

Bassin's Best Kept Secret

By Bob Humphrey



Bass fishing is often considered a southern sport, much more popular in states like Florida, Alabama, and Texas. Even in New England it is the southern three states that get most of the attention from bass anglers, and outdoor writers. But I am about to break my vow of silence and reveal the best kept fishing secret in New England. The Number-one bass fishing state in the region is ... Maine.

Surprised? You're not alone. While many of the state's casual local fishermen still stare in amazement at parades of chrome-polished bass boats heading north up Route 95, the pros have found out what some of the more savvy natives have known all along. No other New England state has the abundance and variety of bass fishing opportunities available in Maine. In addition to myriad largemouth waters, the Pine Tree State hosts a world-class smallmouth fishery, the likes of which can be found in few other places south of the Canadian border. Even better, the size and diversity of many of Maine's lakes allows them to support both species.

Tourney Time

While all this might be news to some, serious bass fishermen have known this for some time. As evidence, roughly three dozen different clubs host nearly 200 tournaments a year, statewide. Many of the top lakes host two or even three tournaments in a single year. Don't worry though. Maine has very specific regulations for tournaments, designed to alleviate their impact on fishery resources. Once slow to acknowledge it, even biologists now recognize the importance of bass as a recreational sport fish, and are managing accordingly. Further evidence is the minimum qualifying weights for Maine's "The One That Didn't Get Away Club": five pounds for smallmouths and seven pounds for largemouths.

York County

The habitat and climate of much of southernmost York County is closest to that of the other New England states and waters in this region often produce some of the State's biggest bucketmouths. Great East Lake in Acton contains both species, though smallmouths are more abundant. The main body of the lake is deep with a rocky shoreline - better for smallmouths - while the shallower east end is more productive for largemouths. There is a State ramp at the outlet, located on the Maine - New Hampshire border. Because this is a boundary water, special regulations apply.



Another good York County water is Little Ossipee Lake in Waterboro. This also has both species but smallmouth fishing tend to be better here. The south end can be easily accessed from Route 5, though the best fishing is probably up at the north end. In addition to being one of the best brown trout waters in the County, Mousam Lake in Shapleigh also produces some top-notch bass fishing, predominantly for smallmouths.

Cumberland County

Many of Cumberland County's best bass waters are located in the greater Sebago region. Typically targeted for salmon and trout, Sebago Lake's bass fishery is largely underutilized. Though it is not considered a "bass" lake, Sebago often produces some big representatives of both species. There are numerous shallow coves and inlets around the lake's perimeter and access is widely available. Nearby Long Lake in Naples is a large, diverse lake with both species. Panther Pond in Raymond also contains both bass, though the best fishing in both of the latter waters is for smallmouths.

Oxford County

Just to the north and west, Oxford County is also replete with good bass waters. Hancock Pond in Denmark is one of the best. It contains both species, but is a relatively shallow water, which tends to favor bigmouths. The Kezars each contain both species. Kezar Lake in Lovell tends to be better for smallies, while Kezar Pond has a better largemouth fishery.

Kennebec County

Moving up to Kennebec County brings you to the heart of big bass country in Maine. Three of the State's top bass lakes lie within five miles of one another. Cobbosseecontee (Cobbossee) Lake is considered by some to be the top largemouth water in Maine. Its nearly 5,000 acres are dotted with islands and rimmed with shallow coves and inlets, one of which leads to Cobbossee Stream, which is also a tremendous bass fishery. Just west of Cobbossee is Anabesacook Lake, another premier bass water. Third on the list is Androscoggin Lake in Wayne. All three have both species. The former two are predominantly largemouth waters while the latter contains better smallmouth fishing. Still, trophy-sized fish of both species are caught in all three.



Farther North

As you head north and east you'll find some of the best smallmouth fishing not only in Maine, but the entire northeast. From Millinocket Lake in Piscataquis County, all the way down to Bangor, the Penobscot River and its many tributaries are rife with bronzebacks. The road system follows the river too, making for easy access along most of its length. To the east, Hancock and Washington Counties are dotted with dozens of good smallmouth waters, both large and small. Though it is considered largely a toad and brown trout lake, Branch Lake in Ellsworth is also one of Hancock County's top smallmouth waters. Washington County's top smallmouth water is 6,765-acre Meddybemps Lake. The rocky shoreline of this relatively shallow lake is accentuated with many islands.

These are but a few of the literally thousands of good bass waters in Maine. There are probably dozens more with fishing as good, if not better. Many of the smaller lakes and ponds also have tremendous bass fishing potential, and often receive less fishing pressure. It's just a matter of finding the right ones. Searching is half the fun, and you just might find a honey hole all to yourself.