier times with brush and weeds.

In turn, that flooding has created miles of new fish habitat and fishing opportunities.

Randy Meyers, TPW district biologist who oversees both fisheries, said the changes are positive, with the only downside being the decomposition of flooded vegetation that will sour water near the shoreline. That will put spawning bass in deeper water come late winter.

"The sour water should be finished before April," Meyers said. "The fisheries were excellent going into the flood, and that won't change."

The two bass fisheries are incredible and have been for years, but they have different personalities.

Amistad is usually clear and deep; Falcon, in the South Texas flatlands, is shallow, with warmer water that is slightly off-color.

Trophy bass anglers who have known the lakes in their normally lower stages will need to get reacquainted if they visit this fall.

Ray Hansleman Jr. has guided on Amistad and Falcon for more than a decade and has fished both lakes since the water made its rapid rise in September.



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A properly rigged worm will be nearly snag-proof in heavy cover, and the wide-gap hook will turn and penetrate the side of the mouth.

He fished Falcon for three days this week and said the fish are “acting strange. Things are different.”

Hansleman said sour water up shallow already is a problem, and that the bass were not where he expected them to be.

“The fish have to learn a new lake just like a fisherman does,” Hansleman said. “They are scattered. There's not much of a pattern. I don't know why. If you find 10 places that hold fish, only two (places) will have fish that bite.”

On Amistad, he said submerged hydrilla that had been up to the shoreline in August is now in 16 feet of water. He is fishing the old shoreline like it is the inside edge of a new weed line.

“There is submerged grass out to 43 feet of water, but I'm not sure how long that will survive with cooler temperatures and less sunlight penetration,” Hansleman said.

He uses Power Tackle, which is made in Del Rio, and fishes with 7-inch Texas-rigged Sinko worms and flips 1 1/2-ounce dark jigs over grass beds and along the edges of the grass lines.

“Most of the (Amistad) water is tea color with a little more color in the Rio Grande arm because that's where the water came in,” he said. “That will all settle out by spring.”

On Falcon, professional bass angler Debra Hengst said the sour water would be more of a problem for anglers than for the fish.

“The bass ... will relate more to the old shoreline than the new shoreline,” Hengst said. “The flooded mesquites and prickly pear means the anglers will have to adjust their thinking. They'll want to go to the bank and fish all that flooded stuff, but the fish won't be there when the water is sour.”

Water in the upper lake is stained, but not muddy, and the lower lake is clear.

Hengst will be fishing Falcon in the mild weather with plastic worms, blue-black jigs and spinnerbaits.

Try plum-colored and redbug 6-inch worms with 1/4-ounce weights. She will also be throwing a 10-inch Rage Anaconda worm rigged to sink very slowly.

The Strike King Raz-R-Blade spinnerbait in all white or chartreuse and white is her other go-to bait.

“The bass will be out from the shore in the trees, and I'll keep the pace very slow,” she said.