



# 2011 KAYAKS

# SPECIAL REPORT: KAYAK FISHING 2011



Angling International  
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"Absolutely the hottest segment in recreational fishing" – that's how one manufacturer has described the booming kayak fishing sector.

In a mature industry that continues to be shackled by turgid trading conditions, the rise and rise of kayak fishing certainly represents a refreshing opportunity for growth and, in the case of some fishing tackle manufacturers, new business.

While kayak fishing can no longer be called new – it has been around in the US for years – it continues to grow at a rapid rate there, and the ripple effect is gathering momentum across the world as anglers are seduced by its particular sense of adventure.

Add to that the attraction of paddling or peddling into previously inaccessible spots, its application in both sea and freshwater, the absence

of fuel bills and boat launch fees and the fun of playing fish from such a light craft and it's easy to see why kayak fishing ticks an awful lot of boxes for so many anglers.

Most importantly for the tackle industry, this emerging tranche of consumers has spawned a whole new trade sector.

Existing kayak specialists are producing far more custom-built

fishing craft, while conventional tackle producers are looking at kayaks and kayak accessories as a profitable and serious diversification.

Angling International talked to some of the leading brands to discover more about the impact of kayaks on their businesses, their latest design breakthroughs and the exciting products they have in store for consumers in 2011.

## Freedom Hawk increases standing Designs by real anglers have given his company an edge, says David Hadden.

### What is Freedom Hawk's business philosophy?

**David Hadden:** Freedom Hawk was founded in 2006 with the goal of making the ultimate fishing kayak in the world. While some companies simply add rod holders to existing models, our boats are designed



from the hull up with the aim of making you a better angler. We started with the premise that to fish better you need to fish from a standing position. We are the only kayak company to offer a built-in patented outrigger system that allows the kayak to transform from a traditional sit-on-top kayak to a fishing platform in seconds by simply moving two levers.

### What are your most popular products?

Our Freedom 14 is our original model and offers maximum stability. It has been in production for four years now, but is still one of our most popular with anglers over 250lbs.

Introduced in the fall of 2009, our 12-footer is smaller and easier to transport and use on smaller waters. With an optional motor mount, it became an instant hit and today is our bestseller. We also introduced a 'canoe/hybrid' version of this hull, the

Freedom 12 Ultralight. At 64lbs in weight, it's our lightest model and a favourite on small lakes, ponds, creeks and protected water.

### What developments are you most proud of?

Obviously our patented outrigger system is very popular, but we back this up with superior hull designs for maximum efficiency and all the best kayak fishing features – rod holders, casting braces, and durable hulls built for a lifetime of fishing and comfort.

For 2011 we introduced an Elite Seating system for our 12ft series. It means that, whether you are seated or standing, you have the best and most comfortable fishing boat on the market.

### What are Freedom Hawk's plans for the coming year?

We are never resting. Our entire staff and sales force are made up of real anglers – most are on the water for a minimum 50 days a year. We consistently come up with new, innovative and feature-rich products at the best value to our customer. We want to continue to push the future of kayak angling. Watch out for a new model featuring our latest and greatest ideas in 2012.

### What is the current state of the market?

Kayak fishing is one of the most popular categories in both fishing and paddlesports. While many categories have been hit by the world recession, this is an area that continues to thrive. While early kayak fishing sales were done in paddlesports shops, today's angler is looking for more. They want a salesperson that is able to talk boats and fishing techniques. Because of this, we are seeing a



switch to tackle shop sales. Almost 70% of our sales are through fishing tackle and fly shops worldwide. We are also seeing a significant growth in the global and European markets and have added more than six distributors worldwide. We are constantly looking for new European and international partners.

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## DIABLO MAKING WAVES WITH ITS HYBRID MODELS



Diablo Paddlesports is now in the second year of production of its hybrid SUP-kayaks – craft that will change the way you fish, says the company.

The Adios – a 12ft 6ins cross between a SUP board and a sit-on-top kayak – was launched last year and it has been followed by the 10ft 5ins Chupacabra. Both craft offer the ability to stand up or sit down to paddle or fish.

The wide beam, that measures 36ins, and stable tri-hull design, means that standing to cast or paddle is easy for all users. This combination is also said to allow both models to accommo-

date larger paddlers or more fishing gear without sacrificing draft or performance.

Diablos have a flat deck that will not catch stripped line, easy access dry and wet storage and double paddle holders.

A leash comes out of the front of the cockpit to help standing and the cockpit is covered in a traction pad for secure footing.

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## PrecisionPak's sales grow by 200%

Kayak fishing accessories has been one of the driving forces behind the phenomenal growth of outdoor sporting goods producer, PrecisionPak. The company says that sales in the last year have risen by around 200% as it continues to expand.

PrecisionPak is the own brand of Alphatan International, a Toronto-based manufacturer and distributor of bags and luggage.

Richard Tan, told *Angling International*: "When we started promoting kayak fishing products back in 2007 at ICAST not too many people were interested. Today almost all retailers are talking about it – and it's not just in North America either. It has become a global thing.

"We were one of the pioneers who created various storage boxes for the sport – especially the CratePaks. Now, with the surge in demand, we are making our products in advance rather than to order as we did in the past. With our pro-staff in the field we are looking to diversify our lines from cut and sew products to hard accessories and we expect to launch these at ICAST in July."

PrecisionPak's products are manufactured at its own and affiliated factories in China.

Tan said that the CratePak and CratePak Max are now firmly established in the kayak fishing market. He said: "They are affordable, and feature an easy to access system for fishing gear and rod storage."

The CratePak fits over a standard milk crate and has three built-in rod holders, multiple mesh and fabric pockets and a safety light holder.

The outside features D-rings to secure it to the kayak. Slits in the top of the unit can be connected to straps for carrying. It is available in black, blaze orange and a special edition camouflage.

The CratePak Max is a complete redesign and is geared towards kayaking, boating and fishing in general. It is fully self-contained and made of water-resistant poly. It also features padded inside panels for extra stability.

Three integrated rod holders are built into one side, while the other features a variety of covered pockets and storage bags. All pockets have plastic grommets to drain away water.

The outside has a built-in holder for a safety light. The top of the unit features side flaps for safe and dry storage of items like maps, cell phones or GPS units.

A shoulder strap is included for transport of the CratePak Max which comes in lime green or blaze orange colour options.

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## WILDERNESS ADDS 14-FOOTER TO AWARD-WINNING RANGE

Wilderness Systems has an award-winning pedigree when it comes to the design of its craft.

For the last two years the company has won 'Boat Brand of the Year' at the annual Canoe & Kayak Paddlesports Industry Awards.

Wilderness became the first boat brand ever to win the prestigious award two years in a row and Sue Rechner, CEO of parent company, Confluence Watersports, said: "We are grateful to our retailers for their vote of confidence – it inspires us to do even better."

The award-winning kayak design team has expanded its Commander fleet for 2011 with the addition of the Commander 140 – a craft that has the same hybrid canoe/kayak design, stable hull and comfort of the Commander 120, but is two feet longer at 14ft.

The extra length gives a roomier ride, more foot room and greater storage space.

Lead designer, Bob McDonough, said: "The Commander 140 is designed to be a versatile, high capacity recreational kayak that has great fishing characteristics. It delivers a wide variety of applications, especially excelling in situations that need great stability and a seat comfortable enough to use all day."

Three paddling positions offers the variety needed to spend all day in the water and its dual seating system gives an elevated position in the moulded Captain's Seat and a lower position in the adjustable Freedom Elite Seat.

Optional angler accessories include:

- Slide Trax Accessory System on the top and sides
- Slide Trax Anchor Trolley with anchor
- Slide Trax Universal Mounting Plate
- Integral trolling motor mounting block
- Two flush mount rod holders
- Scotty rod holder

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## Sea Eagle: 'This is the most vibrant sector in the US'



Cecil Hoge: "Kayaks' wide appeal is the key."

Cecil C. Hoge Sr started out over 50 years ago with a fishing lure company that came to buy an inflatable boat business. Today the company is run by brothers Cecil and John Hoge and is better known as an inflatable boat company which also has a fishing company. That's how Co-Partner Cecil Hoge

describes the transformation in the fortunes of Sea Eagle and its Panther Martin lure business.

Hoge told *Angling International* that the change in impetus has been aided by sales of kayaks, followed by the sale of pontoon fishing boats. He said: "Kayaks are the most important category for us in inflatable boat sales, with pontoon fishing boats coming second."

Hoge added that last year the two companies had combined sales of just under \$11m – with \$7.5m of that coming from its boats.

"Kayak and pontoon fishing have become a big thing in America. They are the only vibrant parts of the fishing tackle industry over here. The rest remain

stagnant as companies fight the recession, bad trends, and reduced shelf space being offered by the retail stores.

"Our lure business with the Panther Martin brand is holding up, but sales are not going anywhere. However, inflatable boat sales are bucking the trend in the US and beating the recession.

"Kayak and pontoon fishing have really caught on and they appeal to a wide range of anglers, including the younger generation who find it exciting and an opportunity to catch big fish."

One of the most popular craft for fishing is the FastTrack Kayak 465 that was introduced in April last year.

Hoge said: "Up to the end of 2010 we sold 600 units. We expect sales of over 2,000 for this year."

Hoge added that there were many reasons for the surge in inflatable sales, including the high cost of fuel, lifestyle changes and versatility of the craft.

He said: "Inflatables – and kayaks and pontoon fishing boats in particular – offer so many advantages in that they are affordable and portable; they are practical in that they can reach areas bigger boats cannot access; and they are easy to store and transport because they can easily fit in the trunk of a car."

The new Sea Eagle FastTrack inflatable kayak can be used to fish lakes, meandering rivers, inland bays and hidden coves.

The secret of the new design is the outside drop stitch keel in the bow and the large skeg in the stern. These combine to limit the sideways movement when using a double-end paddle. and create extra 'bite' on the water.

Hoge said: "Kayaks can be terrible to paddle, but because of the drop stitch keel it can go faster and straighter than other craft.

"Other kayaks may look similar, but underneath there is a world of difference in the performance."

The FastTracks can be equipped with a swivel seat fishing module that can be dropped into the craft in seconds and allows fisherman to sit comfortably for hours. It gives a high line of vision and can turn 360 degrees.

The fishing module weighs just 16lbs and includes two rod holders and the ability to accept a fishfinder or GPS.

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