

Time to put a spin on winter bass fishing

By: Ron Henry Strait – Express News Sports Writer

January and February are wind-down months for hunters, but they are warm up time for anglers. On South Texas lakes, the bass fishing warms up quickly in January, even though the air retains its chill.

The first pond to light up in January is Falcon Lake, a monster impoundment on the lower Rio Grande. Falcon stretches to more than 87,000 acres at conservation pool level.

Debra Hengst, a professional bass angler who fishes Falcon regularly, returned from a holiday trip with encouraging news: The bite is on and the big fish are about to move.

“The bass are not spawning but all they need is a little time,” Hengst said, “maybe just a few days.”

Looking at the calendar, the next full moon is Jan. 22, and if the weather conditions don't turn extreme, the big bass could come up shallow during the last week of the first month. The February full moon rises on the 21st and anglers should circle that week on the calendar as well, Hengst said.

Things to watch for:

- “A strong cold front could change the timing on either (spawning) period, but that's just part of the game.”
- “Water from Falcon is used for irrigation so, if the lake is drawn down, that can have an impact on fish activity. The lake is 12 feet low right now, but there is plenty of flooded cover.”

Things to know:

- “Falcon is not a deep lake, and it has very little grass (aquatic vegetation). You'll be fishing in timber — brush, hardwoods, huisache and mesquite.”
- “Because it is shallow, the water warms up quickly. It's 65 degrees this week, and that's pretty good.”

Lure recommendations:

- “Spinnerbaits, half ounce or three-quarter ounce, with solid white or chartreuse and white skirts and gold double willow leaf blades.” Hengst uses the Strike King Premiere model.
- “In soft plastics last weekend, I used the Rage Craw in watermelon red. In the trees, I Texas-rigged it with a half-ounce weight. On the open flats, I rigged it Carolina-style with a half-ounce or a three-quarter-ounce weight. When the fish move up real shallow, I'll leave the weight off and let it sink slowly.”
- Texas-rigging the Rage Craw in the Falcon timber over the holidays netted Hengst bass that weighed 10, 8 and 7 pounds with multiple 4s and 5s thrown in.

Best spots in winter:

Hengst recommends the Valeño and Rio Salado areas, which are large venues that can accommodate lots of boats and lots of fish. “Valeño is on the U.S. side near the county ramp. It has several creeks running into the (canyon). Salado is directly across from Valeño on the Mexican side of the lake. The timber over there can be very productive.”

To fish the Mexican side, anglers will need a Mexican fishing license.

Note: The BASS Elite Series comes to Falcon in early April, and the results may outshine the outstanding record the Elite has established at Lake Amistad, Falcon's border neighbor.