



Kendra Maness compares a bass she caught to a flounder caught by Jeff Bruhl while fishing in a delta marsh.

Photo by John N. Felsher

TIDAL DELTAS: At high tide, seek bass far upstream in creeks, backwaters

FROM PAGE 13

downed tree in the morning and move to the other side in the afternoon when the tide changes.

"Since the tide might run one way in the morning and in another direction a few hours later, fish change positions throughout the day," explained Denny Brauer, a former Bassmaster Classic champion. "Once someone learns how to do it, fishing in current is the easiest fishing around. It's very visual and obvious where fish should be."

Salinity levels also affect coastal bass. Largemouths can handle some salt, but during an incoming tide, they may head for sweeter water. At high tide, look for bass far upstream in major creeks and backwaters. Bass may also go shallow or stay near the top. Heavier, denser salt water sinks while a fresher layer may "float" above it. During an incoming tide, throw topwaters, buzzbaits or spinnerbaits high in the water column.

"Throughout most of the year, water in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta has less than one part per thousand

to about five parts per thousand of salinity," clarified Dave Armstrong, a state biologist in Spanish Fort. "Bass can tolerate fairly high salinities for short periods, but when salinity levels reach about eight parts per thousand for a long time, that can be lethal to largemouth bass."

Many delta bass anglers prefer to fish a falling tide, which drags saltier water toward the bay. In addition, a falling tide drains many backwaters and shallows, forcing fish to congregate in deeper channels. When the water falls, it also pulls small fish, shrimp and other prey species from cover. Where a small tributary flows into a main channel, bass habitually congregate.

At the mouth of a tributary, toss a soft plastic shrimp imitation as far upstream as possible. Many people fish it weightless, but add a small split-shot or jighead to help with casting if necessary. Simply insert the hook into the plastic to make it weedless and let the flow carry it downstream naturally like a shrimp washing out of a lagoon. Use the reel only to take up slack. Occasionally,

pop the shrimp back to the surface so it will keep flowing downstream. Anglers can also fish plastic shrimp with a small weight or jighead to help with casting.

Many anglers also fish these drains with popping cork rigs, sweetened with either a plastic or a live shrimp. Suspend a temptation about 18 inches below a cork and cast it upstream. As the rig floats with the tide, occasionally pop the cork vigor-

ously. The shrimp flies up near the surface and then sinks again. Predatory fish hear the commotion and see the fluttering morsel.

Bass that live in tidal wetlands seldom reach giant proportions, but they make up for it with their aggressive nature. Tidal bass live in a tough environment that requires them to turn mean in order to survive. They can provide incredible action on light tackle.



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