

How to Deal with Weedy Lakes

by Buck Perry, Education Editor



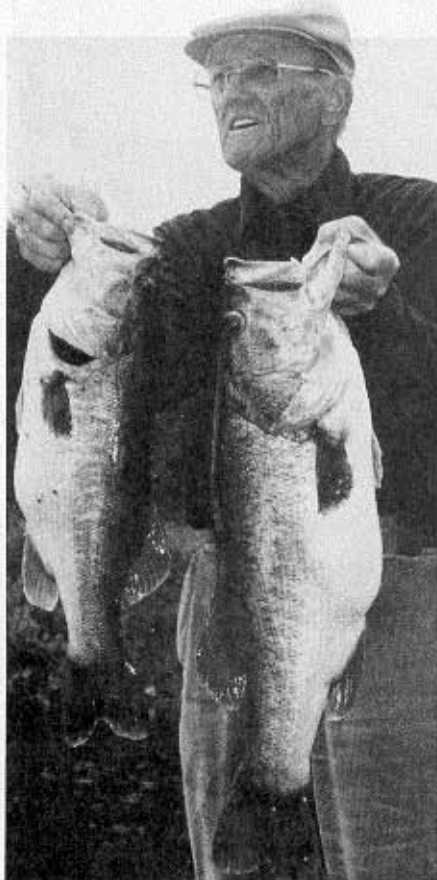
For quite sometime this past year we have talked about the interpretation of a reservoir (man-made lake) from the things we could see *above* the water. There was quite a lot said about "Flatland" reservoirs where brush and standing trees covered almost the whole lake.

At the time we talked about the brush situation, there were some fishermen who reacted by saying: "My fishing water has weeds, not brush." From the comments made, it would appear they had learned a lot about structure situations in their "weedy" lakes from our talks about reservoirs with bushes and trees. This was indicated by the little that was said about "what weeds do I fish?" They seemed to have grasped that the productive weeds should be related to a structure situation.

Let's look at some figures and point out some of the guidelines a Spoonplugger (structure fisherman) would use as to the movements of the fish in different weedy situations, and what he would think about if he desired to catch fish consistently.

Figure 1-A is a side view of a fishing situation with a tall weedline. In this case the fish spend the majority of their time in the weeds. The reason being, there is no deeper water available to give them a better "sanctuary" from a changing environment.

Under certain weather and water conditions these fish would be more difficult to catch than those under a similar (weather and water) condition that had deep water available to them. Deep water is the only reliable thing that will provide a more stable environment to a cold-blooded fish. If deep water is available, the fish will use it in preference to any type weeds that do not extend to stable sanctuary depths. Our guideline says if the fish have depths greater than 20 feet, they will use it. Weather and water conditions would determine just how deep they go. The fish in deep water will become active, moving, and more catchable sooner than those in the shallower weeds. The fish in the shallower weeds can stay dormant over quite a period of time, and the fisherman



Education Editor, Buck Perry, displays a pair of bigmouth bass taken from a section of lake containing abundant aquatic vegetation. In the following article Buck answers questions from fishermen who wish to know how fish can be caught more consistently out of weed-infested lakes.

would find it difficult to get a lure (or bait) close enough, or for long enough to get a "take."

Figure 1-B is a side view of what the structure fisherman would expect to occur during activity and movement of the fish. Our guidelines would say this occurs regardless how deep the weeds may go in a body of water. This is little different from a situation where the fisherman has to exercise patience for the fish to move up to a contact point of a nice "structure situation" before he can make contact.

Figure 2-A is a side view of a weed situation along the shoreline. The weedline does not extend into the

sanctuary depths. That is, the majority of the time the fish are deeper than the depth of the weedline.

When movement towards the shallows occur, and conditions of weather and water are such it extends as shallow as the weedline, our guideline says *not all the fish will go back into the weeds (Figure 2-B)*. This should tell us plenty about the presentations of lures—either casting or trolling. And, it would appear to me, at times we should exercise patience, for the fish to move, instead of spending all our time "thrashing" back in the weeds—if we desire to catch fish consistently.

Figure 3-A is a top view of a weed situation. The broken line is a "breakline" and shows the shape of a wide bar. The breakline disappears (peters out) as shown. There are three weed beds (A, B, C) shown, as well as a weedline along the shoreline. Some depth figures are shown at the weedline, and on each "finger" of the bar to show where a more rapid increase in depth occurs (a breakline). The depth figures below each finger shows how fast the depth increases. The starting point (sanctuary depth) of a good migration of fish is deeper than the weeds and the breakline.

The major question is: what weeds are likely to get the fish on most migrations up on the bar?

Figure 3-B shows the situation after a good migration has put the fish up on the bar. I have placed them at a particular weed bed. The questions that now arise are:

1. Why did I place the fish at weed bed "A"?
2. Should I spend time fishing weed bed "B"?
3. Should I expect to catch a lot of big fish at weed bed "C", or the weeds along the shoreline?

Comment on Question 1—The structure fisherman (Spoonplugger) would have "guidelines" in a situation such as this. His guidelines for the question would be threefold: (a) The depths along the breakline (or finger) and the depth of the water off the fingers indicate the "contact point" to the bar
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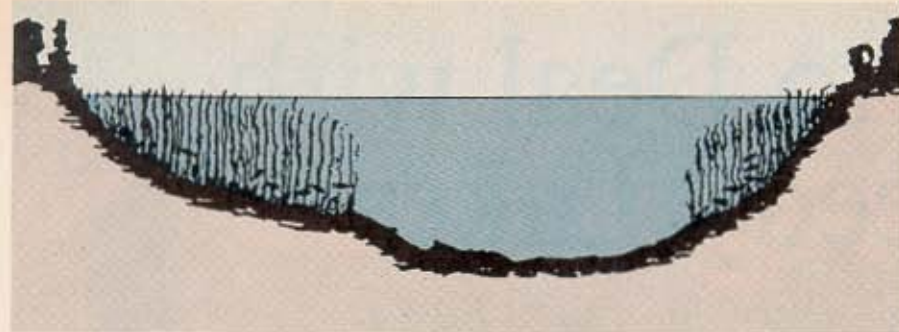


FIGURE 1A—Side view of a tall weedline. When no deep water is available the fish may spend the majority of their time in the weeds.

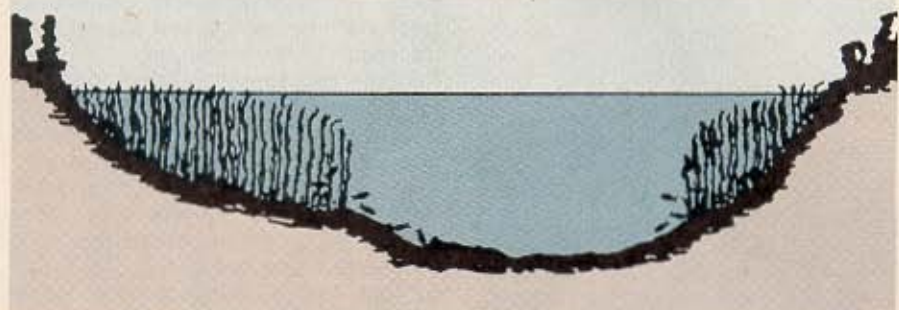


FIGURE 1B—When game fish spend a major part of their time in weeds, this is what the structure fisherman should expect to occur during activity and movement of the fish.

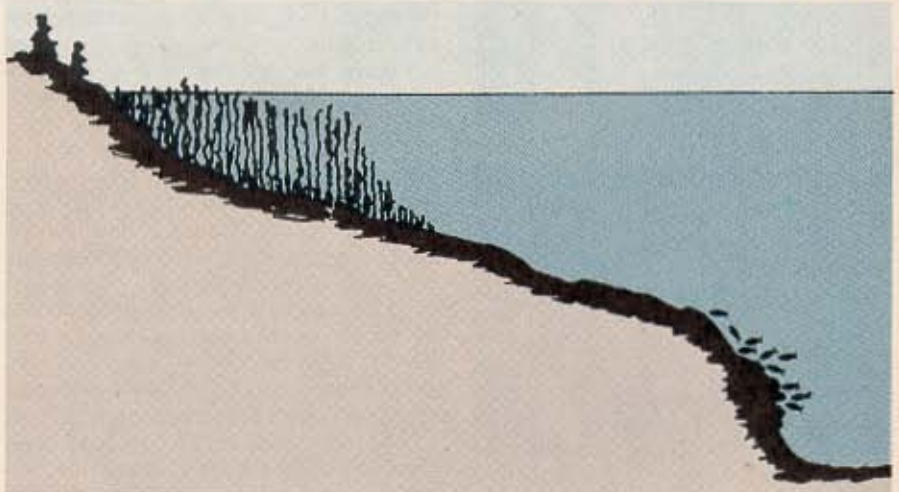


FIGURE 2A—Here the weedline does not extend into the deeper sanctuary depths. This should tell you plenty about the presentation of lures . . . both casting or trolling.

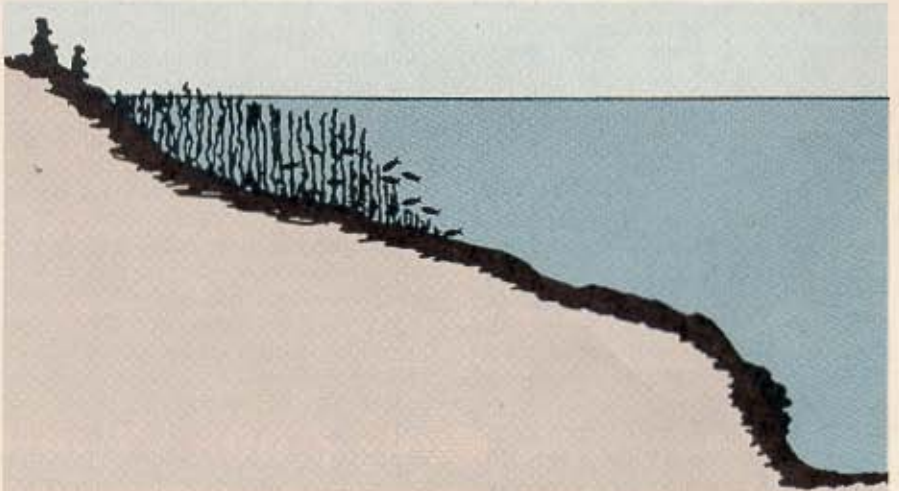


FIGURE 2B—When movement toward the shallows occurs, not all the fish scatter back into the weeds.

(where the fish first make contact with the bar) would be at the finger close to, and probably in sight of weed bed "A". The depths show this finger is the deepest, fastest breaking into the deepest water off the bar. (b) The fish are at this weed bed because when fish move on structure they will pause or stop at a "break" (weed bed) on the structure before going shallower or turning back to deep water. (c) This weed bed (or break) would be about as far as the fish would go on an average *good* migration *up on the bar*. Weather and water conditions limit migrations beyond this point most of the time (see below).

"Interpretation" of the features and movements of the fish should help quite a lot—if we desire to catch them consistently.

Comment on Question 2—"Should I spend very much time fishing weed bed 'B'?"

Without hesitation, I would say no. I might check it out briefly but, if my inspection showed the situation was like that shown in the figure, I'd not spend much time fishing it. This weed bed is not related to structure, breaks, or breaklines. It is isolated on a "flat" void of any signposts. The fish would probably never know it exists. If I spend a lot of time fishing weed beds such as this, I shouldn't expect to catch fish consistently. If I happen to check better weed beds at some time later, the movement of the fish to a "more catchable" position—may have already occurred and is over for the day.

Comment on Question 3—"Should I expect to catch a lot of big fish at weed bed 'C', or the weeds along the shoreline?"

No, I would not expect to catch many big fish at weed bed "C", or along the weedline. During the spawning season and during the short period of "overtake" of the lake in the spring and fall, I could get a few; but for most of the season, I would not expect to get many "good" fish here. My guideline has always been: When fish approach the 8-10 foot depth, most all the bigger fish say "Whoa, back up, I'm getting too shallow." During the periods of *extreme* migrations toward the shallows I would not expect more than two or three of the larger fish to move this far. In fact, the weather and water conditions are seldom good enough—to get ANY "keepers" this shallow.

However, the weed bed and shoreline weedline are *never* passed up.

These should be the first things checked. These can quickly show how active the fish are at the time. If small fish do not show, our guidelines tell us to check deeper. If a small fish shows up, then we ask ourselves: "Where did he come from? What path did he take?" In either case, we should arrive at weed bed "A". If the fish are not at weed bed "A" at that time, our guidelines (and interpretations) tell us to exercise patience, and keep checking weed bed "A" (and breakline) until the fish do show—if we desire to catch fish on or at this bar consistently. If floating markers are thrown on each "finger," the trolling passes and casting positions are more easily determined.

Figure 4 is a top view of a shallow, dishpan-type natural lake. The depth does not change much over the entire lake. The mass of the lake is covered with thick weeds. There exists only two small slots free of weeds. The question is: How would you go about catching fish out of this lake?

If I were fishing this lake, my first objective would be to find the open slots. I'd check them to see if the fish were active and moving. If I did not make contact I would then check out the weeds adjacent to the slots. I'd use surface and weedless lures in my search for fish and I'd probably not get farther away from the "clean" area than a long cast. Periodically I'd check the slots to see if the fish have arrived. After all, I would assume the **MOST CATCHABLE** fish would be where I could get to them.

Figure 4-B shows what I would expect to happen when the fish become active and moving enough to catch — **CONSISTENTLY**.

Fishing these slots may call for just casting, as the clean slot may not be large enough for trolling. In some cases the total area can be covered by casting from one boat position.

PRESENTATION OF LURES

In the beginning it was said many fishermen did not ask us about the presentation of lures. However, there were some who did show concern about presenting lures in tall weed situations. Most of the questions can be covered by the figures already used.

Figure 5 is a repeat of **Figure 1-A**. In a situation such as this, motor trolling is a much better way to locate the fish than casting. The figure shows the trolling passes. In this case, four lure sizes (Spoonplugs) were used to control the depths. Each lure will run at a specific depth, regardless of the speed used. (Different trolling speeds would be used with each size lure.) On the trolling passes, the lures would be "stacked" as close to the weedline as

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FIGURE 3A—Top view of a weed situation. The broken line shows the shape of an underwater bar. There are three weed beds shown (A, B, C), as well as a weedline along the shoreline. Which weeds do you think are likely to get the fish on **MOST** migrations up on the bar? (Answer is found in article.)

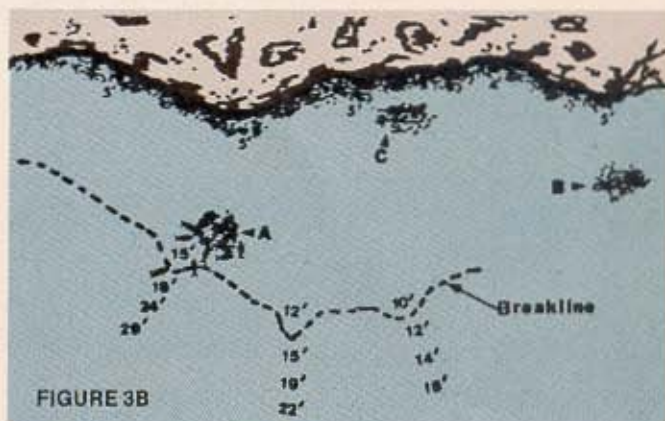


FIGURE 3B

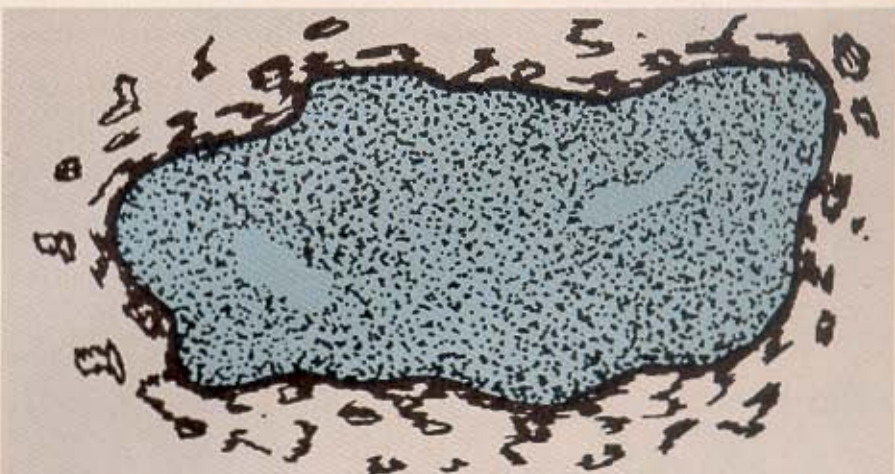


FIGURE 4A—Top view of a shallow, dishpan type natural lake. There exists only two small slots free of weeds. The question is: How would you go about catching fish out of this lake?

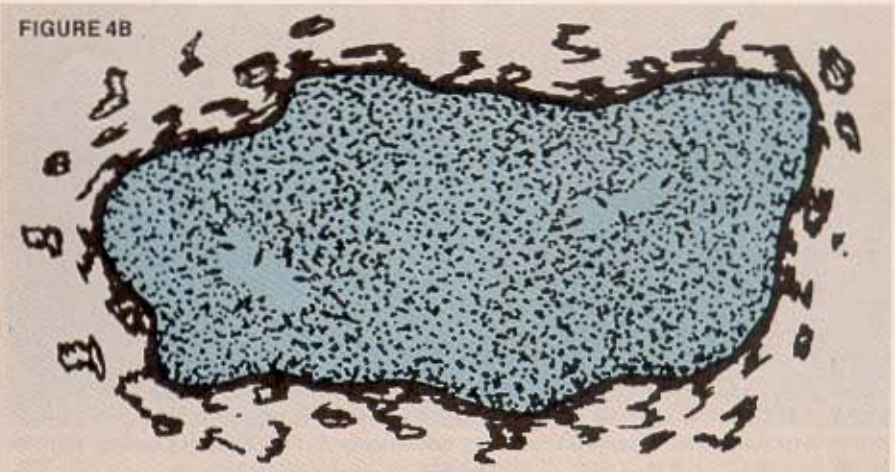


FIGURE 4B

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possible without being continually fouled. When the fish are located while trolling, then a casting position allows better *CONTROL* of *depth* and *speed* with both type lures (free-running and jump-type). The casts should be made parallel to the weedline. Any other position of the boat will not allow full control.

To be sure we have the situation firmly in mind, let's refer back to

Figures 2-A and 2-B. Figure 6 shows the trolling passes that should be made along this weedline. Here again, four lure sizes were used to check out the depths—and speeds. In this type weed situation, proper depth control must be maintained on the troll. The lure size (and running depth) and the amount of line used (let out) should be rather exact, so the lure does not dig down into the weeds continually.

Figure 6 presents a little different situation than in **Figures 1-A, 1-B and 5.** In this case, we have some *sanctuary depths below the tall weedline.* Our guidelines on weather and water conditions and the movement of the

fish tell us we have to check deeper than the base of the weeds. Our guidelines suggest we'll be pretty lucky to find the fish this far toward the shallows very often. However, we have to check the weedline thoroughly.

Figure 7 is a top view of a tall weedline situation in a lake. Please note the weedline is crooked. To properly troll (or cast) this section of the weedline (lures in position) without being continually fouled, several floating markers have been placed. Most were placed on the "fingers" (extrusions) in the weedline. With the aid of these visible markers a decent trolling pass could be made in short order. The "fingers" are our guides for the trolling pass. The trolling pass should be made as *straight as possible*. It is not necessary to hit all the little crooks and turns. If the "fingers" do not contain a fish, it is not likely the "pockets" contain one either. If the fingers contain a fish, then all the small crooks, pockets, etc., can be checked out by casting. However, this is not the whole story.

Figures 2-A and 2-B (refer back) indicated the weeds at *this point* are located on a "structure situation" as the fish use it in their movements and migrations. We would not be far off to assume the structure situation is a narrow ridge-like bar. Most tall weed situations are found in *natural* lakes, and the "bar" is the most common shoreline feature the fish use in their movements and migrations in natural lakes. (**Figure 3-A** is another form of bar found in natural lakes.)

Let's assume **Figure 7** is a top view of the area of the lake shown in **Figures 2-A and 2-B.** The weedline should indicate to us any potential migration route the fish are using. We can quickly spot the greater "finger" (or extrusion) in the weedline. The second marker from the left shows the "bar." If we have to check an area by casting or work any deep water, we can't go about it just anywhere. We must work only the "structure situation" the fish use in their movements toward the shallows.

Figure 8 is a top view of the situation at the second floating marker. When trolling a tall weedline situation such as this, it is again necessary to keep trolling passes as straight as possible if we desire good lure control (lure in position, proper depth, speed, etc.). On a big weedline extrusion the trolling passes (stacked lures) should be made as indicated. This not only checks out the weedline thoroughly, but also portions of the bar. Note that the passes can be made from either direction.

Figure 9 is a side view showing the trolling passes to check the bar and the deeper water. Different lure sizes

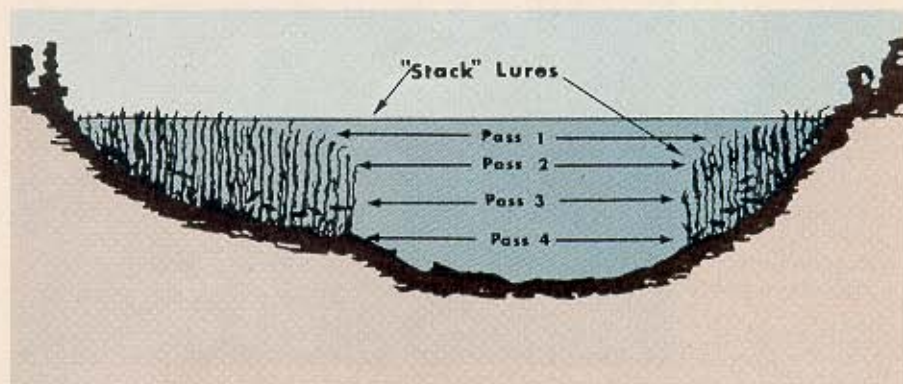


FIGURE 5—Lures should be "stacked" just as close to the weedline as possible without being continually fouled.

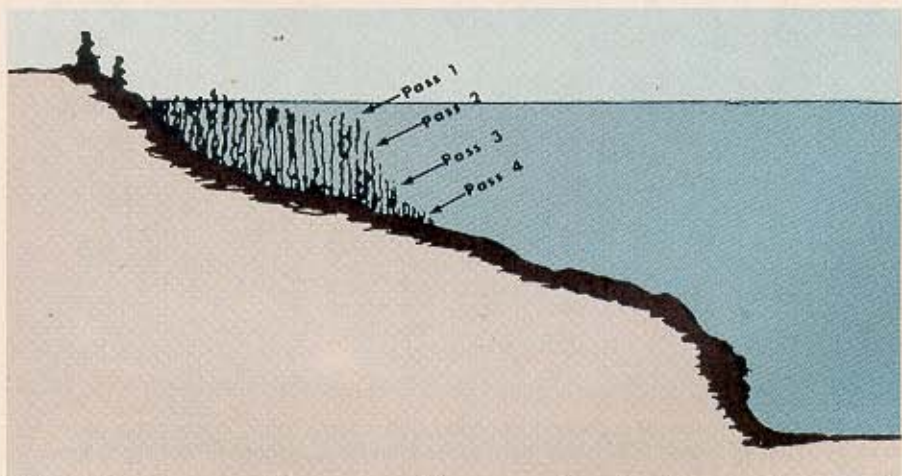


FIGURE 6—Shown are the proper trolling passes that should be made along the weedline.



FIGURE 7—Top view of a tall, crooked-shaped weedline in a lake. To properly troll (or cast) this section of weedline without being continually fouled, several floating markers should be placed on the "fingers" (extrusions) in the weedline.

and running depths should be used to check out the bar. Enough trolling passes should be made to leave very little of the bar unchecked. As the passes are made across the bar (both directions), the crown of the bar should be bumped with the lure if at all possible. As the lure comes bumping off the bar (no longer bumping), the boat is turned for another trolling pass in the opposite direction. When the lure being used no longer reaches the bottom, it is time to switch to a deeper-running lure. The "tool" that I use for the trolling passes is a Spoon-plug, a diving lure designed to do the job. If and when I hit a fish on the troll, I position the boat near the weedline and cover the deeper water by casting (Figure 10).

Let's assume your lake has a tall weed situation. You prefer not to troll, or trolling is prohibited. This means you could spend a great deal of time casting a part of a weedline that contains no fish.

Figure 10 is a top view of a large protrusion of the weedline off a point in the shoreline. This indicates that an underwater "bar" (structure situation) extends out from this point.

Figure 10 shows three casting positions: A, B and C. If we refer back to Figures 2-A and 2-B, we should see the fish could be in the sanctuary depths, at the base of the weeds, or any place in between. This means our casting positions must be chosen so the casts can cover the depths of the bar outside the weedline. To cover the sides and top of the bar (especially at the base of the weeds), positions A and B would be the best choice for casting (as indicated). Position C would be satisfactory for the deeper portions of the bar—after it has been established the fish are nowhere near the base off the weedline.

Here again, two style lures should be used. A sinking, free-running, and bottom-bumping lure on a steady retrieve for checking the faster speed and a "jump-type" (jig, soft plastic, etc.) for the slower. The reason each lure style must sink is because in fishing deeper water, the lures must go down to near the top of the weeds or all the way to a clean bottom, before a retrieve (or jump) begins.

To press home a point, note that in Figure 10, position "A" as shown would not allow a cast down the right side (facing figure) of the extruded weeds. However, position "B" would allow casts to the left side. A guideline to remember is when migrating fish make contact with the base of the weeds, they may not stop. A few fish may penetrate the weeds, but continued migration may have the majority of the fish moving along the base of the weedline before stopping.

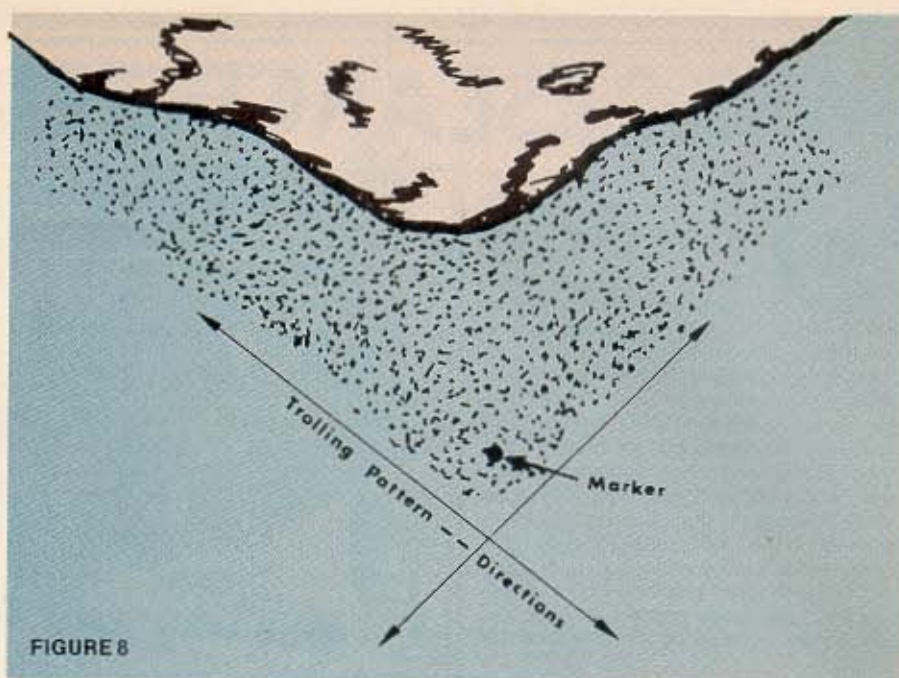


FIGURE 8

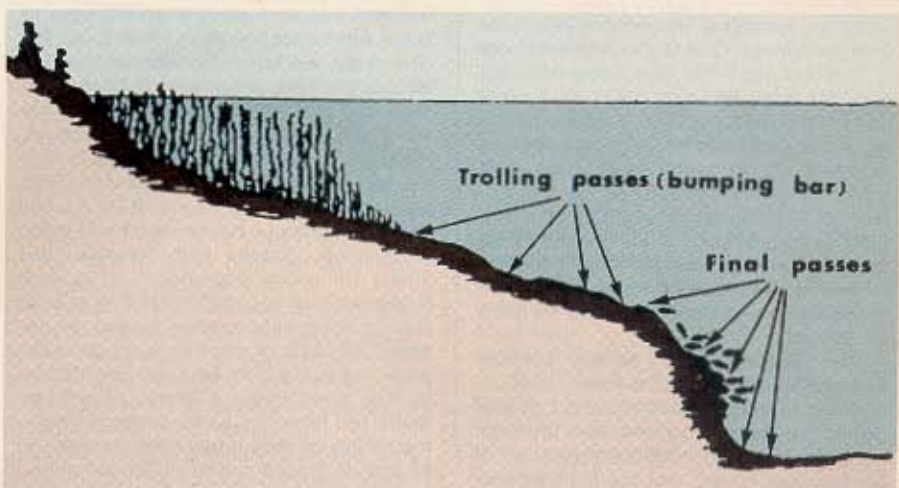


FIGURE 9—A side view showing the trolling passes to check out the bar and the deeper water for signs of fish.

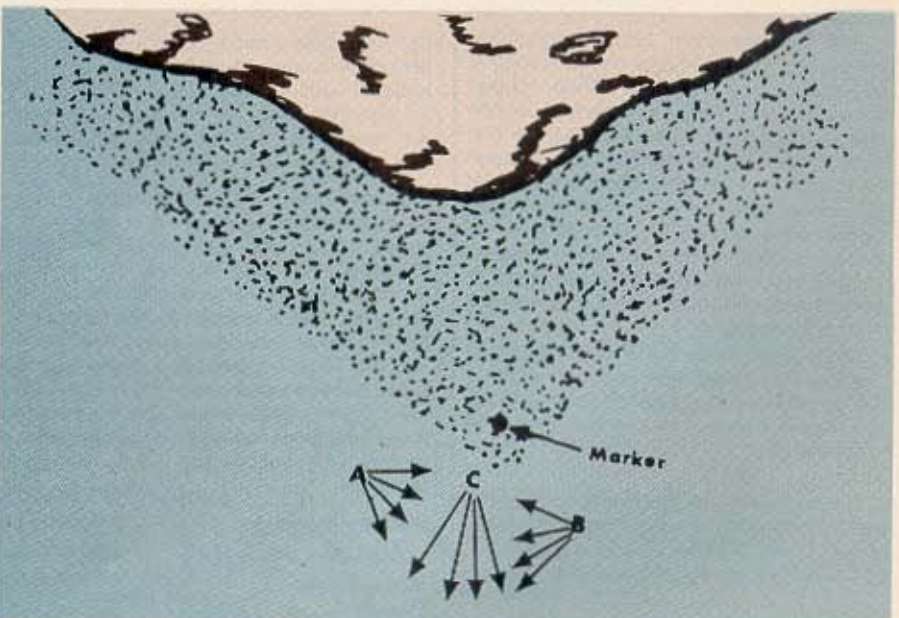


FIGURE 10—Top view of a large protrusion of the weedline off a point in the shoreline. This indicates an underwater "bar" (a structure situation) extending from this point.