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IT PAYS TO OBEY THE LAW!

I often think that Florida’s fishing regulations have become so complicated that it is too much for the average guy or girl to keep up with. We have areas where limits are different, complicated slot limits, restricted areas and much more to be aware of. I always try to be in compliance, but sometimes it’s hard to be sure, because regulations change so often.

As a result of our regulations, I decided to look into how other states and countries handle fish related law. After doing just a little research on the internet, I realized that our rules really are not that bad. I will now share a few regulations that are on the books in other places (you know that these must all be true, because the internet said so).

In Ohio its illegal to get a fish drunk and it is illegal to fish for whales on Sundays. I can understand the need for insuring the sobriety of our fish population, but I have to wonder how much of a problem whale fishermen were really causing on Sundays. Was Lake Erie simply overrun by whale fishermen? Why Sunday? Did these whale seekers make the boating unsafe for others whzo wished to use the waters for quieter pastimes like hosting the America’s Cup sailing races?

You may not fish while sitting on a camel’s back in Idaho and it is forbidden to fish while sitting on a giraffe's neck in Illinois. I have to wonder why the problem was more serious with Camels in Idaho while Illinois had more issues with Giraffes. I do, at least, know of places where one may ride on a camel, but I have never even heard of anyone riding on a giraffe, so I tend to discount the need for the Illinois law.

In Minnesota it is illegal for a human to have sex with a fish. I don’t think that I really want to know why they thought that this law was necessary.

It is illegal to use a lasso to catch a fish in Tennessee. This one completely defies reason. I can’t picture even the most skilled cowboy wanting to ride out and lasso up some catfish or bass.

No person shall take, wound or destroy any fish of Wyoming with a firearm of any kind or nature. This seems a bit more reasonable; I can see a cowboy using this approach.

In Montana, it is illegal for married women to go fishing alone on Sundays, and illegal for unmarried women to fish alone at all. How unfair it is to single out those who have not found a soul mate and then add insult to injury by restricting their fishing privileges. I would question the constitutionality of this one.

In Indiana it is against the law to stupefy fish. The definition of stupefy is make (someone or apparently somefish) unable to think or feel properly. I suppose that this one must go along with Ohio’s restriction on getting fish drunk. I guess it could be like contributing to the delinquency of a fish. Is this the source of the expression “drink like a fish”?

And last, but certainly not least, in Liverpool It is illegal for a female to be topless in public, unless she is a clerk in a tropical fish shop. Clearly, the public must be protected from boobal nudity in most situations, but it is perfectly reasonable to allow a shopkeeper to expose her breastal areas as a purveyor of tropical fish. I imagine that this would allow a shopkeeper to remove her shirt in order to avoid getting it all wet in the process of capturing a wild fish that has been sold or otherwise needs to be taken out for a walk.

Feel free to stop by Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs if you would like to discuss scheduling a camel back fishing expedition (they are legal here, just not in Idaho) but don’t waste my time talking about Giraffe fishing, that is just ridiculous. I can hook you up with camels, but if you would rather go the more conventional route and use a boat, I can help you with that too. You can call me at 727.943.8489 or email at: merle@belleharbourmarina.com.

Be careful out there and always make sure you know your regulations.

Merle & Flip the Bird



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ON THE COVER: Luiza Barros with a big beautiful Mahi Mahi caught on recent tropical fishing expedition with Captain Jimmy Nelson. Learn more about them both and their adventures by visiting: www.livinthedreamtv.com.

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Report violations of fish or wildlife laws by calling the Wildlife Alert Hotline, 1-888-404-3922, or text the information to Tip@MyFWC.com. Tipsters can remain anonymous and might be eligible for a reward. Protect Florida's waters!



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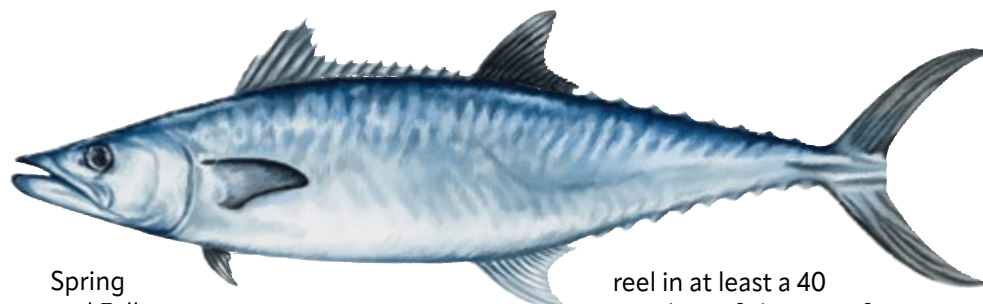
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KINGFISH 101

by Misty Wells

Florida's Fall is here and the local and visiting anglers alike are setting their sites on the Kingfish migration that is just really heating up.

With a lot of new Floridians here in the state I thought I would start with a little "Kingfish 101". Kingfish are in the Mackerel family; they are a migrating and schooling fish that is found off the coast of Florida and other waters this time of year.



Spring and Fall are some of the best times to target these "Kings" of the Gulf and there a lot of big Kingfish Tournaments during those times of year. Just in our area on the West Coast of Florida we host some pretty big Kingfish Tournaments, King of the Beach, Wild West Kingfish Tournament, and the Suncoast Kingfish Classic. The Fall King of the Beach is right around the corner November 9th through the 11th and if you are looking to be "Top Dog" you need to

reel in at least a 40 pound Kingfish. King of the Beach is one of the largest Kingfish Tournaments in Florida with usually over 600 boats fishing nearshore and offshore. King of the Beach also has one of the biggest payouts with over \$200K in cash and prizes!

Kingfish, like many other species and humans, like warmer waters from 67 to 84 degrees. So, in the colder Winter months, they travel South and as the waters begin to warm-up, they will migrate back up North. Popular Kingfish baits are Sardines, Ladyfish, Cigar Minnows, or Ribbon fish, also known as, Silver Eels. Kingfish are constantly on the

move and looking for their next meal; it's all about following the schools of bait. Some of the best locations to troll for Kingfish are wrecks, reefs, ledges, shipping channels and natural hard bottom. Kingfish however can be caught both inshore and offshore, I have seen them caught right off the beach in Clearwater and right off the John's Pass & the Skyway Bridge. I personally have had my best luck in the mornings right as the sun is coming up and for the next few hours after that.

On average King Mackerel weigh between 6 to 30 pounds and when you hook one it is impressive as they sometimes will leap and spin out of the water. They travel in schools searching for food, so if you hook one you may get multiple hook-ups. If you are fishing in a location that does not have structure you can use your chum to gather a school of bait to bring the fish to you.

In regards to rigging your rod, I recommend using a standard "stinger" rig because it helps eliminate the short strikes by placing a hook at both ends of the bait. Kingfish are all about speed, and they may hit your bait traveling about 30 miles per hour, so your setup must be right. If a Kingfish strikes and misses, hit the free spool; odds are they will come back for a second strike! You can buy pre-made stinger rigs or there are a million YouTube videos to show you how to do it.

Let's talk about something that a lot of anglers don't practice enough or they forget about until it's too late; and thats how to gaff a Kingfish. A lot of anglers don't know where to stick a Kingfish and what size gaff to use. First and foremost, make sure before you stick the fish that it is the one you are going to keep and it's not a catch & release fish. The instant you stick a large fish (or any fish for that matter) is the most dangerous time on a boat. The gaffer needs to make sure everyone is out of the way and that they have plenty of room to stick the fish and pull it over the side and into the boat. Make sure the gaff hook is facing down and towards the boat, that way you can gaff the fish and use the boat to pull him onto the gaff quickly. Just like Skeet Shooting, you need to "lead the fish" and then bury the gaff into the head or shoulder of the fish. Gaffing the head of the fish gives you much more control of the fish and it's a better way to protect the meat. Pay attention if the fish is too deep in the water or beyond safe reach just wait and let the angler bring you the fish. Instruct the angler where you want him to bring the fish alongside the boat and don't let them lift the fish.



Anglers never set the rod down or let slack in the line until the fish is completely out of the water and on the boat, many a big fish have been lost that way.

The size of your gaff matters and the size of the "gape" of the hook. The gape is the distance between the handle of your gaff and the business end of the tool. If your gape is too small your gaff will tear free and if the gape if it is too large, you will miss a sleek body fish like a Kingfish. I recommend going to either Fisherman's Ideal Supply House in St. Pete on the Pinellas side or hitting up T.A. Mahoney's on the Tampa side. Both locations will have the size gaff you need to size up to the species that you are trying to catch. Just ask them cause "they've got you covered".

If you want to skip the learning curve and get some first-hand experience, I would go with some pros and book a trip with a local charter company. My #1 recommendation is Captains Tommy & Alex with UnReel Fishing Adventures located right here on Clearwater Beach. They will put you on the fish. www.ucatchfish.com.

No matter if you are fishing a tournament or just for fun, Kingfish are fun to target & catch and they taste great on the smoker! 🍷

Misty Wells, Producer & Host of "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to 374 million on Discovery Channel, Bally Sun Sports, Waypoint TV, World Fishing Network, Hunt Channel, MOTV, TCT, Discover Florida Network & Carbon TV.



A MONTH OF OPPORTUNITY

by Captain George Hastick

November is a great month to be fishing in the Tampa Bay Area. This is a transitional month that you will see the water temperature drop to the low 70s in a typical year.

Well, what does that mean? It means the land of fishing opportunities! You will still have all your resident fish like Redfish, Snook, Trout, Mangrove Snapper among others, but then with the falling water temperatures, going into the magic 70s, the pelagic fish will move in. You will be able to target many species in the same day from Snook and Redfish to Cobia and Kingfish, all within the Tampa Bay area.

Redfish will continue to be good from the October bite but may slow down towards the end of the month, depending on how cold it drops down to. Snook will be on the move this month, but it is a great time to catch a monster of a Snook. Just be sure to handle them with care because most likely it will be a large breeder female.

Take care to revive her first after the fight and then take a quick picture and safely release her to make more juvenile Snook.

There will be plenty of Trout around and more of them along with larger ones moving in. Look for them to be in the 3–6-foot depths on grass flats with plenty of sand holes and also on shell bottom that has grass mixed in. Some of the largest Trout will go to the shallower

water as the sun heats it up first in the morning. This is a good time to throw a topwater lure like a "Duke Dog", "Mirromullet" or "Pro Dog Skin Series" by Mirrolure.

One of the things that happens this month that makes it so good is the abundance and variety of bait fish that is available. Finger Mullet, Threadfin Herring, Scaled Sardines, Glass Minnows and Pinfish; there is something on the menu for everyone!

Flounder is another species that will make its appearance. Look for them to be in the sand around the outside edges of the nearshore and inshore reefs, sand holes on the grass flats and edges of grass flats where it meets the sand. I like to use a ¼ ounce Saltwater Assas-

sin jighead and their "Shrimp Cocktail" or Lil' P&V in "Molting", "Chicken on a Chain" and "Houdini" colors. Make sure to keep it in contact with the bottom with small hops or if the bottom allows it, a slow steady retrieve, like a shrimp crawling along the bottom.

this scenario a live pinfish or threadfin 4' under a cork or a Mirrodine XL for the artificial approach.

Look for schools of Spanish Mackerel to be chasing the schools of bait that are in the bay and along the beaches this month. A casting spoon in Gold or Silver will get the job done along with cut or live Scaled Sardines or Shrimp. Along with Spanish Mackerel there will be King Mackerel moving in along the beaches and moving up into the bay near Port Manatee. A Threadfin, Scaled Sardine or Blue Runner under a balloon on a stinger rig is hard for them to resist.

So, with all the variety available to hook-up with this month get out there and catch a trophy! 🎣

Captain George Hastick of "Fish Hunter Fishing Charters" in St. Pete has been fishing the waters of Tampa for over 35 years & guiding over 20 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.



As we move into the latter part of the month look for Cobia to start migrating towards the power plants as the water cools. These fish can be juvenile in size up to 45+ pounds. The fish will be out, up to a half mile from the power plant. You can sight fish for them if the water clarity allows. In



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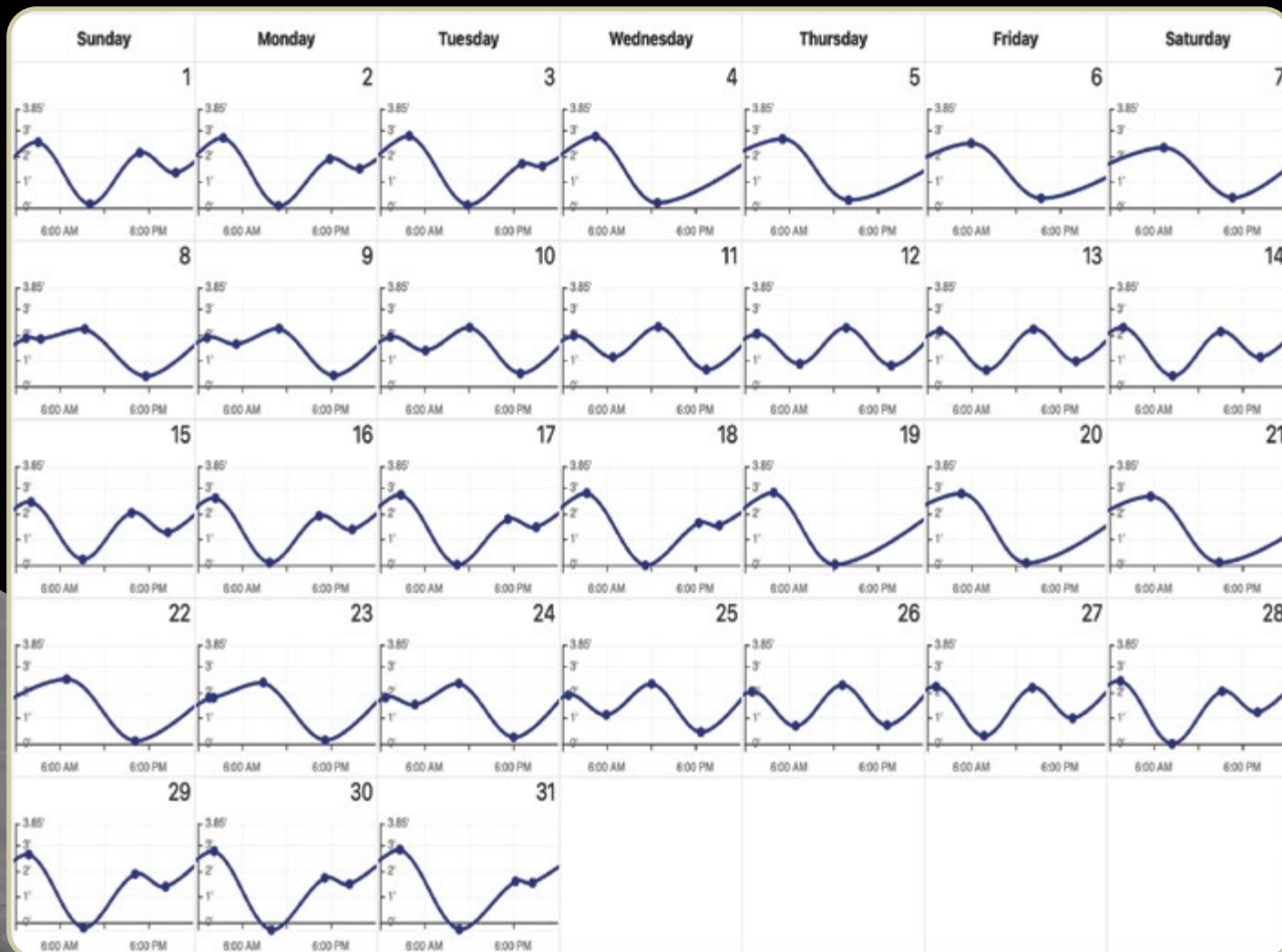
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

High	Low	
-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	
+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	
+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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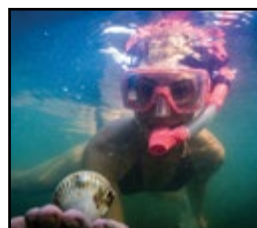
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mesh bag, snorkel set and head out to the grassy, shallow areas of the Gulf during scallop season from July 1 through August 6 for an underwater Easter egg hunt Florida-style!

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THE Galápagos Islands

AN EXOTIC FISHING EXPEDITION

by Brad Kenyon

My first trip to the Galápagos Islands to fish for Marlin was so awesome that a second trip was in order! After telling quite a few friends about the first trip, a group wanted to join me for the second trip, so we had both an Alaskan group and a Florida group of friends meet up there. We had two Brads, two Steves, Jack, Heath, Bobby, Dave and Scott. Needless to say, everyone was excited about the trip and all the anglers were well seasoned & ready to go!



We were lucky to have charter captains from both Alaska and Florida on board. Jack Vasilaros, a Florida native, has specialized in Marlin over the years and he brought a collection of special lures that proved to be very effective. His

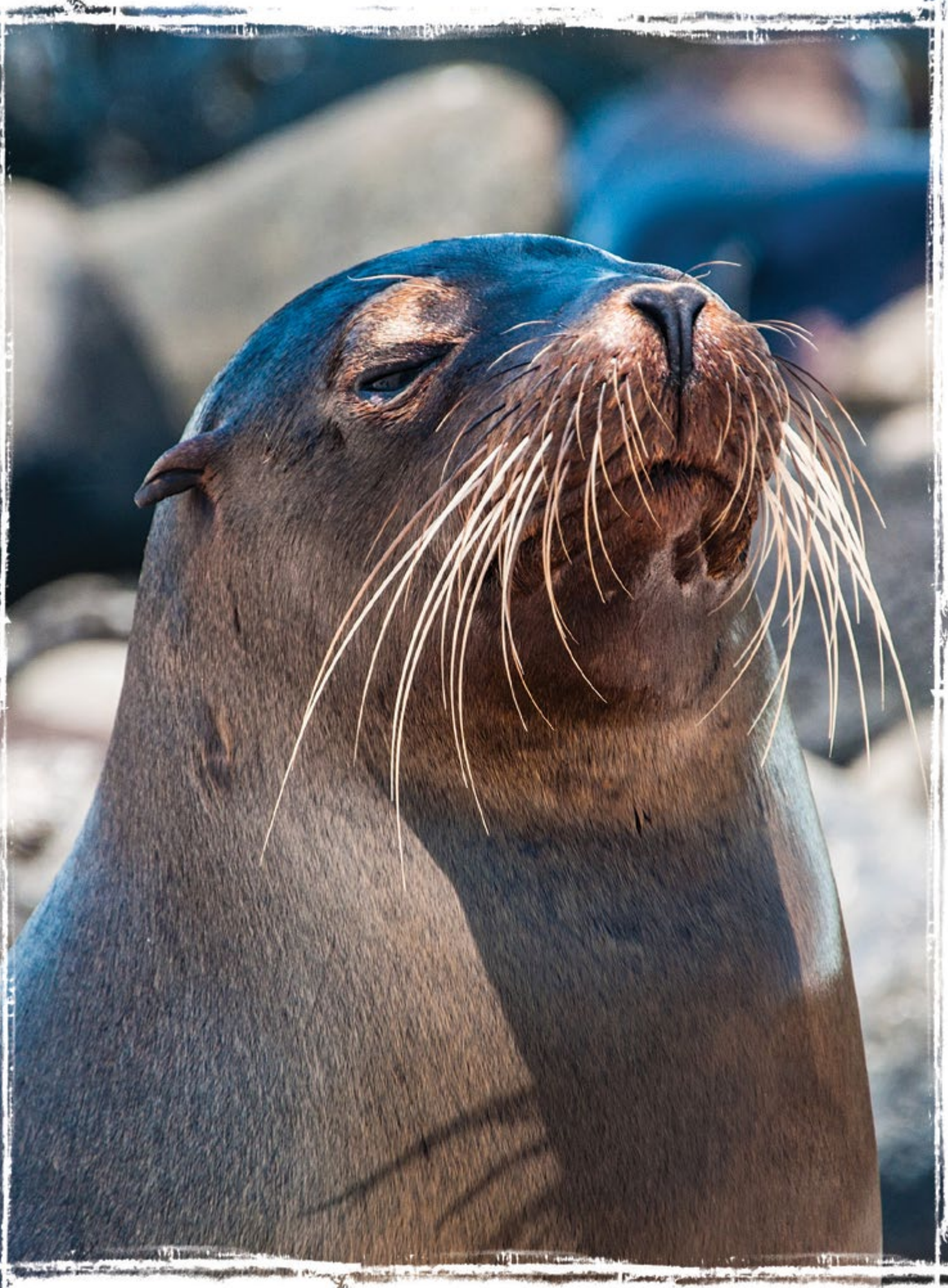
lures and talents were the only way we were able to land our biggest fish of the trip, a 650 pound Marlin! Captain Steve and Captain Bobby operate "Saltwater Safari" out of Seward, Alaska so they had valuable knowledge, as well. Seward is a great trip destination for large Halibut, Rockfish and Salmon, so both of those captains also knew how to catch big fish.



We arrived in Guayaquil in the afternoon and were escorted by the police to the Hilton. Crime has recently been bad in the area as the influx of emigrants from the surrounding countries pass through on their way to the US for a new life. After a quick snooze and

breakfast, we were back at the airport to head towards San Cristabel, Galápagos Island.





The Galápagos Islands are a volcanic archipelago in the Pacific Ocean. It's considered one of the world's foremost destinations for wildlife-viewing. Fishing is surprisingly downplayed. A province of Ecuador, the islands are about 600 miles off its coast. The isolated terrain there is home to very diverse plant and animal species, many of those found nowhere else in the world. Charles Darwin visited in 1835, and his observation of Galápagos' species later inspired his theory of evolution based on discovering animals that look like others but are specially adapted to the con-



ditions on the Galápagos. San Christabel is a nice little town with a population of 6000. It is filled with restaurants, tour operators and shops. The Galápagos Island are also widely known as the enchanted islands.

Enough of the short history lesson, as we definitely came for the fishing. Our primary target was Marlin, and we succeeded. We caught many and



all were released to fight another day. To make sure of this, a park official was on the boat to be absolutely certain that we did not kill any Marlin. We also caught some nice Mahi and a variety of reef dwelling fish, making for delicious fresh meals on the daily!

Our group fished two boats operated by Sport-fishing Galapagos. They are operated by Marco Gutierrez and I must admit, Marco and his team have a comprehensive network of providers on San Cristobal that can accommodate all your fishing, touring, lodging, and dining needs. Your guide for the fishing adventure is none other than Boston legend, Pete Santini. Pete is the most experienced and entertaining fishing guide that you will find in San Cristobal. You are guaranteed to have a great time and you're guaranteed to catch plenty of fish while out on the water with his crew.



Marco and Pete did a wonderful job entertaining us; the boats were clean and reliable. The tackle is nice, and the crew are well trained. This is one place where you can go and catch multiple Marlin every day. I did not count the number of fish we caught but I can confidently say that no one felt like they did not catch enough.

If great fishing, fun, food and the "island life" is in your requirements for a vacation, the Galápagos Islands should definitely be on your bucket list of places to visit! 📌

- Brad Kenyon

CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN THE MANATEE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Discover How Conservation Efforts in the Crystal River Area Impact Fish, Wildlife and More!
by Josh Johnson

As the Manatee Capital of the World, Crystal River takes great pride in being at the forefront of manatee and local ecosystem conservation. These continued efforts help ensure these gentle giants have adequate food sources and a safe refuge yearly from November to early April.

Healthy ecosystems in the Crystal River area greatly benefit us all. Here are two ways you can help take part.



Practice Responsible Boating

A recent study by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission shows that only 4% of observed adult manatees show no sign of watercraft-related scars. As you can tell by this staggering statistic, boats pose one of the single largest dangers to manatees' health and safety.



When posted regulations and signage are not followed, this can physically harm both manatees and their feeding

grounds. For these reasons, it's essential to follow all posted signs and listed regulations and ensure responsible boating is practiced at all times.

Other responsible boating practices include wearing polarized sunglasses during boat operations and observing all manatee speed zones and caution areas.

So whether you're enjoying a sunny day on the water or hunting for your next catch before the sun rises, please remember to practice your manatee manners!

Catch and Release

Unsustainable fishing practices threaten local ecosystems and their resiliency in a few ways. Primarily this happens through overfishing and, in turn, habitat de-

struction. Habitat destruction not only impacts the quality of fishing but also directly impacts manatees and their ability to thrive here.

Groups in the Crystal River area, like Save Crystal River, have spent time and resources breathing new life into the local ecosystem by planting fresh eelgrass and combating harmful invasive species. And because of this, habitats in the area continue to grow and thrive! Now it's up to all of us to keep them that way.

Besides curbing potential habitat destruction, catch-and-release fishing also improves native fish populations. How? Because it ensures that more fish remain and reproduce in the ecosystem. This practice allows anglers to enjoy the bounty of fish in the Crystal River area while increasing their chances of successfully catching fish.

Practicing catch and release of native fish also ensures that the opportunity to enjoy this national pastime and recreational opportunity will be around for many years!

Conservation in the Crystal River Area

As you can see, there are many ways for you to engage in conservation efforts. If you're interested in discovering more about the continued progress being made by conservationists and eco-tourists alike, we have created a Conservation Hub filled with more information. Topics include how to be involved, from the comfort of your home to a deep dive into the invasive aquatic species that threaten the local ecosystem. There's a wealth of knowledge ready for you! ■

Learn more at DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com/Manatee-Conservation.



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Captain Sergio Atanes

A November to remember is always full of surprises as every species seems fire-up and turn on!

I have had some fantastic Cobia bites and big Redfish on the flats. If the water temperatures hold in the mid-70s the Cobia bite around the range markers should be on fire!

Flounder and "gator" Trout will be hiding out in the deeper flats. Be sure to fish them with artificial baits early in the morning. A Saltwater Assassin P&V soft plastic with 1/8 oz Jighead is my go-to and a killer bait this time of year.

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.



Captain George Hastick

November water temps will cool off and drop to the low 70s by the end of the month. This is a transition month with a wide variety of fish to be caught. The Gag Grouper in the bay will be on fire but the season will be closed, but Mangrove Snapper will still be good if you need something tasty to eat. The shipping channel, docks, rock piles and bridges are good places to look. Don't be surprised if you catch Snook and Redfish in the same areas that you are targeting the Snapper. Larger Trout will start to move into the deeper flats and move shallow as the sun warms the water.

"TACKLE TALK"

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TALES FROM "THE OLD GUY"

by Dave Mallory

This month, we will journey back to 1965 for some ice fishing in Vermont. For those of you who have a limited knowledge, or maybe no idea about the sport, I'll try to fill you in.

Most people think of ice fishing as sitting in an ice house or shanty with a small heater and dropping a jig or a bait down a hole and catching, maybe, Perch or Smelt?



Not us! Ice fishing for us was drilling many eight inch holes in ice that was between four inches and up to three feet thick. In 1965, I had a hand auger to drill the holes (that changed to a Jiffy power auger a few years later). When the ice was thin, which was early in November, drilling was easy and good exercise. In March, we could have over 30 inches and that, my friends, was a lot of hard work! In small lakes, we were allowed eight holes per person. In Lake Champlain, we were allowed 15. With thick ice and the hand auger, it might be two to three hours before the holes were done. Usually, I had somebody with me to scoop out the ice chips and put a bait in the hole. What did we

use to put the bait in? "Jacks" or tip ups. Both were basically two sticks at 90 degree angles to each other which were placed over the hole, a reel on the side with heavy line and a wire with a flag on it. When a fish pulled on the line, the flag would tip up in the air to indicate you had a bite. That didn't always mean a fish because sometimes they would let go.

Now, we began to fish! I always started our lines in about five to six feet of water and ran them about ten feet apart going into deeper water. I would put a 4-5 inch minnow on the first line for northern pike and a smaller minnow on the next two or three for perch. After about 10 tip ups, I would move and start another row about 20 feet away and run it parallel to the first row, staggering them so they were in between the lines of the first row. If we were fishing Lake Champlain, we would start a third row like the first two. If we were fishing a smaller lake, we were done. If we caught a nice 5 pound fish, we would put another line near the one where we just caught the big one, in case there could be more near by.

Once we were all set up, we could relax, eat our lunch, and bring in the fish. Sometimes we would catch a walleye, salmon, ling or bass, depending on where we were fishing. My wife would accompany me if it was a "Perfect Pauline Day" - not too cold, not too windy, and lots of fish. Sometimes, we would have a funny experience - like being attacked by a muskrat! One



time, as we were eating our lunch, waiting for a flag to go up, something popped up out of a hole. We weren't sure what it was because it was way at the end of our lines. I

started walking toward it. I could see it was a big muskrat. He started running toward me and tried to bite my boot. I kicked him, he turned around, and ran down the first hole he came to. I guess he didn't like

us in his territory. After a big laugh, we continued to fish until it was time to pick up.

Picking up also took a long time. The jacks all went into a pack basket on my sled, along with the auger. The perch went into a 5 gallon bucket and the northern pike laid on the sled. We usually kept about 20 perch and sometimes a big northern pike. Even though a northern pike has a row of y-bones along the ribs, they could be filleted so you ended up with four fillets instead of two, and the meat was white and flaky.

The bait all went down a hole as a bonus to the fish. And then it was time to go home for a fish fry! 🍷

Dave Mallory can be reached by email at: Dave_Mallory@msn.com

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REEL TALK

by Tom Mohrbach

Everyone has their favorite type of fishing reel; spinning, baitcaster, spincast or fly. The subcategories of each type are mind-boggling. Prior readers of my column know that I am a simple man. Like many Midwesterners, my first fishing reel was a Zebco 202 Spincast. It was your basic inexpensive, no-brainer reel. I was about eight years old when I inherited it from one of my older siblings.

I remember watching enviously as my father flung his line out twice as far with his spinning (or what we called an open-face) reel. He leisurely reeled his cast in compared to my frantic cranking of the Zebco's handle like a jack-in-the-box.

Despite the spinning reel's apparent ease of use, when I would borrow my dad's rod and reel, I would quickly cause a nasty tangle of line resembling Florida forecasters' hurricane projection pat-

terns. I, of course, would return his rod and reel to its usual place and claim ignorance when he finally discovered the mess.

Finally, in my early teens, I conquered the spinning reel. Like my dad, I used a Mitchell 301 for many years, landing many fine Northern Pike and Largemouth Bass. The Abu Garcia Cardinal was also a favorite. As a budget-conscious (ok cheap) fisherman, thirty-five dollars was the most I ever paid for a reel.

Since moving to Florida, I have realized the need to upgrade my gear. I hooked onto something huge a few weeks ago while fishing off the Anclote Pier. My trusty Shimano spinning reel's drag screamed like someone in a haunted house. I watched helplessly as my line emptied from the spool. I never saw what I had hooked but it finally cut my line as my drag was fried.

Determined not to be beaten by inferior equipment ever again, I headed to a local sporting goods store. The variety of reels and their costs were overwhelming. The costlier reels were tethered by cable to the display case like pens on a chain at a bank. I picked up a few of them and cranked away. Holy Moses and Joseph! I had no idea a reel could feel so smooth. And, when I quit reeling, the spool actually spun a few times on its own.

I visibly flinched while checking the price tag but knew I was hooked (pun intended). My Penn Fierce III spinning reel is incredible. It feels rugged, yet smooth. Its Black and Red metal body resembles Spiderman's suit, and the HT 100 carbon fiber drag washers are ready for whatever awaits me. Although I must admit it looks weird on my 12' bamboo rod; poles are another story for another time.

Oh, and if anyone talks to my wife, please don't mention the price of the reel. Yes, I realize most of you serious fisherfolks spend hundreds of dollars on a reel, but as my Grandpa used to say, "I'm on a fixed income." ■

Tom Mohrbach is a retired police officer. He has published four novels since his retirement. All of his books are available to order on Amazon. Tom recommends that outdoor enthusiasts who like action/adventure stories check out his novel, Northern Nightmare. See his website: tommohrbach.com for additional information on all of his books.





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BACKYARD GROUPEr

by Captain Sergio Atanes

November is the start for some inshore fun fishing as gag groupers move into the canals of Tampa Bay.

Change in weather opens the door to different types of fishing. Big reds move into the deeper flats, snook start their migration into the creeks and rivers and breeder speckled trout (gator trout) called for their bright orange mouth roam the deep waters off the bridges and edges of channels.

November is my let's do something different month and I spend at least part of my charters trying to catch gag grouper by trolling in the canals from lower Tampa Bay to Clearwater Beach. First-incoming tide is best, and you need to troll the canals that hold at least 5 feet or more of water at low tide. Second, study your area first as not all canals hold fish. Find the ones that have structures,

builders dump rocks and left-over concrete rubble around the docks as protection against erosion. Over the years these structures become artificial reefs or feeding stations for all species, attracting small bait fish, crabs and shrimp. This also makes a great stopping ground for groupers during the fall and winter months.

There are many manufacturers of great trolling lures for grouper. We all have our preference, and mine happens to be a Rapala X-RAP or YO-ZURI F-Series. These lures work best between 6 to 15 feet of water, perfect for trolling docks.

The speed you troll depends on the depth of water, hull design and size of engine. When trolling it's best to go by RPM than speed. When you get your first strike make a mental note of your RPM and stick with it, since a change in tide movement or wind could affect your speed and you might need to change your RPM accordingly.

Try keeping the lure as close as possible to the outside edges of the docks and watch the tip of your rod because you will want the lure



to bump into the bottom once in a while and this tells you you're on target. I always troll with two rods and each one has a different color lure, some days blue works and others they only touch green back ones, so my recommendation is always carrying 4 or 5 different colors and fish them until you find the one that works for the day.

Somedays are better than others and the water temperature has a lot to do with the bite. The cooler the water temperature the better the bite.

Work an area more than once. Sometimes that fish just didn't get there in time for a meal and your second run through will give him and you a second shot of landing a prize catch.



Another good area is along the sides for channels leading into the canals where the grouper will stage up and work their way in with the tide.

I have caught plenty of flounder, redfish, trout and some big snook while trolling for gags. The best part is that you can start trolling early, catch your fish and be back at the dock in time for the football game.

Sometimes we get unexpected surprise like a big red grouper, some redfish and even a large snook.

GROUPEr TACKLE RECOMMENDATIONS

I use an OKUMA CE-DROS #S-701MA 7'0" rod paired with a OKUMA #6000 AZORES Spinning Reel. Fins Windtamer 40-pound test braided line tied to a Soft Steel 40-pound test fluorocarbon leader, at least 3-foot long. Try a YO-ZURI F-Series or Rapala X-Rap hard plastic crankbait. ☑



Captain Sergio Atanes is a native resident of Tampa and has been fishing the water of Tampa Bay and Boca Grande for over 40 years. He is the owner and operator of S & I charters which is one of the largest charter booking services in the West Coast of Florida with 100 professional captains on staff. Capt. Sergio Atanes can be reached at (813) 973-7132 or www.reelfishy.com.



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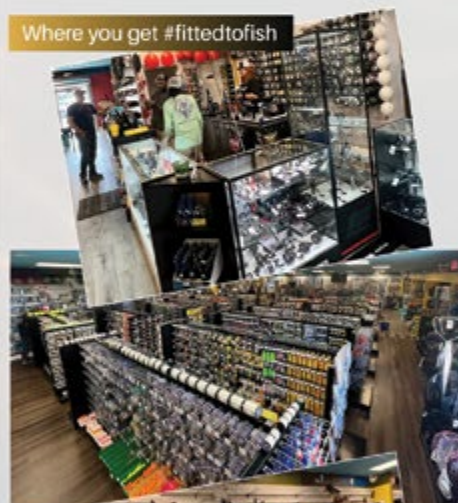
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