

I copied and pasted a letter I received via email from someone who read my feature article "Adult Concepts", which appeared in the September, 2016 issue of *Texas Saltwater Fishing Magazine*. In the piece, I applauded the state for reducing the limit to 5 over most of the waters and called for TPW to eliminate the "one over 25" rule, which allows each licensed angler to kill one trout over 25 inches each day they fish. Apparently, the person who sent me the email disagrees with me about these things. I will address each aspect of his argument in detail. (And yes, I know he misspelled and misused some words in his email. I left it as he sent it to me. Point is not to take issue with his grammar or correctness, but the essence of the points he makes.)

Kevin,

I read your article in Salt Water magazine and wanted to give you my perspective on trout size limitation.

I live in Austin so pulling my boat to the coast to Aransas Pass is about 4 hours and I might get to do that 8 times a year.

Where I see pressure on trout and reds is not from somebody like me but special built boats that can run through the water 12" deep, guides paid by corporations who are filling a limit for guys who don't even bait the hook or cast the rod.

I grew up fishing the Galveston Bay Area and only recall catching two or three trout over 25" in pass 50 years. So to urge TPWL to limit the size and number really punishes a guy like me as fishing guides who catch more and have more successful trips, vertically every outing compared to me will harvest hundreds of trout.

If limitations are necessary then limit swallow water boats that are tearing up the habitat and the number of times guides are licensed to charter their service per year.

First thing the guy mentions is where he lives and how far it is from the coast and approximately how many times a year he is able to fish. He correctly asserts these facts mean he puts less pressure on the resource than people who live closer to the coast and who fish more often. I don't dispute those facts. But, what is his point really? Is he suggesting someone who lives 8 hours from the coast deserves to be allowed to keep twice as many fish as him, because they live twice as far from the coast? I doubt it, but the suggestion that the state should consider how far someone lives from the coast or how many times they fish per year when deciding what their trout limit should be simply doesn't make any sense. Enforcement of a law created with this in mind would prove impossible.

Next, he asserts he sees a problem with people who run "special built" boats in shallow water. Many people agree with him on this one. But in the end, a boat doesn't damage habitat, its operator does. A boat built to run shallow, used properly, does less damage to seagrass than a boat built to draft and run deeper. Regardless of those points, how would the state go about limiting the manufacturing and usage of shallow-draft boats? And how would they reduce damage to the habitat, except by excluding boat traffic in shallow, sensitive areas? It isn't possible to make shallow-draft boats illegal, and we already have "no prop" zones, particularly in the Aransas Pass area, where the author of the letter says he spends his time fishing.

He goes on to say the major pressure on the trout resource comes from guides paid by corporations who fill limits "for guys who don't even bait the hook or cast the rod." Surely, he is correct about this. The state's own studies prove a high percentage of trout caught and killed each year in the state are taken on paid charters. Corporations do, in fact, foot the bill for a large number of these charters. I share his concern about the practice of guides taking people fishing who do not pay directly for their services and who likely don't have any real interest in understanding the resource or best how to manage it. I'd contend this scenario, in fact, accounts for the wasting of lots of fish every year. Guides who fit this description largely use live croakers for bait, and sometimes send their customers home with bags of fillets they will never eat. Certainly, they would be far more likely to kill four trout over 25 inches if they have four clients on board, regardless of who actually reels them in than a guide using lures and wading. All that said, how would the author of the email suggest the state address this issue? By not allowing corporations to pay for guided trips? That wouldn't be practical or easy to enforce.

The person who sent me the response to the article seems to have twisted two unrelated issues into one in this portion of his letter. I simply don't see any connection whatsoever with shallow-drafting boats and excessive harvest of trout by guides who serve corporate clients.

He then goes on to say he can only recall catching a few trout over 25 inches in the past 50 years. Yet he perceives my call for the elimination of the one over 25 rules as punishment to him. This part really confuses me. If he has caught so few big trout in his life, how would he be punished? The state's own studies indicate a lowered limit will increase the number of trout over 25 inches out there for all of us to catch, so I'd contend he might actually be "rewarded" by an effort to reduce the harvest of big trout, not punished. At least in terms of how many he might catch in the future. He seems to be suggesting he wants to keep a big trout when he catches it so the bag of fillets he takes home will be heavier, as a way of maximizing the bang for the bucks he spends coming to the coast. I'd say the man's math doesn't really add up. No way the difference in the amount of meat on a 20 inch trout as compared to a 28 will make enough difference to make a trip to Aransas Pass profitable. I'd contend the man has NO CHANCE of using a legal bag of fillets to monetarily justify the expenditures necessary to make a fishing trip to the coast from Austin, whether the limit on trout is 5 or 10, and regardless of whether one of the fillets came from a fish measuring more than 25 inches or not.

For the record, I believe the state should issue every licensed angler a "trophy tag" for trout, like the one currently issued for redfish. This would allow every angler to kill one big trout per year, not one per day. This would allow someone who caught the state record to retain it legally, for instance. We all know some people would simply use the tag to keep the first big trout they caught every year, which really isn't the purpose of the tag, but this scenario still would result in the harvest of fewer big trout overall than the current laws do.

Last, the man suggests the state should limit the number of times a charter captain can sell their services each year. This idea fails to acknowledge the vast differences among charter captains. Some cater to corporate clients and kill their limit of fish every time they get the chance. Others, like me, don't cater to corporate clients and don't kill limits often, despite

catching limits regularly. In fact, I ran with a 5-fish limit on my boat for over a decade of fishing in the Corpus Christi area, when the state's limit was 10. And, I have offered a \$50 catch and release discount to clients over the same time-frame. On over half the charters I've run since moving here, we have returned to the dock without any dead trout. Why then, should the number of times I fish be limited like the guide who kills limits nearly every time out? The state should concern itself with the number of fish a guide kills, not how many times he (or she) puts a boat in the water. All regulation of commercial fishing endeavors focuses on the harvest, not the number of excursions made.

I myself have called for the state to limit the number of charters a captain can run per day to one. But even that smacks of selfishness in the end. I would rather see the state limit each captain to participating in the harvesting of no more than 6 trout limits per day. That would focus on the harvest, appropriately, and not on the number of clients or trips.

In summary, I'd say I share some of the concerns expressed by the man who sent me the email. I don't like to see so many people running around in the shallows, potentially destroying seagrass and spooking fish in places others like to fish. But this issue isn't related to the number and size of trout the state should allow an angler to keep and kill each day.

I also worry about a culture of guiding which promotes killing limits and as many big trout as possible, particularly when the culture targets corporate clients, many of whom have little respect for the fish and the fishery. But I disagree with the suggestions made as to how to address these issues, particularly the ones related to the number and size of trout one can legally keep and kill every day.

The people of the State of Texas pay taxes to support Texas Parks and Wildlife. The agency earns its money in many ways, one of which involves managing the speckled trout resource in a sustainable way. To that end, the best way the state can properly address the number of trout harvested each year is through adjusting the limit. The best way to reduce the harvest of large, female trout is eliminating the one over 25 law, and replacing it with a trophy trout tag. I offer these suggestions to punish no one, not because I harbor some selfish agenda, except as relates to the desire to catch more big trout in the future.