A man wearing a white cap and a red and black plaid shirt is holding a large, golden-brown fish on a fishing rod. The fish is suspended in the air, and the man is looking directly at the camera. The background shows a body of water and green trees.

Randell Black of Sulligent, Alabama has been fishing the Marion County Lake for many years. "This is a great place to kick back and relax. You can always catch something here." said Black.

Fantastic Fishing

▶ By Phil Ekema, Fisheries Biologist, Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries // Photography by Billy Pope

From catfish to panfish, Marion County Lake has it all!

Located in northwest Alabama, Marion County Lake is a little jewel among Alabama's Public Fishing Lakes. Though only 37 acres in size, it has earned a sparkling reputation as one of Alabama's top catfish lakes. Marion County Lake provides this fantastic fishing at a bargain price. Bass, bream and crappie are also available and easy to access by boat, bank fishing areas and two fishing piers.



Facilities and Amenities

Everything needed for a comfortable day of fishing is available at the lake. Snacks and drinks are sold at the concession building, as well as all of your fishing needs such as tackle, gear, and bait. The concession building also contains a restroom.

Bank anglers can enjoy easy access along the majority of the lake's well-groomed shoreline. A concrete boat ramp is available for launching your own boat, or you can rent a boat from Lake Manager Mickey Goggans at the concession building.



The fishing pier is convenient for anglers to use. A fish feeder dispenses fish food to attract fish to the pier, and numerous cedar trees have been sunk adjacent to the pier. This helps increase anglers' chances to catch fish.

During February 2008, several fish reefs were constructed. These reefs are all within casting distance by bank anglers. Electrofishing surveys in March 2008 showed that fish have moved into these attractors, so bank anglers can now target them to increase their catch rates.

All Visitors Welcome

You don't have to fish to enjoy Marion County Lake. It offers a clean, safe and wholesome environment that is perfect for a family outing. There is no admission charge, kids love the outdoor setting, and picnic tables are available.

In addition, there is a covered pavilion at the lake. The pavilion is available at no charge to anglers, picnickers or other visitors on a first come, first served basis. However, larger groups such as church functions or family reunions must reserve the pavilion in advance.

Catfish Haven

Catfish are "king" at Marion County Lake. Over 5,000 channel catfish – more than 135 catfish per acre – are stocked in to the lake each year. This supplemental stock-

ing program provides for the best catfishing among all 23 state lakes, for both numbers and pounds of catfish harvested per acre of water. Averaging a pound apiece, the catfish are the perfect eating size.

A bonus at Marion County Lake is the catfish-only pond situated above the main lake and across from the concession building. It is stocked with 3,000 catfish in late

fall, and provides anglers with fast fishing action during winter and spring. The covered fishing pier is where most anglers fish.

Bream, Bass, Crappie

If catfish fishing is not your thing, you may want to try fishing for bream, bass, or crappie. Averaging 0.4 pounds each, bream are located around the abundant shoreline cover during the late spring, summer, and fall. They are also caught from the fishing pier. Crickets or worms can entice these fish to bite. These and other baits may be purchased at the concession building.

Bass are abundant in the lake, and average just over 1 pound each. Anglers are encouraged to keep all of the bass they catch, so that the remaining bass can grow faster and bigger.

Marion County Lake also supports some very large bass. In March 2008, biologists conducting a routine survey captured two bass in excess of 10 pounds. Both of these bass were returned to the lake unharmed, and are still there waiting to make a lucky angler's dream come true.

Another popular pan fish is the crappie. Supplemental stocking of black crappie in 2003 seem to have given crappie a "leg hold," and are now appearing in the angler's creels. Crappie average nearly a pound each, and are now common enough for anglers to target.

Requirements and Hours

Anglers 12 years and older must purchase a \$3 daily fishing permit. Resi-


dents ages 16 to 65 years and non-residents age 16 years and older must also have a valid fishing license. The fishing permit is available at the lake store, but purchase a license before arriving at a retailer or online at www.outdooralabama.com.

A jon boat can be rented for \$5 and private boats can be launched for \$3.

Anglers are required to stop at the concession building before leaving and allow the lake manager to count and weigh their fish. That information helps state biologists manage the lake's fish population.

The lake is in operation daylight until dark from February 1 through November every day except Wednesdays. After July 1, the lake is also closed on Tuesdays.

For current information on what's biting, call Lake Manager Mickey Goggans at 256-921-7856.

The State Lakes are operated entirely with user fees. These fees are derived from the sale of fishing licenses and from a federal excise tax on fishing and boating supplies. These funds are directed back to Alabama's fish management agencies through the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program. No General Fund money is used in State Lake operations. 

Directions

Marion County Lake is halfway between the cities of Hamilton and Guin on Highway 43. From Hamilton, take U.S. 43S to its intersection with U.S. 78. Continue on U.S. 43S for 1 mile, then take a right on County Road 148 to the lake. The address is 554 County Hwy. 148, Guin, Alabama.

Other State Lakes

Alabama's State Lakes Program includes 23 State Lakes located in 20 counties, and one is located within easy driving distance of most Alabamians. For more information and directions to the nearest State Lake, please call 334-242-3471, or visit www.outdooralabama.com/fishing/freshwater/where/lakes.