



# THE SMALLMOUTH HORIZON

*Helping to Protect and Preserve Quality Smallmouth Bass Fishing*

October 2014

## How to hold bass right!

by Ralph Manns

**D**avid Campbell, of TP&WD's Tyler Hatchery, announced that anglers were breaking the jaws of lunker bass brought to him under the Lone Star Lunker Program. Since then, Honey Hole, In-Fisherman, and many other fishing magazines have reported his comments. By now, most bassers who occasionally read fishing magazines have heard about jaw damage. But this doesn't mean they understand it.

We, and I mean just about everybody who ever unhooked a bass or held one in one hand for a photograph, have been torquing the jaws of bass. A jaw, whether human or fish, is only meant to open so wide and no more. Forcing it wider does damage.

A few weeks ago I watched a popular television fisherman mention this jaw damage and claim it only applies to lunkers. He said lip-landing was the best way to land and handle bass up to six pounds. If this expert thinks carelessly lip-holding small bass is harmless, it's likely many other bassers think so too.

The TV angler was partially right. Lip-landing does the least damage to small bass, and is often harmless IF their jaws aren't distorted. Only the jaws of mishandled super-lunkers are likely to actually break and cause a bass to starve. But he was wrong

if he thinks anglers should continue to hold smaller bass as we have in the past.

By using jaws as levers to rotate hanging bass away from vertical to a "more natural" horizontal position with one hand; TV anglers, outdoor writers, and average fishermen have unnecessarily strained jaw tissues.

Tissue damage occurs long before bones break. It may take 13 or more pounds to break a bass jaw completely, but strain occurs anytime the jaw is distorted beyond the full-open position naturally used by bass. We don't need to carelessly give every released bass a "jaw ache."

My files and likely those of most TV fishermen, advertisers, and other outdoor writers contain many pictures that show improper handling techniques. As we all have a moral responsibility to display good handling, these old videos, slides, and prints are obsolete and should not be used, except to illustrate bad procedure. Anglers should no longer see distorted jaws and other bad examples.

We can do better. From now on, all published bass videos and photographs should show lip landings in which bass stay vertical, hanging from jaws that aren't forced wide open. If a bass is rotated any amount toward the horizontal, the lucky angler's other hand must support the weight of the body, not the bass' jaw.



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Photo by Dan Johnson

# Places

*Clockwise from right:*

*Exceptional fall colors peaked in Vilas County during the fourth week of September.*

*Rick Reese was rewarded with this big fish on a cold, gray, windy October day up north.*

*Richard Connor with a Wisconsin River bass during an August trip guided by Black Earth Angling*



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It will take time and effort to learn better lipping and holding procedures. Anglers need to experiment with alternate grips. One technique that seems to help is to keep fingers straight while lip-landing and lip-holding bass. This grip doesn't feel as firm and secure as the old method and is awkward at first. But straight fingers don't push in under the jaw and force it open as much as the harmful grip with fingers rolled in toward the thumb.

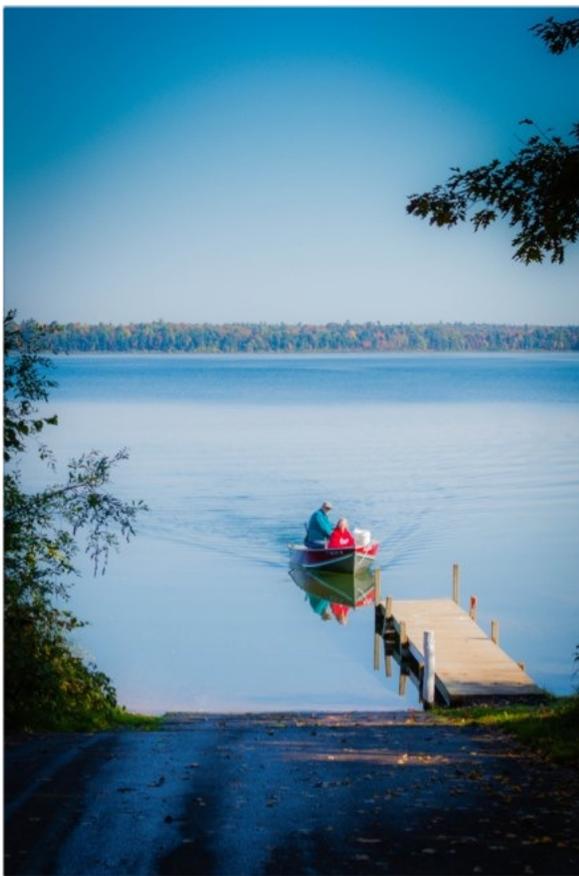
Another option is to grip the bass' jaw from the side without a lure and hooks rather than from the front. This grip is also less apt to force a jaw too wide open.

At least one bass angler I've seen in a video didn't land bass by the lip at all. Instead, he put his hand under tired bass and lifted them straight up.

They seemed docile and didn't flip away. However, he still had the problem of how to hold the fish while unhooking it. For unhooking, it's hard to beat a lip lock that doesn't force the jaw open too far.

Proper release techniques also don't include swishing a bass back and forth to "re-oxygenate" its gills. Gill filaments are attached at only one end and are meant to stream like a flag in a flow from only one direction. Backward current can bend, bruise, or break fragile gill filaments. In addition, too much forward movement can force excess water into the fish's stomach. Although fresh bass naturally jump and splash, fish that are tired and stressed from battle don't need more stress. Place them in the water rather than dropping or throwing them back. If a fish is healthy enough to swim slowly away, just let it go gently.

Let's hold and release bass right from now on.



*Coming in*

## Door County Trophy Smallies

by Jerry Pasdo

Dave McCoy from Rock Valley Anglers in Beloit, filled two hours of our last meeting with fishing techniques and locations to catch 4-6 lb. smallmouths. The locations, site specific, surrounded the tip of the Door and spread to Washington Island. Dave's quality presentation, complete with the gear and technique, gave those in attendance a new method to catch many, huge smallies.

Our upcoming meetings will also share locations for the fisherman to expand their smallmouth fishing horizon. In addition, we will provide evidence of the WSA continued interest in improving smallmouth habitat in streams/lakes and facilitating fishing opportunities for others.

Stay tuned to our newsletter on the web for upcoming meeting topics.

## Our Next Meeting:

**Tuesday  
October 21<sup>st</sup>**

### ***Smallmouth Fishing in the Rivers of Western Wisconsin: The Eau Claire, Chippewa and Jump***

by Heath Benike of the Wisconsin DNR

Heath has worked for the WDNR for the past 18 years as a fisheries biologist out of the Eau Claire and Barron Areas in western Wisconsin.

This past May he was promoted to Fisheries Supervisor for the Western District Operations Team located in Black River Falls which does most of the stream habitat restoration projects, fish production and stocking in western Wisconsin.

He will be discussing smallmouth bass angling opportunities on western Wisconsin Rivers such as the Chippewa, Red Cedar, Jump and Eau Claire River systems as well as some local lakes in the Eau Claire area.



## Upcoming Meetings:

**October 21<sup>st</sup>** WSA monthly Meeting  
Heath Benike "Smallmouth Rivers of Western Wisconsin"

**October 27<sup>th</sup>** BFF monthly Meeting  
Rich Ostoff "Trout in the Driftless Area"

Wisconsin Smallmouth Alliance meetings are normally held on the third Tuesday of each month. The Badger Fly Fishers meet on the fourth Monday. Both groups meet at the Mapletree Restaurant on Highway 51, in McFarland, Wisconsin. Programs begin at 7:00 p.m., dinner at 6:00 p.m. **Visitors and guests are always welcome!**