

# Florida

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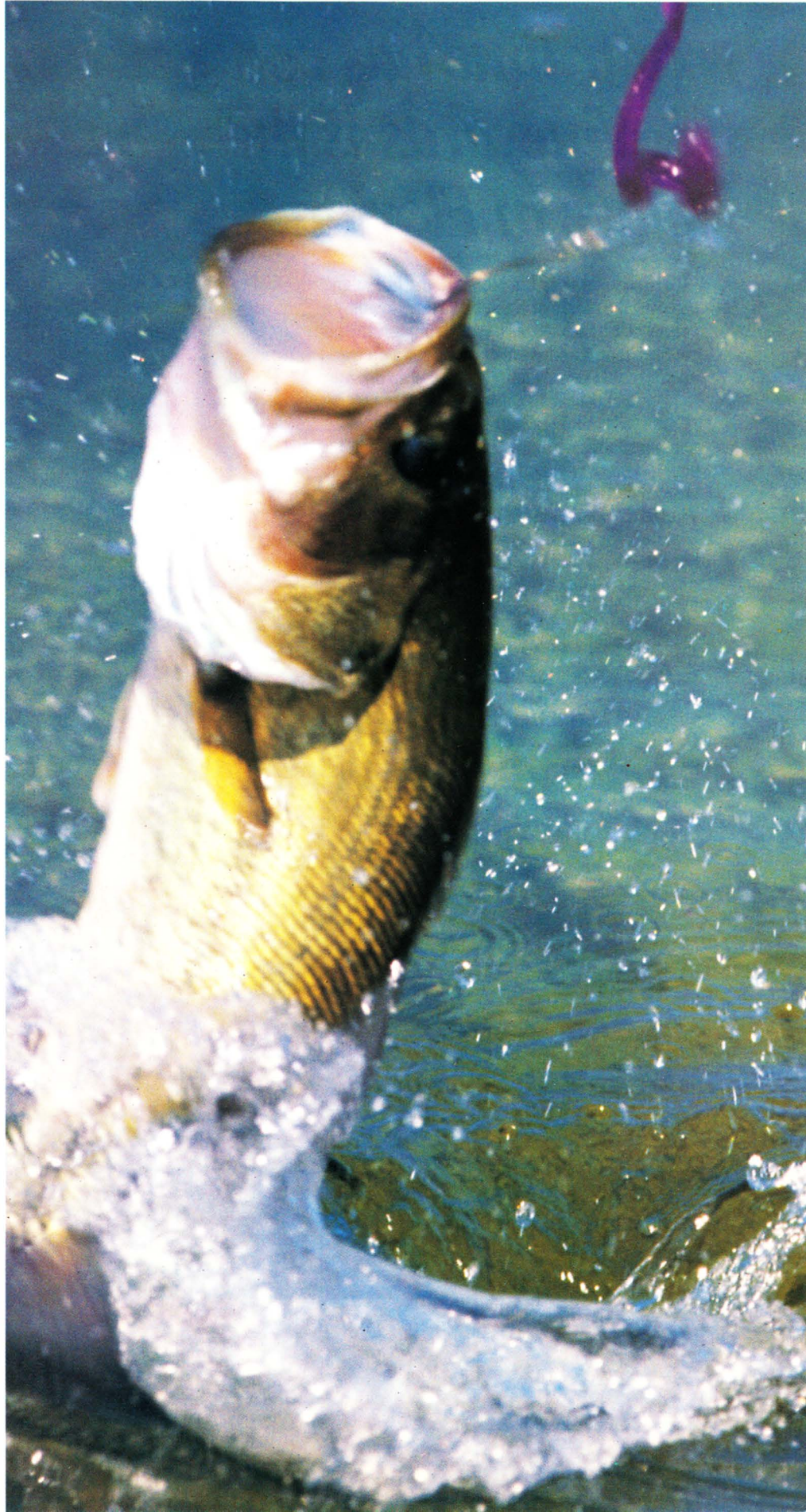
*Go south,  
young man,  
for eye-popping  
largemouth.*

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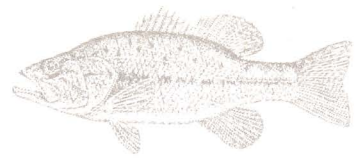
## Florida's **BOSS HAWGS**

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by John L. Field







## South Florida Bass

Lake Okeechobee's bass fishing is now at a peak. This lake is a 650 square mile bowl with a maximum depth of about 18 feet, its perimeter outlined by the Rim Canal system, which can be an excellent fishing spot in addition to the lake proper. Most of the time bass are in the weeds that line Okeechobee's shoreline. Look in the bulrushes and peppergrass and you'll find bass. Deep holes from blasting the canal are a good summer spot to fish. Spawning in the "Big O" takes place between November and March, which is about Florida's earliest. The known hot spots are South Bay and Pelican Bay in the south, in the west the "Monkey Box" and the "wall", and in the north the Okeechobee City area. The towns of Okeechobee City, Clewiston and Belle Glade offer a range of accommodations.



John L. Field

A Florida bassing trip is like a semi-tropical safari, with a fishing bonus just for coming. You'll see wading birds, ospreys, alligators and lush vegetation, plus some of the biggest bass anywhere. In fact, Florida bass are the biggest in the world. The genetic strain producing today's Texas and California monster bass originally came from Florida.

## Finding Florida Largemouth

Sharing these Florida waters with the bass are a few rough fellows, including massive gar and bowfin. Panfish thrive here too — to the point some locals subsist by eating black crappie almost exclusively. You'll also find redear sunfish (also called shellcrackers) and huge bluegill.

Big bass eat the sunfish like popcorn, in addition to killifish, both threadfin and gizzard shad, and golden shiners. Find these small fish and you automatically find bass. Check out weeds, trees, or around submerged docks and river channels. The predominant weed species in Florida are hydrilla, eelgrass and pond weed (commonly called peppergrass), plus maidencane, knotgrass, bulrush, water lilies and coontail.

The bass season in most of Florida runs year-round, with spawning occurring from November to May. However, it's not a good idea to take female fish off redds, or to give them a tour in your live well. Doing so exposes their nest or fry to predators, with obvious consequences.



## Destination Florida

Singling out good Florida bass lakes is a bit like singling out parts of Canada that get cold in January. In the south, try Lake Okeechobee, at the head of the Florida Everglades. The Kissimmee River system, along with the fabled Stick Marsh get the top nod in central Florida, while the St. Johns River holds many northern Florida trophies. Along the panhandle, Lake Talquin, near Tallahassee, is tough to beat.

Some of the best Florida bassing comes when giant females move into the shallows to spawn. Tempting as it may be, it's a bad idea to keep these fish, since doing so leaves their nest and fry wide open to predators.