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WINTER SUCKS

Ok, I give up, its time for winter to be over. Twenty four years ago when I moved here, I thought that I was done with cold dreary mind numbingly boring winter days, but obviously I was wrong. When we moved to Florida, we drove south until we no longer saw the warning signs about bridges icing and we thought that was enough, but I guess it wasn't. I may just have to move farther South.

Where is a little Global Warming when we need it??

Maybe I'm getting old and lazy, but it is just too much extra effort putting on big boy clothes every day before I go to work at the marina. Long sleeve shirts and pants can't possibly be good for my skin, it needs to be out where it can catch rays and breathe in the fresh air. I'm really tired of wearing warm clothes and I'm also running out of them and don't even get me started talking about wearing socks, I'm really so done with them. Right now my feet haven't seen the light of day in 4 weeks, they feel like they are being imprisoned in a padded cell and I may need a padded cell myself if I don't see the sun soon.

In my previous life, I wore grown up clothes every day for 25 years or so, but when I moved to Florida, I really thought my days of adulthood were over. It is really easy to throw on a pair of shorts, a t-shirt and some sandals in the morning, anything more than that is just excessive and I really wouldn't even wear those if I didn't realize how much other people don't want to see me nekkid!!

Flip the Bird also detests the cold winter weather. Her ancestors hail from equatorial Africa, so she is well suited for the warm moist weather that we have for most of the year. I hear friends from up North say things like, "I couldn't live down there, I would miss the seasons too much." Well, I can assure you that both Flip and I would not miss the winter season even one tiny bit.

When I lived in Arkansas, we would go out to fish regardless of the weather, sometimes even when ice formed on our poles, but I was much younger and stupider then. In more recent years, I have adopted the belief that there are plenty of good weather fishing days, so why go on a horrible one. If I were a fish, I certainly would not go out to bite some smelly bait when it is cold and nasty, therefore, it stands to reason that you are only likely to catch the really stupid fish on nasty days. Personally, I prefer to catch the more intelligent and reasonable fish that only come out on beautiful days.

Hopefully, this winter crap will be over in a few more days. Gotta go, the sun just popped out for 15 minutes.

Merle & Flip



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ON THE COVER: Jimmy Houston travels to the "Grouper Capital of the World" to fish the Middle Grounds with Misty Wells. Read more about their adventure by flipping to page 14 of this issue!

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COOL WATER EQUALS A HOT BITE

by Captain George Hastick

Yes, you can find stacked up fish at the power plant outflows, but in February, two fish that like the cooler water are Sheepshead and Trout. With the water cooling off larger Sheepshead and "gator" Trout have moved into the Tampa Bay area. This can make for some great action and table fare to boot.



The Sheepshead is very structure oriented and likes to eat a variety of baits. They love barnacles, which is why you will find them around most structures that have barnacles growing on it. Places to look are rock piles, docks, bridge pilings, sea walls, rock jetties and along the mangroves to name a few places.

There are places inland that will hold some really nice size Sheepshead averaging 12-20 inches but many of the larger Sheepshead will be in 10-20 feet of water on rockpiles or the larger



bridges that Tampa Bay has to offer. Sheepshead have an unbelievable set of human-like teeth with front incisor teeth and back molar teeth. Each has its purpose. The front teeth are made for picking and pulling while the back molars can crack open shells to get to the meat of things. Their teeth is how they got their name, since they are so similar to sheep. Those teeth come in handy since their main diet consists of crabs and crustaceans. They will eat the aforementioned barnacles, shrimp, oysters, mussels, clams, fiddler crabs and mud crabs to name a few things they like. Crabs and mussels seem to work the best or tube worms, but worms are a secret bait guarded by the old timers on where to catch them!

Their nickname, the "convict" fish, is up for grabs on how they got that. Some say it is because of their ability to steal your bait, while others think it is because their stripes look like prison bars, or it could be the combo of both. Sheepshead have seven stripes, no matter what size they are, unless you have a deformed one. I like to use a 1/0 hook with 4-5 feet of 25lb. test fluorocarbon leader and 10-15 lb Fins Wind Tamer. I like to use as little as weight needed to keep the bait on the bottom, especially when rock pile fishing. Inshore dock fishing, if the current isn't too strong, I like to free line my bait so there is no resistance when they grab your bait.

The other fish that is great to target in January and February are the larger "gator" Trout. They can be in totally different terrains this time of year. You can find them in shallow 2-3 feet of water on very sunny days where the water heats up. This will usually be near a drop off or



deeper hole that they will also be in. Some of the areas that have a good shell bottom mixed with grass patches and coral will also hold large trout. These areas are deeper, like 7-10 feet. Residential canals with good bottom will also hold Trout in 5 to 8 feet of water. Trout will eat Shrimp and Scaled Sardines but this time of year, soft plastic like Saltwater Assassins Sea Shad or Lit'I P&V in Chicken on a Chain or Opening Nite colors both with Chartreuse tails will get the job done. ☑

Captain George Hastick of "Fish Hunter Fishing Charters" in St. Petersburg has been fishing the waters of Tampa for over 35 years. From novice to professional; Captain George will make you feel as if you have been fishing buddies for years. Contact him at 727-525-1005, www.FishTampa.com or email CaptGeorge@TampaBay.rr.com.



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INSHORE FISHING ON FLORIDA'S GULF COAST

Chasing The Bite

by Captain Justin Searcy

February is an exciting time for inshore anglers along Florida's Gulf Coast. With cooler water temperatures and a transition period setting in, the fish are on the move, and so are we. Whether you're a seasoned local or new to the area, this time of year offers opportunities to target some incredible species and hone your skills in adapting to the changing conditions.

Finding the Bite

This month, focus your efforts on back bays, creeks, and channels. These areas tend to hold warmer water, drawing baitfish and, in turn, predators like Redfish, Snook, and Trout. Patience and observation are key. Look for subtle signs: mullet schools, wakes along the shallows, or birds working the surface. When you spot the activity, that's your cue to get lines in the water.

The Redfish Run

Redfish are the star of the February inshore lineup. Schools of slot-sized 'reds' are frequenting shallow grass flats and oyster bars, especially during the afternoon when the sun warms the water. I've had

success using gold spoons and soft plastics on a light jig head, working them slow and steady across the flats. On calmer days, tossing live shrimp or cut pinfish near the mangroves is a surefire way to hook up.

Snook in Hiding

Snook, on the other hand, can be a bit more elusive in February. As temperatures drop, they retreat into residential canals and deeper pockets of water. Here, live bait reigns supreme. Pilchards and large shrimp are hard to beat, especially when presented naturally in the current. Be ready to switch to artificial lures like a suspending twitch bait if the live bait isn't producing. Patience and persistence are your allies when targeting these wily predators.

Speckled Trout Frenzy

Don't overlook Speckled Trout, especially for a fun and productive day on the water. They're schooling up on deeper grass flats and channel edges. A popping cork rigged with a shrimp imitation or



a DOA Shrimp is deadly this time of year. Work your presentation at varying depths until you find the strike zone.

Timing Is Everything

February fishing success is all about timing. Pay attention to tide patterns, as moving water will always increase your chances of a bite. Early mornings and late afternoons tend to be productive, but midday can surprise you when the sun has warmed the flats just enough to wake up the fish.



Gear Up for Success

This is the month to fine-tune your gear. I recommend medium-light spinning setups with 10-15 lb. braided line and a 20 lb. fluorocarbon leader. This balance gives you the sensitivity to feel subtle strikes while still providing enough backbone to handle those larger fish that might surprise you.



Respecting the Resource

As always, let's do our part to preserve the waters we fish and protect the species we love. Practice proper catch-and-release techniques, and remember that the fish we enjoy today are here for the next generation because of the decisions we make.



This February, take the time to slow down, read the water, and immerse yourself in the thrill of inshore fishing. Whether you're targeting Redfish, Snook, or Trout, the Gulf Coast has plenty to offer this month. Tight lines, and I'll see you out there!

For more inshore fishing tips and updates, follow me on Instagram: @capt_justin_searcy. 📷

- Captain Justin Searcy

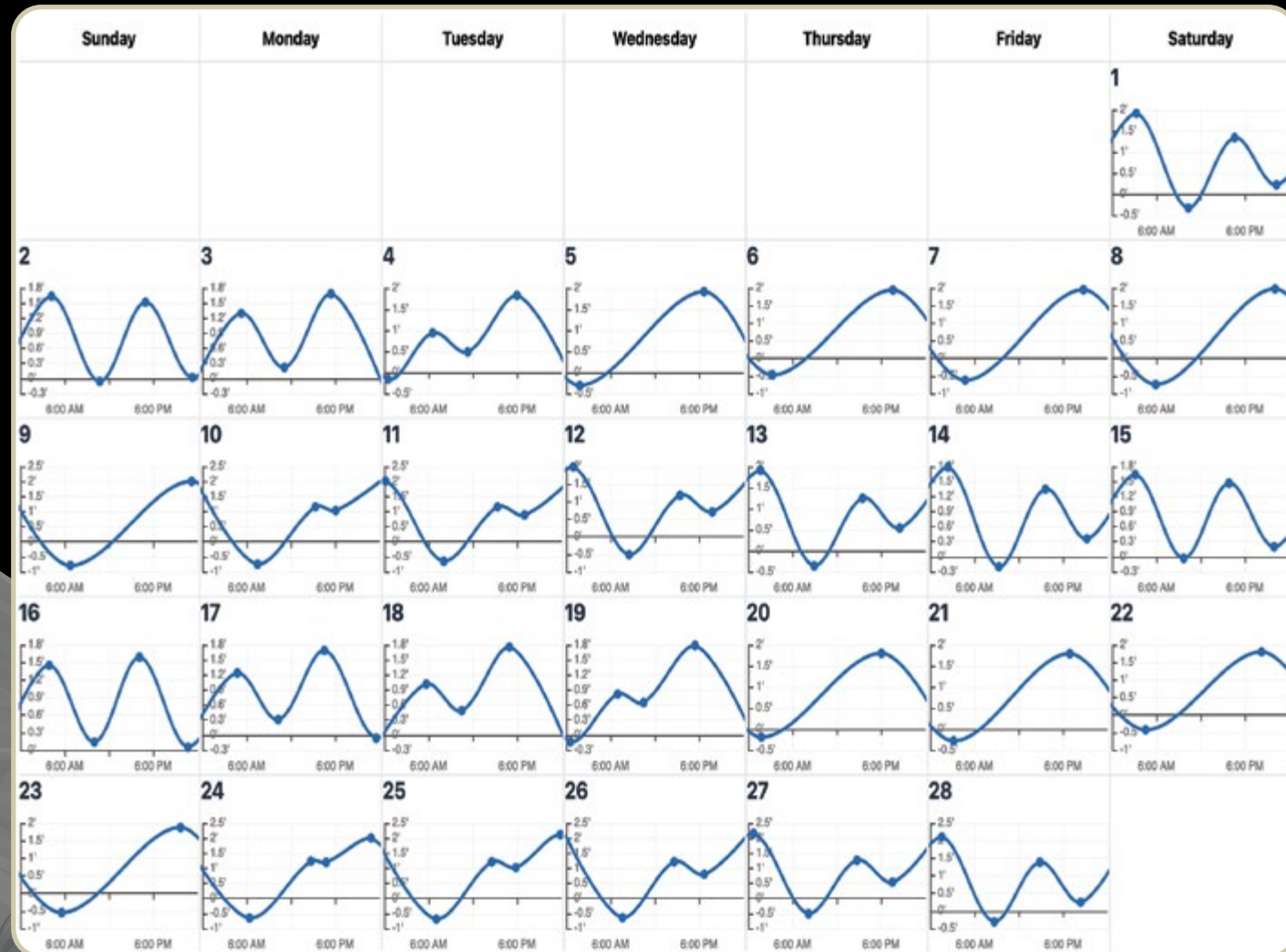


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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

High	Low	Location
-0:02	-0:10	Dunedin, St. Joseph Sound
-0:05	-0:15	Anclote Key, South End
+0:42	+0:42	Tarpon Springs, Anclote River
-0:07	-0:03	North Anclote Key
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
+0:33	+0:53	Gulf Harbors
+0:42	+1:05	Hwy 19 Bridge, Pithlachascotee River
+0:50	+1:35	New Port Richey, Pithlachascotee River
+0:36	+0:43	Hudson, Hudson Creek

Conversions for St. Marks River Area

High	Low	Location
+0:23	+1:18	Everglades City
-1:17	-1:03	Cape Romano
-1:04	-1:08	Marco Island
-1:59	-2:04	Naples
-0:46	-0:09	Indian Bay
-0:59	-0:42	Bayport
-0:25	+0:23	Withlacoochee River

Conversions for Tampa Bay Area

High	Low	Location
+0:49	+0:58	Gandy Bridge
+1:38	+1:55	Courtney Campbell Cswy.
+1:38	+1:55	Safety Harbor
+0:20	+0:22	Ballast Point
+0:07	+0:26	Hillsborough Bay
+0:21	+0:29	McKay Bay Entrance
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
-2:27	-2:24	Egmont Key
-2:53	-2:46	Anna Maria, Bradenton Bch
-2:10	-2:19	Anna Maria, City Pier
-1:24	-0:55	Bradenton, Manatee River
-0:30	+0:14	Redfish Pt., Manatee River
-2:22	-1:58	Mullet Key Channel, Skyway
+0:08	+0:17	Shell Point
-0:22	-0:29	Point Pinellas
-1:34	-1:30	Pass-a-Grille Beach
-1:32	-1:05	Gulfport
-1:18	-0:44	St. Pete Beach Causeway
-2:14	-2:04	John's Pass
-1:40	-1:18	Madeira Beach Causeway
-2:00	-1:25	Cortez, Sarasota Bay
-1:38	-0:58	Sarasota Bay
-2:02	-1:38	Venice Inlet
-0:57	-0:40	Englewood, Lemon Bay
-1:27	-0:59	Placida, Gasparilla Sound
+1:38	+1:56	El Jobean, Myakka River
+1:52	+2:30	Shell Point, Peace River
+1:06	+1:27	Punta Gorda, Charlotte Hbr.
-1:12	-1:56	Boca Grande, Charlotte Hbr.
-0:19	+0:26	Pineland, Pine Island
+0:43	+1:28	Matlacha Pass
-0:55	-1:14	Redfish Pass, Captiva Is.
-0:46	-0:20	Captiva, Pine Island Sound
-2:20	-2:28	Captiva, Gulf Side
-0:25	+0:16	Galt Isle, Pine Island Sound
-0:30	-0:44	St. James City, Pine Island
+2:08	+2:44	Fort Myers
+1:15	+2:02	Cape Coral Bridge
+1:08	+1:40	Iona Shores
+0:51	+0:42	Indian Rocks Beach, ICW

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FISHING WITH A "REEL" LEGEND

by Misty Wells

We are all excited that Red Grouper opened on January 1st and the weather finally seems to be getting good.

As some of you may know Pinellas County is the "Grouper Capital of the World" as we bring in more Grouper from offshore in the Gulf than any other location in the world. Red Grouper are not only fun to catch, but they are great to eat and offer a nice flaky white fillet and a notable lack of bones. Red Grouper is considered one of the best tasting Grouper to eat and it is very forgiving when cooked as it remains moist, firm and has large flakes. Approximately 70% of the Grouper harvested in United States waters is Red Grouper and like I said, the best place to fish for them is right here in my hometown of Clearwater, Florida. Red Grouper don't grow all that fast; on average, they range from 5 to 20 pounds, however, they have been caught weighing up to fifty pounds. Red Grouper are not a migratory fish, so they are going to be caught in some of the same places you are catching your other species like rocky bottom and ledges. Those Red

Grouper monsters you see on the cover of this magazine were caught in about 80 to 100 feet of water right off the coast of Pinellas County.

I got an unexpected call one day from a real fishing legend, Jimmy Houston. He said he was coming to St. Pete and wanted to film an episode for "Jimmy Houston Outdoors" and catch some of our famous Grouper. I said no problem, Jimmy! Wow, I was so excited to be asked to fish and film with such a fishing legend. I had shared with Jimmy how Pinellas County is the Grouper Capital of the World and of course anytime I went fishing offshore I would send him some pictures. If you are not familiar with Jimmy's history, he is a pro angler and TV host and one of the original anglers to have a TV show in the 70s. Jimmy was on ESPN for 21 years and now airs on many other networks like NBC Sports, Outdoor Life Network, Waypoint TV and so many others. Jimmy was inducted into the

"National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame", as he has fished in over 246 Bass Master Tournaments and won hundreds of thousands of dollars in prize money over the years. Needless to say, Jimmy is one heck of a good fisherman and a really good man in every way. Jimmy is best known for his famous blonde hair, distinctive laugh, his faith and his fun sense of humor.



I had to set up a trip for Jimmy with my favorite Captain Tommy Laronge, because he knows the Middle Grounds and the Gulf better than anyone I have ever met. I knew if we were fishing with

Capt. Tommy, not only would we catch a lot of big fish, but he would really help make it a great show. We left dock at about 4 a.m. to head to the Middle Grounds so that we could ease our way out and be there when the sun came up. It was an epic day like I knew it would be and if you're able, you should look up that episode on Jimmy Houston Outdoors. I would love to say I out fished Jimmy, but we all know that would be a lie that no real angler would believe.

Let's chat a bit about your Red Grouper tackle set up. It is going to be the same set up I would be using for Gag Grouper or American Red Snapper. I like to start with my favorite combo; my 4/0 wide Penn Reel on my Crowder Rod; man, I love fishing with that rod and reel. Because we usually are fishing deep, I am using 80 to 100 lbs. test for line and leader, 6 to 8 oz lead depending on the current and 6/0 circle hooks. Now, if the fish are big, I will switch over to my stiffer rod with my 6/0 Penn Reel to make sure I get them

off the bottom and to the boat. I am not a fan of braided line when bottom fishing for Grouper as mono line is the way to go. If you want to debate that I will catch two fish to your one all day long.

If you have read any of my articles you know that I am going to start fishing with half cut Sardines to stink up the water and get the fish bite going. Then, once they are biting steady, I switch to a live Pinfish. Red Grouper will eat almost anything once the bite is hot, as I have caught plenty of them with squid, live bait and even Publix fried chicken skin; they love it. Don't be afraid to put a big pinfish on your hook, but you better be ready because the big Grouper will "hurt your feelings" if you don't put the hammer down and reel your hands off right away.

TIP: Don't get broken off fishing for Grouper; a lot of time you can shut down the bite. Your bag limit on Red Grouper is TWO per person per day in season and they must be at least 20" long to keep. Remember there is a FOUR Grouper per day bag limit aggregate so if you get lucky and catch some keeper Scamp Grouper or Graysby Grouper you're lined up for a great day.

Right now, there are a few other species that you can target while offshore, like Hogfish. The bite the last two months has really been hot. Hogfish, if you have never had it, are one of my favorite fish to eat and they are fun to catch. Back in the day you would get told that you can't catch a Hogfish on hook & line, however, now a days that is simply not true. Hogfish are commonly found over rocky bottoms and coral reefs ranging in depth from 30 to 100 feet. Hogfish prefer rocky and reef bottoms with hard sand with patch reefs and usually are spread along the edges of the reefs or rock formations and will school up in small groups. The name "hogfish" is derived from the species' elongated, hog-like snout that is used to dig around the bottom for food and prey. Hogfish have very strong jaws for their species size, and they have protruding canine teeth that are used for crushing hard shell prey such as mollusks and crabs. Color patterns of a hogfish vary depending on sex, age, habitat and males will often have the brighter color pattern than females and young fish. When targeting this species, I like to utilize a light tackle spinning rod the one I use is the new Penn Spinfisher VII combo it is part of their new and affordable rod and reel series, and it reels them in. Remember Hogfish like to hang on the outer edges of the reef or rock bottom and you really must drop right down on them, they won't go too far out of their way for a meal. The bait that I personally have the best luck with is live shrimp, but they will also go for small crabs, sand fleas and sometimes squid. Your bag limit on these is 5 per person and they must be at least 14 inches from the fork to keep.

Another great species to target during this time of year is Tripletail, and they are easy to spot right now because they love to swim around the Stone Crab balls all season. Tripletail is also some of the best eating nearshore fish you can catch; it boasts a classic white flaky fish fillet. Most of the time you can just slow cruise along a Stone Crab row and just keep your eyes peeled for them on top of the water column. Again, you want to use a light tackle spinning rod and reel with 1/0 or 2/0 circle hook, no weight, 15 lbs. leader and some 21-25 count live shrimp or baby crabs for bait. Tripletail are very skittish so try not to cast a shadow and ease up on them, when they get spooked, they swim down but usually don't stay gone for too long. You want to cast your rig past the target then slowly reel your bait into the strike zone. When you hook a Tripletail be sure to reel him away from the ball or structure quickly.

TIP: Be sure to check your drag. Once you get the fish away from the crab ball, you can reel it with ease. Your bag limit on this species is TWO per person per day and they must be a minimum size of 18 inches.

If you want to catch some 'big ole' Red Grouper you need to come to Pinellas County and reach out to one of our great local captains as there are a lot of good ones to choose from. My personal captain of choice is Capt. Tommy LaRonge with UnReel Fishing Outfitters located right in Clearwater, Florida. If you want to catch big grouper just like the ones you see in this article and on the cover, Captain Tommy will put you on them just like he did us. Captain Tommy's motto is "Get there faster, Fish more, and with a 34' center console with triple 300s on the back "you get there fast".

When you are done fishing for the day and ready to finally enjoy your Grouper check out some of our local restaurants that offer "hook & cook" right here on Clearwater Beach and beyond. Pinellas County is full of exciting, fun and enjoyable ways to "take it outside" so if you are looking for ideas in the outdoors beyond fishing, go to www.visitstpeteclearwater.com Ready to book your Grouper trip go to www.ucatchfish.com and plan your trip of a lifetime. ☑

Misty Wells is producer & Host of "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to over 320 million on Discovery Channel, Waypoint TV, Bally Sun Sports, H2O, Pursuit Up, Hunt Channel, MOTV, TCT, Discover Florida Network & Carbon TV. Bass Pro-Outdoor Pro & Outdoor & Travel Writer. Founder of "A Reel Future" non-profit devoted to teaching the passion of fishing & conservation to foster children, over 3,800 children & counting. www.mistywells.com



Strong north winds and negative low tides will provide kayak anglers with great opportunities for fish catching this winter. With each passing cool front, we will see high pressure and a strong northerly wind following it. These north winds will actually push water out of the bay, creating lower than predicted tides. These low tides and cold temperatures will force fish off the shallow flats and into deeper potholes, troughs and depressions on the flats.

Many times, tides will be so low that motorboats will not be able to reach these trapped fish. This creates a scenario where kayakers have a great advantage to other types of watercraft. Navigating over inches of water and sometimes-even dry land can be the ticket to finding holed up fish. With much of the flats left dry, there is far less water for fish to hide in, making it much easier for anglers to locate them. Find the right hole, and it can be like shooting fish in a barrel!

Soft plastics will prove to be the most effective lures for targeting these cold-water fish. Use 1/4 oz jig-heads to keep your bait near the bottom and slowly bounce the bait back towards you. With the majority of baitfish gone from the flats, inshore species will primarily be feeding on crustaceans. Keeping that in mind, remember to 'match the hatch' and use colors to mimic their forage. Colors like golden bream, clear

with glitter, and new penny are all good bets. My go to bait is the Lil John made by MirrOlure. They are a 3 3/4" plastic tail with embedded scent that imitates a small shrimp well.

Waders will be a handy piece of equipment for the cold-water kayak fishermen. Fishing from your kayak in windy conditions can prove to be very difficult at times, making wading a great option to better control your positioning so as to not drift into the holes or depressions you want to fish. On exceptionally windy days, anglers can still find protection by launching from shorelines lee of the wind. Planning carefully to accommodate the strong winds will be necessary, but can yield exceptional results.

Low tides provide kayakers with ideal conditions to take full advantage of using a paddle craft. While expensive skiffs and bay boats are left at the dock, kayak anglers will be busy catching fish. The weather might be cold, but the fishing is still hot!

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TALES FROM THE OLD GUY

by David Mallory

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Dad and I would have to fish as a family (with Mom and Baby sister), but that worked out pretty well. Dad and I would fish beside a brook, hopefully catching brook trout, while Mom sat next to the brook, reading, making sure my sister was okay. She had a small crib on legs that stood up about 2½ feet that my sister could sleep in and be safe.

We were able to use my Grampa's Chevy to drive to either Jonesville or Jericho to fish a brook near the road and have our picnic.

On one particular day, we went to Snipe Ireland Road in Jonesville to use a friend's land to fish and picnic. He had a jewelry store in Burlington and was a friend of Dad's. The lower part of the brook had rainbow trout from the Winooski River and the upper part was full of brook trout and beaver dams. We went up the road about two miles and found a spot to set up. Dad and I walked over to the brook to see how it was. We had often seen raccoon and deer tracks, but this

time we saw another track. Dad said it was a bear track! We decided

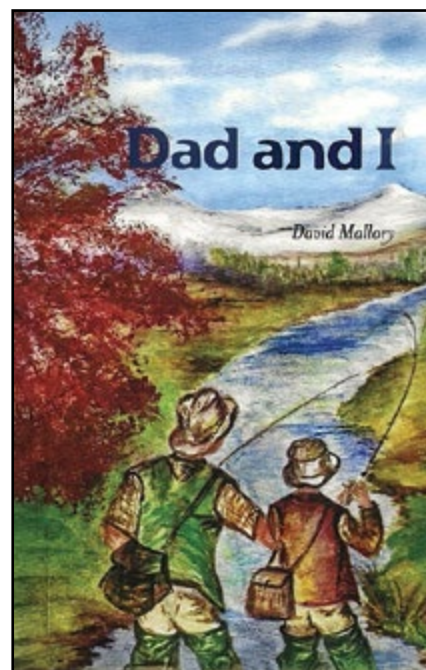
not to say anything to Mom because it would frighten her and the track was not very fresh.

Back to the car we went to eat our lunch of fried chicken, deviled eggs and a gallon jug of something Mom made from "Kool-Aid", ice tea and lemonade (dad christened it as "Belly Wash" and it stuck). It was "belly wash" for as long as he lived, which was many years of hunting and fishing trips.

After lunch, Dad and I were free to go fishing. So, we did!

In those days, a Brook Trout had to be at least six inches, later it was changed to no size limit. We always used worms or pieces of Night-crawlers to fish, upstream for Dad and downstream for me because it was easier. That day, Dad ended up with one trout that was almost 14 inches, a good size for fishing in a small brook, plus he had a total of 11. I caught four trout, pretty normal for us. We cleaned the fish in the brook, leaving the fish guts for the coons and went back to the car.

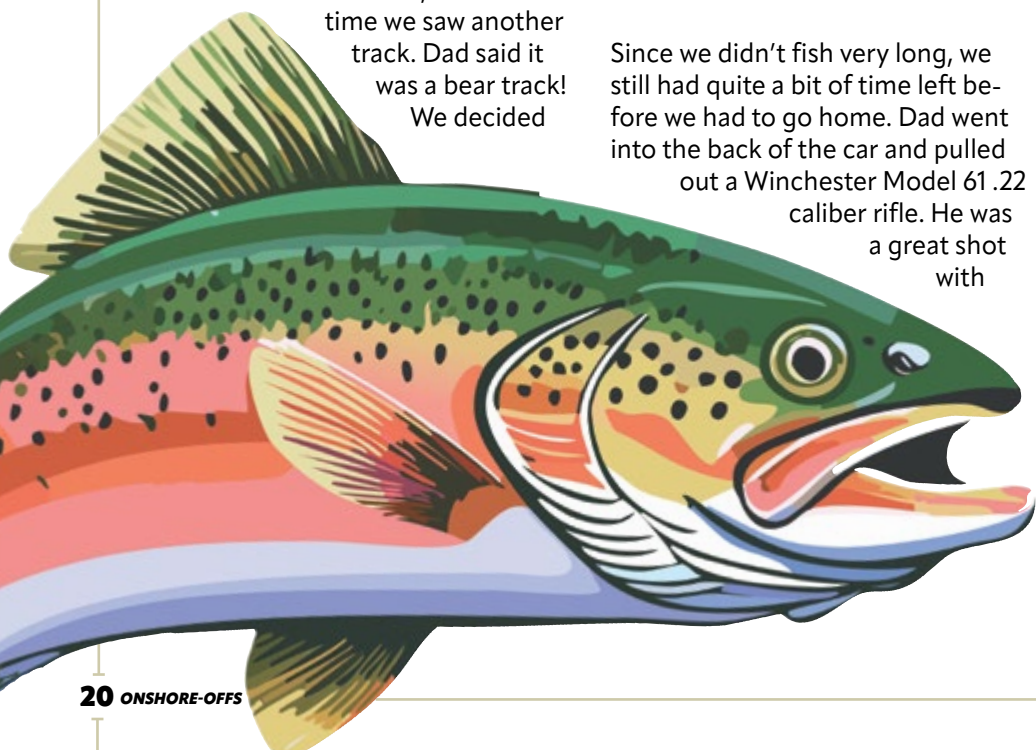
Since we didn't fish very long, we still had quite a bit of time left before we had to go home. Dad went into the back of the car and pulled out a Winchester Model 61 .22 caliber rifle. He was a great shot with



rifle, pistol and shotgun, and was teaching me to be like him when we had time to practice. Sometimes we rested the rifle on the car and sometimes we just held it standing up. We set up a target on a dead tree and shot five shot groups. This gun was not a target rifle so we shot from about 30 paces. We didn't measure the groups, but anytime they looked good, we were happy. If mine were smaller, I was delighted, but it didn't happen that often! Dad's groups were almost always smaller, but I was getting better!

After lunch, fishing and shooting, we drove for a ways on Route 2 in Bolton. In the Spring of the year, there were always many deer eating the fresh grass because they were overcrowded all winter. After awhile, Mom and Dad said we should get home. Once again we had a great family day together which involved some outstanding time fishing. ▣

- David Mallory





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SAVE THE DATE: THE 33RD ANNUAL NEWS CHANNEL 8 OUTDOORS EXPO & BOAT SHOW

Calling all outdoor enthusiasts and water & nature lovers! The 33rd Annual News Channel 8 Outdoors Expo and Boat Show is back; it's free and it's a great family and dog friendly event at Armature Works along the Hillsborough River.



Who says the best things in life aren't free? Well, they were wrong because this amazing outdoors show is free and tons of fun for the whole family. News Channel 8 is teaming up with the beautiful waterfront view of Armature Works in historic downtown Tampa to bring the 33rd Annual News Chan-



nel 8 Outdoors Expo and Boat Show.

This annual outdoor show will span over three days with admission free to all. There will be raffle giveaways, tons of activities and local vendors all weekend! The Outdoors Expo and Boat Show begins Friday, March 28th through Sunday, March 30th. The family friendly event will feature the beautiful downtown Tampa skyline, ability to tour boats in the water, the Armature Works food hall, a dog friendly outdoor space, seminars and activities throughout the whole weekend.

There will also be meet and greet opportunities with the News Channel 8 anchors and Misty Wells of Discovery Channels "Let's Take it Outside" TV Show. Misty will also be the Emcee of

the 2nd Annual "Mullet Toss" competition as a fundraiser for her non-profit, "A Reel Future". Every Mullet Toss competitor (over 21) will win "Free Beer" and be in the drawing for a Free Off-shore Charter with "Un-Reel Fishing Outfitters" in Clearwater, Florida.

With nearly 400,000 square feet of exhibit and activity space, this Expo is the perfect place to explore boats of all shapes and sizes, boating accessories, fishing gear, apparel, outdoor sup-



plies, and much more. Check out high-end luxury vessels, ski and sportfishing boats, pontoon, family, and speed boats showcased by multiple manufacturers and dealers. Guests can take advantage of weekend seminars featuring talks on fresh and saltwater fishing, fly-fishing, boating, and more. Learn the latest tips, tricks, strategies, and advice from the industry's most renowned professionals.



The 34th Annual News Channel 8 Outdoors Expo and Boat Show takes place on Friday, March 28th, from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday, March 29th from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday, March 30th from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Armature Works located at 1910 North Ola Avenue in Tampa, Florida.

Parking at Armature works will be event pricing in the lots, street and parking garage. You could also use the Riverwalk or The Pirate Taxi! Admission to the event is FREE, we will see you and your crew there!

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Captain Sergio Atanes

February gets me turned on artificial baits some of my favorites are the Saltwater Assassin P&V on a 1/4 ounce jig head worked along the bottom and edges of canals; my favorite way for catching Flounder, Silver Trout, Redfish and big Trout. The lower the tides the better fishing it forces the fish into the holes and canals looking for warmer water and food. Don't overlook the warm water runoffs on the outer edges of the power plants. You simply just need to be somewhere in the general area where the water temperature could be just a few degrees warmer.



Captain George Hastick

February is one of the best months to target Sheepshead. We've had enough cold fronts by now to have consistent colder water to move the larger Sheepshead into Tampa Bay. Look for them on dock pilings, bridges, sea walls and near the mangroves, but if your looking for quantities of larger Sheepshead consistently, look at deeper water bridges like the Skyway and rockpiles in 10-20 feet of water. Also look at deeper channels, rivers and power plants where the water will be a little warmer for a mix of fish like Redfish, Trout, Snook, Jack Crevalle and even juvenile Tarpon.

ABOUT THE CAPTAINS

Captain Sergio and Captain George Hastick fish the Florida waters, specializing in and around the West Coast of Florida and Tampa Bay. Their show, Fishing Adventures Florida, is about two captains sharing their knowledge and experience of the local waters. Encouraging others to share in their love of what the outdoors has to offer. Their goal is to educate, entertain and share the experience of fishing opportunities the state has to offer.

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WINTER WADE FISHING STRATEGIES & TACTICS

by Dave Ulgenalp

It almost always comes as a surprise to people when they learn that winter may be my favorite time of the year for wade fishing in the Tampa Bay area. Especially to those that have avoided wintertime fishing because they've heard or believe that fish are hard to find or unwilling to take an artificial lure. In fact, I find the opposite to be true if you know where to look and what lures to throw. Fish behavior becomes very predictable under these conditions and when you do find them, they are often in large schools and easy targets once you find a lure and retrieve that they're interested in.



skies and north winds, and will most likely have fish moving off the flats to deeper water, hanging close to the bottom and a bit lethargic. These are the conditions where soft plastics rigged on a jig head are my lures of choice. Try rigging up a 1/4 oz jig head with a natural colored shrimp imitation or a white, new penny or root beer colored, three inch paddle tail. Let the lure sink all the way to the bottom after the cast, always ready for a hit as it sinks, and then work it back slowly by raising your rod tip and the lure off the bottom, then lowering your rod tip while reeling in the slack as the lure drops to the bottom. This creates a yo-yo like retrieve that mimics a shrimp or small bait fish swimming along the bottom.

There is a fairly predictable weather pattern from Thanksgiving through the middle of March and your strategies and tactics for finding and catching fish will vary depending upon where you are in that pattern.

The day or two following the passing of a cold front generally bring cold air, dropping water temperatures, clear

If that isn't producing fish, try slowly dragging the jig along the bottom and stopping it for a few seconds every ten feet or so. If that doesn't work, try a quicker retrieve with an erratic twitch, twitch pause action. As a last resort, if you're not getting any action on the soft plastic shrimp or paddle tail, switch to a jerk bait like the Salt Strong Tweaker or Mirrolure Lil John and start the process over again. Covering ground is important, so don't spend more than half an hour in any one spot without getting fish before moving on to another. However, once you find the fish, there's a very good chance you will find a bunch as they tend to school up tightly when it's cold.



The coldest days following a cold front are usually followed by a couple days of gradually warming weather and milder winds. During these periods, stick to the cold weather strategies and tactics early in the morning and on low water. However, look for fish to move back onto the flats later in the mornings and throughout the afternoons when they coincide with higher tides. The warmer water during these periods will have the fish more active and willing to chase bait retrieved more quickly. Paddle tails and jerk baits rigged on a 1/4 or 1/8th oz jig head retrieved with the rod tip held high and retrieved quickly enough to keep your lure from getting hung up in the grass is an effective way to get these fish



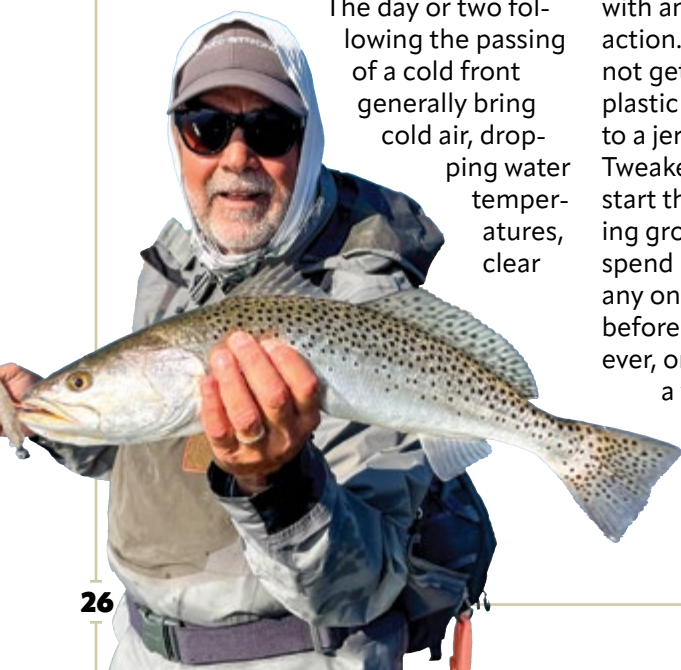
to strike. As you should always do, be on the lookout for mullet schools, birds wading or diving on bait or other signs of fish activity, as there's a good chance red, trout and even snook may be in the same areas.

The best days for winter fishing are often the day before a cold front moves through, which typically brings winds out of the south, warming temperatures and lower pressure. The south winds tend to pile water up on the flats and shorelines causing tides to be higher and last longer than predicted on tide tables. These conditions trigger a feeding response in most game

fish and will have them feeding aggressively as they sense the imminent arrival of a cold front and leaner times. These are great days to stalk flooded flats and shorelines using a variety of baits, including top water plugs, slow sinking or suspending hard baits, weedless spoons and jigs rigged with soft plastics. Look for fish to be hanging near sandy potholes, oyster beds, sand bars, and other bottom structure or along mangrove or rock lined shorelines.

The weather pattern ends with the passing of the next cold front which usually brings rain, breezy conditions, a change in barometric pressure and a shift from south to north winds. Fishing while the front is moving through can often prove challenging due to extreme weather conditions and while fishing can be productive, it's usually a good day to do something else. ☑

Dave Ulgenalp, aka "Wader Dave," is Tampa Bay's Premier wade fishing guide. You can find out more about him and book a trip at www.wadersguide.com or follow @waderdave on Instagram. Also, be sure to check out the numerous videos he's featured in on SaltStrong.com and YouTube by searching for Wader Dave.



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- 2 tbsp Olive Oil
- 2 lbs Potatoes, peeled and diced
- 3 large Onions, chopped
- 8 Celery Stalks, chopped
- 1 Garlic Clove, minced
- 2 Green Peppers, chopped
- 6 Carrots, diced
- ½ cup Parsley, chopped
- 1 can (28 oz) peeled Tomatoes
- 1 can (10 oz) Consommé
- 1 cup Ketchup
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire Sauce
- 2 tsp Lemon Juice
- 2 oz Gosling's Black Seal Rum
- 4 tbsp Outerbridge's Original Sherry Pepper Sauce
- Ground pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS:

(1) In a large pot, add water, fish fillets, salt, and spices. Bring to a boil and let simmer for 30-45 minutes.



(2) In a frying pan melt butter & oil and sauté onions, celery, garlic, and green peppers. Then add tomatoes and consommé and let everything simmer for 30 minutes.

(3) Transfer this mixture to the boiled fish stock and add remaining ingredients. Simmer partially covered for 2 hours. Adjust the seasoning to your liking.

(4) Serve hot and pass around Outerbridge's Original Sherry Peppers Sauce for topping. And, if you please, keep the Gosling's Black Seal Rum close for dashing.

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WEATHER OR KNOT

by Captain Sergio Atanes

February can go two ways depending on the weather, so based on the last few months let's start with an above average temperature scenario.

Snook will be along mangroves that have easy access to deep water in case the water temperature starts to drop. Big Island flats at the northwest end of Howard Frankland bridge have a deep-water channel between Big Island and the shoreline. Although the charts show it as a 1 to 2 feet of depth, in truth the channel is over 10 feet deep with an old barge lying on its side, an absolute favorite of Redfish, Snook, Trout and Mangrove Snapper.

The old barge sitting along the shoreline can only be seen during the winter months with the extra low tides. It's a great hang out for Sheepshead, Mangrove snapper and Redfish with a falling tide.

The radio towers on the northwest side of Gandy Bridge is another hot spot with plenty of rocks and a deep water canal with easy reach in case of a quick cold front. This is a great area for shore bound anglers from the end of the bridge west to where the mangroves start and



has plenty of deep water which is a favorite for Snook, Trout, Jacks and Redfish.

Weedon Island will hold Redfish and snook around the oyster bar at the entrance to Christmas Pass. Just outside in the deeper water flats in 3 to 4 feet you can find some above average Trout and Flounder.

If the weather is cold, everything changes and you need to look for the fish around deep water canals, hot water runoff around the power plants and rivers.

Silver Trout will more than keep the average

angler active, so look for them in the main channel going into the St. Petersburg power plant or the south side of Port Tampa channel in about 30 to 40 feet. The big female Sheepshead will have moved in from the gulf to spawn in the deeper waters. I have the best results when water temperature hits below 65 degrees, which may not be good for snook but great for the big Sheepshead.

Little Manatee river is a Gold Mine when the temperature drops below 65 degrees. Large schools of jacks will roam the river from the entrance all the way to the railroad bridge. Snook and Redfish will hang around the points waiting for the bait getting pushed by the tides. Look for pot holes or an area where the tide has made a trench. I found some areas that drop as much as 8 feet and guess where the fish are staging; at the bottom of these deep pot holes.

Don't worry about trying to catch the white bait (Green-



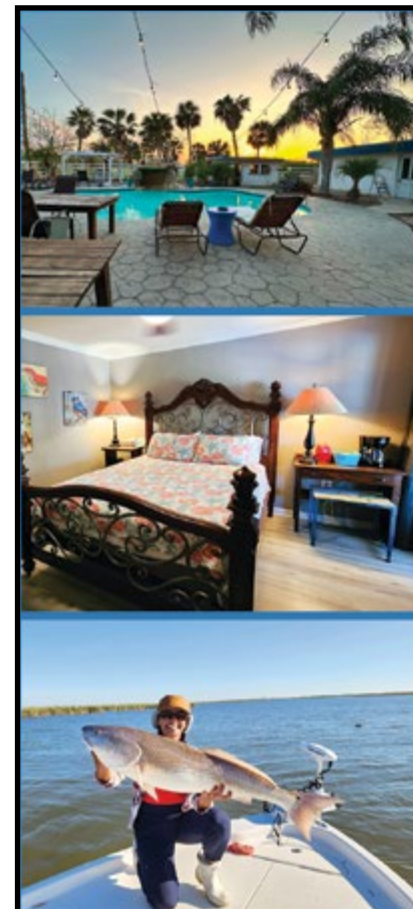
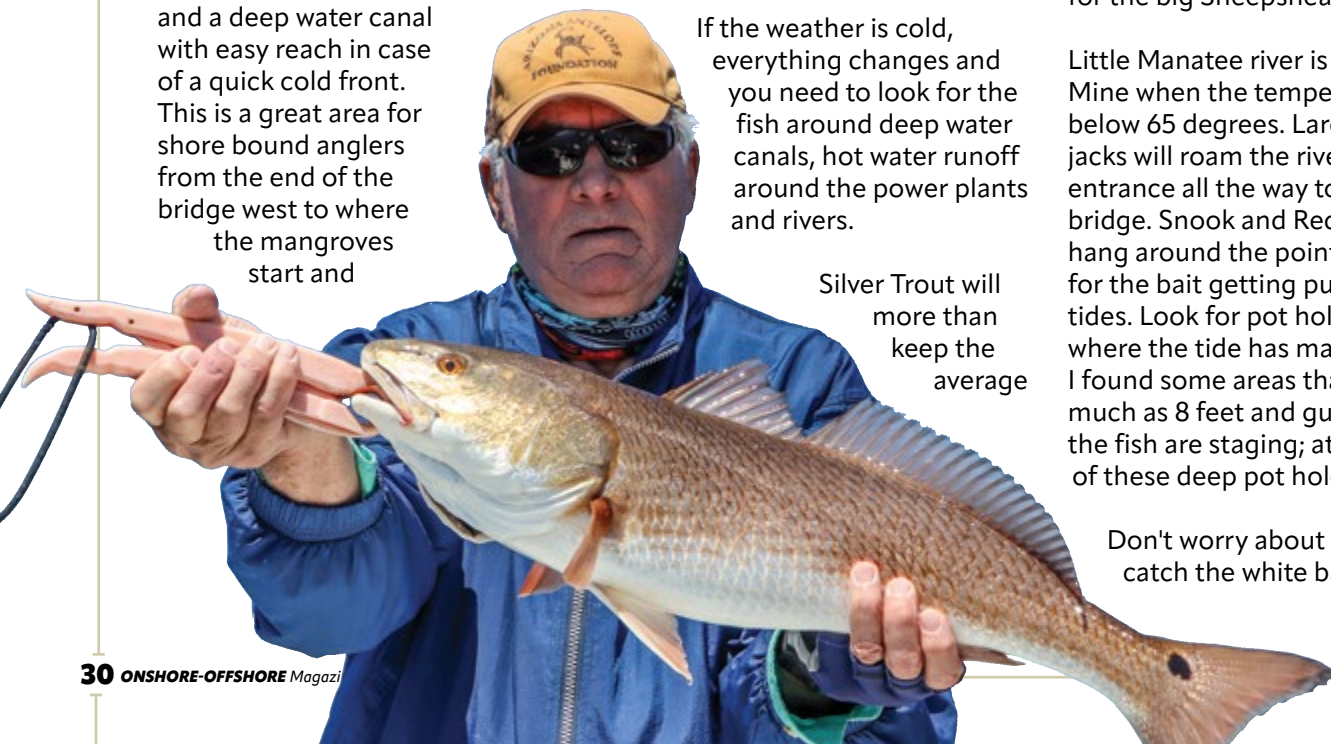
back Sardines), as artificial baits and Shrimp are the best winter bait. Artificial baits will out fish live Sardines during the cold month's period.

Look for deep holes or cuts along the flats. Let the negative tides work in your favor because the fish have to find somewhere to go and if you take some time you can find the right spots that hold fish. The Fort DeSoto area is a great spot to start as there are still many old "bomb holes" left over from the early 50s when the area was used as a bombing range.

Low winter tides and wind also make a perfect combination to fish the many canals in the Apollo Beach area. As the sun hits the docks and seawalls it radiates the heat into the water acting as a radiant heater drawing various baitfish to it acting like a food court for the hungry Redfish, Sheepshead, Snook and Mangrove Snapper.

So, after all has been said, it's weather or knot on where to fish and that depends on the wind, weather and water temperature. ☑

Captain Sergio Atanes | Phone (813) 973-7132
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See it live on YouTube channels: Fishing Adventures Florida and Captain Sergio's Fishing Chronicles





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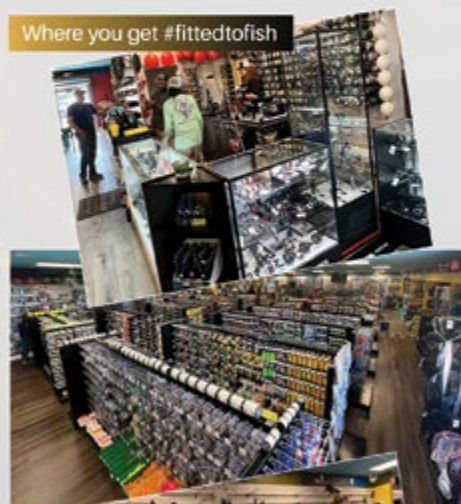
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