



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **LAKE OKEECHOBEE TO HOST BASS PRO SHOPS US OPEN REGIONAL QUALIFYING EVENT & FAN VILLAGE ON MARCH 13**

*Grandest tournament in fishing history kicks off with 250 amateur teams competing for shot at \$1 million prize*

*Fans of all ages welcome to enjoy FREE outdoor activities and weigh-in ceremony featuring country music star Chris Janson and fishing legend Roland Martin*

**OKEECHOBEE, Fla.** - The path to the [Bass Pro Shops U.S. Open National Bass Fishing Amateur Team Championships](#) - a first-of-its-kind amateur fishing tournament offering the biggest payout in freshwater fishing history - begins on Florida's legendary Lake Okeechobee on Saturday, March 13. With proceeds benefiting local fisheries conservation and the future of fishing, the fan-friendly event is a true celebration of bass fishing being held exclusively for amateur anglers with a guaranteed purse value of \$4.3 million.

One of 8 regional qualifying events being held nationwide, the Lake Okeechobee event will feature 250 two-person amateur teams competing for a first place \$50,000 prize, with the top 40 teams qualifying for the National Championship. The Bass Pro Shops US Open National Championship, held this November at Big Cedar Lodge on Missouri's famed Table Rock Lake, will be internationally broadcast and offer a \$1 million cash prize to the winning team.

"Lake Okeechobee is a fisherman's paradise, and I can't think of a better place to start the Bass Pro Shops US Open than here in the heart of Florida," said noted conservationist and Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris. "We're excited to welcome everyday anglers, friends and families on March 13, all while raising money for local conservation and the future of fishing."

### **Families and Veterans Among the Amateurs Competing for \$1 Million**

The Lake Okeechobee qualifying event will feature anglers ranging in age from 6 - 80 years old. The amateur field of 250 two-person teams consist of a cross-section of families and active military/veterans adding to the fun of the tournament including:

- 79 military veterans
- 14 active military
- 45 father-son teams
- 16 mother-son teams

- 14 husband-wife teams
- 12 brother-brother teams
- 4 father-daughter teams
- 26 female anglers

### Fan Activities & Celebrity Guests

While anglers are competing on the water, the general public is invited to participate in the excitement taking place on the broad banks of Lake Okeechobee with free socially distanced outdoor activities beginning at noon (address: [C. Scott Driver Park, 10100 W Hwy 78, Okeechobee, FL 34974](#)):

- **Free Kids Activities:** Free interactive games, inflatable slides and more will create a festive atmosphere for families and fishing fans of all ages to enjoy.
- **Celebrity Guests:** Hosted by **country music star Chris Janson** and **legendary angler Roland Martin**, tournament weigh-in will begin at 2:30 p.m. Competitors will arrive at the weigh-in site in waves throughout the afternoon and are invited to stay for the final award ceremony, taking place at 6:30 p.m.
- **Live Music:** The Petersens, an American bluegrass band from Missouri's Ozark mountains, will also provide live music and entertainment throughout the day.
- **World-Class Boat Demo Rides:** Fans can test ride the latest offerings on the water. Models from America's foremost boat brands including Tracker, Ranger, Nitro and more are available for fans 18 years of age and older.
- **Outdoor Fun for the Whole Family:** Guests can learn about fisheries conservation with representatives from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and enjoy a Bass Pro Shops pop-up shop with exclusive merchandise and the latest gear from top outdoor brands, along with food and special activities.

### Angler Prizes

The stakes are high at the Lake Okeechobee event, with teams competing for life-changing cash and prizes. A fish-friendly weigh-in will score teams by the official weight of each team's catch (five bass limit) to determine winners. Prize breakdown for the regional qualifier is as follows:

- First place team wins \$50,000 with a payout to 40th place
- Top 40 teams qualify for the National Championship
- \$1 million prize if a team breaks the Florida state record for a largemouth bass (record of 17.27 pounds set in 1986)

### Benefiting the Future of Fishing in Florida & Beyond

The regional qualifying events, including Lake Okeechobee, will benefit local fish habitat with proceeds supporting [The National Fish Habitat Partnership](#). One-third of all entry fees will directly support the partnership, with Bass Pro Shops and longstanding conservation partner Toyota matching each donation, enabling an amount equal to 100 percent of all entry fees – over \$1 million – to benefit conservation.

Lake Okeechobee, one of the nation's best bass fishing lakes and headwaters to the Everglades, is like no other. Spanning more than 700 square miles, the sheer size presents a

challenge to understanding the lake's scale and conservation concerns. Bass Pro Shops is working alongside state wildlife agencies and local partners to tackle priority conservation projects in restoring water quality and fish habitat of this vital natural resource.

Across Florida, Bass Pro Shops is proud to partner with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in enhancing, conserving and promoting trophy bass fishing through the nationally-renowned [TrophyCatch](#) program. The incentive-based conservation program designed for anglers who catch-and-release largemouth bass heavier than eight pounds allows for invaluable research and trophy bass management in Florida. Lake Okeechobee remains one of the top five producing waters for TrophyCatch, and increasing participation in the program is important for future management success on the lake.

In keeping with its longstanding commitment to conservation, Johnny Morris and Bass Pro Shops is partnering with the Florida FWC to help ensure all fish caught during the Bass Pro Shops US Open regional qualifier on Lake Okeechobee are released responsibly following a fish-friendly weigh-in.

### **Media Credentials**

Media interested in covering the Lake Okeechobee regional qualifier on-site can register for media credentials [here](#).

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### **About Bass Pro Shops**

[Bass Pro Shops](#) is North America's premier outdoor and conservation company. Founded in 1972 when avid young angler Johnny Morris began selling tackle out of his father's liquor store in Springfield, Missouri, today the company provides customers with unmatched offerings spanning premier destination retail, outdoor equipment manufacturing, world-class resort destinations and more. In 2017 Bass Pro Shops acquired [Cabela's](#) to create a "best-of-the-best" experience with superior products, dynamic locations and outstanding customer service. Bass Pro Shops also operates [White River Marine Group](#), offering an unsurpassed collection of industry-leading boat brands, and [Big Cedar Lodge](#), America's Premier Wilderness Resort. Under the visionary conservation leadership of Johnny Morris, Bass Pro Shops is a national leader in protecting habitat and introducing families to the outdoors and has been named by Forbes as "one of America's Best Employers."

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