

Anglers might catch anything on a fall day in the Delta

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

When September comes to south Alabama, many sportsmen begin hunting, but people who drop their fishing rods too soon might miss some of the best angling action all year.

In the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, fresh river water mixes with briny water coming up from the Gulf of Mexico through Mobile Bay. Where the two environments collide, the ranges of many species overlap. Bass and other aquatic species can tolerate some salt. Speckled trout can tolerate reduced salinities. Redfish, flounder and striped bass can live in pure fresh water.

The incredibly blurred demarcation between the two worlds moves constantly and can change quickly. Rivers usually flow at their lowest in the fall, so salty water pushes farther north. As river levels drop, anglers might spot some very large saltwater fish in the main channels and passes.

“The diversity of the delta is one of the phenomenal things about this fishery,” explained Wayne Miller, a fisherman from Satsuma. “I mostly fish for bass, but if the tide changes, I might start catching redfish or trout. One time, I was bass fishing around Gravine Island with my son. Suddenly, some tarpon showed up and they were feeding upon the bass. We hooked quite a few, but couldn’t land any.”

What one catches at any given moment depends upon the salinity levels at that spot, which can fluctuate hourly with tides and winds. Anglers might catch bass in one spot early in the morning and redfish or speckled trout by noon as the tide changes.

As cooler weather arrives, predators fatten up on whatever they can catch before winter comes. Fish from both the marine and aquatic environments gorge themselves on a diverse buffet that might include such aquatic species as shad, crawfish, minnows or sunfish and marine creatures like crabs, menhaden, bull minnows, mullets, pinfish, croakers or a thousand other morsels. Frequently, bass and redfish attack the same prey at the same time and hit the same baits.

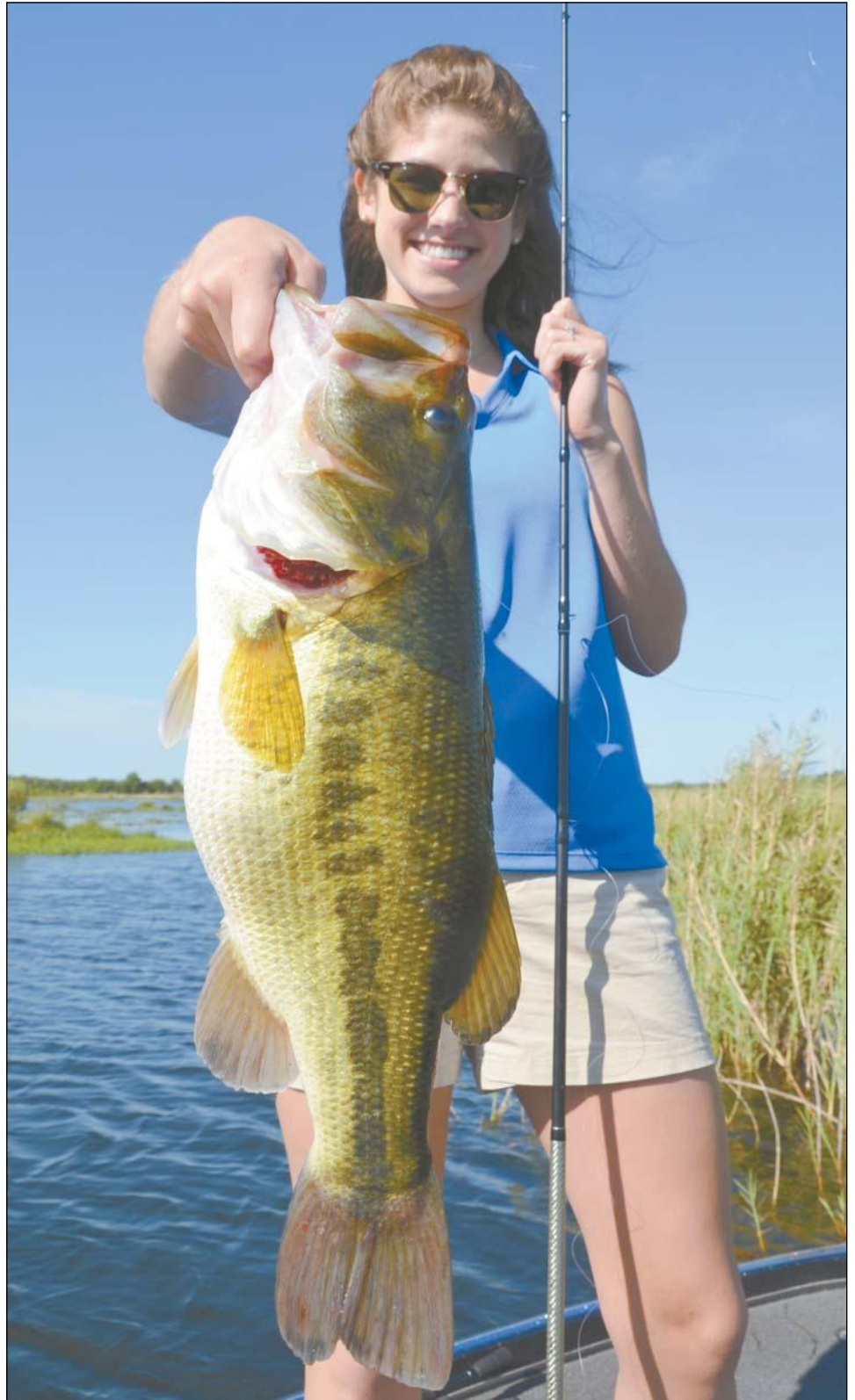


Photo by John N. Felsher

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Kelli Fontenot shows off a largemouth bass she caught in a marsh.