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BOATER TRAINING

I see a lot of people sharing our waterways that really need a little boater education. I'm not even talking about boater safety class; it goes without saying that everyone on the water should have taken this at some time. I'm talking about getting a basic understanding of the way that powerboats work. To help those who have not yet had the opportunity to learn some of these basics, I provide my top ten tips for operating a powerboat. For those of you who are experienced boaters I'm sorry if I am wasting your time.

#10: Water is wet. If you do not want to get wet it is wise to avoid proximity to water. Wearing a body condom really does not help much.

#9: Laying a rope loosely around a cleat is not tying up your boat securely. Tightly wrapping, knotting, binding and otherwise generally tangling up 10 feet of rope all around a cleat so that Houdini couldn't get it off is also not the way to tie a boat up properly. Use a little common sense when attaching your ropes to cleats. Keep in mind that it is also important to attach the anchor to the boat in a secure manner, before throwing it overboard; I really wish that more of our boat rental customers would remember this.

#8: Know what the tide is doing while you are boating. Going for a nice walk on the beach and coming back to find your boat 50 feet up on dry land does not make for a fun afternoon!

#7: If your boat has a kill switch, it will not start without the switch and lanyard properly in place. THAT IS WHY IT'S CALLED A KILL SWITCH!!!

#6: If your boat is in gear (forward or reverse) the motor will not start. Make sure it is in neutral BEFORE YOU CALL SEA TOW! If you don't do this they will laugh at you and call you silly names.

#5: If you are docking and the boat is not quite going where you want it to, giving it more throttle will not fix the problem. When docking, even the best captains occasionally get screwed up by wind or current and wind up bumping the dock. Boats do not have brakes, pushing on the floor with your foot will not keep you from hitting the dock, that is what reverse is for, if used properly. If you are going to hit something, hit it slowly, idle is your friend!!!!

#4: Jet Skis are an exception to #3; they do not steer without some throttle. However, with too much throttle, they may jump over the dock. It really is just best to avoid these entirely as they are no good for fishing anyway.

#3: When launching your boat at the ramp, it is important to insert the drain plug first. The drain is not a one-way hole; it will let water in too. It is much easier if you put the plug in before putting the boat in the water, the launch ramp is not a nice place for a swim! It is really better to just store your boat in a nice dry stack marina, perhaps somewhere like Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs.

#2: It is not a good idea to attempt to boat where birds are walking. This usually does not end well for you or the birds.

#1: Alcohol and driving a boat do not mix. In a best case scenario, you can wind up looking really silly stuck on an oyster bar in Fernandina, waiting for the tide and in a worst case scenario, you can do serious damage to your boat and possibly even serious bodily injury to yourself or others.

If you follow these tips you are sure to have more fun and fewer problems on the water and at the same time avoid annoying me. Merle and Flip the Bird can be reached at Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs, Florida by calling 727.943.8489 or by emailing: merle@shoredev.com.

Merle & Flip



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ON THE COVER:

May is all about the kids and this proud junior angler landed an extremely healthy and spotty Redfish caught on a recent outing with our very own, Captain George Hastick. Nice catch indeed. Tight lines, young man!

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P.O. Box 861
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DON'T BE AFRAID TO MIX IT UP!

by Captain George Hastick

Whether you like fishing with live bait, cut bait or artificial baits some days it might pay off to have a mix of bait to fish with as the water temperatures start to rise or weather conditions change during the day. Some days the fish might catch on to what you are throwing and changing it up can extend your bite in an area before you leave to find another productive spot.



I like to use both artificial and live baits. One advantage I had growing up is that I started off as a bass fisherman using 90% artificials and usually nightcrawlers the other 10%. This allowed me to really hone my skills with hard and soft plastic baits on Largemouth Bass.

I started using the same lures in saltwater with great success along with using live shrimp. Then I was introduced to creek chubs, pinfish and scaled sardines which was a whole other world of fishing and techniques. Just like the way artificials have techniques to catch more fish so does using live bait and how to present them.

The thing that is good is you can use both to help you to catch more fish. For example: if you are

fishing a new area, you can fan cast a top water lure to search for fish. This is especially helpful on the flats when looking for reds and trout. A topwater lure will cast very far and cover a lot of area. It is also loud to help attract fish from a distance to strike the lure. Once you start getting strikes in an area you can live chum

scaled sardines in that area to really fire up the bite and switch to live bait. Now this tactic can also be used in reverse if you really like catching fish on artificial, but they just aren't biting you can live chum to fire them up and continue to use artificial baits.

Now, if you are an artificial enthusiast, there is a sense of pride and accomplishment when you fool a fish and catch him purely on an artificial bait without any outside help, but I am just trying to show techniques to catch more fish.

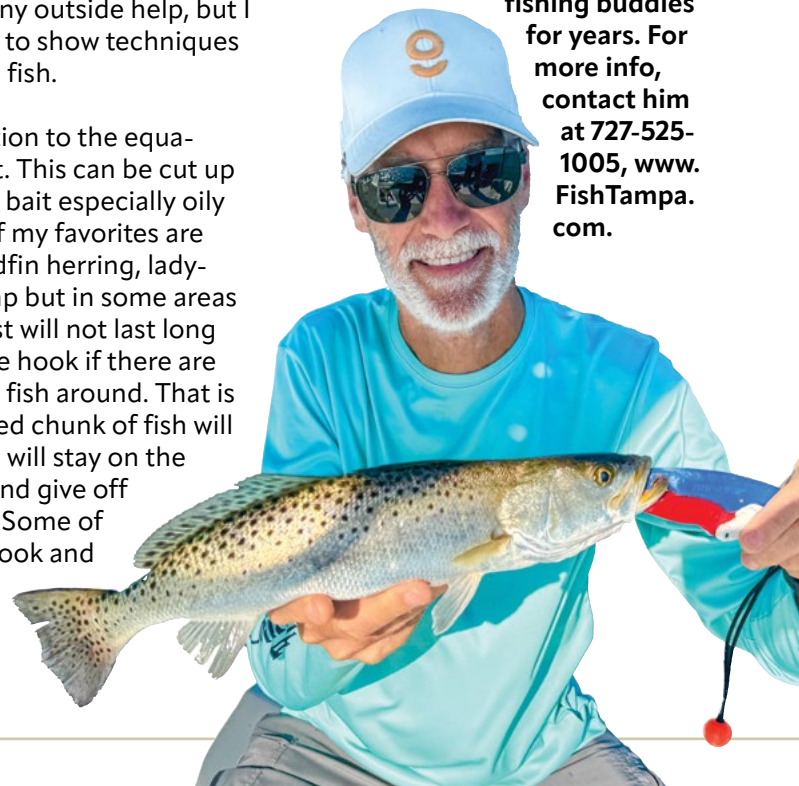
Another addition to the equation is cut bait. This can be cut up chunks of any bait especially oily ones. Some of my favorites are pinfish, threadfin herring, ladyfish and shrimp but in some areas the shrimp just will not last long enough on the hook if there are too many bait fish around. That is why a nice sized chunk of fish will work better. It will stay on the hook longer and give off a lot of scent. Some of your larger snook and redfish will be caught on cut bait



especially as the water temperature rises during the summer months. This is because they do not have to exert energy to chase a bait down and the scent draws them in.

Go out and don't be afraid to mix it up; you might be surprised with the success you have! 🎣

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; you'll feel like you have been fishing buddies for years. For more info, contact him at 727-525-1005, www.FishTampa.com.



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WELLS COVE: A PREMIER BOATING COMMUNITY ON THE ST. JOHNS RIVER

For those who measure quality of life by time on the water, Wells Cove offers a rare and thoughtfully designed opportunity. This exclusive waterfront enclave is a premier boating community located along the banks of the St. Johns River, where riverfront living, privacy, and convenience come together in a way seldom found in today's market.

Wells Cove is intentionally intimate, with only seven homesites planned within a gated setting. Rather than a large-scale subdivision, the community was designed for those who value space, serenity, and a true connection to the water. Each residence includes its own private boat slip, allowing homeowners to move seamlessly from home to boat without the complications of shared marinas or off-site storage.

At the heart of Wells Cove is an impressive 845-foot private dock, thoughtfully designed to accommodate serious boaters. Owners can drive their golf carts directly to their boats, making everything from early morning fishing trips to sunset cruises effortless. This level of convenience reflects the careful planning that went into creating a community specifically for those who live an active boating lifestyle.

Situated on a prime stretch of river, Wells Cove enjoys sweeping views of the iconic Dames Point Bridge. By day, the bridge provides a striking architectural backdrop; by night, it becomes a beautifully illuminated landmark that enhances the riverfront setting. These views add a strong sense of place and visual distinction to the community.

One of Wells Cove's most compelling features is its exceptional access to open water. From the dock, it is ap-

proximately a 15-minute high-speed run to the Atlantic Ocean and the jetties. This makes Wells Cove especially attractive to both freshwater and saltwater fishing enthusiasts, as well as boaters who want quick access to offshore waters while still enjoying the calm and protection of riverfront living.



Beyond its boating advantages, Wells Cove offers a location that balances privacy with everyday convenience. The community is just minutes from Jacksonville's beaches, providing easy access to coastal recreation and dining. Major destinations such as the St. Johns Town Center, River City Marketplace, and Jacksonville International Airport are all nearby, making travel, shopping, and entertainment simple and efficient.

Homes at Wells Cove reflect the community's upscale character, with quality construction and coastal-inspired design. Select residences offer buyers the opportunity to personalize finishes and design details, allowing each home to reflect individual taste. Immediate occupancy is available, enabling new owners to begin enjoying the waterfront lifestyle without delay.

Pricing at Wells Cove ranges from \$899,000 to \$1,900,000, representing a compelling value for a gated, private-slip boating community of this caliber. With only seven homes in total, availability is limited, reinforcing the community's exclusive nature and long-term appeal.

Wells Cove is more than a place to live — it is a destination for those who appreciate life on the water. From private slips and rapid ocean access to iconic river views and thoughtful design, this premier boating community offers a lifestyle defined by ease, exclusivity, and enduring value. ■



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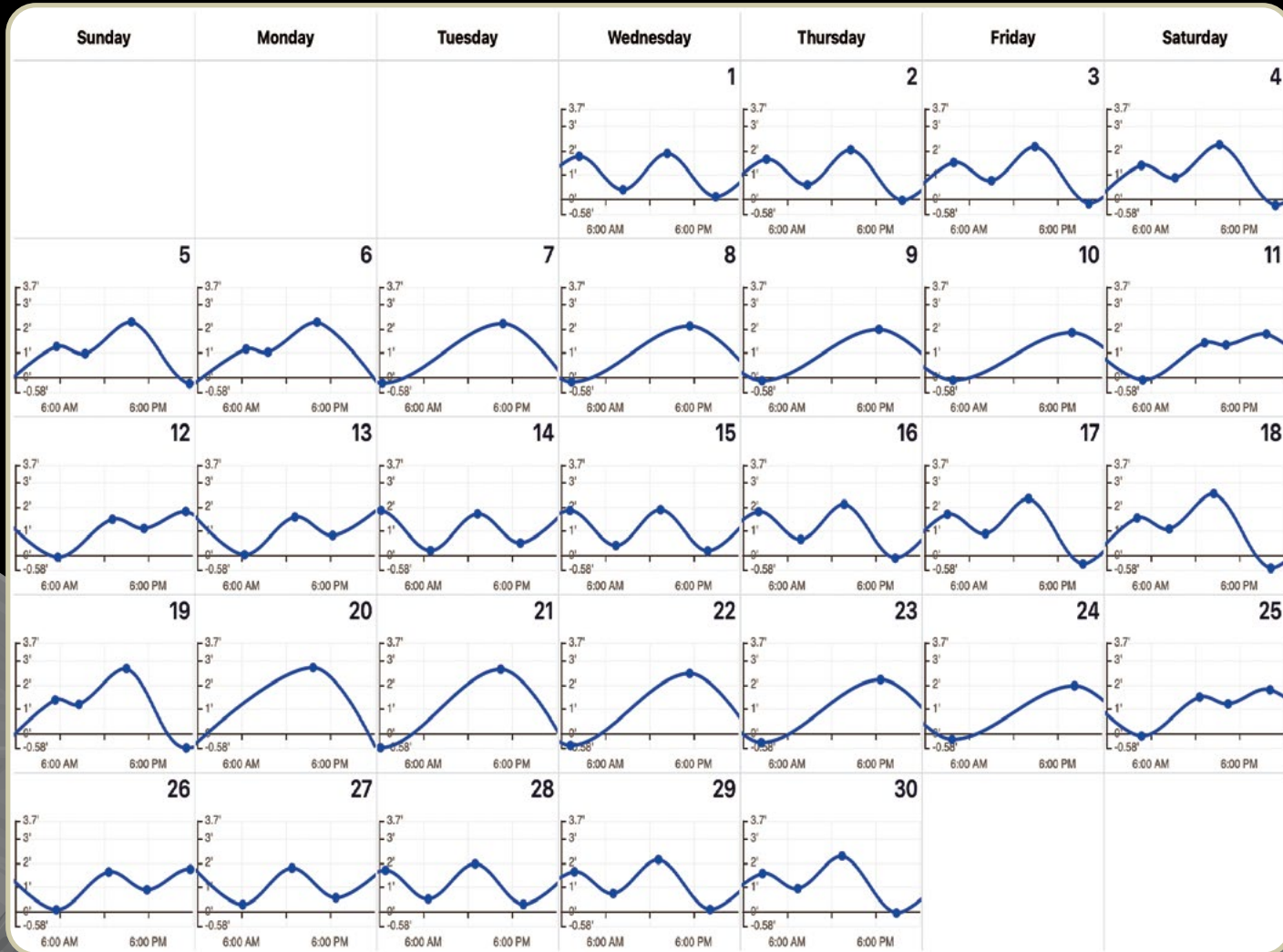
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

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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A REEL FUTURE

On a Reel Mission with the Jose Wejebe Foundation

by Misty Wells

This summer marks year three of a "Reel Mission" for A Reel Future and the Jose Wejebe Foundation, where we are taking numerous groups of kids in foster care on the "Trip of a Lifetime" in the Florida Keys.



A few years ago at ICast in Orlando I had the pleasure of meeting Krissy Wejebe, the daughter of Jose Wejebe from "The Spanish Fly",

and immediately we knew we met for a reason. Before I jump in, I realized that there may be some of you that don't know who Jose Wejebe is, allow me to introduce you. Jose Wejebe was an legendary angler, host of one of the most popular saltwater fishing television shows in the World and a conservationist. Through his show and his adventures, Jose shared his passion for fishing and a lifestyle that touched and inspired anglers around the world. At the same time, Jose encouraged conservation, leading his viewers by example to take better care of the environment they enjoy so much.



Being born in Cuba, Jose Wejebe never forgot his humble beginnings or those others that helped him find success. As a first-generation Cuban-American, his story is characterized by a tumultuous upbringing and a passion for the ocean. Throughout his life and career, Jose unselfishly donated his time, money and equipment to support countless charities including the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, The Marc House, Wounded Warriors, Big Brothers and Big Sisters and now A Reel Future as well.

On April 6, 2012 Jose's life was cut short by a tragic plane crash and as the World seemed to stand still on that day, a true legend was lost. Through true grit, compassion and dedicated to support future anglers and help her fathers dreams stay alive Krissy Wejebe and team founded the Jose Wejebe Foundation.

In 2014, I realized entire generations of children are growing up in foster care, and at the time it was something I did not know much about. Did you know at any given time in the United States there are over 450,000 children in foster care right now as you read this article? I meet entire families of siblings that are all growing up in foster care together and most likely will not get adopted. With hundreds of thousands of children not being exposed to nature, our waterways, parks, and beaches how are they going to develop a love for the outdoors and the desire for conservation?

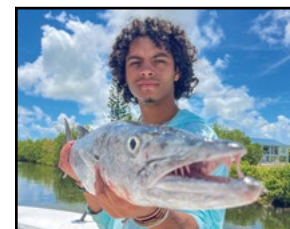
So, in 2014 I decided to do something about it and started "A Reel Future" a non-profit designed to take children in foster care fishing



and teach them about nature and conservation. When Krissy and I started talking we realized we both were traveling a similar path and needed to join forces.

So, you may ask why is fishing so important, why not something else? Taking kids fishing was important to Jose Wejebe because he believed it could "change lives" by providing healing, building character, and ensuring the future of conservation. Having been mentored himself by legendary anglers, he viewed time on the water as a vital way to shape the next generation of "watermen and women".

Through "A Reel Future" I have taken over 4,000 Kids fishing, and I have never been with 1 child that did not laugh or had the best time of their lives catching their first fish. Fishing is such an even playing ground for anyone because they don't have to be the fastest, strongest, smartest, or even have any experience to



land a catch. I would say 70% of the children I take fishing have never been on a boat, caught a fish or learned anything about conservation. It is amazing the self-confidence that these children get by learning to fish; they even start to begin to help the other children once they get the hang of it. Now don't get me wrong, at the beginning of a trip some of the kids didn't even want to be there, but it was fishing or chores, so they opted to fish. However, once we leave the dock and they get the feeling of being on the water, seeing dolphins and then catching fish "they are hooked".

Three years ago, Krissy and I teamed up and put together our summer program where we are bringing small groups of foster kids down to the Keys for several days. The kids that we are choosing are older kids that are going to "age-out" soon and not even have group foster care to count on anymore. To "age out" means that you never got adopted and at 18 years old you are no longer in the system and it's time to enter the real world alone. The reason we are bringing these kids down to the Keys is to give them a glimpse of what they could have to look forward to if they can further their education, stay out of jail and stay on track. Krissy and I want them to see another side of life, we want them to have a desire to strive for a better life for themselves, family or not.

For this summer program the Jose Wejebe Foundation does most of the heavy lifting, their small team works year round to raise money for this project and many others. They provide the accommodations, fishing guides, a day at the Dolphin Research Center, swag and a memorable dinner at the Square Grouper where the kids can order any thing off the menu. For "A Reel Future" I work to put the groups and the schedule together, and for the month of June I become the house Mom, fishing guide, cleaning crew and chef for all the kids. It is life changing for these kids as they get to be on a real fishing vacation in a place they have only ever heard and dreamed of. Krissy and I know that it changes their lives because it changes our lives every summer, these kids feel empowered.

This June I am preparing to head down to the Keys again for a month to serve some of the most deserving kids I have ever met. Getting ready for my month long trip I flash back on some of great moments of the past years where kids have landed their first Tarpon, or reeled in 45 pound Am-

berjack from 200 feet and caught countless Grouper and Snapper. The days in the Keys with these kids just fly by and before you know it we are having our last dinner at the house laughing about all the catches and misses of the last few days. Honestly as we enter the month of May I feel like a kid looking forward to summer and all the fun I will have! Krissy and I are counting down the days.

What can you do to help? Glad you asked. The Jose Wejebe Foundation is always accepting donations and hosting events that directly support this program and many other life changing programs under their umbrella. I challenge you to sit back and look around for the next generations out on the water what do you see? Frankly, I do not see very many adults taking their kids or many other kids fishing, or spending time in the outdoors. What I mostly see is the tops of kids' heads as they all look down at their Tablets, Phones, and portable Games. Most of the kids nowadays are involved in posting 300 selfies daily on their Instagram, Snapchat and Tik Tok, but what are they posting? What can we do in 2026 to make some changes in kids' lives and get them outside and engaged in Reel Life?

Our program is a life changing program that helps to shape the future of these kids that have been forgotten and left behind. The Jose Wejebe Foundation not only supports A Reel Future but helps so many more in need such as Veterans, cancer survivors and families in need. I agree with Jose when it comes to fishing, it does heal many wounds and gives you a more positive and brighter outlook. You have to be honest, have you seen many unhappy people on a boat or fishing, I did not think so. Take this article and share it with your friends, find a way to get involved or donate in a meaningful way. Krissy and I are on a mission, combined we have taken over 4,000 kids out on the water and we are not stopping anytime soon. Come join the "Reel Life", where the "Spirit of the Spanish Fly" lives in all of us.



To learn more about our organizations and be part of the change go to www.areelfuture.com and the www.josewejebe-foundation.org.

Misty Wells Producer & Host of Award Winning "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to 220 million on Discovery & Discovery GO & Plus & 17 other networks. Bass Pro-Outdoor Pro & Outdoor & Outdoor, Travel Writer. Founder of "A Reel Future" non-profit devoted to teaching the passion of fishing & conservation to foster children, over 4,000 children & counting. Watch at mistywells.com.

HOW TO GET YOUR KIDS HOOKED!

BY CAPTAIN CLAY EAVENSON



I often get clients on the boat who tell me that they just can't get their kids "into fishing". They say that they've tried to get them interested, but they just can't figure out how to make their kids love it. I'm a big believer in not forcing sports on kids, if they don't enjoy it, they don't enjoy it. Even though I played professional baseball for a few years, my son doesn't love baseball. He plays it because it's better than sitting at the house, but he doesn't have a passion for it and I don't force him to play it. He loves fishing and football. Now, maybe I passed on the fishing bug, but I sure didn't pass on his love of football.



Even though I don't think you should force a hobby or a sport on your kids, I do think there's a few ways to encourage them to like fishing and even help them become better at it once they show an interest.

Make it easy for them to succeed early on.

Some of my clients who have tried to get their kids into fishing tell me about how they took their kids Snook fishing, or Redfish fishing, or even trolling offshore. Even though you can have great days doing those types of fishing, you're very likely to have a slow day fishing for such sport fish. There's no better way to turn your kids off from fishing than

to take them to fish for a hard to target species. If you also throw in inclement weather you may have just insured that they pick up bowling instead.

The lowly Bluegill.

The Bluegill doesn't get much recognition as a sportfish, but I can just about guarantee that it is responsible for starting the addiction to fishing that most avid fisherman have. The lowly Bluegill has this ability because it is easily accessible, fairly easy to catch and puts up a good fight on a Superman rod and reel from Wal-Mart. If you want to give your kids that nudge they need to really get into

fishing, take them to a local pond with a tube of crickets and a little rod and reel setup and you could very well hook a kid for life.

You can find Bluegill almost everywhere from the north to the south. Almost anywhere you go, you can find a pond that has them in it and they will eat anything from bread to red wigglers. Take a small push button rod and reel with some easy-to-come-by bait and just sit on the bank and bait your child's hook. If they have a single fishing bone in their body, they are bound to get hooked. If they don't enjoy that, start looking into piano lessons.

Pick easy to use tackle.





There's no need to start your kid out with an expensive spinning or bait casting rod and reel, unless you enjoy frustrating your kid. If that's the case, seek mental help. Just head over to a local tackle shop and pick up one of those push button combos that come in the heat-shrunk packages and cost about \$15. All you'll have to teach them is to hold the button down until they make their cast. The key to all of this is to let them succeed. If you make things easy early on, they will want to learn more advanced things.

Teaching the skills.

It's not possible for most people to take a boat out every day so that their child can practice casting. The good news is that you don't have to. My kids wanted to be better at casting and they often would express this frustration while Bluegill fishing so, I made casting a game for them. I would set a bucket out in our dead end street and tie a hookless soft plastic bait to their poles and let them practice casting into the bucket from different angles and distances. I would give them points for getting close and more points for getting the bait to land in the bucket. They would compete like this several times a week and they loved it. Early on, the trees in the front yard would begin looking like Christmas trees as lures dangled from them like ornaments, but after a while they became quite proficient at casting. These days, my 8 year old son Cade acts as my first mate on many of my charters, often casting for my clients who are inexperienced.

Graduating from Bluegill and Superman poles.

My son and daughter still love catching Bluegill, don't get me wrong, but they've both moved up the food chain. Because they fell in love with fishing early on, they have a hunger for more challenging game. My oldest daughter, Claire, is now 7 years old and she has caught Redfish, Snook, Trout, Cobia, Sharks and much more. My son has caught all of those and Tarpon to boot. He's 8 years old and this year he caught his 14th Tarpon, which is his biggest to date, a 150lb beast. All of these fish take some serious skill to cast to, hook and land, but none of it would have been possible if I hadn't made fishing easy for them early on.



If you want your kids to catch the fishing bug, make it easy and enjoyable. Pick targets they can readily catch and when they learn to love our sport, help them improve with simple games they can enjoy. 🎣



SPRING AWAKENING

Spotted Seatrout in Florida's Big Bend

by Terri B. Huffmaster

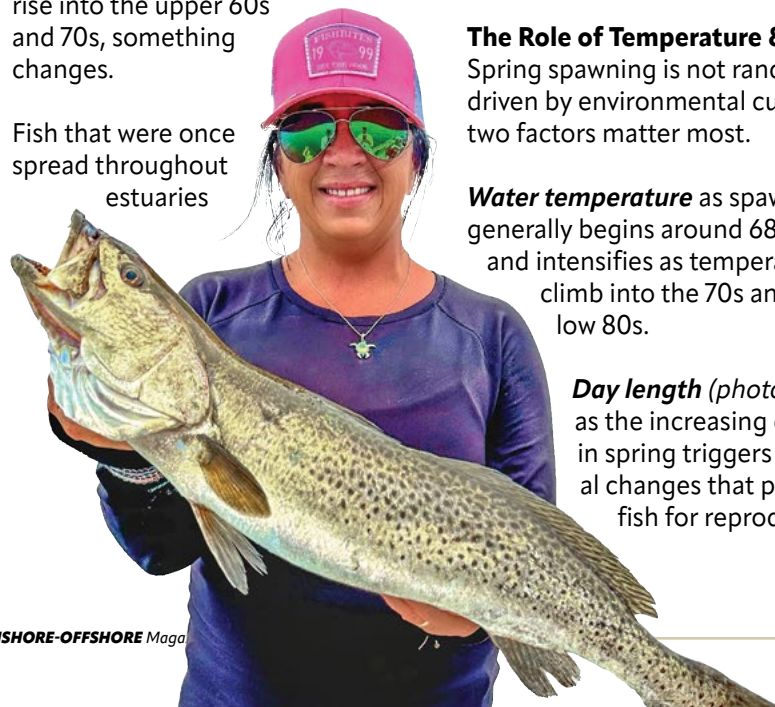
Along Florida's Big Bend coastline where sprawling seagrass meadows meet shallow, tannin-stained rivers spring doesn't just signal warmer days. It marks the beginning of one of the most important biological events in the Gulf: the spawning season of the Spotted Seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*), known to anglers simply as "specks."

From March into early summer, these fish undergo a dramatic behavioral shift. What was once a scattered, winter pattern turns into a focused, instinct-driven cycle of feeding, staging, and reproduction one that defines both the fishery and the ecosystem of this unique stretch of Florida.

A Seasonal Shift in Behavior

As winter fades, Spotted Seatrout begin transitioning from deeper, protected waters back onto the expansive grass flats that define the Big Bend. During the colder months, trout tend to hold in rivers, creeks, and deeper holes, conserving energy. But as water temperatures rise into the upper 60s and 70s, something changes.

Fish that were once spread throughout estuaries



begin to concentrate in higher-salinity areas closer to the Gulf, especially along outer grass flats, creek mouths, and channels.

In the Big Bend, this movement is especially pronounced due to the region's geography. With miles of shallow flats and minimal development, trout can roam freely, staging in ideal spawning habitat. These areas typically feature dense seagrass beds, moderate tidal flow, clean, well-oxygenated water and nearby deeper channels for staging. Unlike migratory offshore species, spotted seatrout are largely homebodies. Most remain within a relatively small range, often spending their entire lives within a single estuary system.

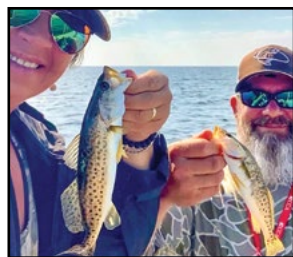
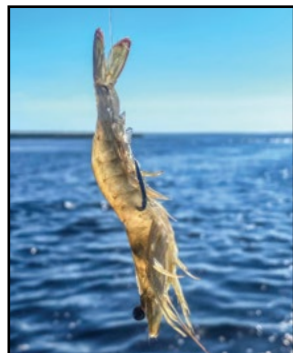
The Role of Temperature & Light

Spring spawning is not random—it's driven by environmental cues and two factors matter most.

Water temperature as spawning generally begins around 68–70°F and intensifies as temperatures climb into the 70s and the low 80s.

Day length (photoperiod) as the increasing daylight in spring triggers hormonal changes that prepare fish for reproduction.

In the Big Bend, these conditions often align earlier than in other parts of the Gulf due to shallow water warming quickly. By late March or April, the first spawning activity is already underway.



Nightfall & the Sound of Spawning

One of the most fascinating—and often overlooked—aspects of spotted seatrout spawning is that it happens almost entirely at night.

As the sun sets over the grass flats, male trout begin producing a distinct drumming or croaking sound, created by specialized muscles vibrating

against their swim bladder. This sound serves one purpose: attracting females ready to spawn.



In peak conditions, these "drumming aggregations" can involve hundreds—even thousands—of fish gathered in one area.

Spawning typically unfolds like this, males begin drumming shortly before sunset. Fish gather in loose schools over grass flats or near

channels. As darkness falls, activity intensifies. Fish engage in side-to-side contact and surface activity, sometimes even splashing or jumping. Eggs and sperm are released into the water column. This process usually lasts only a few hours, often ending before midnight.

Egg Production: A Numbers Game

Spotted Seatrout rely on sheer numbers to ensure survival of their offspring. A single female can release tens of thousands to over a million eggs in one spawning event, and may spawn multiple times throughout the season. A very important reason to release all females 20 inches or more due to the fact, they are the big carriers to keep our trout population afloat. Please be mindful of that. Across an entire spring and summer season, a mature female can produce millions of eggs! Unlike species that guard their nests, spotted seatrout are pelagic spawners. Eggs are released freely into the water. Fertilization occurs externally and no parental care is provided. The eggs themselves are tiny—less than 1 millimeter—and their survival depends heavily on environmental conditions.

In the Big Bend, salinity plays a crucial role in egg survival. At higher salinity levels, eggs remain buoyant and drift in the water column. At lower salinity, they sink toward the bottom. Optimal survival occurs around moderate salinity levels, typical of coastal estuaries where fresh-water & saltwater mix.

This is why spawning sites are often located near river mouths, along outer grass flats and in shallow bays connected to deeper channels. These environments provide the perfect balance of salinity, temperature, and protection.

From Egg to Juvenile: A Race for Survival

Once fertilized, spotted seatrout eggs develop quickly—hatching in as little as 18 hours. The newly hatched larvae are incredibly small and vulnerable. They drift with currents and seek refuge in seagrass beds, shell bottom areas and protected estuarine zones. Within a few weeks, these larvae begin forming small schools, feeding on tiny plankton and growing rapidly. By the time they reach a few inches in length, they resemble miniature versions of adult trout and begin occupying the same habitats.

Spring Feeding & Aggression

Spawning doesn't mean trout stop feeding—quite the opposite. Spring is a period of intense feeding activity, as trout need energy for reproduction. They become aggressive am-

bush predators, targeting shrimp, small baitfish like mullet and pinfish, crabs and other crustaceans. On the Big Bend flats, this often translates to explosive topwater strikes at first light and heavy feeding during moving tides. Adult trout typically move with incoming tides, pushing onto shallow flats to feed, then sliding back into deeper pockets as water levels drop.

Florida's Big Bend region offers one of the most productive spotted seatrout fisheries in the country and spring is the reason why. The combination of vast, unbroken seagrass habitat, low fishing pressure in many areas, ideal spawning conditions and strong recruitment of young fish creates a near-perfect environment for trout populations to thrive.

Unlike heavily developed coastlines, the Big Bend remains largely natural. This allows spawning cycles to occur with minimal disruption, ensuring consistent year classes and healthy fish populations.

While spotted seatrout are prolific spawners, their success is not guaranteed. Their reproductive cycle depends on a narrow window of environmental conditions like stable water temperatures, proper salinity levels and healthy seagrass ecosystems. Any disruption whether from pollution, habitat loss, or extreme weather can impact spawning success and future populations.

Recent regulations across Florida, including the Big Bend, reflect growing awareness of these pressures and aim to

protect spawning fish and ensure sustainability for future generations to come.

Conclusion: The Rhythm of Spring

In the Big Bend, spring is more than just a season it's a cycle of renewal. As water warms and daylight stretches longer, spotted seatrout gather, drum, and spawn beneath the surface, continuing a process that has shaped these waters for centuries. For anglers and conservationists alike, understanding this cycle adds a deeper appreciation for the fishery. Every strike on a topwater lure, every school seen over a grass flat, is part of a much larger story one that begins each spring with the quiet rhythm of drumming trout beneath the Gulf's surface.

As always, no matter where you fish, make sure that you know your rules and regulations for each region of the state. Trout are protected differently and every region. 🎣

- Terri B. Huffmaster





The month of May turns Tampa Bay into a big fish bowl! Snook and Redfish roam along the edges of the flats, Mangrove Snapper congregate under the bridges, Mackerel on edges of shipping channel and some Cobia mixed in for fun. Tarpon will also start staging under the Skyway Bridge and inside many of the canals with incoming tides.

Great action for early bird fisherman can be had using topwater plugs on the edges of mangroves and grass flats. Add some "Pro-Cure Super Gel" in Shrimp scent for inshore saltwater to increase the bite. Lastly, Black Drum action is at its peak under bridges using fresh live blue crabs or live large shrimp. Second choice would be fresh dead blue crabs.

ABOUT THE CAPTAIN

Captain Sergio Atanes has been fishing the waters of Tampa Bay since the age of five years old. He has seen all the changes over the last 50-years and loves to share his knowledge and experience with anyone interested in fishing especially kids which are the future anglers and captains. His goal is to educate and share the experience of fishing opportunities all over the Tampa Bay area.

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THE GRAND SLAM MONTH

Snook, Redfish & Tarpon in May

by Captain Justin Searcy

May is the grand slam month on Florida's Gulf Coast. If you know where to look, it's the best inshore fishing of the entire year.

May mornings are when the Gulf lays down like glass, the bait is right, and by mid-morning you've got a Redfish, a Snook and a Tarpon.

THE REDS: FIND THE STRUCTURE, FIND THE FISH

Redfish don't ask for much this time of year, some moving water, cover, and a bait that lands close enough to matter.

Along the gulf coast, large schools of Redfish have been showing along mangrove lines, points, and spoil islands with slot-sized fish moving in schools of 15 to 30. When you find one of those schools on a shallow flat in the early morning light, do yourself a favor, kill the motor, get on the push pole if you have one, and take your time. One bad cast and they're gone. One good one and it's a moment you'll remember.



High tide is your friend with reds in May. Push into the mangroves, work the roots, and let a tail-hooked whitebait or cut pin do the work. On lower incoming tides, slide back to potholes along the outside edges of the flat.

SNOOK: CATCH-AND-RELEASE, AND WORTH EVERY CAST

Quick reminder Snook season is closed on the Gulf Coast from May 1st through August 31st, so everything here is catch-and-release. That doesn't make it any less worth doing.

In fact, this is some of the most exciting Snook fishing of the year. Specially along the Florida beaches sight casting to giants in crystal clear water.

Good numbers of fish are holding in typical spring areas, with consistent action during higher stages of the tide. Most fish are running in that 20–26 inch range, with larger ones showing for anglers willing to stay patient.

They're tight to the mangroves right now, pushing deep into the root systems. One of the most effective approaches has been chumming a few live whitebaits to pull them out. It takes patience and when it happens, it happens fast. You'll toss a few freebies, make your presentation, and when a big



snook finally commits and lights up that line of yours, it's over in a hurry.

As the month progresses, more fish will slide toward the passes and beaches ahead of the summer spawn. That early morning beach bite on light tackle, fish staged along the shoreline is hard to beat.

Use appropriate gear, fight them efficiently, and release them healthy. These are breeding fish heading into the spawn.

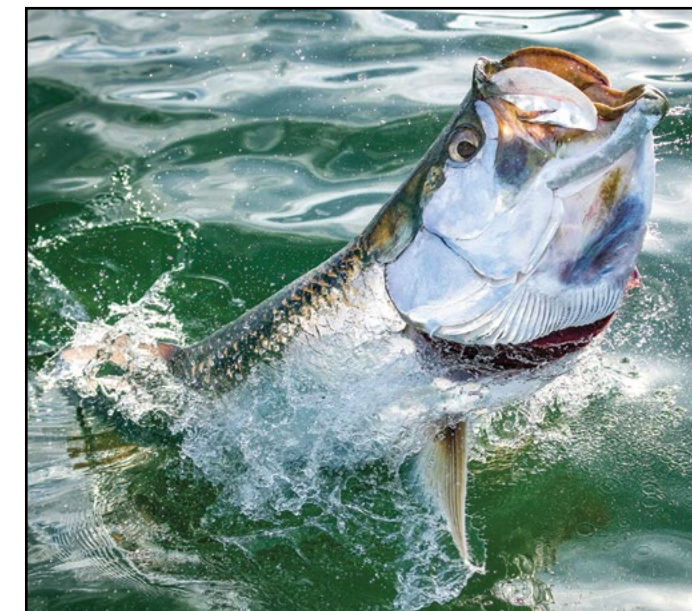
TARPON: THE SILVER KING ARRIVES

The Tarpon run starts to show in May, and the early fish are already right on schedule.

A gulf coast inshore slam Redfish, Snook, and Tarpon is very real this month.

You'll start seeing Tarpon along the beaches and in the shipping channels, with fish taking live crabs and thread-fins. Early season fish tend to be more resident than migratory, but they're big, aggressive, and not forgiving if you're underprepared.

The Sunshine Skyway Bridge always gets attention, and for good reason. But don't overlook the passes or the open beaches from Clearwater south. There are fish there, and they're catchable.



When you hook one, remember the rule: bow to the king. The moment that fish jumps, drop the rod tip and give the fish some slack.

THE SLAM STRATEGY

If you're looking to put all three together in a single day, May gives you that window.

Start before sunrise and spend a short window loading the livewell with greenbacks. From there, move to mangrove shorelines on an incoming tide for Redfish and Snook while they're shallow and feeding. As the tide falls and the flats start to empty out, transition toward the passes or the beach to look for Tarpon.

It's one of those times of year where every day looks a little different which is part of what makes it worth paying attention to.

The fish are there if you stay mobile, read the conditions, and move with the tide.

The fish are there. The window is open. May doesn't last long.

I'll be on the water through it watching how the patterns change week to week and how the fish move as the month unfolds. If you want to see it as it happens, follow along on Instagram [@capt_justin_searcy](#). Tight lines! 🎣



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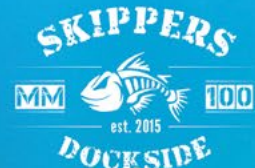
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SPANISH MACKEREL 101

by Captain Sergio Atanes

May signals the start of some of the best fishing Tampa Bay has to offer. From Double Branch in the north to Bishop Harbor in the south, anglers enjoy exceptional inshore opportunities throughout the region. As water temperatures rise, Snook begin migrating from creeks and rivers to the flats and passes in preparation for spawning around the first full moon of May.

Redfish and Trout that inhabit the flats year-round will also start feeding heavily on Greenback Sardines. This seasonal influx of bait fuels Spring fishing and typically lasts until the first cold front of Fall. Look for bait along the mangroves, as gamefish are rarely far behind.

Spanish Mackerel and Cobia also follow these bait schools inside the Skyway Bridge. Larger concentrations tend to hold near tripods, artificial reefs, and rocky bottom areas from 'Channel A' just inside the bridge north to the Howard Frankland Bridge. Spanish Mackerel, in particular, provide fastpaced action and consistent results, making them a favorite target for my clients. I often begin the day by locating a large school to get the bite started.



Once 30 to 40 fish are landed, we move on to the next opportunity.

My approach to Spanish Mackerel fishing is simple. Locate the bait, anchor, and establish a steady chum line to keep fish feeding behind the boat. Cut greenbacks work well, as does a five-pound block of frozen chum. Light-action tackle is ideal: a 7½-foot rod, a 2500-size spinning reel spooled with 10-pound braided line, a No. 1 XX-long shank hook and approximately 30 inches of 30-pound fluorocarbon leader. The long shank hook eliminates the need for wire leader and results in more strikes.

Hillsborough County maintains six artificial reefs that consistently produce Spanish Mackerel. GPS coordinates and additional information are available through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, which also provides a printed brochure upon request.

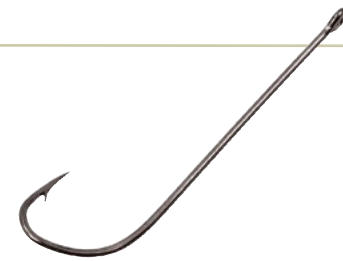
Spanish Mackerel are an excellent option for families fishing with children. While Redfish and Snook can be reward-



ing, they are often harder to locate and less aggressive. Mackerel offer nonstop action that keeps young anglers engaged. One recent trip with the Davis family resulted in more than 50 mackerel landed, with many more lost to cutoffs. For Adrian, who chose a fishing trip to celebrate his 13th birthday, it was an unforgettable day on the water—and a great reminder of the value of getting kids outdoors and away from electronic screens.

RECOMMENDED TACKLE

- 7½-foot medium-action rod
- 2500–3000 size spinning reel
- 10–15# braided line
- 1/0 XX-long shank hook
- 30# fluorocarbon leader - 30" minimum.



NOTE: Captain Sergio will host the 5th Annual Free Kids Fishing Clinic on June 6 at Picnic Island Park. The first 100 registered children will receive a rod and reel, a tackle box with gear, and hands-on instruction. The clinic is open to children ages 6–14. Registration is required. For details, email atanes@msn.com or call 813-973-7132.

Captain Sergio Atanes is the host of Fishing Adventures Florida and Captain Sergio Fishing Chronicles on YouTube, Waypoint TV, Carbon TV, Outdoor Action TV and Angling TV. For info call 813-973-7132 or email: atanes@msn.com.





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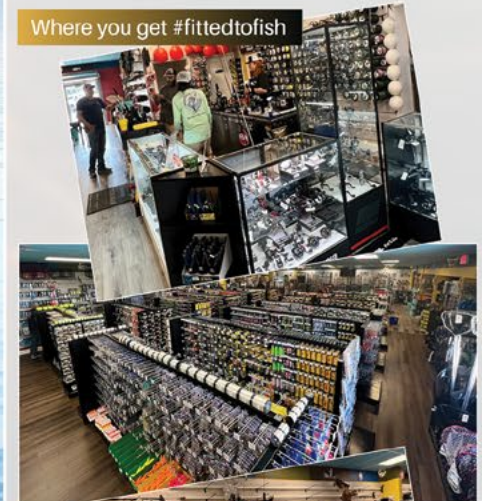
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