

# DO YOU KNOW THESE 'BASICS' OF STRUCTURE FISHING?

by Buck Perry, Education Editor

As a youngster I had to repeat a primary grade in school due to an illness that caused me to be absent from class for a long period of time. When I returned, the subject matter being discussed just didn't make sense. When I repeated the grade I found the material missed was the key to understanding what was being said when I returned after the illness.

As a "teacher," I know the main points of a talk (or article) may not be fully understood because the person hearing the message may not have enough background knowledge for the subject to make sense. I am also aware that many will not understand because they are hearing or reading the information for the first time. It is further known that the comprehension of what is said is not likely to be the same for all.

All this means the "teacher" must review at times. He must be repetitious and approach the subject matter from different directions. If he does not do this, a goodly number of those who are listening will not get the point.

I have been talking "structure fishing" (Spoonplugging) in *Fishing Facts* for a good number of years. In the beginning the simple basics were discussed. As time went on, the things involved in structure fishing were talked about in detail. The fishing situations you and I face were covered in many different ways.



*"When the fish are in the deep sanctuary depths, they are normally so dormant or so deep they are almost impossible to catch. As fishermen, we are saved due to the fact they do not stay so dormant or so deep all the time. Once or twice on an average fishing day the fish become active and may move toward the shallows." - Buck Perry*

However, today when one of my "talks" gets in print I may spend days trying to answer the questions raised by the article. In the last few months articles about Spoonplugging by different writers have appeared in several magazines. At times I just sit and stare at the pile of mail. Some are asking for clarification on specific points. Some say: "That ain't the way I heard it;" and a great number remark: "I never heard of Spoonplugging or 'structure fishing;' what is this all about?"

After 40 years of "preaching," reactions such as these would indicate I haven't been doing a very good job. But the main thing that has been pointed out is the fact that *there are new fishermen coming along all the time*. This has been strongly pointed out since the expanded distribution of *Fishing Facts*.

At this time it appears to me it would not be out of order to review some of the "basics" of structure fishing. As some of you know from my books, Home Study Courses, etc., the things involved in structure fishing are quite extensive. It is not possible to cover a subject thoroughly in an article such as this, but we can cover some of the basics so our future talks make more sense to the present readers of *Fishing Facts*.

If you are one of those who have heard me talk over a period of time, you should know I have stated that at some time or other,  
*continued*



## DO YOU KNOW THESE BASICS?

a fish can be caught by most anyone, most anyplace, on most anything, and by most any method. However, if you desire to catch more and bigger fish **consistently** and get satisfaction from the effort, it will not be accomplished if you go about it in a haphazard manner.

I realized while only a small chap I would have to have some "guidelines" for my fishing if I was to achieve success and satisfaction. Over a period of time I set up not only a "BASIC" guideline for fishing, but guidelines for the multitude of fishing situations I would encounter. One of the first observations made was the fact I was not likely to face any two fishing situations *exactly* the same no matter where or when I went fishing. It was never likely that the weather and water conditions of a fishing day would be *exactly* the same as another day. In fact, each fishing day would be a completely new ballgame. What was "good" yesterday is most likely to be "lousy" today. The guidelines that I set up were made from my educational background, lengthy observations, and just plain logic. *The primary function of these guidelines was to allow ME to be consistently successful at catching more and bigger fish whenever and wherever I went fishing.* At no time were the guidelines to be used to prove or disprove a scientific theory. Unfortunately, some people have missed this point completely. Besides, it seems obvious to me that knowing "why" a fish did this or that had little to do with my putting him on the stringer.

I am reminded of a conversation I had recently with a newspaper reporter. He made a statement that has been running around in my head like a song that can't be tuned out. He said that fishing has become so "scientific" (or claimed to be) that not only has it taken the fun out of fishing, but has "turned off" a lot of potentially good fishermen who are now engaged in other forms of recreation.

Our fishing guidelines were set up so I would spend my time where I had the **BEST** chance to catch a fish. They would have me at the right place at the right time, fishing in the right manner. No less important, *they would have me fishing for the MOST "CATCHABLE" fish in the body of water.*

When I set up guidelines (for MY fishing) it had become obvious to me **there were no problems catching fish when they were in "shallow" water** (contrary to what some fishermen would have us believe). **Problems in fishing are related to "deep" water.** Lack of knowledge on fish behavior and deep water is a major

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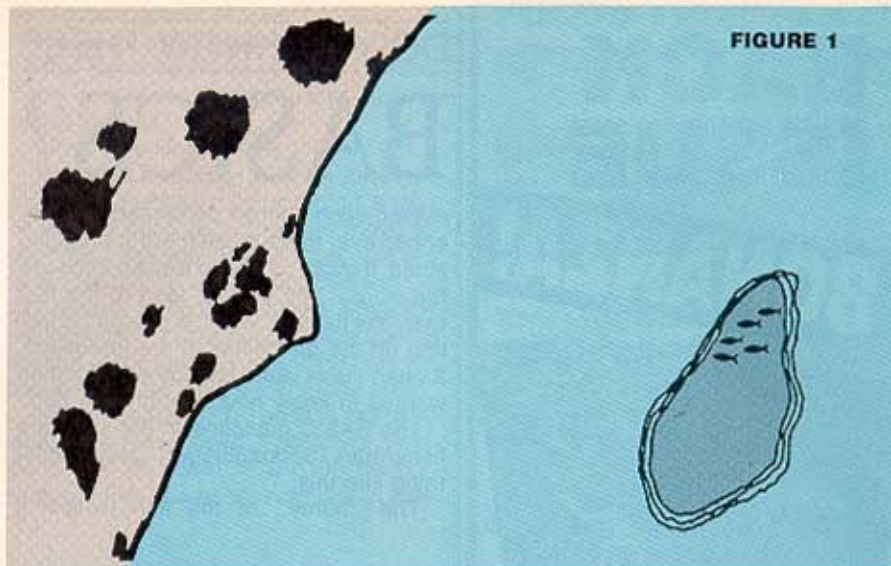


FIGURE 1

*FIGURE 1 - Top view of a body of water (lake, stream, or reservoir). The question is: what does this figure mean to you?*

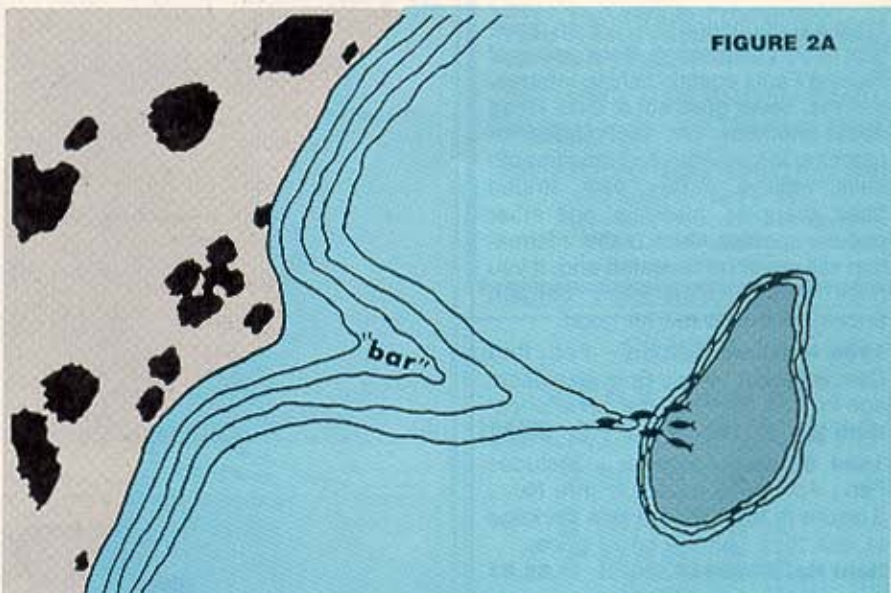


FIGURE 2A

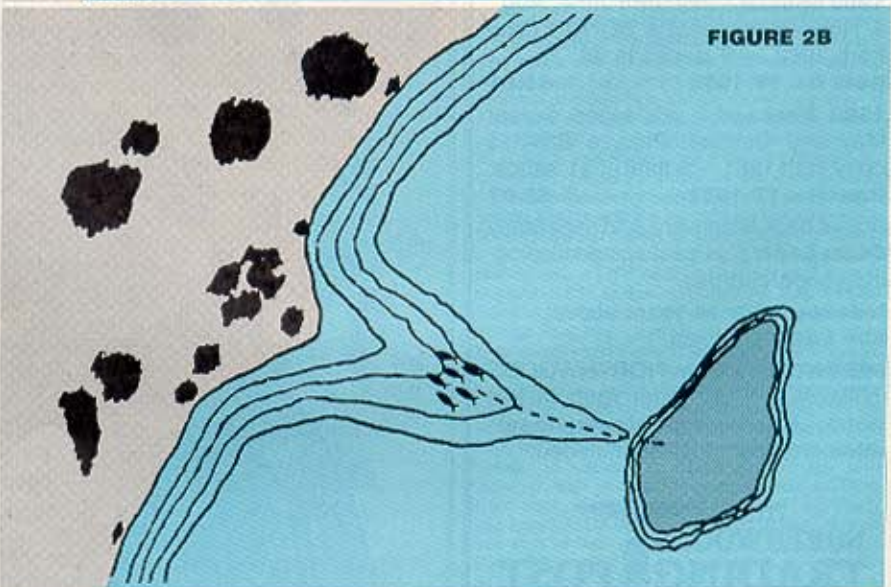


FIGURE 2B

*FIGURES 2A & 2B - Top view of the same lake area shown in Figure 1. Again — what do these figures mean to you?*



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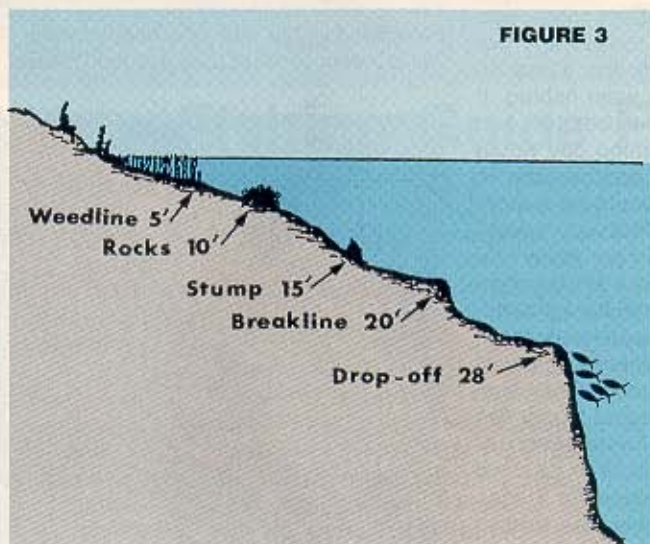
## DO YOU KNOW THESE BASICS?

reason such a small percentage of fishermen ever make a catch worth bragging about. It might be well to explain that I use the words "my fishing" due to the fact that "my fishing" was the reason for setting up the guidelines in the first place. It wasn't until years later other fishermen wanted to know how I caught the fish.

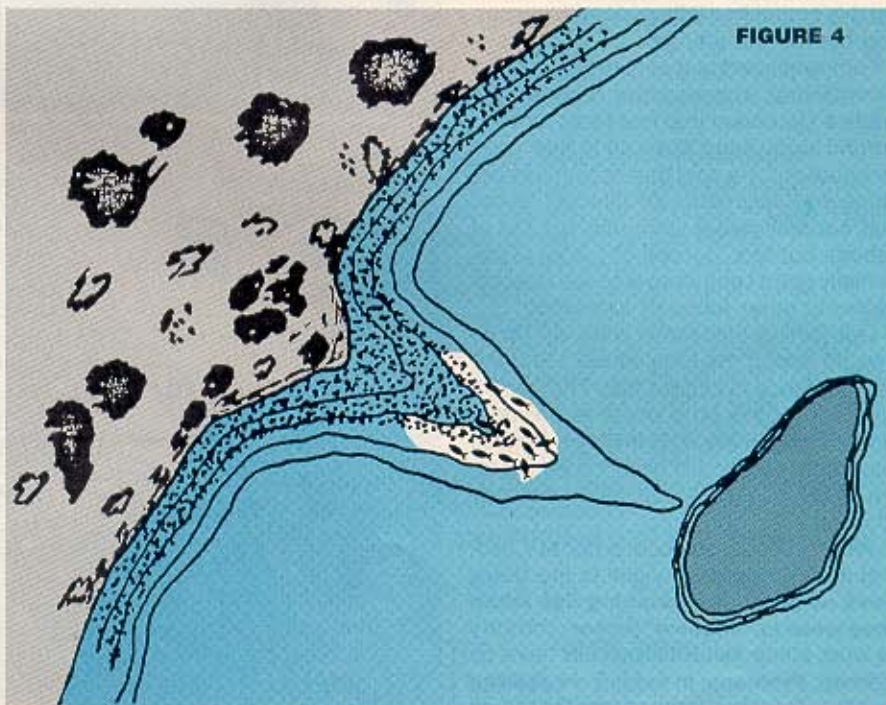
The **BASIC** guideline of the structure fisherman (Spoonplugger) goes something like this:

The "home" of the fish (where it

spends the greater part of its time — a sanctuary from a changing environment) is somewhere in the deep, or deepest, water in the area being fished. When in the sanctuary depths, the fish are normally so dormant or so deep they are almost impossible to locate or catch. As fishermen, we are saved due to the fact they do not stay so dormant or so deep all the time. Once or twice on an average fishing day the fish will become active and **may** move toward the shallows. We are saved again because when fish do become active and move toward the shallows, they do not go in just any direction. The route they take has bottom features (structure, breaks, breaklines) that show them the way. As the fish move along a bottom feature (structure) they will pause or stop



**FIGURE 3**  
*FIGURE 3 - Side view of an underwater bar (structure) the fish use in their movements towards the shallows. It shows the "breaks" on the bar where the fish pause or stop on their movements toward the shallows. There are five "breaks" on the bar.*



**FIGURE 4**  
*FIGURE 4 - Top view of a fishing situation where there is a definite weedline in the shallower water.*



at "things" (breaks and breaklines) on the bottom. How far they go (toward the shallows) and how long they stay (at a break or breakline, before turning back to deep water) is dependent upon or controlled by the weather and water conditions at that particular time.

In order to consistently catch fish we must control the depth and speed of our lures (or bait) on and/or around the bottom features (structure, breaks, breaklines) the fish are using in their movements and migrations.

I realize it is somewhat difficult for some fishermen to apply the written word to the fishing situations he faces when he gets on the water. He may think he has the material well in mind, but when he gets on the water his mind goes blank and he

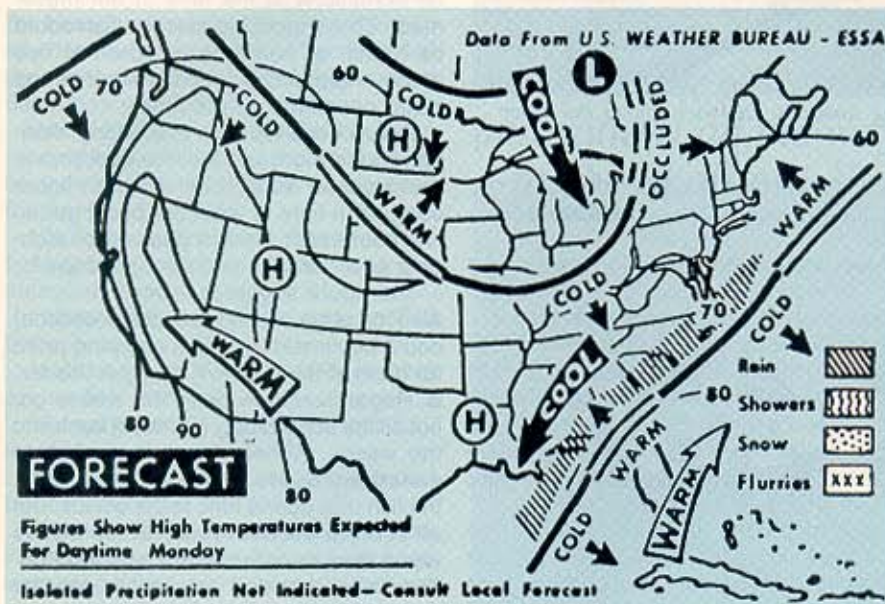
would be a waste of time."

**Figure 2A** and **Figure 2B** are top views of the same situation (**Figure 1**). Here again I would ask: "What do these figures mean to you?"

What they say to me:

"A part of the basic guideline states another fact that has to be accepted. It says when fish become active and move toward the shallows, they do not go just any direction, but will use features *OF* and *ON* the bottom to show them the way. The most common 'structure' being a 'bar' (a feature of the bottom) extending from the shallows to the deep water in the area."

It might be well at this point to say more about the terms used. "Structure situations" are features (*OF* and *ON* the bottom) the fish use as their guides in their



**FIGURE 5** - Typical weather map found in many newspapers. It shows all types of weather patterns moving across the United States.

sometimes wanders around like a lost duck. To be sure you understand what was said in the "Basic Guideline," let's get **ON THE WATER** and talk about it.

**Figure 1** is a top view of a section in a body of water (lake, stream, reservoir). The question I'd like to ask is: "What does this figure mean to you?"

If I asked a group of fishermen what it meant to them, I'd probably get a variety of answers. However, I'm quite sure most of the answers would merely describe what they saw — "some fish in a deep hole." My guess is when most of these fishermen get on the water they don't have the faintest idea that a situation such as this can exist.

Without further delay, let me say what the figure means to me.

"If the fisherman does not accept the first part of the basic guideline, which states that fish spend the **greater** part of their time in deep water, further study of the structure fisherman's guidelines

movements and migrations. "Structure" is a feature of the bottom that is different from the surrounding bottom area. "Breaks" are objects ON the bottom such as stumps, rocks, bushes, sunken objects, etc. "Breaklines" are places on the bottom where there is a more rapid increase or decrease in depth, such as the edge of a channel. When the more rapid increase or decrease in depth occurs at a particular spot (a short distance) it is referred to as a "break." Fish react to other forms of "breaklines" such as: the face of a weedline, the edge of a current, where waters of different colors or temperatures meet, where a "clean" bottom meets a "dirty" bottom (clean versus muck, etc.). In time we will discuss all the different "structure situations" you and I encounter.

The basic guideline states that when the fish move on structure they will pause or stop at "breaks" and "breaklines" ON

*continued*

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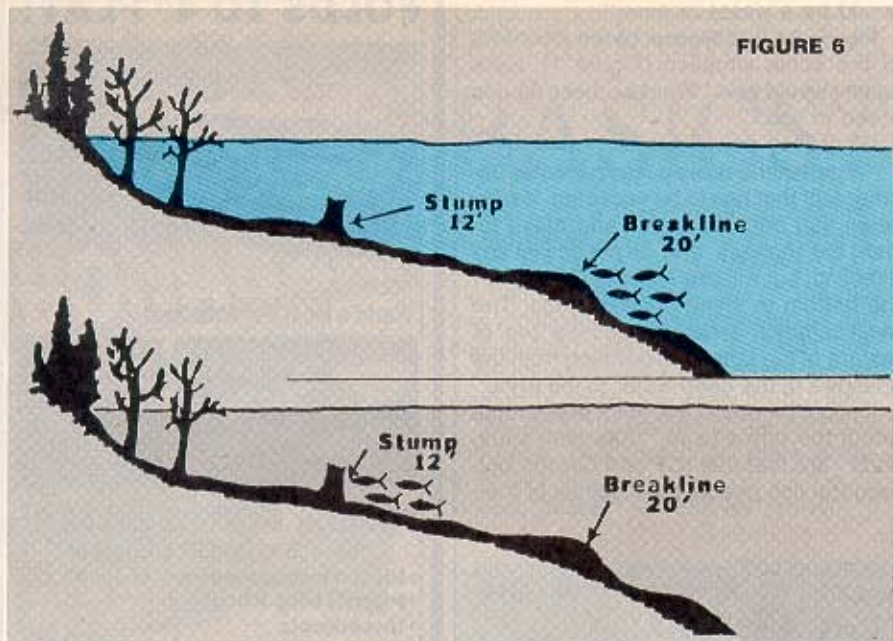


FIGURE 6 - Two side views of the same fishing situation. One view shows the water as "clear;" the other view shows less clarity.

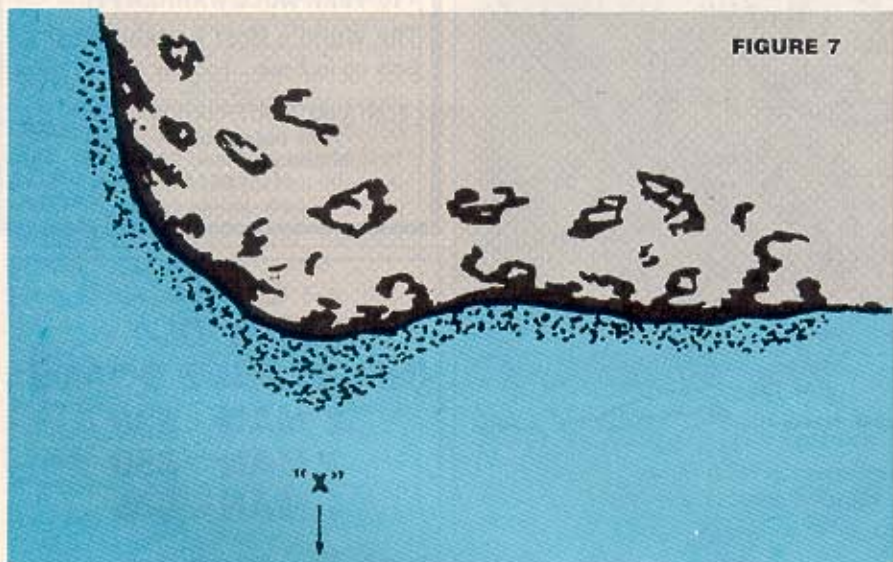


FIGURE 7

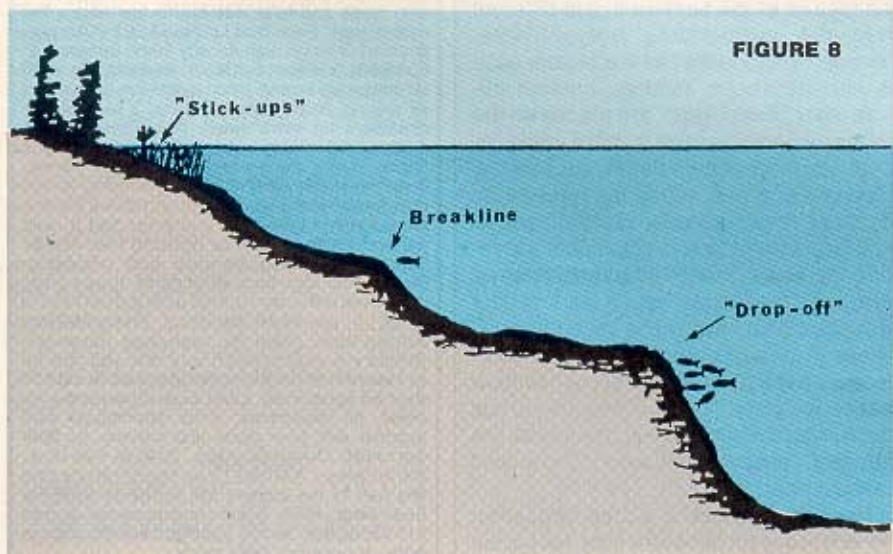


FIGURE 8

FIGURE 8 - Would you say a "shoreline pounder"; has a good chance to consistently catch fish?

## DO YOU KNOW THESE BASICS?

the structure (feature OF the bottom). **Figure 3** is a side view of the "bar" (structure) the fish use in their movements towards the shallows. It shows the "breaks" on the bar where the fish will pause or stop in their movements toward the shallows. There are five "breaks" on the bar.

**Figure 3** also points out another important point of the basic guideline. It says: how far fish move toward the shallows and how long they stay is dependent upon (or controlled by) the weather and water conditions at the time of the movement. This should indicate the fish could be found, at one time or other, at five spots — depending upon the weather and water conditions at the time.

**Figure 4** is a top view of a fishing situation where there is a definite weedline in the shallower water. What does this figure suggest in light of what the basic guideline said about the fish pausing or stopping at a "break" on/in the structure?

The figure suggests to me:

**A.** The edge of the weeds (weedline) could be considered as a stopping point for most of the fish — if they get this far.  
**B.** Regardless how deep the weeds go, not all the fish will stay (or move) back into the weeds. (Where there is **no better sanctuary depth** "outside" the weeds, the fish may spend time in the weeds. But **all of them will not remain in the weeds when they become active and moving.** The fish "outside" the weeds are the most catchable.

**C.** I can check the outside of the weedline and feel confident this will tell me if the fish are active and moving.

If you look at **Figure 5** you will see a typical weather map found in newspapers. It shows all types of weather patterns moving across the United States. This means you and I will be faced with daily weather patterns, none of which will ever be exactly the same.

Not long ago we discussed the effects of water color on the movements of the fish. To refresh your memory, let us look at **Figure 6**.

**Figure 6** shows two side views of the same situation. One view shows the water color as "clear." The other view shows it with less clarity. It could be a yellow-green color or white-sandy, etc. If you compare how active or how shallow the fish have moved *under the same weather conditions*, it should show how important water color is to the movements and migrations of the fish. We can get by with sloppy fishing (sloppy presentation of lures, incorrect interpretations, etc.) in shallow water, but we can't when working deep water. The deeper we go the



more exact our efforts must be. In addition, the deeper we go, the more difficult it becomes to do a good job.

When you begin to accept the basic guideline as truth, then in time you will see, most of the time, the weather and water conditions will not be good enough to get movement (migration) all the way to the shoreline shallows. This would indicate we better plan to go to the fish, as he is not likely to come to us. The good part of this is, you and I will know where to look for the fish (breaks and breaklines) on a structure situation (the features of the bottom the fish use in their movements and migrations).

**Figure 7** is a top view of a fishing situation. Position "X" is the location of the boat where I was casting **ever so often** to a spot toward the center of the lake.

My fishing partner was a professor from the biology department of a major university. He was present due to the fact I had agreed to show him some of the structure fisherman's guidelines.

We had been on the lake fishing for an hour or more before I anchored the boat as indicated, and began to cast toward the center of the lake.

His first question was: "Why aren't we fishing the grass back there along the shoreline?"

I said: "Because there are no fish there."

He then said: "How do you know there are no fish there?"

My reply was: "I just got through fishing it."

He said: "Why are you casting toward the center of the lake like that?"

My answer was: "I am making my casts like this because the fish are in deep water and I'm checking to see if any have moved on this 'bar' toward shallower water. I stopped at this point because in the deeper water beyond my casts the bottom is flat and covered with muck. I

can't work my lures properly out there due to the muck, and I have no idea where the fish might be due to the flat. So I'm waiting for the fish to move to the spot where I'm working the lures."

He said: "You mean to sit there and tell me with five or ten miles of shoreline on both sides of us, you expect the fish to hit that spot you are casting toward?"

"Yep!"

"I don't believe it."

"Well, friend, you might as well get comfortable, for we may be here for quite a spell. You might look at your watch and

*"Most of the time  
the weather and water  
conditions will not  
be good enough to  
get good fish movement  
(migration) all the way  
to the shallows."*

take note of how long it takes me to prove my point."

Ever so often I would make a long cast, letting the lure (a 100-series Spoonplug) sink to the bottom before making the retrieve. After sinking the line I'd keep the rod tip low so a fast retrieve would not make the lure leave the bottom. It would bump or walk most all the way to the boat.

Between casts, which were made every five minutes or so, we had a chat, ate a sandwich, drank several cups of coffee, and I listened to a professor who thought he was out with some nut.


I was lucky this time, because after only two hours and 14 minutes (by his watch), I connected on a cast and it didn't take

long to have two fish short of two limits (6 per limit) flopping on the bottom of the boat. Not one of the fish was caught more than 10 feet from the spot where the lure first hit the bottom.

The professor's reaction was to say: "Why didn't you take time to string the fish? Why did the fish stop hitting after the tenth fish?"

I told him the weather and water conditions indicated a *short* activity period was likely to occur. This meant I couldn't fool around if I expected to put a mess of fish in the boat. I was thankful the fish stayed active and around as long as they did. (I *didn't* tell him the major reason was due to the fact I didn't get any help while he sat there bug-eyed.)

**Figure 8** is a side view of a fishing situation. A part of the basic guideline says if you and I expect to catch fish consistently we must control the depth and speed of our lures (or bait) on, at, or around (close as possible) the features the fish use in their movements and migrations. Would you say a "shoreline pounder" has much chance to consistently catch fish?

In the future we will direct our attention toward the question: "What all is involved in the basic guideline and structure fishing?" In our talks we will find that all the things (subject matter) involved in structure fishing and the basic guideline will fall under eight major headings. As we talk about these subjects our "direction" will be to approach them by **STAYING ON THE WATER** as much as possible, pointing out the "guidelines" we should use on the different "fishing situations" that occur. Our purpose for going fishing is to catch *more and bigger* fish whenever or wherever we might fish. The guidelines we will talk about will do just that. We never lose sight of the fact that most of the time most sections of the water contain no fish. 

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