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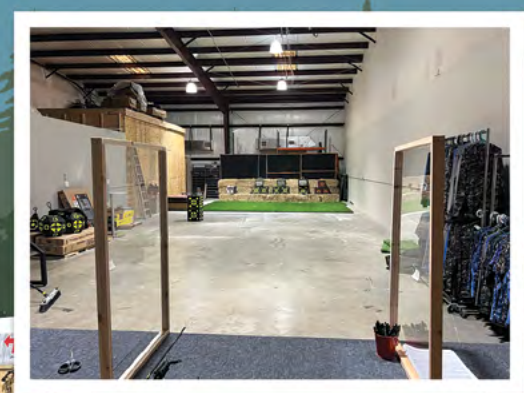
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MERRY FISHMAS, SANTA CARP IS COMING TO TOWN

It's the time of year when everyone who has a spouse or significant other who loves fishing is looking for the perfect gift. If, like Oprah, your shopping budget ranges to 6 figures, your choice is easy. A new boat, outboard motor and/or truck is always welcome. If your budget is more modest, perhaps I can help.

You can always visit your local tackle shop and pick out a new rod and reel that is appropriate for their favorite type of fishing. No fisherman will ever tell you that they have too many rods and reels, there's always room for one or even ten more.

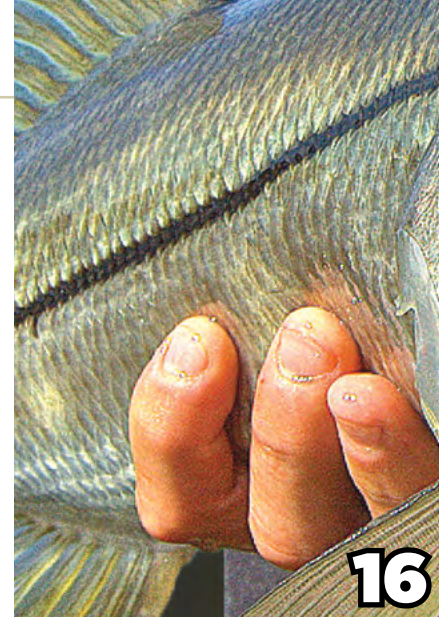
If even these are a bit too pricey for you, you can first consider your level of commitment to your significant other and if this does not do it, you can choose from a number of cheaper options like something from the following list:

1. Camsch makes a truly ugly Blobfish toy, it is very bloblike and squeezable for stress relief for when the real fish aren't biting or the weather is simply not cooperating.
2. Archie McPhee makes a truly annoying Yodeling Pickle. I don't know what it has to do with fishing, but who would not want one? The chances of this gift being something that they already have is miniscule, how many people have ever shown you their yodeling pickle?
3. Late for the Sky makes a board game named Fishin-opoly. It's a lot like Monopoly, but with Fish. What a great way to spend a rainy afternoon with your family or fishing buddies.
4. Probably the most desired fishing gift on my list is the Toilet Fishing Game made by Fairly Odd Novelties. Instead of spending toilet time reading Facebook or Twitter, This, fun for all ages, game potentially provides hours of catching fun. The family will be fighting over who gets the bathroom first.
5. Uncommon Goods offers a Fishing Pole Campfire Roaster that allows you to grill hot dogs, roast marshmallows or your other favorite campfire foods. Perhaps you could even roast a trout.
6. Haiboxing offers a Radio Controlled Boat all set up for fishing. Perfect for those who just have no casting skills. With this boat, you can get that lure right to where the big ones hide, just hope they aren't stronger than the boat.

If none of these suggestions tickle your fancy, there is always the option of scheduling a pre-paid fishing charter with one of our great contributors or advertisers. It's far cheaper than a new boat, but it nearly insures a fun family day on the water, with a great fresh fish dinner to follow.

If your significant other knows how to run a boat, but they just don't have one, you could buy a Boat Rental Gift Certificate from me and Flip the Bird here at Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs. Call me at 727.243.1493 to get one sent out to you.

Merle



CHRISTMAS SALES EVENT & GIVEAWAY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17TH

GIVEAWAY INFO

MUST REGISTER IN PERSON DURING EVENT

- 14' Salt Creek Skiff
- Mercury 15HP Outboard
- Magic Tilt Trailer

\$3,999 Value. Winner will be announced December 19th. You do not need to be present to win. Family and employees of Boat and Motor Superstores and Mercury are not eligible to win.

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ON THE COVER: A beautiful lady angler with a nice December Redfish caught on an productive outing on her Kaku Zulu kayak. For more information or to check out the awesome lineup offered by Kaku, please visit them online at: kakukayaks.com.

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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17TH



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TWO JUSTINS

by Tom Mohrbach

This is the true story of two Justins from Pensacola, Florida. Justin D. owns a successful landscaping company and Justin H. is a prominent lawyer.

I spent the early part of November with them and several others in one of my favorite places, Northern Michigan. My home state. We were bowhunting the elusive Whitetail Deer and its one of the highlights of my year. The core members of our annual camp are my three brothers, a cousin, and myself. We are referred to as "The Elders" of the group.

Justin H. informed us before the trip that he was looking forward to harvesting a big Michigan buck. We all got a laugh out of that; the out-of-stater thinking he was going to score a big buck at his first camp. Our biggest buck to date from public land was a seven-pointer, and we had been hunting for over thirty years. Although an experienced Florida deer hunter, Justin H. hunts several acres of private land his family owns and has harvested many fine Florida deer. But, the public lands of Michigan would be new uncharted territory for him. I have been on a multi-year dry spell of harvesting a deer of any size and had high hopes of ending it this year. How this Pensacola lawyer figured he could waltz into camp and arrow a huge buck was almost laughable.

My only kill this camp was a direct hit of a giant white oak tree. When my broadhead impacted the old oak, it sounded like it was hit with a baseball bat. It certainly scared the large doe standing near it as it bounded off faster than a "Space

X" rocket. Obviously, the arrow was deflected by an unseen twig. Um. Sure, that was it.

Justin H. shot a small antlerless deer on the second day. I teased him that his deer was definitely not a big Michigan buck. His reply was that he only shot it as he figured we needed some venison for the camp meals.

As camp progressed, us elders were in awe of the two Justins' dedication. Rising each morning at 4:00am, they didn't return to camp until well after dark. They missed several quality lumberjack-style breakfasts and lunches we prepared each day. Not to mention some quality afternoon naps us elders enjoyed.

Having studied topo maps for months prior to camp, the Justins regaled us each night with their tales of trudging through swamps, climbing huge hills, and trekking through miles of dense forest to reach their hunting areas. They utilized sling-style tree stand that they backpacked in with them. Us elders easily reached our stands within a few minutes walk from our parking spots. We spent a couple hours in the stands each morning, then enjoyed our leisurely afternoons at the cabin before heading out for a few hours in the evening. We snickered at how tired the Justins were each night, averaging only four hours of sleep. A few days into camp, David, my nephew, and Brian, my cousin's

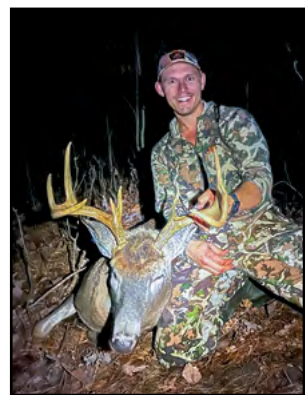
son-in-law, added to our camp total with an antlerless and a nice seven-pointer, respectively. It was their first ever deer harvest for each of them.

On the second to last evening hunt, we received a phone call from the two Justins telling us to wait up for them as they would be late returning to camp. They stated that they had a couple of surprises to show us. We speculated that they each got a deer. Maybe even a buck.

When they finally returned to camp and dropped the tailgate on their pickup, we were not prepared for the monster bucks within. Justin H. harvested a huge bodied nine point; easily the biggest buck in camp history. Justin D. had shot a nice six-pointer, as well.

I grudgingly admit that the Florida Justin duo, not only talked the talk, but walked the walk and showed some of us true "Michiganders" how it's done. The only question that remains is, do we invite them back next year? Hmmm. ☑

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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THE RIVERS REPORT

by Captain John Rivers

December in Tampa Bay is known for great Trout fishing, fun Sheepshead fishing and even the fair-weathered Snook, which have moved up into the rivers. Redfish are still milling through the flats, docks and ledges along drop-offs too. We get a lot of cold fronts this time of

year, and you have to pick your days to fish in between the fronts or you're going to be fishing on a windy day. However, the advantage to fishing Tampa Bay is that even when it's blowing out, you have many areas to hide behind the mangroves or just go up in the rivers to have a very produc-



tive day on the water. Just make sure you're bundled up, but then again, you never know what the temperature is going to be in December here; I've worn shorts on Christmas day on Tampa Bay, so each year is different. When we get a strong cold front, it usually takes the fish a day or two to adjust if the water temps drop more than a few degrees.



The bait should be still around on the flats or on the markers, which is a plus, but sometimes when it gets really cold, it can be hard to find. I always have a back-up plan and Wintertime is exactly when I may have to change the strategy for how I'm going to catch these fish.

I will typically have a livewell full of frisky Shrimp for the Sheepshead and other species if I've been having trouble finding the bait. But, since I really enjoy tossing artificials, December is a great time to do just that. The nice thing about Wintertime fishing is you don't have to start out at daylight, and sometimes it's actually better to let the sun heat things up which is when the fish become more active.

The Sheepshead love the cooler temps, but just make sure you have moving water. I like the first two hours of either the outgoing or incoming tides. Trout will be definitely be on, as well, and I recommend either live Shrimp or soft plastics (4-inch paddletails on a 1/4oz jig). Again, pursue Snook up in the rivers, and if you bring a livewell of Pilchards, you'll keep the rod bent all day. Lastly, stop off at a few docks for a Redfish. They may be looking for a free meal to get them through the holidays.



Before the year ends, take a few days off from the hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping and go splash the boat.


Hope everyone has a Merry Christmas and receives bent rods under the tree this year! 🎣

Captain John Rivers has a lifetime of fishing knowledge and over 20 years of experience fishing the gulf coast. For more information or to book an unforgettable fishing trip, please call 727-313-1781.



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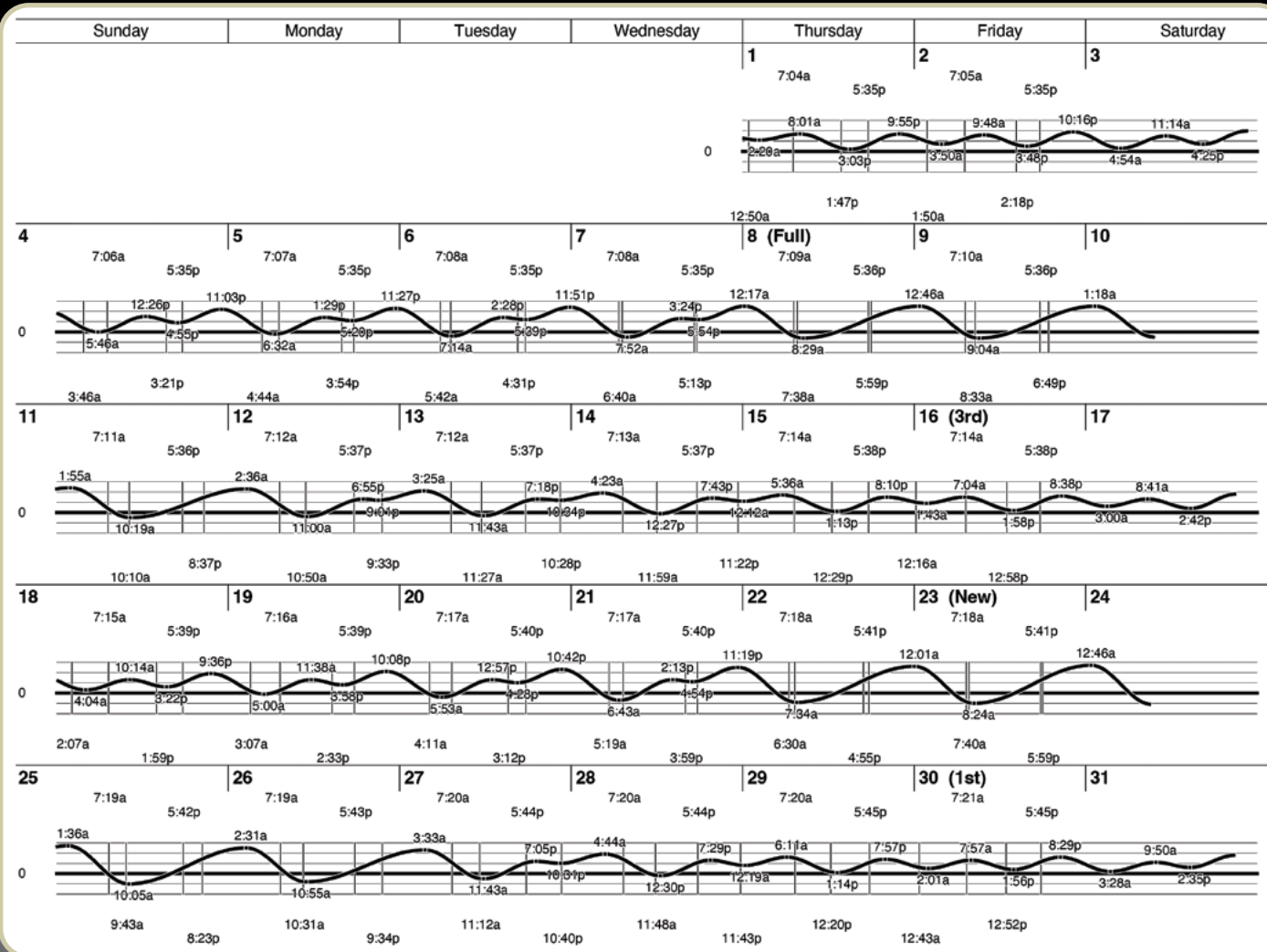
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area			Conversions for St. Marks River Area		
High	Low		High	Low	
-0:02	-0:10	Dunedin, St. Joseph Sound	+0:23	+1:18	Everglades City
-0:05	-0:15	Anclote Key, South End	-1:17	-1:03	Cape Romano
+0:42	+0:42	Tarpon Springs, Anclote River	-1:04	-1:08	Marco Island
-0:07	-0:03	North Anclote Key	-1:59	-2:04	Naples
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa	-0:46	-0:09	Indian Bay
+0:33	+0:53	Gulf Harbors	-0:59	-0:42	Bayport
+0:42	+1:05	Hwy 19 Bridge, Pithlachascotee River	-0:25	+0:23	Withlacoochee River
+0:50	+1:35	New Port Richey, Pithlachascotee River			
+0:36	+0:43	Hudson, Hudson Creek			

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
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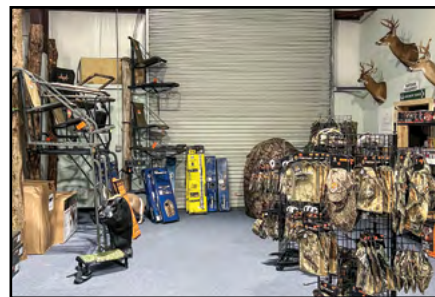
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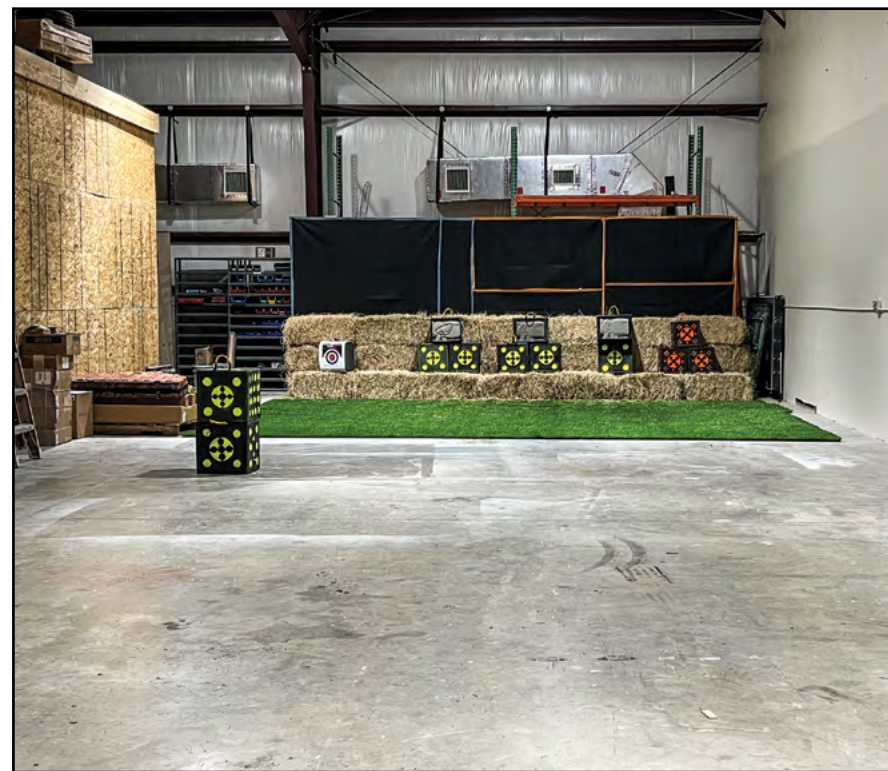
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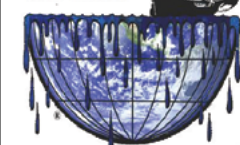
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Strong north winds and negative low tides will provide kayak anglers with great opportunities for fish catching this winter. With each passing cool front, we will see high pressure and a strong northerly wind following it. These north winds will actually 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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Paddle Pub comes to Clearwater Beach compliments of Misty Wells, owner and host of the fast-

est growing outdoor show on the airwaves, "Let's Take it Outside". Misty is on the cutting edge of what tourist and party enthusiasts are looking for on the water; fun, interaction, music, and cold drinks. Paddle Pub is reminiscent of the much larger Paddle-wheel boats of a bygone era and elicits those same senses of fun and adventure. You will paddle your way through the crystal-clear waters of the Inter-coastal to the Gulf of Mexico in search of dolphins, great memories and epic sunsets.

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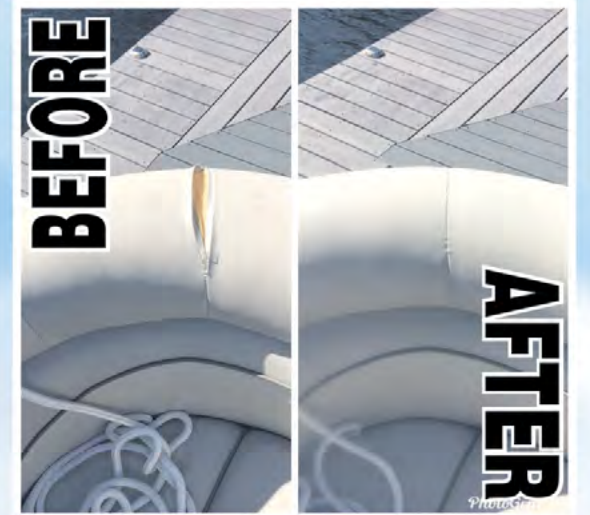
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REEL IN AWESOME IN CRYSTAL RIVER

Cast your line in Citrus County, Florida for world-class fishing, year-round!

by Christine Steele

Set on Florida's Nature Coast, just a short drive from Orlando, Tampa, Gainesville and Ocala, Discover Crystal River is a true sportsman's paradise. Three spring-fed rivers — the Homosassa, the Chassahowitzka and the Crystal — feed into the Gulf of Mexico and create a rich fishing habitat.

This combination of fresh and salt water fishing, along with the pristine untouched character of the landscape and easy, relaxed pace of life, make Citrus County a world-class fishing destination year-round.

GO COASTAL OR GO FRESH

Homosassa Bay, with its mangrove shorelines, dense seagrass beds and network of islands, is known for its giant Redfish, but that isn't the only species that will give you reel-burning thrills in this authentic Old Florida destination. You'll also find an abundance of Spotted Seatrout, Cobia and Spanish Mackerel ready to challenge the best of light tackle anglers. The clear, pristine flats are perfect for drifting or trolling along and taking in the scenic beauty all around.

At the mouth of the Crystal River, reel in Tarpon, Cobia, Redfish, Seatrout or venture offshore to deeper waters for Snapper, Grouper and Amberjack. At the river's headwaters, you'll find Bass, Sheepshead, Mullet and Bluegill.

Off the coast, the 19,000-acre Tsala Apopka chain of lakes connect with the Inverness and Floral City pools in Citrus County that are prime for landing largemouth bass. Shellcracker and Bluegills also flourish throughout the chain, making this a quality, year-round freshwater fishing destination.

FISHING IS A WAY OF LIFE

Fishing goes back generations in Citrus County. Guides with a lifetime of experience on the water can help you find the best honeyholes to access boatloads of fish, both inshore and offshore.

While visiting, be sure to spend some time swapping fish stories with the locals at unique spots like MacRae's or the Monkey Bar in Homosassa, or Peck's Old Port Cove in Ozello. Or, just sit back and watch the boats go by as you relax with a cold one after a successful day on the water.

During the summer months, Citrus County's famous scallop season is in full swing. The waters off Crystal River and Homosassa are two of only a handful of places in Florida where you can gather buckets of fresh, juicy scallops. Dive into this local tradition likened to an underwater easter egg hunt.

FROM FISH TO FORK

After a fantastic day on the water, pull your boat up to shore and bring your buckets of crabs, cleaned scallops or fish to one of more than a dozen restaurants or seafood shacks where a local chef will cook your catch in this time-honored Florida tradition.

Call ahead and let them know you're coming, then have a seat and let them serve it up to you with all the fixin's, fresh from the water and onto your plate.

With so much to see and do, plan your next fishing trip to Citrus County and discover authentically awesome fishing and more in the soul of Florida. ☑

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THE GIFT OF FISHING IN DECEMBER

by Misty Wells

December is a great time of year to go fishing in Florida. The weather temperatures have not usually dropped too cool, and the bite is still hot!

Of course, now is a good time to get out and shallow water fish for Gag Grouper. Gags are only open until the end of December, so it's a good time to take advantage of them moving into shallow waters. Now, I have offered up this information on this type of fishing before, but in case you missed it, here we go again. I am going to share tried-and-true methods that have worked for me shallow water trolling for Grouper. The great thing about this type of fishing is you don't need an offshore boat and you aren't going to burn a lot of fuel during your trip.

Let's talk equipment. I like to use an "open face" Penn Senator 4/0 setup with 60 lb. test mono line, then measure out a 30-foot leader, also using 60 to 80 lb. test mono line. If you want to use a Spinning Reel, I recommend a 6 to 7 ft., medium to heavy action Penn Slammer 2 setup with 60 to 80 lb. braid, and same setup with the leader as above.



Now depending on the depth of the water you are fishing, you have to decide what size Planer to use – #1-10 foot, #2-20 foot, #3-30 foot and so on. Planers run at about a 45-degree angle and achieve about 1 foot of depth for each 2 foot of planer line. When trolling with these planers, I suggest running about 5 to 5.5 knots, as the water temps cool, the fish become more lethargic, so "slow and steady wins the race".

My secret weapon on these Grouper is using a giant lip lure or a White curlytail jig. You can pick them up at FISH on the Pinellas side or TA Mahoney's in Tampa. Using my favorite Pumpkin Jig in 1 hour my daughter and I landed a Snook, Tarpon, and keeper Gag Grouper. This method is one of the best ways to prospect for large



Grouper in an area, so keep working a location with several runs as you may not get a hit the first time through. Remember, before you head out to fish, fill-up the livewell with some lively "White Bait" or Pinfish. If you find a good rock pile or some good bottom, drop a line just like you are bottom fishing offshore because that works great too.

Another great species to target during this time of year is Tripletail. They are pretty easy to spot right now because they love to swim around the Stone Crab trap buoys all season long and Tripletail is some of the best eating inshore fish you can catch; it's a classic white flaky fish fillet. Most of the time you can just slow cruise along a Stone Crab row, keeping your eyes peeled for them on top of the water column. You want to use light tackle 1/0 or 2/0 circle hook, no weight, 15 lb. leader and some small-to-medium size live shrimp or baby crabs for bait. Tripletail are definitely skittish, so try not to even cast a shadow. When they get spooked, they swim down to deeper depths, but usually don't stay gone for too long. You'll want to cast your rig past the target then slowly reel your bait into the strike zone. And, when you hook a Tripletail, be sure to rip him away from the ball or structure, so be sure to check your drag. Once you get the fish away from the structure, you can loosen things up a bit.

The final great species to target in the Winter months is Sheepshead. They are also sometimes nicknamed "convict fish" because of their black and white stripes. You can find Sheepshead in some of the same places as Tripletail, as they generally migrate into inshore waters from November through February. They love to hangout around piers, pilings, docks, seawalls, and oyster bars.



Your tackle setup is pretty much the same as it is for Tripletail, however, you may want to downsize to a 1/0 hook. Sheepshead have pretty small mouths and are notorious for stealing your bait and love to eat Shrimp, small crabs, Mollusks and even Barnacles. One reason they hang around the pilings is to eat the barnacles off them. And, one of the most unique

things about Sheepshead is the fact that they have teeth very similar to humans; it seems like they found someone's dentures and put them into swim around. If you are fishing on a pier or piling, drop your bait right straight down the pole or if you are casting to the pole, cast right on to it and remember they eat right off the piling.

I hope some of this information was helpful to you for some fun Wintertime fishing and you set aside some of your Holiday time to "take it outside". Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, may you all be blessed to be with loved ones this Holiday season and hopefully bend a rod together! 🎣

Misty Wells Producer & Host of "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to 38 million on Bally Sports, World Fishing Network, Waypoint TV, Hunt Channel, MOTV, 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 3,500 children & counting.

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RIVERS OF GOLD

by Captain George Hastick

Tampa Bay is one of the greatest estuaries and the largest open water estuary in all of Florida. It is also home to four major rivers that flow into Tampa Bay, which also makes it a great place for a variety of bird and fish species. The rivers are Alafia River, Hillsborough River, Little Manatee River, and the Manatee River. There is also the Palm River which will also hold fish in the Wintertime months.



When the water temperatures start to drop near the end of November and the start of December in Tampa Bay, the fish will migrate to the rivers to stay warm. As the water temperatures continue to drop further into January and February, they will move further up the river for survival reasons including warmth and food sources.

When water temperatures on the flats out in the bay drop into the lower 60s and lower, the bait often disappears; moving out into deeper waters leaving fish like snook, redfish, trout and a variety of other fish like Jacks, Tarpon and more looking for warmth and a food source. This is where power plants and rivers provide both.



For artificial lures you can throw soft plastics like the 4" Saltwater Assassin forked tail, split tail and Shrimp style lures.

If using live bait this time of year, it is hard to beat Shrimp as a good choice. If you do not like using lures, Shrimp is a great alternative, especially if you pinch the tail off. This will allow the Shrimp to stay alive and move around while putting out a nice scent trail. Scent is a big factor when fishing, but it is especially important in Wintertime when the fish are sluggish to bite. All fish respond to scent, from Trout all the way up to Tarpon. A lot of times when fishing the river, docks will hold a lot of fish but they will usually be laying on the bottom staying warm on the dark mud or silt bottom. For this reason, I like to use live Shrimp on a 1/4 oz. jighead to get it down to the bottom and have good contact with the bait to feel every hit. I usually run 4-feet of fluorocarbon leader and use a 1/0 circle hook with a large enough split shot about 10 inches above the hook. Adjust the size of the split shot to keep your bait on the bottom depending on depth and current.



For the Shrimp, I like the "Houdini" and "Papa Smurph" colors and for the tails, I like "Papa Smurph", "Houdini" and "Chicos Red Ear". With the Shrimp, I like to use a 1/4 oz. jig head either worked slow on the bottom or a two-hop; let it sink & retrieve. You will usually get the hit on the sink, so watch for your line to hop and set the hook. Usually, Redfish and Snook will go after this setup. With the tails I like to setup on a 1/4 oz. weighted twist lock styled hook. When rigged you can bury just the tip of the hook into the plastic to make it weedless, which will help when throwing around structure or debris. You might even encounter a Tarpon, Bass or even Gar, depending on how far up the river you go. Work these lures along the docks, bridge pilings, tree or mangrove lines and sea walls. When fishing docks look for ones that look old and well established; they will usually hold more fish. When fishing sea walls, look for metal ones that have been in the sun all morning which will transfer heat into the water, attracting fish to hang out there.

For hard plastics, it is hard to beat the selection that MirrOlure has, but the new "C-Eyes Skin Series" are becoming my new go to lures. They are so realistic; you could see why a fish would eat it. The "Heavy Dine" in the Pinfish, Pilchard or Mullet pattern are all good choices. All these lures that I have men-

tioned will work well to get fish that are laying on the bottom, but when we have those warmer days between cold fronts and the sun is out and warms up some of the shallower areas near the banks, a finger mullet presentation on top water can lead to some explosive hits. This is where the "MirrOmullet" can be a dynamite lure and if you want a larger presentation, maybe to raise that lunker snook, the "Pro Dog Mullet" is a loud fish calling machine. With the "Heavy Dine", I would work along the docks and work bridge pilings, letting it get down into the lower water column with a slow to medium twitching retrieve depending on what the fish are responding to that day.

Now, like we talked about earlier, scent, especially in the Wintertime, really makes a big difference! You can really enhance your soft and hard plastic lures by adding scent to them. "Pro-Cure" makes an awesome assortment of scents for all style and types of fishing. The list is long, and they make

oils, sauces, super gels and more. For the river fishing in are area in Wintertime, I like the Shrimp and Mullet super gels. The super gel is very sticky and stays on your lures longer and it comes in a squeeze bottle, so you don't have to touch it. It is made from real bait with amino acid and bite stimulants as this gets you more hits on the soft and hard plastics and also makes them hold onto your lures even longer to get a better hook set. So, get up the river and go for some tight lines! 🎣



Captain George Hastick of "Fish Hunter Fishing Charters" in St. Petersburg has been fishing the waters of Tampa Bay for over 35 years & guiding over 20 years. From novice to professional; Capt. George will make you feel as if you have been fishing buddies for years. Contact 727-525-1005, www.FishTampa.com or CaptGeorge@TampaBay.rr.com.

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BLACKTIP SHARK BEACH FISHING

by Anthony Gomez

Blacktip sharks are one of my favorite fish to catch. They are some of the most powerful fish and are almost always biting. They make drag screaming runs and give a great workout while fighting them. During the Winter, it can be tough to get on a good bite for most fish, but Blacktips, on the other hand, are almost always patrolling the beach and looking for a nice meal. Throughout these cold months, we get a giant migration of these Blacktip Sharks. Thousands of these big fish travel up and down the coast feeding on everything they can get their mouth around throughout the day and night. They are very full of energy and like to get airborne at times. They shoot themselves out of the water, spinning around several times on the jump. This makes them a fun and exciting fish to hook off the beach.

Most of the time, I usually have some frozen baits in my freezer that I will use for blacktips. Jacks, Ladyfish, Mackerel and Bluefish are usually my go to frozen baits.

Catching a fresh bait, however, is definitely my favorite. Off the beach, I like to cast around a spoon or diamond jig to see if I can catch some fresh cut bait.

Usually, I can get tight on some Spanish Mackerel and Ladyfish. I prefer those two for cut bait. If I get a small Jack or Bluefish on the spoon, I tend to use them live for these sharks. In my opinion, a live 2-4 lb. Jack or Bluefish is the #1 Blacktip Shark bait out there. For some reason, they can almost never pass one up. Also, using a live bait for these blacktips creates some of the best strikes you'll ever see. These sharks will completely clear the water and absolutely crush that live bait on the end of your line. Even after catching countless blacktips, it still gets my heart racing every single time.



For gear, I like to use at least an 8-foot rod with a lot of backbone. You don't want to go out to the beach with anything smaller than that. Sharks tend to fight until exhaustion, and this can cause the shark to die once you land it and then try to release it. I use at least a 6000-size reel



fully spooled with some 40lbs braid. These big blacktips can make an easy 100 yard run when they really want to. They'll make that drag sing for a little while.

To my braid, I'll tie a 200-300lbs monofilament top shot. I usually use about 6-8 ft of this top shot. The reason for such a long section of monofilament is because of these shark's abrasive skin. If the braid touches the shark's tail or body, it will brake almost every time. With these blacktips being so acrobatic, they can wrap themselves in the line and cause a break off. The monofilament can take a lot of that abrasion and prevent a shark from breaking you off.

After the monofilament top shot, I tie a swivel to about a 1-2 foot section of #9 wire. However, you can fish straight 200-300lb monofilament to your hook. I actually prefer it because the monofilament is much easier to tie and is quicker for me to cut and make a new rig with. Tying heavy wire can be difficult at times. Using straight monofilament is simpler for the shark to bite through,



but a circle hook gets in the corner of that blacktip's mouth and makes it very hard for them to bite through it. About a 12/0 circle hook is the standard size for me. When I use a cut bait, I'll use a small clip and attach a weight onto my swivel. Depending on my gear and the waves, a 4-6 oz pyramid or sputnik weight usually does the trick. I like to have my drag loose and set the

rod in a sand spike. From then on, it's just a waiting game. With a live bait, I do not use any weight. I'll cast that bait out and let it swim way away from the beach. I hold the rod and keep the bail open while waiting for a giant blacktip to crush my live bait.

Live and cut baits on the beach can produce some drag screaming blacktip sharks. They are a great way to get your lines tight during the tough winter months and are tons of fun to catch during the day and at night. One thing to make sure of is to have your "Shore-Based Shark Fishing Permit." It is a quick course that needs to be renewed every year to fish for sharks from land. It helps with educating everyone on our shark fishing laws, having proper equipment, and identifying different types of sharks. There is always the chance of hooking a different species of shark such as a lemon shark or spinner shark.

All these sharks have different rules on whether you can take them out of the water or not, so it is very important to take this course and get the permit. In the end, blacktips are a strong fish that can be an absolute blast to catch this winter! 🍷

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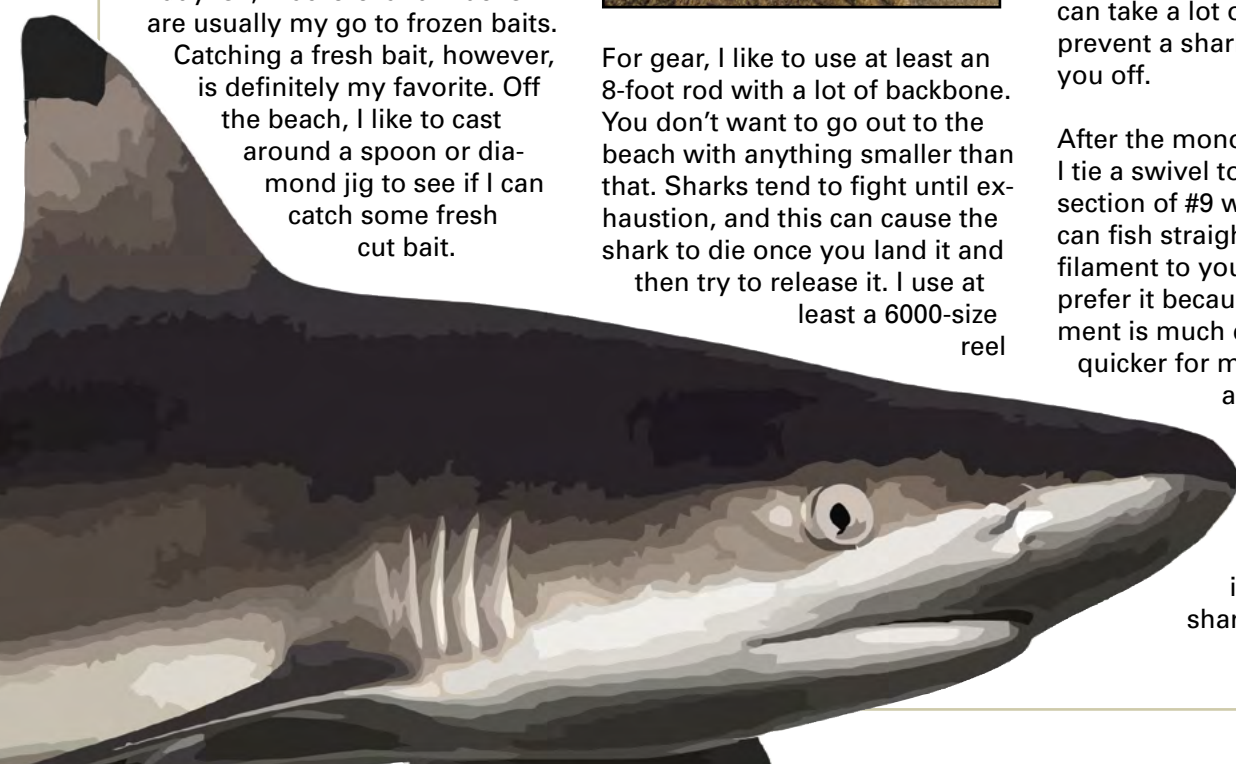
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COLD WEATHER SNOOK

by Captain Sergio Atanes

The old myth that snook shut down during cold weather holds true when the water temperature drops down below 65 degrees. Captain George Hastick, a good friend and part of the Fishing Adventures Florida TV show has a technique on how to catch them during the cold months.

Capt. George invited me along to go after some big winter Snook using his technique, and before he could finish his invitation, I asked him when and where. We set a time and place, agreeing not to divulge any of his secret, favorite fishing spots.

Wednesday morning arrived and the winds were blowing from the Northwest with temperatures in the mid 60s and dropping as the cold front approached. Capt. George explained that his technique works best with a falling tide and the water temperature no lower than 60 degrees.

His method is to troll channels using one of favorite Snook lure a MirrOlure M30MR-18. We picked the black back and gold-sided one, and tied it to a 30-pound test leader about 36-inches long. We used a 7-foot medium action spinning rod and reel combination.

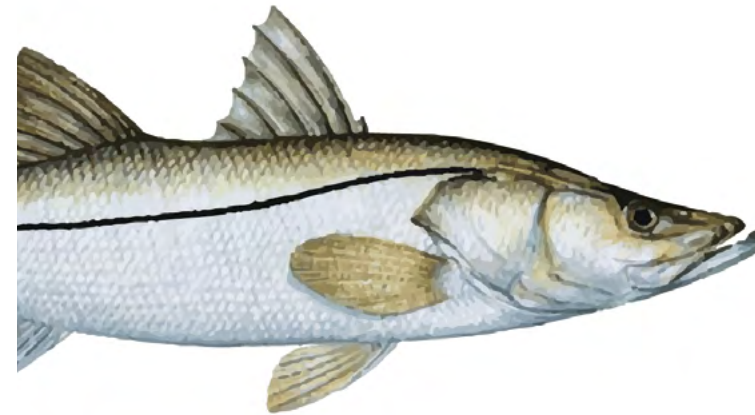
A short trip from the boat ramp and we were ready to fish. As we entered the first channel, we cast the lures about 25-feet behind the boat and held the rod outward and down as if they were outriggers. The secret is to keep the tip of the rods down and away from the boat and watch the tips of the rods for movement from the lure. Lures have a wobbly movement and in some cases the lure can pick up some bottom trash and will stop the wobbling or come to the surface.

By trolling slowly through the edge of the channel the chance of catching Snook will increase for two reasons. The bottom of the channels is muddy and holds water temperature higher than surrounding waters, causing the snook to move into deeper water and second, as the tide drops, they are forced away from the shallows and rocks and down toward the edge of the channels.



After a few minutes of trolling, our first hit was a small 8-pound Snook, and as we made our turn into the other side of the channel, I had a hard tug. For a minute I thought I had struck rock, but the rock moved, and I realized this was a very large Snook. Capt. George popped the motor out of gear and suggested I put a little more pull into catching this large snook or take the chance of losing him as he made a dash for the nearest rock or dock. Shortly afterward, I had him at the side of the boat, ready to give up the fight.

We were back at the dock by midday not only with the largest Snook weighing in at 12- pounds. That day Capt. George made me a believer in trolling for Snook.



WHERE TO TROLL:

1. Residential channels that are at least 5-foot deep at a low tide.
2. Main channels leading to any marina.
3. The channels that run along the docks are best if away from boat traffic.
4. The edges of the Little Manatee River.
5. Channel leading into Bishop Harbor.

WHEN TO TROLL:

I find this method works best ahead of a cold front or anytime the water temperature holds below 68 degrees. Like I said, falling tide is best. A falling tide or midway through an incoming tide.

TACKLE SUGGESTIONS:

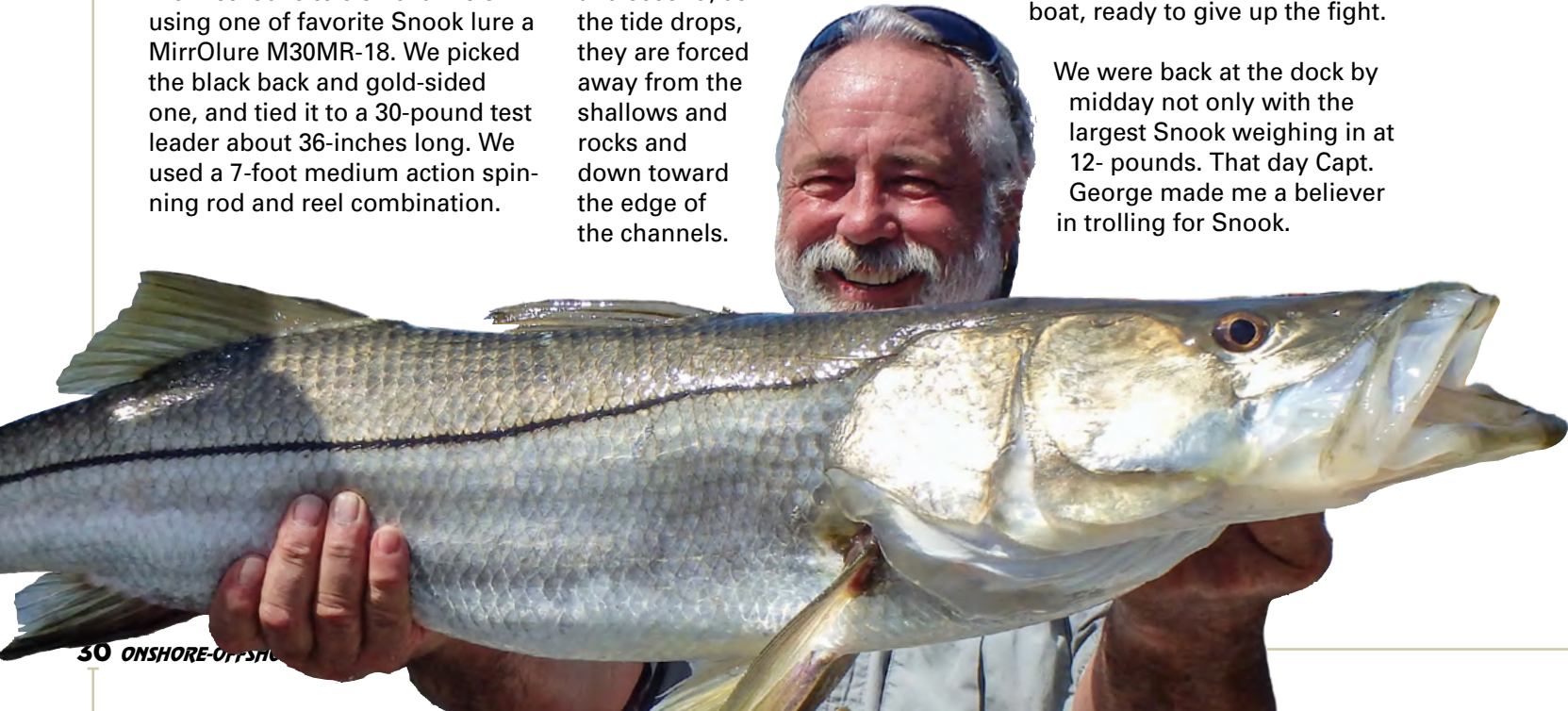
- 7-foot medium action rod.
- Medium size spinning reel.
- 30# test braided line.
- 30# test fluorocarbon leader.
- Silver and black diving lure.
- MirrOlure Model M30MR-18.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Clean water
- Water depth of at least 8-foot.
- Structure. This means from rocky bottom to concrete blocks left from old construction.

Please contact me for further information cause I love to educate other anglers that want to learn. ☑

Captain Sergio Atanes is host of Florida West Coast Fishing Report on Facebook and YouTube every Monday night 7-8 p.m. live. He is also host to Aventuras De Pesca USA on national TV and Radio Show. Email the captain at: atanes@msn.com, call 813-973-7132 or visit: reelfishing.com.



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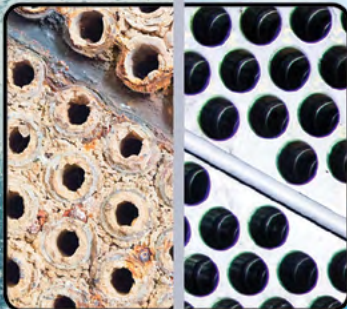
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