

## 'Prop Alert' can save boaters

New product can solve old problem

By TERI BOGGESS  
Correspondent

We've all done it – spied a display at a fishing or hunting show, stopped in our tracks and exclaimed the same words: "I wish I'd thought of that."

The same thing happened numerous times this past weekend at the State Fairgrounds in Raleigh. Only Jonathan Hughes and brother Knox really did think of that.

The boat-loving entrepreneurs have a patent pending on their invention, The Prop Alert, a cover for boat propellers that serves as a bright-orange warning to keep drivers from bumping the motor jutting from a trailered boat.

"People say, 'I don't know why no one has come up with that idea,'" Jonathan Hughes, an account executive in Raleigh, said at the product's first show, last weekend's Bass and Saltwater Fishing Expo.

Knox Hughes said the idea came from his "experience of a tiny bump at a launch ramp." The bump barely dented the offending bumper but left the boat with \$1,200 in damage.

The Prop Alert, a bright-orange round cover made from PVC-backed fabric, reflective strips, mesh and a drawstring, enhances the chance that drivers will recognize that the engine is jutting out from the back of the boat ahead.

"When you see something orange, we've all been trained to recognize it as a warning," Knox Hughes, a financial adviser, said.

Over the past year and a half, the brothers have researched U.S.-made materials, found a manufacturer in North Carolina, launched a website in June and now hit the show circuit, including Richmond, Va., this weekend and Greensboro next month.

"We really wanted to find out what people with boats thought about our product," Jonathan Hughes said. "The feedback we've gotten will help us ... to be able to sell to the mass market."

The top request is for collegiate logos to be printed on the fabric. Current images are the product logo, a bass, a red drum, a duck, a skull and a skier. Two sizes sell for about \$25 and \$30 on the website [www.thepropalert.com](http://www.thepropalert.com).

**Gun and knife show:** The Dixie Gun & Knife show will be at the State Fairgrounds this weekend. Hours will be 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. Admission will be \$9.

**Comment sought:** NOAA Fisheries seeks comment by Jan. 23 on Amendment 29 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. Go to [http://sro.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable\\_fisheries/s\\_atl/sg/2014/am29/index.html](http://sro.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/s_atl/sg/2014/am29/index.html).

**Register soon:** The Salt Water Sportsman National Seminar Series will make an inland N.C. stop 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Jan. 24 at the Embassy Suites, 201 Harrison Oaks Blvd., Cary. George Poveromo, host of "George Poveromo's World of Saltwater Fishing" on NBC Sports and editor-at-large for Salt Water Sportsman, will headline the program.

The fee is \$55. Attendees will get free admission to a post-seminar event at Bass Pro Shops. Call 800-448-7360, or visit [www.nationalseminar-series.com](http://www.nationalseminar-series.com).

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Chris Foster fights a chain pickerel at White Lake.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE MARSH

# CHAIN OF EVENTS LEADS TO LAKE FISHING TRIP

Day's fishing at White Lake leads to week's catch of chain pickerel

By MIKE MARSH  
Correspondent

Normally, captain Butch Foster and his son, captain Chris Foster of Yeah Right Charters, are fishing for grouper on their offshore boat or their 21-foot skiff for speckled trout. However, grouper season had closed. The weather was too cold and windy for anyone to book a trout charter. It was even too windy for them to fun fish for whiting. This chain of winter events found them heading to White Lake on a pickerel trip.

"On days when we can't fish in saltwater, we like to head for one of the nearby lakes," Butch said. "When we come to White Lake this time of year, we have the lake all to ourselves."

The anglers stuffed the required \$8 into an envelope and tucked the envelope into the slot at White Lake Water Sports and Marina, which has the only public access ramp at the lake. In summertime, the lake is a vacation and water-skiing mecca well known to most North Carolinians. However, before the summer tourist season arrives, only the few hardy anglers who have unlocked the lake's secrets discover the treasure trove of interesting species in its clear waters.

"I fished in freshwater lakes long before I came to the coast," Butch said. "Chris and I have caught everything you can imagine. In winter, we caught largemouth bass, strippers, catfish and crappie at High Rock, Tillery and Badin lakes. White Lake has clear, acidic water, rather than the muddy, neutral water of the Piedmont lakes, so we find different fish."

"We really like catching the lake's chain pickerel, which are more prevalent in the lakes of the Northern states. I figure that if they can catch northern pike by boring a hole in the ice, chain pickerel must be biting here, when it's cold. All chain pickerel is a smaller version of a north-



Butch Foster and his son, Chris Foster, caught these chain pickerel at White Lake. The fish are members of the pike family.

ern pike. They are both in the pike family."

Another good reason to go after such an off-the-radar fish is that North Carolina has no creel limit for them. Foster said, despite their poor reputation among bass anglers, chain pickerel are great to eat.

"I clean them two ways," he said. "I cut the fillet off and feel with my fingertips for the Y-bones. Then I use my knife to cut outward and away from them. That makes two strips from each fillet, almost the same way as we fillet a flounder. However, the method wastes a lot of meat along the center of a chain pickerel fillet. So, most of the time, I just cut off the fillets and skin them. Then I fry them like any other fish fillet. I break the fillet open along the center after it is cooked and that reveals the Y-bones. It only takes a minute to pick them out, then I can

enjoy eating the meat without the bones."

The anglers set out a trolling spread as though they were offshore fishing. However, they downsized the rods, reels and lures.

"We use ultra-light spinning rods and reels with 6-pound monofilament line," Chris said. "Chain pickerel have rows of sharp teeth. They cut off a few lures, twist and break the hooks and scar up the lure finish something awful. But, if you use heavier lines and lures or tie the lure to the line with a heavy leader, you won't get as many strikes. The water is so clear that the fish see anything that doesn't look just right."

Butch used a GPS unit and down-imaging sonar he had purchased recently. Less than five minutes after launching he found a good fishing spot.

'White Lake has clear, acidic water, rather than the muddy, neutral water of the Piedmont lakes, so we find different fish.'

ANGLER BUTCH FOSTER

"Before I got the latest in sophisticated sonar, I thought I was marking grass," he said. "But, what I was marking were schools of yellow perch and the chain pickerel that were feeding on them. Today, I'm using a Berkley Flicker Shad, and I will add a drop of Pro-Cure Crappie and Panfish Super Gel to each side of the lure. If you don't enhance the lure with the scent, you will catch a lot fewer fish."

The Fosters trolled a minute or two before the first strike. The fish leaped from the water when it felt the hooks.

"A chain pickerel strikes and jumps just like a barracuda," Chris said. "It puts up a great fight and is everything you could ever want out of a game fish. Some bass anglers hate to catch them because they tear up their lures and cut their lines."

The anglers caught 33 chain pickerel during a day's fishing. Most of them went into an ice chest for the trip home.

"It might take us a week to eat them all," Butch said, "but I like chain pickerel so much I can eat them for every meal."

Capt. Butch Foster has posted a video on Youtube that has received thousands of hits showing how to clean a chain pickerel at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjcelLOjhIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjcelLOjhIE).

## Fishing Report

### Saltwater

#### OREGON INLET

Tuna is biting consistently. Offshore, yellowfin and blackfin are being hooked. Contact: Oregon Inlet Fishing Center 252-441-6301, [www.oregon-inlet.com](http://www.oregon-inlet.com).

#### BUXTON/HATTERAS

When the weather is good, offshore tuna, wahoo and king mackerel are being caught. Inshore, some blue fish are biting. Contact: Red Drum Tackle 252-995-5414, [www.hatteras-island.com](http://www.hatteras-island.com); offshore news, Oden's Dock 252-986-2555, [www.odensdock.com](http://www.odensdock.com); or [www.hatterasharbor.com](http://www.hatterasharbor.com).

#### OCRACOKE/PORTSMOUTH

By the beach, some puppy drum are biting. Offshore, bottom fishing has been decent on days the weather is good. Contact: Tradewinds Bait & Tackle 252-928-5491, [www.fishtradewinds.com](http://www.fishtradewinds.com); Morris Marina 252-225-4261, [www.portsmouthislandfishing.com](http://www.portsmouthislandfishing.com).

#### CAPE LOOKOUT/BOGUE INLET

When the weather is good, trout are being caught in the creeks. Offshore, bluefin and tuna can be found. Contact: EJV Outdoors 252-247-4725; Portside Marina 252-726-7678; [www.ncoif.com](http://www.ncoif.com).

#### TOPSAIL ISLAND

In good weather conditions, drum, sea mullet, and speckled trout, dog fish and flounder are being caught near the piers and in the surf. Speckled trout, flounder and red drum are biting in the sound. Offshore, red snapper, sea bass and bluefin are being hooked. Contact: East Coast Discount Tackle 910-328-1887, [www.eastcoastspports.com](http://www.eastcoastspports.com).

#### WILMINGTON/ WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH

Striper fishing in the Cape Fear River has been good. Some drum are being caught along the docks. King mackerel are biting by the tower. Contact: Tex's Tackle 910-791-1763, [www.textackle.com](http://www.textackle.com).

#### SOUTHPORT/SUNSET BEACH

Trout have been biting by the piers and in the backwaters. Contact: Dutchman Creek Bait & Tackle 910-457-1221; [www.yeahrightcharters.com](http://www.yeahrightcharters.com); or [www.oifishingcenter.com](http://www.oifishingcenter.com).

### Freshwater

#### FALLS LAKE

Bass are biting are biting at 15-25 feet and are being caught with blade baits. Crappie are biting at 15-20 feet and are being caught with minnows. Water level: normal 251.5. Wednesday 252.62, full pool 264.8. Contact: Outhouse Tackle 919-217-0085; [www.wmi.org](http://www.wmi.org).

#### JORDAN LAKE

Crappie are biting at 2-37 feet and can be found around the bridges. Catfish can be found on the bottom. Water level: normal 216, Wednesday 217.08, full pool 240. Contact: Wilsonville General Store 919-362-7101; Crosswinds Marina 919-362-5391.

#### KERR LAKE

Bass, strippers and crappie are biting at depths of 10-30 feet and are being caught with live bait and Alabama rigs. Water level: normal 300, Wednesday 299.52, full pool 320. Contact: Bobcat's Bait & Tackle 434-374-8381; [www.kerrlake.com](http://www.kerrlake.com).

#### LAKE WHEELER

Crappie are biting at 2-37 feet and can be found around the bridges. Catfish can be found on the bottom. Contact: Wilsonville General Store 919-362-7101.

#### SHEARON HARRIS LAKE

Bass are biting in the mouths of the creeks and are in 20-30 feet of water and are being caught with spoon baits. Crappie can be hooked at 25-30 feet with minnows. Contact: The Tackle Box 919-557-8255; [www.wmi.org](http://www.wmi.org).

(For water levels go to <http://epec.saw.usace.army.mil/>)