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## Local News

# Getaway: Fish are biting in Toledo Bend

by Cheré Coen

More than 50 years ago, the Sabine River rolled lazily through the center of the state, literally a border between Louisiana and Texas.

To address flooding issues and to build economic development, a dam was proposed that would deliver electricity to both states while providing recreation for tourism. A statewide effort was called for to fund the project and remaining monies from a Confederate Widow's Fund were used. Garden Club members wrote thousands of letters advocating the project and a group of women in Minnie Pearl hats carrying small bottles of Sabine River water took to the streets of New Orleans in favor of the dam.

And the rest is history.

Toledo Bend Dam is the largest man-made body of water in the South, encompassing 186,000 acres and generating 92 megawatts of electrical power.

"The lake is 1,200 miles around," said Linda Curtis-Sparks, director of Sabine Parish Tourist & Recreation Commission. "It's the same difference between here and Chicago."

Most Louisianans think of fishing when you mention Toledo Bend. There are 36 fishing tournaments on the lake each year, including the Bassmasters Open Series. In the 2007-2008 Lunker Bass Program, there were 52 lunkers weighing over 10 pounds caught in the reservoir with the largest ever weighing in at 15.33 pounds.

For those who don't own a boat, there are more than 36 fishing guides ready and able to provide boats, tackle and lake knowledge. J.T. Thompson of Living the Dream Guide Service will even put the bait on your hook.

But that's not all that Toledo Bend offers.

There are numerous accommodations, from rustic to resort. Wildwood Resort, for instance, offers 44 lodges, cabins and suites that vary from a hotel-type room to a honeymoon cabin equipped with oversized Jacuzzi. Fishermen love the spacious cabins that sleep many and the Pavilion, Conference Center and Executive Lodge offer cozy but private spaces for family reunions, retreats and business meetings. Catering services by owner Randy Zeigler include a delicious secret barbecue sauce over tender Black Angus steaks and boiled crawfish.



Photo by Cheré Coen

**If you don't have a boat, don't worry — there are plenty to rent in the Toledo Bend area.**

Above all, Wildwood is comfortable, offering plenty of wooded land stretching down to the lake. Families will love the bird aviaries, six stocked ponds for catch and release, an animal sanctuary, four swimming pools and canoe rentals. Ducks and geese visit often with some, such as a spring group of Canadian geese, enticed to stay.

Toward the south end of the lake, and closer to Lafayette, is South Toledo Bend State Park, which offers 19 vacation cabins, 55 RV campsites and five tent sites within deep woods and lakeshore access. The park boasts one of the few sandy beaches on the lake, plus a covered fishing bridge, interpretive nature center and rangers who offer hikes to see bald eagles that make Toledo Bend their home.

Nancy Miller, interpretive ranger for the park, led a group of visitors to view an abandoned eagle's nest, as well as spot a bald eagle perched majestically on a nearby pine tree. Halfway through the trail, the group paused at a wooded bluff overlooking the lake in three directions.

"You always get a breeze up here," Miller said.

In addition to the six pairs of eagles at the park, and two living by the nearby dam, visitors have spotted numerous bird and butterfly species such as the pine warbler, tufted titmouse and swallowtail butterfly, witnessed roadrunners, armadillos and deer and found petrified wood and other unusual rocks.

The area didn't receive the influx of economic development they thought the dam would originally provide, Curtis-Sparks said, but plenty is coming. New development of condos, rentals and cabins are in the development stage.

But Toledo Bend still retains that rural atmosphere, with friendly residents and pristine woods.

And, of course, there's the fishing.

## If you go

### **Living the Dream Guide Service**

J.T. Thompson  
(318) 228-5870

### **Wildwood Resort**

(985) 789-5834

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