



AUSTIN FLY FISHERS

March 2021
Volume 23, Issue 3



Ben Patrick with a Smallmouth Buffalo, article on Page 3



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A month ago, I wrote about the potential epic winter storm bearing down on the state. Little did I know at the time just how bad the ramifications of the storm would be for many Texans. During the storm, I saw reports from friends and family who were snowed in and struggling without power or other necessities of life. Even though many people were reasonably prepared, I doubt any of us could have imagined just how bad it would get. We were fortunate at our house; we only lost cable and internet service for a few days. Apparently my street is on the same power line as a local hospital so we were spared when power had to be cut to so many homes and businesses. And if the storm wasn't bad enough, the aftermath brought busted pipes, water service issues, damaged property, and dead outdoor plants.

Unfortunately, damage to property isn't the only negative result of the frigid storm. As is usually the case when extremely cold weather makes it to the Gulf coast, our saltwater fisheries sustained a major fish kill. Many saltwater fish cannot survive cold water temperatures, and unless they can find deep warmer water, they will perish.

Texas Parks and Wildlife estimates that a minimum of 3.8 million fish died as a result of the cold water temperatures along the entire coast. That's a lot of fish, 91 percent of which were non-recreational species such as hardhead catfish, pinfish, mullet, and other baitfish. While not necessarily desirable to catch, these fish are important to the saltwater ecosystem and provide forage for the fish we generally seek as fishermen. Of the recreational fish that were lost, nine percent of the total, spotted seatrout or "specks" and black drum took the brunt of the damage with 48% and 31% of the count, respectively. A frequent target of fly fishers, red drum or "redfish", accounted for three percent of the recreational fish that were killed. Doing the math, that means approximately 10,000 redfish were lost. While I hate to see any damage to the coastal fisheries, that's perhaps not as bad as I had feared. I have to believe that's a small fraction of the number of redfish retained by fishermen during a typical year so recovery may not take as long for some species.

The damage was not uniform along the Texas coast. The Upper and Lower Laguna Madre from Corpus Christi to Port Isabel sustained the highest fish kill. These bay systems are the most shallow along the coast, and also offer fish relatively few passes to the safety of warm Gulf waters which may explain the higher mortality. Of all the specks that died, 89 percent were in the Upper and Lower Laguna Madre. Black drum took a beating in the Upper Laguna Madre with 65 percent of the statewide total counted there.

TPWD will continue to monitor fish populations along the coast as they always do and report on the continuing effects of the killer temperatures. They may also need to adjust regulations to help protect the remaining fish while the populations rebuild. It's encouraging to note that this fish kill, based on early estimates, does not appear to be as devastating as a couple of similar events in the 1980s which took two to three years each to recover from. That's good news considering how sensitive the fishery is to these events.

Extra attention to conservation will be necessary to give the fishery an opportunity to rebound as quickly as possible. Of course, fly fishers as a general group are much more inclined than most to practice catch and release so that continued behavior will serve the state's saltwater resources well.

Financial Report

by Jim Robinson

2/1/2021 to 2/28/2021

Begin Bal. Checking	\$21,851.52
Income:	
Total Income	\$00.00
Disbursements	
USPS	\$134.00
Earthlink	\$127.28
Fly Fishers Int.	<u>\$970.00</u>
Total Disbursements	\$1,231.28
Net	\$(1,231.28)
Unencumbered:	\$12,943.89
Encumbered Funds:	
Casting for Recovery	\$2,365.52
SKIFF	\$5,310.83
Ending Bal-Checking	\$20,754.24

Fly Fishing for Smallmouth Buffalo by Ben Patrick

With Many fly anglers have developed a penchant for Carp fishing. From Dallas, to Houston, and all of Hill Country; anglers have had their angling hopes fulfilled and crushed by golden ghosts. For those that have caught their fair share of carp here and abroad, a challenge awaits in the clear water rivers and lakes of Texas: Smallmouth Buffalo.

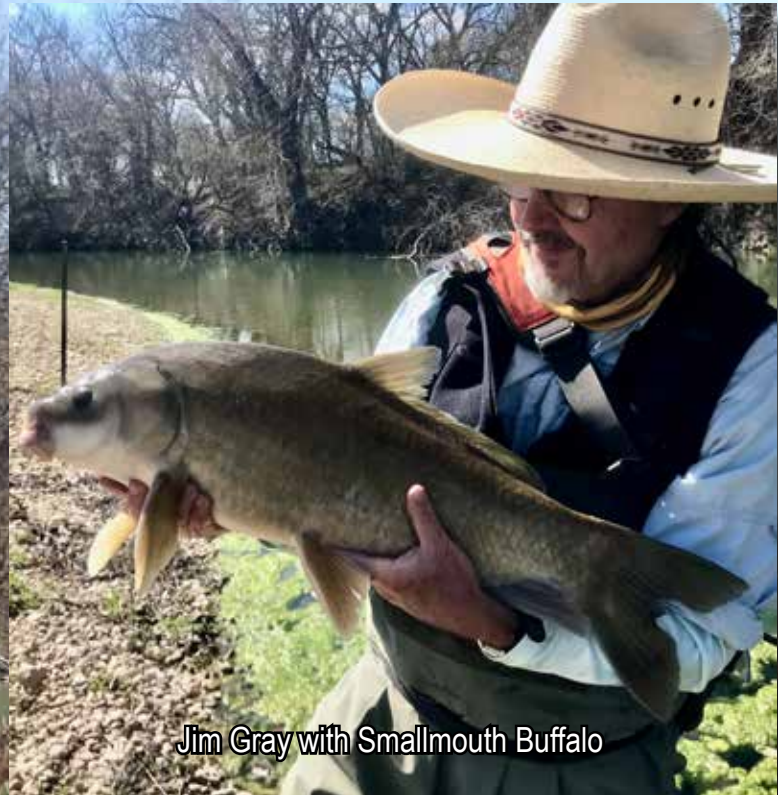
Smallmouth Buffalo or *Ictiobus Bubalus* are a freshwater sucker species that are native to the Mississippi River and its surrounding waters. Texas represents their western boundary. They are the largest species of sucker topping out close to 90lbs. The IGFA record currently stands at 82lbs 3oz. This specimen was caught at Lake Athens Texas in 1993. There are very limited studies on their lifespan but samples have been documented reaching over 60 years of age. Buffalo are commonly found in larger lakes and rivers. I most frequently see them in the San Gabriel, Llano, and Colorado rivers.

It's easy to confuse buffalo with carp. They have similar body shape, color and they often feed together; but they are tell-tale differences. I normally pay close attention to the color of the tail when sighting buffalo in rivers. Buffalo have a black tail while carp have a spectrum of color from gold to red.

When I pursue buffalo, the game is sight fishing. I often find prime targets or 'players' in shallow water around two or three feet. Players are easy to identify; their tails sway in the water as they make giant mud clouds. The flies you fish can vary but they have to be weighted so they sit on the bottom; where the buffalo is feeding. I've caught buffalo on weighted damselflies and Nils's crab fly. While buffalo are not as spooky as carp, anglers still need to be careful with their cast. Similar to carp, you want to cast above and past the fish, retrieving the fly into the feeding zone. You want to keep the fly slowly moving through the feeding zone. If you detect a strike, set the hook before the buffalo has a chance to spit the fly out.

The initial fight can seem lethargic given the size of the fish, but don't worry, they're going to wake up. You can expect soaring runs, punctuated by the fish attempting to turn its body in an attempt to tail wrap your leader. The majority of the fish are ten to thirty pounds and will take you into your backing.

The fish on the cover of this month's newsletter was caught on a fly given to me by Nils Pearson and weighed in at 17 pounds. For anglers who are looking to up their carp fishing prowess, pursue smallmouth Buffalo, and expect to be gratified. While the fish are challenging, they are not impossible and the payoff is rewarding.



Jim Gray with Smallmouth Buffalo



Ben Patrick with Mirror Carp

Outings by Juan Shepperd

White Bass Fishing

Scott Kerrigan, as always, did an excellent organizing and finding a speaker for last month's AFF meeting. Unlike the usual format, Scott facilitated a Roundtable Discussion on white bass fishing in Central Texas. Inspired, I fished the San Gabriel River a few days later. I did okay. Caught one. Chatted with a few fly fishers, all of whom caught more fish than me. I had a great time. As I stood in the river, talking shop, enjoying nature, I considered myself fortunate. I watched a red headed woodpecker dig for food high up in a cottonwood tree across from me. I know what some of you are thinking: Don't take your eye off the water. Upstream, on my side of the river, were a couple of older, beyond-middle-age, white, spin fisherman who I could hear talking but not so loudly that it bothered me or I could follow the conversation. After a while, another man walked up and asked if he could fish next to them. Soon, I heard distinctly one of the original spin fisherman yell, "You're from China?!"

Uh-oh, I thought. Here goes.

Then, kid you not, one of the original two spin fisherman starts talking animatedly in what, I suppose, was Mandarin to the new guy. Then his friend jumped in. The three fisherman talked, back and forth, for 15 – 20 minutes in another language. Loudly. Excitedly. Laughing. Connecting. This is not Austin from 20 years ago, I thought. Change happens. It's not better or worse, but there is plenty of positivity if you want to see it. Whole thing made me smile.



Outings

I have a couple of outings planned, if you would like to join. I am also going to scout the Coast next month with my kids. Hope to schedule a saltwater trip soon. As a reminder, the Austin Fly Fishers are a group of men and women who enjoy fly fishing, camaraderie, conservation and the nature. Club meetings are free. Club Outings are limited to members. Unofficial club outings are open to anyone. Diversity and inclusion are important to me. Not just men and women but people of different background, color, class, and ethnicity. I want to help plan trips you want to join. If you have ideas, suggestions, or want to lead an outing even, let me know. I am happy to work with you and/or step aside and let you lead. Help is always appreciated.

Before I go further, first, a fish story.

March Outing

I can't promise you'll hear a foreign language, but if you want to fly fish for white bass, it's time. Let's target Saturday, March 20, 2021 - First Day of Spring – for the March outing. Meet at 9 AM at Reimers Ranch, an LCRA Park in Travis County, on the west side of town. Physical address is 23610 Hamilton Pool Rd, Dripping Springs, TX. Website is <https://parks.traviscountytexas.gov/parks/reimers-ranch>. Things you need to know. Park opens 7 AM to twilight. Admission is \$5. Accept cash but no credit or debit cards. Reimers Park does not take reservations. Also, restrooms are currently closed for repairs. Finally, Reimers Ranch Park may close without warning if it becomes overcrowded. Please bring your own food and water and trash bags.

April Outing

I'm going to fish the Texas Coast with my kids on April 10 – 11 during a new moon. I haven't visited Rockport since before the Hurricane Harvey. I am interested also to see how this winter's freeze might affect the fishing. I'd like to schedule a Saltwater fly fishing outing before it gets really hot. If any club member wants to organize a Saltwater fishing trip, I support you.

Pencil in Saturday, April 17, 2021 for the April Club outing. I think it might be nice to float and fish the Colorado River from Little Webberville Park to Big Webberville Park. This stretch of water is close to Austin and offers a chance to land largemouth bass. From Austin, take MLK Road, drive East and it will turn into FM 969. Little Webberville Park (100 Water Street, Webberville, TX 78621) is located on the banks of the Colorado River in the town of Webberville, about 20 miles East of Austin.

Don't have a boat? Call Syd 512-276-7767 at Cook's Canoes, he rents canoes & kayaks and runs shuttles. \$50 per day for tandem boat. \$35 per day for solo boat. \$20 shuttle. *Rental includes canoe or kayak boat, PFD (lifejacket), paddles and shuttle. You can also rent a boat from Austin Canoe and Kayak.

Yellowstone National Park

I want to tell you about another trip. It's a few months out – and this unofficial club outing may interest you. Bears, Bison and Wolves, Oh My!

Yellowstone National Park has got it all. Tons of wild-life. Black bears, Grizzly bears, Bison and Wolves. Bighorn sheep, Elk, Mountain goats, Mule deer, Moose, and Pronghorn antelope. More carnivores still. Badgers, Coyotes, Otters, and wolverines. 67 different mammals live in the Yellowstone National Park (YNP). Forget all the birds. Sorry Bald Eagles, hawks and ospreys. I want to get to the fish. Arctic grayling, Brook trout, Brown trout, Cutthroat trout, Lake trout, Rainbow trout, Westslope cutthroat trout, Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

No place else in world has so many gold medal waters. Many people visit YNP and drive the Park's Grand Loop Road and call it a day. They see a bunch of animals, natural wonders, grab something to eat, and drive out. That's a wonderful day's experience. Nothing wrong with it. If you get the chance, slow down and savor it for a few days. Spend the night inside the Park.

I worked and lived in the Park 20+ years ago and I didn't see all of it. Not even close. I fished 3-4X days a week for six months. I hiked and camped the back-country. It's amazing. If you haven't been, put Yellowstone National Park on your bucket list. If you're not sure where or when to go, anywhere and anytime is the right answer.

I'm going back in June. Direct flight. Less than \$60. I'm camping – and will eat at the many restaurants in the Park so I am hardly roughing it. There are lots of available places to stay and eat within the Park and just outside it. A 3-day Yellowstone National Park fishing permit is \$18. A 7-day permit is \$25. I am going to fish the Firehole River, Gibbon River and Madison River. They all fish well in June.

Since this is a fly fishing club, you'll be pleased to know it is fly fishing only. Barbless hooks. Artificial flies. No lead. No felt-bottom boots. Much of the Firehole in June offers superb dry fly fishing. If you like hunting, this fishing is as close to hunting as you'll get. It's not easy, with fish rising and you casting upstream to entice them with a drag-free presentation and skilled hookset, and oh so rewarding. Most of the fish in these 3 rivers are non-native (brook, brown, rainbow). They've adapted and thrived, in fact. Despite the predators. Fish haven't been stocked since the 1950s.

In Flyfisher's Guide to Yellowstone National Park, Ken Retallic writes:

"The Firehole's modern fame as an extraordinary dry fly stream springs as much from the wariness of its brown and rainbow trout as from the privilege to cast a line in such a spellbinding amphitheater of nature. Puffs of steam and sulfurous vapors drift on the winds across an arena carpeted with spouting geysers, hissing fumaroles, and bubbling mud pots linked by the most genial of Yellowstone's streams. Lush meadows and verdant pine forests lining its banks harbor large herds of bison and scattered bands of elk, occasionally spooked by roaming coyotes, grizzly bears, and wolves."

This kind of nature exists in Yellowstone.

The Gibbon River, some would say, has it all. Parts of it offer voracious small brookies. Parts offer big, hungry browns. Parts offer Arctic Grayling. In The Yellowstone Fly Fishing Guide, new and revised edition, Craig Matthews (who owned a nearby fly shop) writes about the Gibbon River south of Norris Junction: "This is a great place to see elk and wolves. The river is much like a spring creek here, with deep slow meandering flows and deep undercut banks." He adds, "This area is on-your-knees fishing to wary brown trout." I fished this river 3 years ago and caught a nice brown on the Gibbon. There are so many good places to fish on this river that the hardest part is decided where to fish.

In YNP, the Firehole and the Gibbon Rivers join to form the Madison River, named after President James Madison. The Madison is beautiful but not easy. Due to deep runs and undercut banks, beaver dams and lush weeds, it is tough to sustain a drag free float. I caught small fish in the summer here, but Fall, when the monster browns come up from Hebgen Lake, is when it really shines. Someday, I hope to do that. The Madison River outside the Park fishes well all year.



So that's my plan. Three rivers in a geographically tight area of Yellowstone National Park. It's an "unofficial" club outing. A couple of us are planning on going up there in June to relax and enjoy nature. Even though I am focused on fishing, you could mix it up: Hike. Drive around. Join a free Ranger walk. See the entire Park. You can't go wrong. I'm going to fish. If this is something that interests you, or you want to chat about your own trip, let me know. I am happy to share details about what I know about the Park, where you can go online to learn more about planning your own trip, and I am sure I will learn a few things from you. My itinerary looks like this, for this Unofficial Outing, Sunday, June 6 – Thursday, June 10, 2021:

Day 1 – Fly direct from Austin to Bozeman. Overnight.

Day 2 – Enter and fish YNP.

Day 3 – Fish YNP.

Day 4 – Fish YNP.

Day 5 – Free. Depart Bozeman that evening for Austin.

YNP is 2.2 million acres. Tons of wildlife. Tons of great fishing. No billboards. No internet. No cell service. If you need a visual, this river is typical of most of the rivers you will see in the Park. Not to mention the 100+ lakes and 1,000+ small streams.

Fly Fishing Water in Yellowstone National Park

If you have questions, please contact me about any of the outings.

Juan (5-one-2-7-Five-1-seven-7-ate-3)



SKIFF by Bob Maindelle

With As we look forward to March, the spring warm-up, and whatever 2021 may bring, I've made a few adjustments to my calendar, resulting in a more SKIFF-friendly schedule by being open for kids-only on Saturdays from mid-March through Labor Day.

As I looked back at the data we've collected on the SKIFF trips we've conducted through the years, it is during these months that most of the SKIFF trip requests have come in.

This, combined with the very kind offer of Mrs. Denise Igo, herself a SKIFF trip recipient from years gone by, to post my SKIFF opening on her very popular Fort Hood Area Events Facebook Page, should help us bounce back from the COVID-impacted rough patch we went through in 2020.

This combination of calendar adjustment and publicity has already yielded one family signed up to come out with me on Saturday, March 20th, as the Maness boys, ages 8 and 9, who are separated from their father thanks to his military duty, will join me for some white bass fishing on Lake Belton or Stillhouse Hollow.

I appreciate your support which makes it possible for me to say "yes" whenever a request from a military family comes in.

Club Sponsors

The following individuals who made presentations to our club in 2017/2019. Please follow the links to get more information on the services they provide. You won't be disappointed.

Marcus Rodriquez – <http://livingwatersflyfishing.com/> Central Texas Guide

Capt. Billy Trimble – <http://trimbleflyfishing.com/> Fly Fishing Rockport/Texas Coastal Bend

Chris Johnson – <http://livingwatersflyfishing.com/> Living Waters Fly Shop and Central Texas Guide

Pat Dorsey – <http://www.bluequillangler.com/> Fly Fishing Colorado

Capt. Scott Hamilton – <http://www.flyfishingextremes.com/> Fly Fishing Florida's Atlantic Coast

Capt. Eric Glass – <http://www.captainericglass.com/> Fly Fishing South Padre Island

Kevin Stubbs – <http://www.expedition-outfitters.net/> Fly Fishing the Devils River

Kevin Hutchison – <http://hillcountryflyfishers.com/> Fly Fishing the Hill Country

Capt. Steve Soulé – <http://www.theshallowist.com/index.asp> Fly Fishing Galveston

Jeff Davis – <http://allwaterguides.com/jeff-davis/> Fly Fishig the lower Colorado River

Jud Cole – <http://centraltexasflyfishing.com/> Central Texas and Colorado

Capt. Rus Schwausch – <http://www.epicanglingadventure.com/> Fly Fishing Southwest Alaska

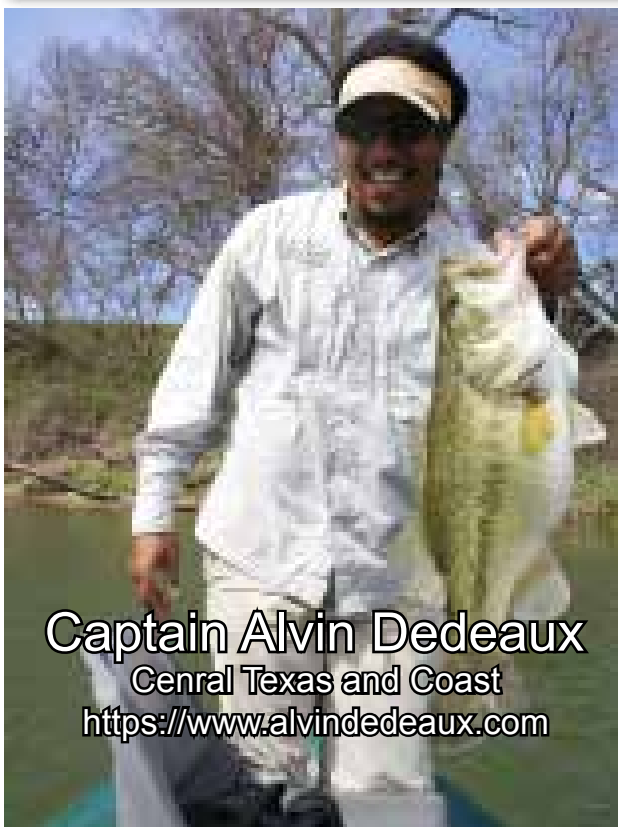
Nick Streit – <https://taosflyshop.com/flyguide/main> New Mexico and Southern Colorado

Capt. Randy and Truette Cawlfeld – <http://www.lagunamadre.net/styled-33/index.html>

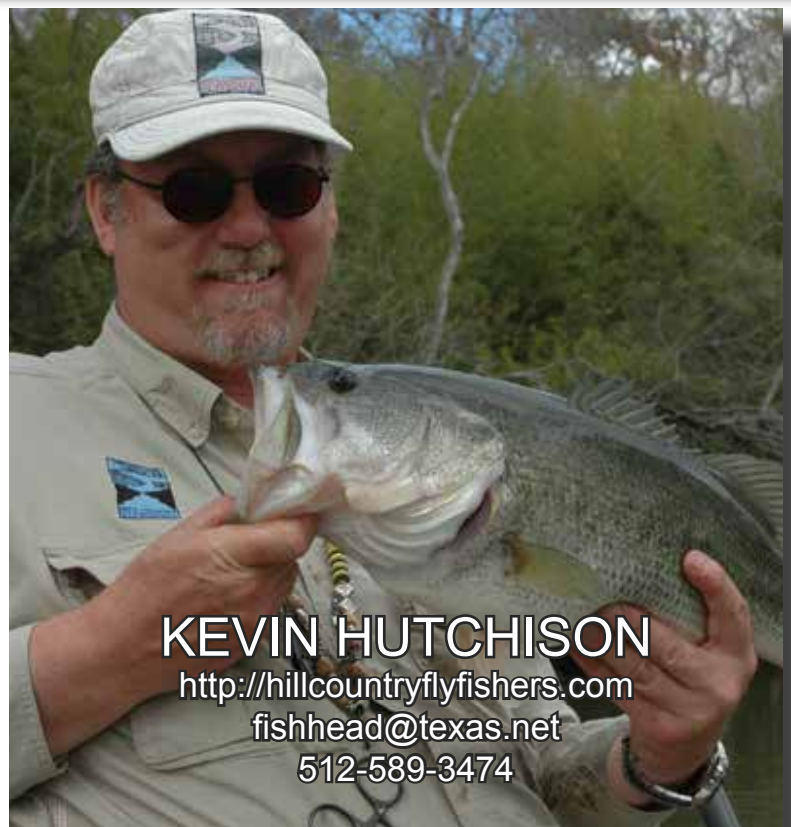
Lower Laguna Madre

Pat Vanek – BousqueValleyFlyFishing@gmail.com Rivers of Central TX

Capt. Alvin Dedeaux – <https://www.alvindedeaux.com> Central Texas and Texas Coast



Captain Alvin Dedeaux
Central Texas and Coast
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Captain Eric Glass

South Padre Island, Texas

<http://www.captainericglass.com>



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Capt. Billy Trimble

Shallow Water Flats Fishing
Texas Coastal Bend

<http://trimbleflyfishing.com/>
361-205-1266



Capt. Scott Hamilton

Fly Fish Jupiter, Florida

<http://www.flyfishingextremes.com/>
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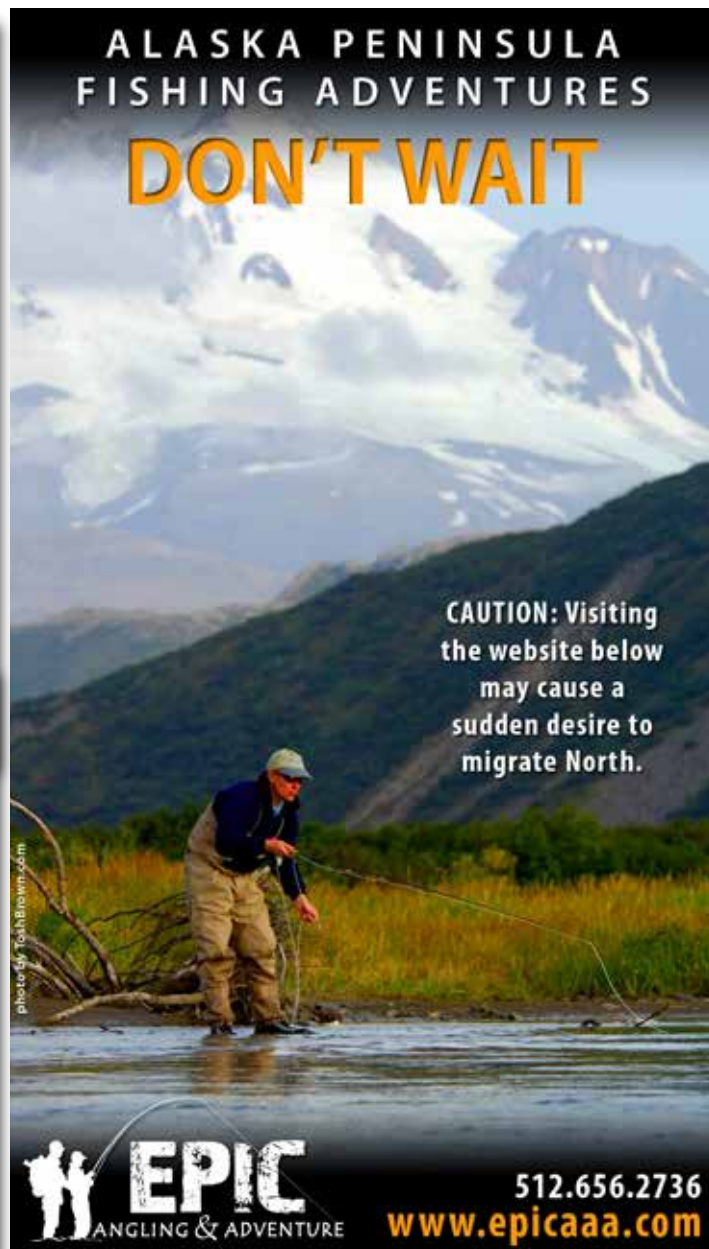
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