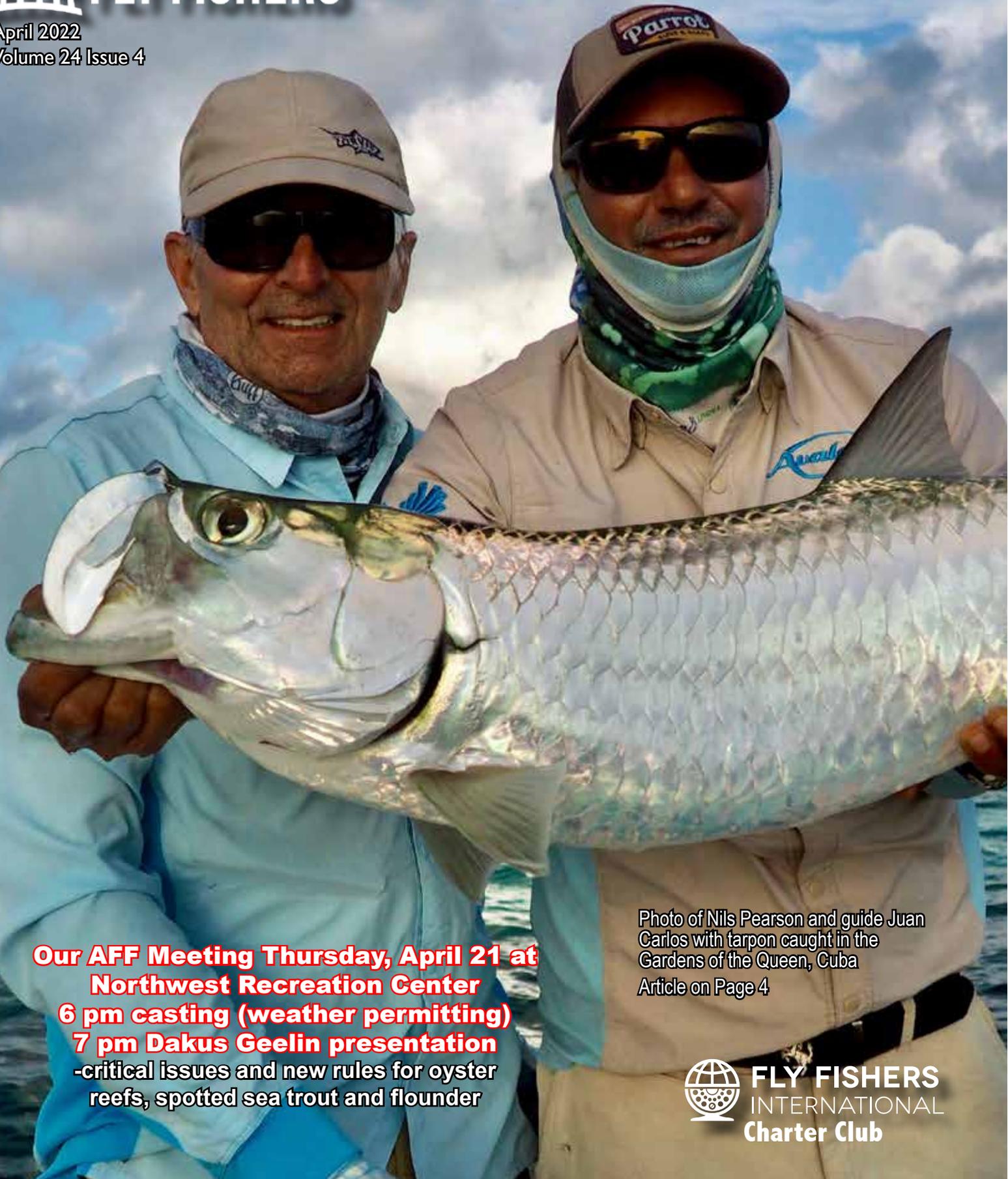




AUSTIN FLY FISHERS

April 2022
Volume 24 Issue 4



**Our AFF Meeting Thursday, April 21 at
Northwest Recreation Center
6 pm casting (weather permitting)
7 pm Dakus Geelin presentation**
-critical issues and new rules for oyster
reefs, spotted sea trout and flounder

Photo of Nils Pearson and guide Juan
Carlos with tarpon caught in the
Gardens of the Queen, Cuba
Article on Page 4



FLY FISHERS
INTERNATIONAL
Charter Club

President's Message by Kathi Harris

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Info@AustinFlyFishers.com

I'm happy to announce that Dakus Geeslin, from Texas Parks and Wildlife, will be speaking at our April 21st meeting. Dakus is the Deputy Director of the Coastal Fisheries Division and is going to update us on the conservation and rules status of the oyster fisheries, spotted sea trout and flounder.

Now that we've switched to Daylight Saving Time, we can resume our informal pre-meeting casting sessions. Folks usually start gathering near the soccer field at the Northwest Rec Center around 6pm to exchange casting tips and fish stories (no fact-checkers will be on duty). Beginners are welcome, with or without a rod!

If you're in the market for flyfishing gear, I strongly encourage you to shop our local fly shops first. Sometimes, though, you may not find what you want locally, which brings me to this month's recommendation:

www.burfish.com

I recently broke my favorite wading staff and went searching for a replacement. No shops had it in stock and I couldn't find it available online, except for one place I'd never heard of, Burleson Sporting Company. The website showed it in stock with priority shipping via USPS. It seemed too good to be true but I took a deep breath and typed in my credit card number. Two days later, I still had not received the typical confirmation email. Just as I was dreading having to follow up, I noticed a voicemail from an Alabama area code. It was

a message from Mike Burleson, who had called to inform me my order would not be shipping that day. Well of course not, I thought. But it was his next sentence that I found truly surprising. Mike said the order would actually be shipping the following day and he hoped that would not be a problem. The apparent owner of the company had called me to notify me of a one day shipping delay! I received my wading staff three days later with an enclosed receipt bearing a handwritten thank you note from Mike. I emailed Mike to thank him for the great service. That's why I'm recommending Burleson Sporting Company, if you just can't find what you want locally and need to order online...they provide jaw-droppingly attentive service to the skeptical.

Happy Fishing!

Kathi

Financial Report

by Jim Robinson
3/1/2022 to 3/31/2022

Begin Bal. Checking	\$25,380.64
Income:	
Total Income	\$00.00
Disbursements	
Total Disbursements	\$00.00
Net	\$00.00
Unencumbered:	\$17,248.79
Encumbered Funds:	
Casting for Recovery	\$00.00
SKIFF	\$8,131.85
Ending Bal-Checking	\$25,380.64

Conservation Announcement

by Keith Mars

If you have been down to the coast lately you've probably noticed more people on the water. But, as keen-eyed, conservation-minded Austin Flyfishers, you've probably made a few other observations— what happened to the oyster reefs and where are the Speckled Seatrout? Last month the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) took two steps forward for coastal conservation by closing the majority of oyster harvest areas and reducing the Speckled Seatrout harvest limits. These conservation measures were not easy decisions, but necessary to sustain the future health of coastal ecosystems and fisheries.

By late March 2022 TPWD closed most every oyster harvesting area on the Texas coast due to a collapse in harvestable oysters. Oyster reefs are foundational to coastal ecosystem and fisheries health, and are in need of protection and comprehensive management strategies. Many coastal advocacy groups are heavily involved in this issue and provide excellent content.

<https://flatsworthy.com/flatsworthy-news/oyster-conservancy/>

<https://ccatexas.org/oysters/>

Also effective in March, TPWD reduced the daily Speckled Seatrout bag limit along the middle and lower coast from five to three and narrowed the slot size from 15-25 to 17-23 inches. Winter Storm Uri packed a wallop on the middle and lower coast fisheries, particularly the Speckled Trout. These changes are effective for at least two years to leave more spawning fish in the water to help the Speck fishery more quickly recover from Winter Storm Uri. Personally, I would advocate for these changes to become permanent, particularly the slot reduction. Many if not most Specks over 23 inches are females and have a lot more value in the water than in the frying pan.

There are many pressures on our Texas coast— drought effects on freshwater inflows, oyster reef health, habitat loss, and more people and uses on the water than ever. However, there is good reason for optimism. There are highly engaged conservation advocacy groups, an extensive network of public lands and large ranches, and a state agency that is taking the right steps towards properly stewarding our coastal resources.

April Speaker – Dakus Geeslin

Dakus Geeslin is the Deputy Director of the Coastal Fisheries Division within the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. He oversees fisheries monitoring and management and hatcheries programs for the division. His work includes leading the longest continuous fisheries monitoring program in the country and the largest Red Drum hatchery production in the world. Dakus works collaboratively with department marine biologist and scientists to develop the best available research and science to guide policies, practices, and regulations for both commercial and recreational fisheries within the Gulf Coast of Texas.

Presentation: Dakus will update us on critical issues and new rules for oyster reefs, spotted sea trout and flounder.



Jardines de la Reina, Cuba – by Nils Pearson

The Gardens of the Queen is a chain of islands about 50 miles off the southeastern coast of Cuba. Its name has been attributed to Christopher Columbus to honor the Queen of Spain. Since 1996 this 840 square mile area has been designated as a marine reserve with limited access to divers and fly fishermen.

For Brandon Rabke and me, this is our second trip to this remarkable place. On this trip, we traveled to this area during the next to last week in March. These dates were chosen by our host to coincide with the early migration of Tarpon. Our first trip to JDR was in January before the tarpon migration.

As in our previous trip, Nick Streit, owner of Taos Fly Shop, made all of our arrangements. It is no small task putting a trip like this together to Cuba because of all of the paperwork and agreements required to gain entrance to Cuba. Then there are the negotiations to charter a mother-ship at a reasonable cost. Other than our airline tickets, Nick made all of the arrangements and trouble shot any unexpected problems. You could not have asked for a better host.

We flew in to Havana on a Friday, spent the night, and boarded a bus for the 5 hour ride to Jucaro where we boarded the JDR III operated by the Italian company Avalon. As the paved road ended just outside Jucaro, our driver slowly maneuvered our large bus through narrow streets of this port town. We entered a compound at the dock and boarded our mother-ship for our 50 mile journey to the Gardens of the Queen with 17 fishermen aboard. Our living conditions were very comfortable. We had individual rooms with baths and numerous outdoor decks for relaxing. Thankfully, we were completely disconnected from the rest of the world with no cellphone coverage or internet connections.

Each morning after breakfast we left the mother-ship and our guides took us out in skiffs to search for tarpon, bonefish, and permit. The search for tarpon usually began by traveling to the Caribbean side and positioning the skiff beside a channel formed by the islands. When the water was clear and a cloudless sky allowed the sun to penetrate the water, you could see tarpon moving toward the positions our guides had staked out. As the tarpon approached the boat, a quick cast in front of the cruising fish usually got a strike. After that, it was up to you to set the hook,



Jardines de la Reina cont.

let the tarpon run, and put the rod tip down on every jump. I have to admit that I was completely astounded by how readily these tarpon swallowed my Puglisi peanut butter fly. On my best day, I probably jumped many tarpon but only got three of these monsters to the boat ranging in size from 40 to 60 pounds.

When not targeting tarpon, Brandon and I pursued bonefish. On these occasions, our guide poled our skiff in and around the mangroves in search of our elusive prey. Fortunately on our first day, Brandon and I spoke with our guide about heading to a small island called Chocolate where we had great success on our previous trip. We were undecided until we saw that all of the other skiffs heading out for tarpon. That's when we decided to do something different and head to Chocolate. What a great decision! Brandon and I spent most of the day wading the sandy flats around this island. Our guide Corki kept directing us toward singles, doubles, and small schools of bones. Landing 14 bones that day was a personal best for me.

Late in the afternoon, when we returned from fishing we had refreshments and dinner on the mother-ship. The crew could not have been more accommodating and the meals were always excellent. After dinner, we congregated on the upper deck telling stories of our fishing exploits with generous servings of mohitos.



SKIFF Program by Bob Maindelle



Dear Friends of S.K.I.F.F.,

With winter's grip continuing to hold onto our weather well into March, there was not just a host of families looking to get out in the wind and cold to go fishing last month.

Nevertheless, the Hawbaker family, with two teen boys, signed up to give it a go. We were all set to make this a reality when the Killeen Independent School District made the decision not to grant President's Day as the scheduled holiday it was intended to be, all in order to make up for school days lost during February's winter storm.

So, no fishing for the Hawbakers in March, but we have those boys, whose father is deployed to Romania, now scheduled for April 18th in the afternoon.

Since the weather outside was frightful, we took it inside for something more delightful. That came in the form of a "casting clinic" for about

120 fourth-grade students at Tarver Elementary School in Belton, TX.

Each of six groups of kids ranging in number from 14-22 students joined my wife, Rebecca, and I, on the floor of the school's gym. We set up multiple stations, each equipped with a closed-face rod and reel and a "Backyard Bass" lying flat on the floor as a casting target.

We provided all of the children with basic instruction on how to safely and accurately cast a rubber-coated casting plug beyond the Backyard Bass, then use the rod's tip to maneuver the plug into the notch on the target's head so as to "catch" it and reel it in across the smooth gym floor.

We did a practice round and then a competition round. The winners of the competition rounds were each presented with their own rod and reel -- rods and reels obtained by AFF's own Dave Hill as a donation from Cabela's a while back.

As with most of the schools around

Fort Hood, there are quite a number of military kids in attendance at Tarver. We let them know about SKIFF and provided a means for parents to contact us about a fishing trip in more pleasant weather.

When the weather gave us lemons, we attempted to brew some lemonade!

For those new to SKIFF, SKIFF is an acronym for Soldiers' Kids Involved in Fishing Fun. It is a program now in its 13th year, sponsored by the Austin Fly Fishers, and supported by individuals and entities, all of whom desire that kids separated from a parent by that parent's military duty, be given an opportunity to experience the outdoors through fishing during that time of separation, free of charge. The program also offers a time of respite for the home-front parents who may need a short break from single-parenting.

Thank you for your support of the SKIFF program!

Waving a Stick in Water by Juan Shepperd

There's something special about Spring in Texas. When redbud trees bloom pink, I drive to Colorado Bend State Park near Lampasas, Texas for a wonderful fly fishing experience.

In March 2022, I camped and fished and hiked Colorado Bend. Hiked more than I wanted, really. Carried a backpack. TWICE. I booked a backpack-in site and I overpacked. Hence, the extra hiking. (Walked over a mile each way, back and forth, from car to campsite: First with my camping stuff, next with my fishing gear.) The Colorado River at Colorado Bend State Park is wide open. There's a lot of room for anglers. It's shallow and sandy in places. Perfect for white bass. Limestone bluffs form a canyon on each side of the river which funnels wind, making casting difficult sometimes, and provides natural air conditioning. The weekend I visited, the weather was perfect. Most people had waders. Some people wet waded. I was surprised to see about half the people fly fishing. Everybody was catching fish.

Fish Colorado Bend at this time and you'll likely see stringers full of white bass. Daily limit is 25 fish. I saw several people reach the limit. I enjoyed my time on the river. I made small talk with anglers. I met a couple from Austin, who reflected how much better Bend was than the Steps, which they fished the previous day. I talked to a woman from Houston who bought a vacation home on the river and was just learning to fish. I talked to a man from Fort Worth who works for a national rod manufacturer. The brand is in all the fly shops; you guys know it. We talked for a long time. Shared stories about rivers we had fished. Compared notes. It was fun chatting with him. Totally unexpected. Proves there's more to fishing than fishing. He gave me some insight on Oregon too. Speaking of which, 2 people are committed to float and fish the Deschutes River in October. Still time to sign up. We need even numbers, so if you're interested, let me know. I have details.

At the fish cleaning table on the last day, I met people from San Antonio. Nineteen members of the Alamo Fly Fishers – that explains the high percentage of fly fishers – were wrapping up their second trip to the park this year. They fish Colorado Bend twice in March every year they told me “because it's the best.” I grew up somewhat close, in Burnet, and I agree Colorado Bend is excellent water for catching white bass. It's a 2 hour drive from Austin. Little far for a day trip, but worth it in Spring. A Lampasas man, exiting the river with a fly rod and a full stringer, told me Colorado Bend fished well last year into May. If you go now, you can probably still find fish. There were a lot of fish when I was there. Parts of the river are 8 – 10 inches deep. You can see schools of fish, shadows below them, swimming in skinny water. Almost resembles bonefish on flats. Like bonefish, white bass in shallow water are skittish. Best to find a good hole. The fish stack up and hide. Find the right hole, you'll likely soon limit. It's a fun river to fly fish. Try it sometime.

I made dinner for my family later that week with what I caught. Easy recipe. I'll share. Marinate fish in mixture of lime juice, chili powder, cumin and cayenne. While fish absorbs spices, make purple cabbage slaw. Whisk together some mayonnaise (just a little), lime juice, cilantro and honey. Stir in shredded cabbage, corn, and diced jalapeno. Season with salt and pepper. Makes a delicious slaw. White bass fillets cook in 3 – 5 minutes on a comal. Cast iron skillet works too. While the fish cools, I heat corn tortillas. Serve with a side of black beans, fresh avocados, and lime wedges. Perfect fish tacos. Even one of my kids, who doesn't usually like fish, liked these tacos.

Anyway, I understand fly fish outings are important to people in the Club. That said, here are a few outings to consider:

April 16, 2022 – non AFF event. I am going to fish the Llano Slabs outside Kingsland on 4/16, if anyone wants to join. Sunfish and bass are hungry this time of year and the wet wading on the Llano River is fun. Slabs are 1- 1.5 hours from Austin. Free parking. Free access. Long's Fish Camp is directly upriver. This is the free version of the same water.

April 23, 2022 – Official April 2022 Austin Fly Fishers (AFF) Club Outing. Saturday after the Thursday club meeting. Float the Colorado River from Little Webberville Park to Big Webberville Park. This stretch of water 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 about 20 miles East of Austin.

April 30, 2022 – non AFF event – Brushy Creek Clean Up and Crawfish Boil – Registration Required. Register online at www.livingwatersflyfishing.com

May 7, 2022 – non AFF event – World Championship Bass on the Fly Fishing Tournament in Lake Fork. I can't make this event but I hope you go. I went duck hunting near Lake Fork in January; I could tell it was a fishy area. Hope to go back on a fishing trip someday. If you go, please share experience with the club.

May 14, 2022 – non AFF event – Guadalupe River Trout Unlimited (GRTU) Chapter Meeting at Lazy L&L Campground in New Braunfels.

May 14 – 16, 2022 – non AFF event – Bud Priddy One Fly Tournament hosted by the Alamo Fly Fishers on the Nueces River. I have done this trip several times. It's a great Hill Country stream. Gin clear water. Lots of wild native Guadalupe bass. Texas Women Fly Fishers join and usually catch a lot of fish. Sometimes Dallas clubs and San Marcos clubs make the trip too. It's a fun weekend.



Waving a Stick in Water cont.

May 21, 2022 – non AFF event. Brushy Creek One Fly Tournament. Meet at Living Water Fly Shop in Round Rock, Texas at 8 AM.

I haven't planned an official club outing for May. I want to plan trips you want to join. Happy to co-host, or hand it over to you. Part of me is leaning towards a Colorado River float in a new section of the river. It's huge river, right?! San Marcos River fishes well this time of year, though it moves fast. You need a boat. Ideally, 2 people in a boat. One to fish; One to steer. I am also curious to try the Guadalupe River Southeast of Austin, close to where it meets and absorbs the San Marcos River outside Gonzales, Texas. It looks to be an hour from Austin. Come and Take It. If you have thoughts you want to share, a preference or another suggestion, drop me a line. I'm always game for fishing.

June makes a nice time to fish the Texas Coast. Anyone want to organize a saltwater outing?

I'm kind of a river rat. I like moving water. Hopping on and off a boat. Sitting in rapids and enjoying a cold beverage, occasionally. Waving a stick. I like the whole experience. I blocked off dates (June 25 – June 28) to float and fish the South Llano River near Junction. It's a non AFF event. For those of you who have a kayak and can get away, the South Llano River makes a great float. River starts about 60 miles southwest of Junction, near the Kimble-Edwards county line. Out there, the landscape is arid and dry and this trip is great prep for a Devil's River float in the Chihuahuan desert (something I want to do someday). Near Junction, Hill Country soils support oak, juniper, pecan and mesquite trees. Lots of native grasses. Smarter people than me estimate there are over 1,000 springs in the area. I'm going to camp to keep costs down and stay close to nature, but there are local motels too. I floated this river 2 years ago and it was a blast. I saw deer, feral hogs, raccoons and Rio Grande turkeys all near the water. Tons of Guadalupe bass. I didn't find monsters, but I bet some of you could. I found lots of beautiful, native, wild, hungry fish. Made me happy. If this interests you, let me know. South Llano River makes for some fun fly fishing.

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

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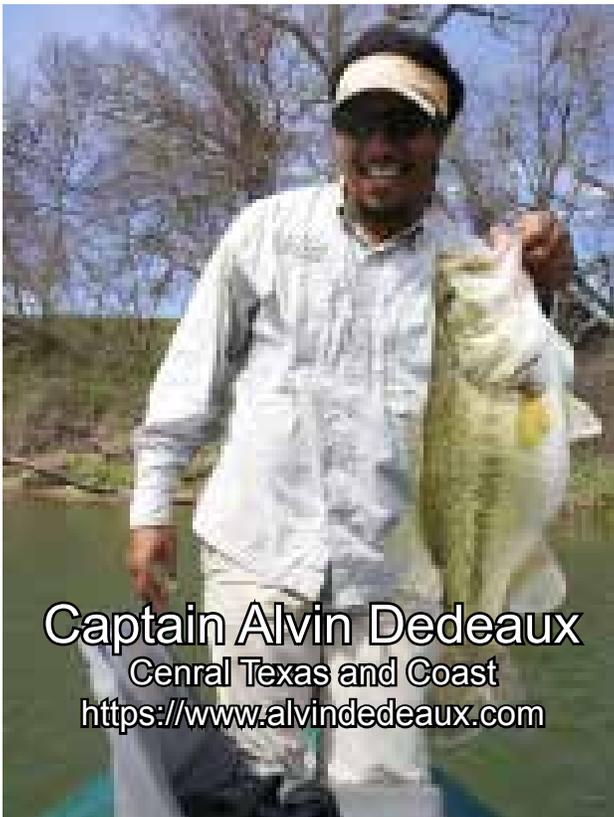
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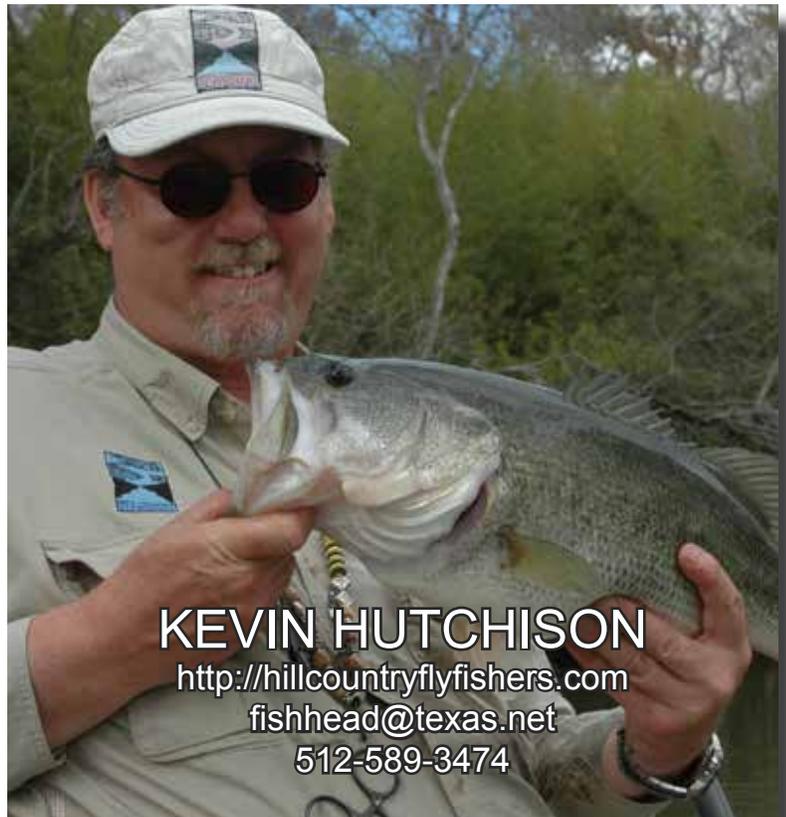
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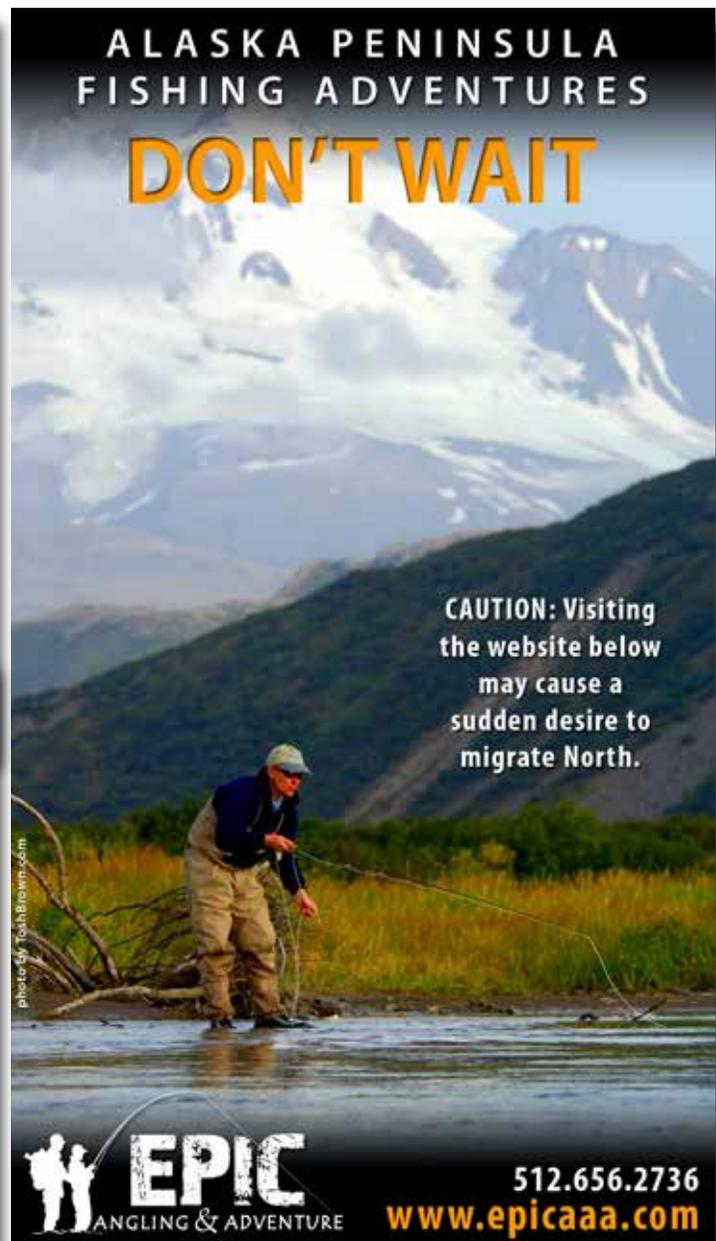
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