

# Catch a fish, spot a gator at Millwood Lake

Big bass, crappie the prize on trip south

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ASHDOWN — Take a giant chunk of the Ozark National Forest, flatten it out and cover it with 8 feet of water. That paints a good picture of Millwood Lake, a black bass and crappie haven in southwest Arkansas.

Millwood is 30,000 acres of flooded cypress trees, bushes and enough vegetation types to stump any botanist. Speaking of stumps, Millwood is full

of them. All that combined creates incredible black bass habitat that makes the shallow reservoir a trophy largemouth bass lake.

“The lake record is 14 pounds and that was caught in the early 1970s,” said Mike Siefert, who’s been a bass fishing guide at Millwood for 36 years and owns Millwood Lake Guide Service. “A kid caught a 13-pound, 8-ounce bass during a high school bass tournament last year.”



Running a boat can be tricky in Millwood Lake’s shallow water. “It’s 30,000 acres of flooded timber that can be intimidating to anyone,” says Mike Siefert, Millwood fishing guide.



Mike Siefert works a Rat-L-Trap crank bait March 3 around cypress trees and vegetation at Millwood Lake.

Siefert's biggest trophy is a 12-pound largemouth. He's got a replica of that bass on the wall at his home in nearby Texarkana, Ark.

Siefert and yours truly fished together in October 2024 and had a whale of a day landing 20 largemouths and spotted bass up to 3 pounds.



Black bass, such as this 3-pound largemouth, bit March 3 at Millwood Lake throughout the day.

“Late February and early March are the best times for a chance at a really big bass,” Siefert said in 2024. We arranged to fish in early March last year but had to cancel twice because of bad weather. Luck was with us this year for a perfect fishing day March 3. The temperature was comfortable, wind wasn’t howling and the sky was overcast. Siefert couldn’t have ordered a better day.

He’s been running a boat at Millwood for decades and could find his way safely around the lake blindfolded. Game plan was to head up Little River, a main Millwood tributary, to start the morning. Running 50 mph up the narrow tree-filled waterway doesn’t faze Siefert, and it was a thrill ride for his passenger.

“A lot of people say that boat ride is worth the cost of the trip,” Siefert laughed when he shut the engine down.

The first bite came from a hefty bass the guide hooked while casting a bright colored spinner bait toward a matt of weeds and grass. Siefert got a peek at the fish as it swirled and spit the hook.

"That was a good fish there," Siefert said. "I'd like to put my thumb in his mouth."

His fishing buddy for the day went to battle throwing a white spinner bait and stuck with it the whole trip. A 3-pounder hammered the lure and this fish was hooked solid. After some photos, the largemouth went back into the stained water.

Siefert switched to a white Rat-L-Trap crank bait and welcomed several bass into his neat-as-a-pin Champion bass boat. His fishing pal wrangled big fish of the day into the boat, a solid 4-pound bass that felt like a torpedo when it hit at the base of a cypress tree.

"White rules the day today," Siefert said. "Almost every fish we've caught has been on white."

Compared to Beaver and other lakes in the Ozarks, Millwood is like another world. Wasps the size of bats buzzed by the boat now and then. "They build nests big as the steering wheel on a car," the guide noted.

It's also got big alligators. We saw two during our trip, one 6-footer and a young 3-foot 'gator. They're hard to spot because their eyes are about all that sticks up above the water. Alligators eat "whatever they can get their mouths around," Siefert said. "Geese, ducks, nutria rats, snakes. They have plenty to eat."

Rarely do they bother people. "They see us as a larger predator," Siefert said.

Millwood is open for hunting during the state's September permit alligator season.

April and May are fine months for bass fishing at the lake. Spring is top-water time. A top-water frog worked around lily pads might get clobbered by a 10-pound largemouth. Any surface lure an angler likes to throw should work.

If big bass aren't enough, Millwood has huge crappie. Three giants bit our bass lures. Crappie fishing was on the agenda for Day 2 of the Millwood trip. We'll have that story down the road in NWA Outdoors.

