

Printed From North Texas e-News == ntxe-news.com

**SPORTS**

**White bass chase away winter blues**

By Luke Clayton

Jan 18, 2016

Within a few weeks of right now for the past several years, I've joined guide Seth Vanover on the Sabine River below Longview for some of the best spawning white bass action that I've encountered, anywhere. Fishing for spawning white bass in moving water is one of my passions and through the years, I've had the opportunity to fish some of the best white bass steams in the state.

But this year, Vanover says the influx of water the past few months has turned his normally gently flowing river into a torrent, rendering it all but unfishable for spawning "whites" this spawning season. But Seth has many clients that want to enjoy some fast paced white bass action and a big fish fry during the late winter months. A fishing trip with he and his son Evan last week proved the popular guide has developed his Plan B!



Guide Seth Vanover and son Evan with a couple of candidates for a big winter fish fry landed last week at Lake Fork. *photo by Luke Clayton*

Winter fishing is extremely “weather dependant” and we watched the weather reports closely last week. Our window of opportunity for near perfect fishing conditions was Wednesday and Thursday, before the most recent cold front pushed through. Rather than hit the water at first light, many winter fishing trips begin around mid morning. So it was last week, Seth was taking a “guides holiday” with his son Evan and myself.

Our goal was to collect some fresh white bass fillets from Fork’s cold waters and, expose my friend to the great tasting yellow bass. Seth has caught many of these scrappy little fighters while fishing for white bass or crappie. He was just not sure of their flavor when

exposed to corn meal and hot cooking oil! Yellow bass are one of my favorite freshwater fish to eat and I'd been bragging about catching and eating them. Seth had heard enough, we rigged some light spinning rigs and tipped our hooks with pieces of cut minnow, my favorite bait when specifically targeting yellow bass. We also used medium size live minnows for the whites, our primary target.

"Luke," says Vanover as we motored up to his first 'spot' to fish, "I'm changing my tactics for catching white bass this year. The 'run' will be next to impossible to fish on the Sabine River but I have a lot of clients looking to me to put them on the white bass. There is something very special about a late winter fishing trip for whites; it's a trip that many of us eagerly await each year. Take a look at that graph...that solid irregular line marking between thirty and thirty-five feet is white bass. They have been holding near this drop into deeper water for a couple weeks. Those big 'clouds' above them are huge schools of shad. We should be able to trigger some action with these live minnows. They should be fat, almost ready to spawn."

At times, baits such as slabs and spoons are unbeatable for catching white bass and I began "bumping" the bottom with a spoon and a crappie jig tied about 18 inches above. During the first few minutes of fishing, I watched Seth land a couple of chunky white bass on the live minnows he was baiting with. Nary a nibble on my baits. Enough of this! I know a pattern when I see one!

After switching to the live bait offerings, I too was soon hooked fast to a chunky white bass. I've always been amazed at how one single live bait on the end of a fisherman's line, swimming in the midst of thousands of baitfish, triggers a fish to bite but bite they did. We soon had a nice mess of white bass in the box and I prompted my buddy about the yellow bass. It's a fact that the two species usually do not school together.

"I've got a submerged brush pile that is a crappie catching hot spot. We very often catch yellow bass on the same live minnows that trigger crappie strikes. We can try your system of using cut pieces of minnow on the smaller hooks there." said Seth as he fired up the big engine and began following his GPS to the spot.

I first learned about using bits of minnow for yellow bass from my friend Billy Carter at Caddo Lake where yellow bass action is often red hot in the Cypress River Channel during the winter months. We switched to small #4 case hardened bait holder hooks and soon had our baits close to bottom on the fringe of the crappie "hole". Seth had read the water correctly. The yellow bass were there in numbers and we proceeded to put a few in the box with the white bass. About this time, a chill wind began to pick up out of the north, the front was arriving and we headed to the ramp.

During the fish cleaning process, I pointed out the almost non existent bloodline along the sides of the yellow bass. I believe lack of this "red meat" is the primary reason that yellow bass fillets are so mild tasting. This red strip is relatively easy to remove from white bass, using a sharp thin blade fillet knife. During the filleting process, it's a good idea not to bear down too hard with the knife when removing the skin; this leaves the majority of the red strip attached to the skin.

If you have that favorite stream or river that you keep a close eye on this time of year, waiting for the eagerly awaited white bass run, you might have to think about doing some main lake fishing this spring. It's a proven fact that white bass spawn around points with current on reservoirs. I've enjoyed some great fishing for spawning whites in reservoirs through the years but that was usually because of lack of run off in the stream or river below

the dam. This year, it's not a lack of water but an overabundance of it that might create tough river fishing. If you are in the mood for a big winter fish fry of crispy white bass fillets, give Vanover a call and plan a trip to Fork. I can attest to the fact that he knows where the whites are staged in huge numbers right now. If the current pattern holds you might have to leave those slabs and spoons in the tackle box and resort to live minnows. When it comes to catching dinner, I am game for whatever is working at the moment! Right now, at Fork at least, frisky live minnows will definitely get your line stretched and your livewell filled!

Contact guide Seth Vanover online at [www.lakeforkcatandcrappie.com](http://www.lakeforkcatandcrappie.com) or call 903-736-4557.

Join Luke this Saturday, Jan. 23 at Hootens Hardware in Emory, Texas to celebrate the publishing of his new book, *Kill to Grill, the Ultimate Guide to Hunting and Cooking Wild Hogs*. Luke will be present from 10 until 2. Stop by and visit!

Listen to *Outdoors with Luke Clayton and Friends* on weekends on radio stations from Nebraska to Texas or anytime online at [www.catfishradio.com](http://www.catfishradio.com)

Copyright © 2016 - North Texas e-News, LLC