

Record fish shot on other side of state

Contributed Report

A lifetime bow-fishing dream came true for Larry Wolfe of Chaffee, Mo., May 21, when he stuck an arrow in a monstrous alligator gar. Then he awoke to the reality of hoisting more than 100 pounds of thrashing, needle-toothed fish into his johnboat.

Wolfe, 52, was alone, patrolling the Headwater Diversion Channel in Cape Girardeau County at 12:45 p.m. when he spied an enormous gar.

“I knew it was really big, and it was an alligator gar,” Wolfe said, “but I didn’t realize just how big.” The fish saw Wolfe, too, and made for the shelter of a fallen tree. Wolfe gave chase, using the trolling motor to close the distance between him and the fish. Then the leviathan began to slowly sink like a submarine.

“I finally had to just shoot or let him go,” said Wolfe. “He was still a little too far, but I got lucky. It was my day.”

The arrow pierced the fish’s side just behind its head, and the fight was on. To land the fish, Wolfe had to haul in several yards of 120-pound braided fishing line hand-over-hand. He was surprised that the sinewy, torpedo-shaped fish did not pull harder.

“He never moved fast,” Wolfe said. “It was just steady, constant trying to get away. The first time he ran in towards that tree I thought he got off, because my line fell limp. I picked up my line again, and I thought the arrow had pulled out and the arrow had hung on something. So I started pulling on it. It felt like lifting a log. Then that log decided to take off.”

The fish headed back to open water, still at a leisurely pace. “I don’t think I really hurt him. The arrow just went in far enough for the head of the arrow to open up under the skin. The first time he came up, I could see part of the arrow head sticking out, and I knew I didn’t have him hooked very well. So I just let him do what he wanted to do for 45 minutes until he finally came up tired enough that I could get my gaff hook up under his jaw.”

The 5-foot, stainless steel gaff gave Wolfe a secure grip on the behemoth, but it took “a lot of grunting and groaning” before the fish finally came up over the side of the 18-foot johnboat. “It took me about four or five attempts. I think it was pure adrenalin.”

The excitement was far from over, however. The fish, still not significantly hurt, lay quietly in the bottom of the boat until Wolfe headed for home.

“He got pretty feisty on the way back to the boat ramp,” Wolfe said. “He got pretty riled up. He had been pretty calm until I cranked the motor up. I had a cooler between me and the console to where he couldn’t get at me.”

Back on land, Wolfe took his catch to the Missouri Department of Conservation’s office in Cape Girardeau. Fisheries Management Biologist Mark Boone had some difficulty locating a certified scale capable of handling the fish’s 6-foot, 11.25-inch bulk. Even after the delay and the drive to the MFA store in Jackson, the fish still weighed an impressive 127 pounds.

Everywhere he went, the monster fish drew crowds. Wolfe originally intended to clean and eat the monster gar. However, by the time people quit coming to his house that night he was afraid the meat had spoiled, so he donated the fish to the Conservation Department.

The agency has determined that Wolfe’s fish was a female. Because it already has a mount of the previous state alligator gar record — a 115-pound, 2-ounce fish caught from the Headwater Diversion Channel in 2001 — the Conservation Department plans to have Wolfe’s fish mounted as a skeleton, revealing the fish’s bone structure. Both mounts will be displayed at the Cape Girardeau Conservation Campus Nature Center.

The alligator gar (*Lepisosteus spatula*) is native to the lower Mississippi River and adjacent waters.

“I spent my whole life trying to catch an alligator gar,” Wolfe said of his experience. “I hope this isn’t the last time I do.”