

“Florida largemouth bass—the best of the best”

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Recreational fishing remains one of the most popular outdoor entertainment options in North America. At last count, the Outdoor Industry Foundation reported 159 million Americans over the age of 16 participated in ‘human-powered’ outdoor activities during 2004. Of those, 80.4 million participated in fishing. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported in 2001 that 16% of the population nationally fished, with freshwater fishing being the most popular type of fishing and black bass (these include largemouth, smallmouth

and Suwannee bass) being the most popular group of fish. Of those, it is the Florida subspecies of largemouth bass that generates the big hawg trophies and the most excitement, with 12.2 million days of fishing spent in the sunshine state in 2001 by black bass anglers.

This year looks like it will be another outstanding year for bass anglers. For starters, the Florida Bass Conservation Center (FBCC), in Sumter County, is ready to begin producing its first crop. This state-of-the-art research and production hatchery was completely refurbished at the site of the old dirt-pond Richloam Hatchery. New production methods will vastly reduce water use from the aquifer and loss to predators, while incorporating certification programs for the fishes’ health and genetic integrity. New laboratory-created feeds and climate-controlled facilities will enable biologists to produce healthy bass from the proper genetic stocks at the correct size to provide supplemental stockings for specific applications. Quality habitat combined with appropriate fishing regulations and enforcement will still be the most critical concerns, but hatchery fish can help maintain quality fishing in intensively managed community-based fisheries, and offset the effects of lost year classes resulting from hurricanes, droughts, restoration efforts and similar events and jump start new reservoirs. Ultimately, a privately funded visitors’ center will make the FBCC a must-see destination for anglers. To learn more, see MyFWC.com/Fishing/FBCC.



The Florida Bass Conservation Center’s planned production is 6.75 million fish; nearly triple the current average of 2.3 million.

Fisheries Biologist, Wes Porak, of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission asked other biologists to look into their crystal ball in an effort to predict which lakes and rivers, among

the 7,700 lakes and 12,000 miles of rivers in Florida, anglers are likely to have the best bass fishing success on for 2007. Full details on their selections, including specific consumption advisories from the Department of Health, can be seen at MyFWC.com/Fishing/Forecast where you can also get quarterly updates and find local contacts for most of these lakes. If you are interested in locating a guide to help you get familiar with the area, check out MyFWC.com/Outfitters. (NOTE: Guides should go on line and submit their business information to be listed. The FWC does not currently certify guides and is providing this listing only as a customer service. Generic advice on how to find a reliable guide is included.)

THE BEST OF THE BEST FOR 2007

Lake George is one of the premier largemouth bass fishing lakes in central Florida. It is the second largest lake in the state (46,000 acres), and is located 18 miles northwest of Deland and 29 miles east of Ocala. Lake George is one of the many natural lakes that are part of the St. Johns River System. It has extensive vegetation that provides excellent habitat for bass. Wade fishing in eelgrass with plastic worms fished on the surface, and other topwater lures, is productive. Fishing with live golden shiners is an excellent method for catching trophy bass during spring spawning season. Hot spots on the lake include Juniper, Salt and Silver Glen spring runs on the western shoreline. In winter and early spring, look for bass to congregate at the jetties on the south end of the lake. Casting deep-diving crankbaits near old dock structures along the northeast shore and off Drayton Island can also be productive. There are many fish camps on the St. Johns River just north and south of Lake George; however, the only one located on the lake itself is Pine Island Fish Camp. There is one public boat ramp with limited parking on the south end of the lake off Blue Creek Lodge Road, located north of Highway 40. A fishing pier is also located along the east side of the lake at the end of Nine Mile Point Road.

Stick Marsh/Farm 13 Reservoir was created in 1987, the Stick Marsh/Farm 13 Reservoir is synonymous with trophy bass fishing. This 6,500-acre reservoir near Fellsmere, a small town west of Vero Beach, became one of the hottest bass lakes in the country during the past decade. FWC biologists predict excellent largemouth bass fishing during the 2007 season. Electrofishing during winter-spring 2006 documented high abundance of quality- to trophy-sized largemouth bass in the reservoir. A creel survey conducted during January through April 2005 estimated that anglers caught more than 42,000 bass, of which more than 700 were 8 pounds or heavier. Anglers can locate bass throughout the reservoir by targeting a variety of habitats including woody stump fields that were flooded when the reservoir was created, submersed canals and hydrilla beds. Hurricanes that came through the area in 2004 drastically reduced levels of hydrilla throughout the reservoir. The lack of submersed vegetation affects where the bass can be located before and during spawning season. Anglers should keep this in mind when trying to pattern fish. Plastic worms, spinnerbaits, crankbaits, soft jerkbaits, and topwater stick baits with propellers can be very effective. Live golden shiners are the top choice for anglers looking to catch a trophy fish. The recreational harvest regulation for largemouth bass anglers is catch-and-release. There is a two-lane boat ramp, paved parking lot, picnic pavilions and rest rooms at the main access point. No gasoline, food, ice or other facilities are available at this site, which is located a fair distance from the main road. This reservoir is part of the St. Johns Blue Cypress Management Unit

West Lake Tohopekaliga (Lake Toho; 18,810 acres) is south of the City of Kissimmee, which sits on the lake's northern shoreline in central Florida. Lake Toho is well known in the angling community for producing excellent fishing, as well as trophy largemouth bass. The lake received national attention during 2001 when the all-time B.A.S.S. tournament record for total weight was eclipsed by professional angler Dean Rojas with a total catch of 108 pounds. During the four-day competition, two 40-pound-plus limits, 21 bass over 10 pounds, and 251 five-fish limits were brought to the scales. While these professional tournament results are truly impressive, trophy bass are consistently caught from the lake by amateur anglers. An extreme drawdown and habitat enhancement project was conducted during spring 2004 to enhance critical shoreline habitat for fish and wildlife utilization. As a result of the project, approximately 8.4 million yards of organic material and associated vegetation (that was too dense to provide optimum fisheries habitat) was removed from 3,506 acres of lake bottom. In 2005, water levels returned to normal, and native vegetation began re-colonizing the shoreline areas. During early spring, live golden shiners are fished inshore near native vegetation or topped-out hydrilla. Plastic baits (worms, crawfish and lizards) flipped along grass edges, hydrilla beds or bulrush will catch quality-sized bass. Spinnerbaits, soft jerkbaits and chugging baits can also be very productive. Both Texas-rigged and Carolina-rigged plastic worms and rattling crankbaits are proven lures during warmer months. North Steer Beach, Little Grassy Island and Goblet's Cove are popular fishing spots on the lake. Both Shingle Creek and St. Cloud Canal hold good concentrations of fish when flow is present through these tributaries. Eight, man-made fish attractors are located in deeper areas of the lake and consistently produce good stringers of bass during the summer. Two fish camps, one marina, one county park, and five public boat ramps are available to anglers. Two fishing piers and numerous access points exist for bank fisherman along the north shore.

Lake Kissimmee covering roughly 35,000 acres is the largest of five main water bodies on the famous Kissimmee River in central Florida. Lake Kissimmee is nationally renowned for consistently producing high quality fishing. The lake underwent an extreme drawdown and habitat enhancement activities in 1996, whereby nearly 24 miles of shoreline were enhanced through removal of accumulated organic sediment and associated vegetation that was too dense to provide optimum fisheries habitat. Subsequently, more beneficial native vegetation became established in firm, sandy enhanced areas following lake refill, which provides spawning and nursery habitat for fish. Although fishing success temporarily declined for a short period after the enhancement project, anglers are once again enjoying good catch rates of largemouth bass. Results of angler surveys conducted during spring 2005 indicated that bass anglers had excellent success, with a catch rate of 0.64 fish/hour. Strong winds associated with hurricane activity during fall 2004 cleared vegetation from many areas of the lake, which offered anglers the opportunity to fish areas that had been inaccessible prior to the storms. Some areas of Lake Kissimmee that were impacted by the winds include the shoreline between the C-37 Canal and the Pig Trail, Lemon Point and Grassy Island. Native grasses, bulrush, hydrilla and lily pads at Philadelphia Point, North Cove and Brahma Island provide anglers with cover to flip plastic baits or slow-troll live golden shiners for spawning bass during winter and spring. Rattling crankbaits, soft jerkbaits and Texas- or Carolina-rigged plastic worms are productive during summer and fall when fished in open-water or along edges of vegetation. Fly fishermen have access to some outstanding areas for wade fishing, and consistently catch bass on popping bugs during spring and summer. Three fish camps, one state park and two public boat ramps are available to anglers.

Rodman Reservoir, east of Gainesville and south of Palatka, covers 9,500 acres of prime largemouth bass habitat. Since its creation in 1968, Rodman Reservoir has been known for trophy largemouth bass. Much of the fishery's success is attributed to abundant habitat in the form of stumps and submersed aquatic vegetation, and periodic drawdowns occurring every three years. Although drawdowns on Rodman are used primarily to control invasive aquatic vegetation, biologists have demonstrated a relationship between strong largemouth bass year-class production and reservoir drawdowns. These year classes provide pulses to the fishery on three-year intervals that provide the majority of the angler catch. Generally, largemouth bass on Rodman Reservoir are most active during cooler months. Anglers targeting trophy largemouth bass use live golden shiners, either floated under a cork or free-lined. Most big bass are caught in the pool area, known as the "stump fields," along the river channel. However, many trophy bass come from the area between Cypress Bayou and Kenwood Landing. Successful anglers also use artificial baits, such as deep-diving and lipless crankbaits, spinnerbaits and soft plastics. Boat ramps can be found near the town of Interlachen off C.R. 315 in Orange Springs and Kenwood. Additional boat ramps are located at the Rodman Recreational Area off Hwy 19 and at Eureka off C.R. 316.

Lake Tarpon is a 2,500-acre lake near Tampa/St. Petersburg in Pinellas County. This lake has consistently produced high-quality largemouth bass fishing. Most fish range from 12 to 16 inches long; however, quality and trophy fish are also present in good numbers. Biologists have observed anglers catching upwards of 20 fish, including an occasional 10-pounder. Anglers are most successful flipping or pitching plastic worms along canal and bulrush edges. Offshore bass fishing is productive for anglers who fish around ledges, humps, coontail, and eelgrass beds. Popular lures offshore include shad-imitating jigs, crankbaits, jerkbaits and topwater baits. Fishing with live, wild shiners and live shad is also effective. There are two public boat ramps within county parks. Anderson Park boat ramp is on the west shore, off U.S. 19. Chestnut Park boat ramp is on the east side of the lake, off C.R. 611. Some bank access is available in both parks. Boardwalks and piers serve as excellent fishing locations.

Lake Weohyakapka (Lake Walk-in-Water), commonly known as Lake Walk-in-Water, is a 7,500-acre water body. The lake is located south of Orlando and east of Lake Wales, and it is just south of S.R. 60. Lake Walk-in-Water has a national reputation as an outstanding spot to catch largemouth bass. Anglers frequently catch up to 25 bass a day with several ranging from four to eight pounds. The lake also produces many trophy bass exceeding 10 pounds each year. A 15- to 24-inch slot limit regulation and a three-bass daily bag limit are in place to help maintain quality bass fishing. Anglers may keep three bass per day, either under or over the protected slot range, of which only one bass greater than or equal to 24 inches is allowed. Typically, the best technique to catch trophy bass is to drift live wild shiners over hydrilla weed beds; however, the 2004 hurricanes cleared most of the hydrilla from the lake. Soft jerkbaits, lipless rattling crankbaits, and plastic worms also produce bass in these areas when hydrilla is present. Angling techniques need to be altered since the hydrilla has not returned as expected, with only a few small patches being found. However, if you can find them, these few hydrilla patches should hold good numbers of bass. Pitching live wild shiners and flipping soft plastic baits in the bulrush ("buggy whips" or "round rush") in the northern, eastern, and southern areas of the lake should be successful through spring 2007. Spinnerbaits should also produce bass in the bulrush and cattail stands. Bass have also been found in maidencane grass and knotgrass (Kissimmee

grass) stands along the shoreline during spring and fall sampling on the lake. Soft jerkbaits are a must when fishing these areas. Topwater lures are also productive, particularly chuggers or the walk-the-dog types of baits. Although topwater baits catch fish throughout the year, summer months offer the best action when schools of bass roam deep-water areas. Bass will move off shore when the shallow water temperature heats up through the summer. A public ramp is located on Boat Landing Road, which runs east off of Walk-in-the-Water Road; just a few miles south of S.R. 60. There is little access for bank fishing on the lake.

Lake Istokpoga (28,000-acres) is sometimes overlooked by largemouth bass anglers who fish the Kissimmee Chain of lakes to the north and Lake Okeechobee to the south. Situated in Highlands County between U.S. 27 and U.S. 98 south of Sebring, Istokpoga is the fifth largest natural lake in Florida and has an average depth of only six feet. During angler surveys conducted from October 2004 through May 2005, anglers caught 79,927 bass, of which almost 44,000 were 2 pounds or heavier, and 1,291 bass were over 8 pounds. Although bass fishing is excellent throughout the year, April and October are prime times for anglers looking for cooler weather and lots of bass. From January through April, bass can be found spawning in bulrush, cattail, and other vegetation over sandy lake bottom areas that were enhanced during the 2001 drawdown. Spawning bass can also be found around the lake's two islands: Big Island and Bumblebee Island. Flipping dark-colored, soft plastics in bulrush patches and in pockets of submerged vegetation can be productive during this time of year. Red shad and Junebug colors seem to be the most successful when fishing with soft plastics. In spring and summer, topwater lures and jerkbaits worked over the top of hydrilla and pondweed in the south half of the lake are often successful. Weedless spoons tipped with grub tails and spinnerbaits fished over pondweed south of Bumblebee Island are deadly on bass during early morning. Rattling lures (silver, gold, and "Tennessee shad" are excellent colors) can also be effective during summer and fall as baitfish school in open water areas along the north end of the lake. A live shiner fished a few feet under a popping cork is the most reliable bait for catching trophy bass. Lake Istokpoga has a 15- to 24-inch protected (no-harvest) slot limit for bass with a three fish daily bag limit, of which only one bass may be 24 inches or longer. All residents between 16 and 65 years of age and all non-residents are required to have a fishing license. Several fish camps and four public boat ramps provide access to the lake.

Deer Point Lake is a popular largemouth bass fishing destination in Florida's panhandle area near Panama City. This 5,000-acre impoundment is located 7 miles north of Panama City off US 231 and SR 77 at Southport. Deer Point Lake is fed by natural freshwater streams and supplies more than 760 million gallons of fresh water daily to Panama City and the surrounding areas. Although largemouth bass fishing typically slows down during winter months in Deer Point Lake, it picks up again in mid-February and March, and becomes red hot in April and May. Anglers unfamiliar with Deer Point Lake should try fishing for largemouth bass in the old creek channels of Bear, Cedar, and Econfina creeks with plastic worms, diving crankbaits or rattletraps. Bayou George and the flats area at the confluence of Bayou George and Deer Point Lake are also popular largemouth spots. Also, try targeting docks and boathouses along creek channels and at the mouth of Bayou George. Anglers should exercise extreme caution during boat operation due to the amount of flooded cypress stumps and snags found in the lake. The lake can be accessed by taking US 231 north to Panama City (6 miles) to C2321 west (1.5 miles) and turn right on C2311 for (3.5 miles): the ramp is on the left. There are two fish camps located

on the Lake: Cherokee Landing (on County Road 2301 at the bridge crossing) 10035 County Road, Youngstown, FL 32466 (850) 722-4902 Tharp's Camp (off Resota Beach Road) 4405 Huckleberry Lane Panama City, FL 32409 (850) 265-2330.

The Suwannee River is a pristine, black-water stream which flows 213 miles within Florida from a swampy region near the Georgia border to salt-marsh tidal creeks where it empties into the Gulf of Mexico. Rocky bluffs and shoal areas occur in the upper reaches of the river. Floodplain cypress tree-hardwood swamp borders, lined with lily pads, are found through the middle reaches of the Suwannee River. The Santa Fe River, a major tributary of the Suwannee, is influenced by the input of many natural springs, which makes the water clearer, yet more productive for submersed vegetation and invertebrate fish food organisms. Although the Suwannee River is not known for trophy largemouth bass, good numbers of bass can be expected, and quality-sized largemouth bass are caught frequently. The smaller, but feisty, Suwannee bass species also occurs throughout much of the river system. Suwannee bass over 16 inches (2 pounds) can be caught by anglers in the Santa Fe River, which qualify as a "Big Catch" in FWC's Big Catch Angler Recognition Program. Crawfish are the main food item for bass throughout the river system, so anglers should fish accordingly. Plastic worms, lizards, and crawfish; jigs with orange skirts and pork rinds; and metallic crankbaits are all standard lures that catch fish in the river. While the scenery may change every 20 or 30 miles, the key to catching bass is the same. Anglers should always look for deep structure, or shallow structure that has deep water nearby. Suwannee bass, which are more common in the Santa Fe River, prefer moderate to fast current flowing around cypress trees. When water levels are low, the mid-river is a better bet for catching Suwannee bass, particularly in vegetated areas or other structure. The lower Suwannee River moves more slowly, and bass utilize shoreline cover such as fallen trees and cypress trees on the outer bends of the river. Plastic baits, rigged weedless, can also catch bass on the inside shallow banks where lily pads are present. Live shiners can be fished into brush piles from upstream areas by letting them float downstream. Small bass will hit a fly or a small floater-diver fished along the bank in the Suwannee. The estuary is also productive. Fishing can be outstanding during fall when shrimp migrate into in the river. Tidal creeks provide a unique fishing experience near the Gulf of Mexico. Boat ramps are located along the entire river, but fish camps are few and far between.

The Everglades Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) are south Florida marshlands intersected with over 200 miles of canals. WCA-2 has 210 square miles of marsh, and WCA-3 covers approximately 915 square miles of marsh. Originally designed for flood control and water supply, the area provides some of the best largemouth bass fishing in the country. Over 25 public boat ramps provide access to the different segments of canals surrounding and intersecting the WCAs. L-67A, L-35B, and Alligator Alley (I-75) are three of the most popular fishing canals. The best fishing usually occurs in spring when declining water levels concentrate fish in the canals. April is the peak fishing month when angler catch rates can be as high as 4.1 bass per hour in the L-67A Canal. This past year, in the L-67A Canal, a peak season creel survey recorded an average catch rate of 2.4 bass per hour, with more than 20% of those fish 14 inches or longer. Catch rates for bass have also been excellent in the L-35B and L-38E canals. Most anglers fish in the canals rather than the marsh. Anglers work canal edges with plastic worms, soft jerkbaits, and minnow imitations. Flipping the vegetation is also a popular technique. During high water, some anglers will enter the marsh areas where bass can be found in open slough

areas. The L-67A and Alligator Alley canals have access trails off of them that are specifically cut to provide boats access to adjacent marsh areas. The L-67A Canal has access at the north end at Everglades Holiday Park, off U.S. 27, where camping and boat rentals are available. At the south end, it can be accessed via a FWC boat ramp at the S-333 water control structure off Tamiami Trail (S.R. 41). The L-67C Canal may also be accessed from a FWC boat ramp and parking area adjacent to this site. The L-35B Canal access is at Sawgrass Recreation Area, off of U.S. 27, which has boat ramps and boat rentals. Ample access to the Alligator Alley Canal is available via a string of recreation areas and boat ramps along I-75. A special bass fishing regulation is in affect in south Florida, including the Everglades Conservation Areas, where only one bass of the five-bass daily bag limit may be 14 inches or longer. This gives anglers the opportunity to harvest smaller bass, but still prevents over-harvest of fish over 14 inches in total length.

Crescent Lake (15,725 acres) borders the east side of Crescent City on the Putnam/Flagler county line. Crescent Lake flows into the St. Johns River via Dunns Creek on its north end. Past electrofishing samples for largemouth bass revealed one of the highest catch rates recorded for areas on the St. John's River. Largemouth bass up to 20 inches long were well represented in the sample and good numbers of larger fish (8 pounds plus) were collected. Fall and early winter fishing tends to be best near deep-water structures such as dock pilings. Preferred artificial baits include plastic worms, spinnerbaits and crankbaits. Live golden shiners are always popular baits. Several fish camps provide access to the lake on the western and southern shorelines. A public boat ramp is located near downtown Crescent City one block east of U. S. 17 and another is located on the northeast shore off S.R. 20/100. Bank access is limited to these facilities.

The 7,300-acre Tenoroc Fish Management Area near Lakeland provides a special opportunity to bass fish in Florida's famous phosphate pits. These 7- to 227-acre lakes were created years ago by draglines during phosphate surface mining operations. As a result, lake bottoms have irregular contours with depths ranging to 35 feet. The bass fishing experience in these phosphate pits can rival any natural lake when the bass are biting well. Bass fishing is best from mid-November through March. Lake 2, Lake 3, Lake 4, Lake 5, Lake B, Shop Lake and Hydrilla Lake offer some of the best bass fishing opportunities on the property. Probing deeper waters with chrome-colored rattling lures and chartreuse (Firetiger-color) diving crankbaits is a good bet in phosphate pits. Plastic worms are often the best all around lure for fishing in these lakes. Red shad and Junebug are good colors. Anglers that can find submersed islands or sandbars off points will find concentrations of bass. During spring, flipping worms or soft plastic baits in thick brush will produce largemouth bass. Tenoroc lakes are managed with a variety of catch-and-release harvest regulations; including total catch and release (no harvest) and 15-inch maximum size limits, in which anglers must immediately release all bass larger than 15 inches in total length. Tenoroc is located just two miles northeast of Lakeland on Highway 659, which can be accessed from Highway 33 just south of Interstate I-4. Call the Tenoroc Headquarters at (863) 499-2422 for more information or to make reservations, because these lakes are only open to the public four days a week. All anglers must check in and out at the Tenoroc Fish Management Area Headquarters, deposit their valid fishing license, and pay \$3 for a daily fishing permit.

Mosaic Fish Management Area provides bass fishing trips in southwest Florida that are definitely worth planning. There are 12 phosphate pits (i.e., lakes created by surface mining) that

range in size from 10 to 200 acres, and have depths that range down to 30 feet. This fish management area is not very well known, because it just recently opened. As a result, the fishing pressure is low and bass fishing can turn on at a moments notice. Like Tenoroc, these lakes offer a special opportunity to fish Florida's famous phosphate pit bass fisheries. Topwater baits around dawn and dusk, white or chartreuse spinnerbaits, plastic worms, and chrome or "Firetiger" (chartreuse and orange) colored crankbaits can all be successful. Fishing shoreline brush and vegetation works well in spring. Anglers that can find submersed islands or sandbars off points will find concentrations of bass, particularly during warmer months of the year. Lakes LP2 West, SP11, Pine Lake East, Coulter, SP12 North and SP12 South offer some of the best bass fishing opportunities on the property. Mosaic lakes are managed with a variety of catch-and-release harvest regulations; including total catch and release (no harvest) and 15-inch maximum size limits, in which anglers must immediately release all bass larger than 15 inches in total length. Mosaic Fish Management Area is located near Ft. Meade in Polk County. The fish management area is only open to public fishing four days a week from Friday through Monday. No reservations can be made, so lake permits are allocated on a first-come-first-serve basis. Please call (863) 499-2421 ext.104 for more information about fishing at Mosaic Fish Management Area.

NOTE: Many of Florida's best black bass fisheries produce consistently year after year. Notably missing for 2007, however, is 450,000-acre Lake Okeechobee. Recently revered by largemouth bass and crappie anglers nationwide, the "Big O" is currently imperiled by environmental consequences following record setting hurricane seasons in 2004 and 2005 when devastating storm winds repeatedly wreaked havoc on Okeechobee's aquatic plant communities. FWC biologists continue to assist the South Florida Water Management District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Florida Department of Environmental Protection and others in restoring the lake and its fishery to its glory days. Contact local marinas and tackle stores for current conditions.

For more information about the lakes and rivers listed above, contact the following FWC biologists:

- Lake George and Crescent Lake – Jay Holder (386) 985-7827
- Lakes Weohyakapka and Tarpon – Tom Champeau (863) 648-3202
- Farm 13/Stick Marsh Reservoir – Bob Eisenhauer (407) 752-3115
- Rodman Reservoir – Eric Nagid (352) 392-9617
- Lake Istokpoga – Beacham Furse (863) 462-5190
- West Lake Tohopekaliga and Lake Kissimmee – Kevin McDaniel (407) 846-5300
- Everglades Water Conservation Areas 2 and 3 – Barron Moody (561) 625-5122
- Deer Point Lake – Chris Paxton (850) 265-3676
- Suwannee River – Dan Dorosheff (850) 265-3676
- Tenoroc and Mosaic Fish Management Areas – Eric Johnson (863) 499-2421 ext 104

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