

## **Conserving our Resource:**

### **Increasing Post Tournament Survival**

**By: Doug Vahrenberg**

We have all had those special days on the water when it seems we can do nothing wrong and the bass just keep biting. Keeper after keeper is caught and we keep culling to get our best limit of fish. Usually these days are rather limited in number. What can we do to preserve these great memories so we can enjoy more of them or most importantly future generations?

One thing that makes the Bass a great tournament fish is its ability to be caught and released; with a high survival rate. We as anglers can help improve the odds of survival; from the time we catch the fish - to the release after weigh-in. The first step starts when the fish bites your bait. The faster you can land the fish, the better the chances for release. A knotless or rubberized dip net is highly recommended to reduce stress on the fish. The next step is to quickly get the fish measured and into the livewell. (It is recommended to dip the measuring board in the water prior to measuring to help protect slime coat.)

The livewell has evolved over many years and has transitioned from a place to store you catch prior to cleaning for human consumption; to a highly advanced, fish holding tank. Today's boat manufacturer's are constantly researching and adding new features to improve bass survival. Skeeter boats has gone as far as funding a university research project to improve livewell survival and to implement those findings in its livewell system. The number one thing is to keep your livewell system in top shape, clean and understand the functions and how to operate them.



***Skeeter Livewell with OxyMax System***

Aeration and recirculation of water is very important in maintaining your catch. When surface water temp is below 65 degrees adding fresh water will support approximately 1 pound of fish per gallon of livewell volume. For example my boat has 2 separate 24 gallon livewells and could maintain easily 24 pounds per side. When the water temperature is between 65 and 75 degrees continuously adding fresh water will maintain the necessary oxygen level to keep fish alive. This not only adds water but also flushes out ammonia and waste products. The most critical time for livewell performance is when the water temperature reaches 75 degrees or greater. The warm water has less oxygen holding ability and the fish require more oxygen for survival in warm water. The aerator should be run continuously and a recirculation system be used in unison. Above 75 degrees it is highly recommended to cool water with ice, as cooler water has a higher oxygen holding capacity. I personally prefer to use frozen water bottles to cool the water. They are easy to keep in the boat cooler, plus they do not add any chemicals found in public water systems like chlorine to the water. It is also recommended to flush the water every 2-3 hours with freshwater and re-cool with ice or frozen water bottles.



### ***OxyMax Photo***

For added performance in the livewell optional equipment or chemicals can be used for added protection of your catch. My Skeeter livewell system is available with the optional OxyMax System that adds oxygen to the water by using electrical current to break the water down into Hydrogen and Oxygen. The hydrogen is released and evaporates from the livewell and the oxygen is absorbed by the remaining water for uptake by the fish. Adding pure oxygen to the water improves the health of the fish and reduces stress on the fish. Another product that improves performance is the use of special chemical packages designed for catch and releasing of fish. There are many products on the market and all seem to work but one product I prefer is the U2 Pro Formula. U2 Pro Formula actually restores lost energy in the fish and keeps your catch healthy and alive. It restores the slime coat and keeps the fish in a more healthy state

with its all natural ingredients. The U2 Pro Formula contains no Salts so it will not produce harmful chemicals to fish with the use of the Oxygenator. Never use salt with electrical oxygen systems. Some products actually stimulate the fish to calm them down and sometimes relax the fish too much and regurgitate their last meal. Thus, leaving the fish with an empty stomach and in need of food. This also reduces the weight of your catch and can result in loss of weight at the weigh-in.



## ***U2 Pro Formula***

The last and most important step is the weigh-in process. Once you arrive back to the take-off site after spending the day taking high-quality care of your catch; don't slack here as the fish will be treated to some possibly stressful situations real soon. Make sure to have a big enough bag to carry your catch to the weigh-in site. For a good rule of thumb 10 pounds of bass in one to two gallons of water will deplete the available oxygen in about two minutes. Once you arrive at the weigh-in tanks place aerator stones in bag and add fresh-cool water to help the fish. Keep the water on the fish until ready to submit to the bump board attendant. Once the weigh-in is done add enough water to transport the fish back to the release site or release boat. If the tournament requires the angler to release the catch back in the water carefully place bag in the water close to a shady location and allow fish to swim free or help fish to regain their composure by moving in circular pattern in the water to help get more oxygen in the gills for a faster recovery.



***FLW Outdoors Water Scale*** (Photo by Rob Newell with Permission from FLW Outdoors)

Many steps have been incorporated in today's modern weigh-ins to insure a full recovery and to return the maximum number of fish back in the lake to be caught again. One of the most modern ways, just introduced, is the wet weigh-in endorsed by FLW Outdoors where the fish are weighed in a tank of water. This type of weigh system reduces stress even more. If you are involved in a tournament use your knowledge to make suggestion on ways to improve the successful release of our precision natural resource. A little care will go a long ways and can improve your odds of a bountiful catch.

### **Tips:**

- Freeze bottles of water and use them to reduce livewell water temperature.
- Install an additional temperature probe to fish finder to monitor livewell water temperature. Readout will show up on Graph easy to read and always available.
- Pre-measure small ZipLoc bags of livewell chemicals or use a product like U2 Pro Formula with it's easy to use dispenser and know your livewell size. Makes adding Chemical Treatment fast, and easy and accurate.
- Purchase a carrying bag to carry fish to weigh-in site.
- Obtain a copy of "Keeping Bass Alive" from BASS. Highly recommended for anglers and tournament directors. Lots of good information.

### **For More Information and references:**

"Keeping Bass Alive" by Bass Angler Sportsman Society [conservation@bassmaster.com](mailto:conservation@bassmaster.com)

A 44 page book on tips for taking care of your catch and how to set up a weigh-in site for maximizing healthy release rates.

OxyMax System: [www.keepfishalive.com](http://www.keepfishalive.com)

[http://www.bassdozer.com/articles/manns/keeping\\_alive.shtml](http://www.bassdozer.com/articles/manns/keeping_alive.shtml)

<http://www.state.tn.us/twra/fish/Reservoir/blackbass/livebass2.pdf>

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