

VBAC Freshwater Fishing Tips 101



This collection of tips and helpful facts is geared towards the average freshwater angler with hopes of increasing success on your next trip to a Virginia or North Carolina lake, river, or stream. Look for Freshwater Fishing Tips 102 in a future posting!

Map It. When fishing in a freshwater lake or pond locate a topographical map of that body of water. This will let you know what and where the different depths of the lake or pond are likely to support the most fish. These maps may also show locations of sunken man-made fish cribs and debris.

Bait Matters! The best type of bait is live bait! Worms, minnows, wax worms, freshwater clams, and soft-shell crayfish are excellent baits. Select a live bait which is best for the species of fish you're targeting. Other types of live bait that are also used are crickets, leeches, and frogs, but feel free to use any other live offering you think the fish will attack! Artificial bait works also, but it is a topic all unto itself. Popular options include plastic baits, spinners, and crank baits.

"Match the Hatch." A corollary to the above, your bait selection should be, or at least mimic (with artificial bait) what the fish are eating. Use baits and lures that look like and are the same size as the forage found naturally in the body of water you are fishing. Foot Stomp: Live bait always works best!

Check the Water Temperature. The majority of freshwater fish species have specific water temperature and weather preferences. The hotter it gets outside the deeper you'll need to fish. Fish tend to like cool temperatures and will move to deeper, cooler water as the temperature outside rises and dissolved oxygen content drops. During dusk and dawn, fish enter more shallow water to feed. Research the specific fish you want to target to figure out the best times and water depths to improve success.

Keep Your Hands Clean! When fishing in water with little salinity, make sure you keep your hands clean. Fish have a great sense of smell and any foreign scent on your bait or lures can turn them off.

Other Essentials. Aside from a properly outfitted rod and reel, you will eventually need a tackle box, needle-nose pliers, a net, and an ice chest. A nice pair of polarized sunglasses will block UV rays from the sun and cut the sun's glare on the water, and they will help you see better into the water to locate fish.

Inlets and Outlets and Hang out Spots. Fish like specific temperatures and will generally hang around areas of a lake they find comfortable. Places where water enters or drains from a lake are generally much cooler and favorable to fish. Bait fish hang out in these areas, along with the giant fish that eat them!

Find Sunken Structure and Hideouts. Fish like structures that make them feel safe and provide the opportunity to ambush other fish. Structures such as sunken trees, branches, and man-made fish habitats are a great place to fish. It's a safe haven, or so they think...analogous to an offshore wreck in saltwater.

The Wind is on Your Side. On days with a strong breeze, expect bait fish to get pushed closer to shore, and feeding fish will follow. Watch for drift lines and follow them to the bait fish, which will lead to the big fish you are seeking.

Scout for Weeds. A lot of big fish such as like northern pike and largemouth bass, like to stalk their prey from the cover of a weed bed. Locate some weed beds in the lake you are fishing and cast your bait and/or lure in that area to see if you can coax a fish to bite. The weed beds that lead to deeper water and create a break line are the best spots!

John T.H. Germanos, VBAC Surf Fishing Committee Chairman