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## FISHY FLATULENCE

Those who know me best would certainly verify that I usually try to steer away from discussion of puerile subjects like flatulence, but recent news reports make it imperative for me to bring you up to speed on researcher's discovery of fish farts. Apparently a study performed by USF researchers in St. Pete identified several new noises, emanating from the depths, which they felt were best described as tuna toots.

These researchers (almost certainly funded by some sort of huge government grant) sent a robot glider out into the gulf to eavesdrop on the daily lives of our fishy friends. While they did not discover any terrorist threats or make any breakthroughs that would locate the undersea wonders of Atlantis, they did determine that there are a variety of fish species that pass gas producing underwater fart sounds.

I can picture it now. Researchers listening to the sound recordings jump from their chairs and shout, "EUREKA, I JUST HEARD A HERRING RIP ONE" while his or her associate breaks out the bubbly to toast their monumental discovery.

Is it possible that this is all just a cruel joke? Did they consider the possibility that it was all just a playful scuba diver with a waterproof case for his iphone who was playing with the Atomic Fart App?

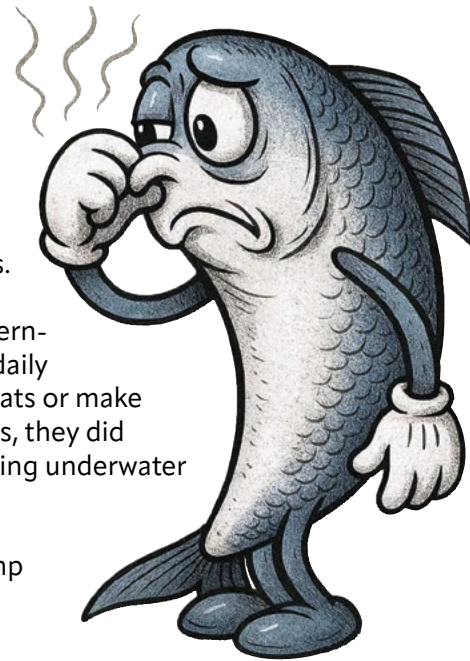
Don't get me wrong, I am a proponent of undersea research that can teach us how to better preserve our fishy resources, but I am not quite sure how fish farts play an integral role in this type of research. The gliders that collect this sort of information cost a lot of money. Some typical base prices of models that I could find on line start at \$120,000 to \$140,000 and go up from there. Researchers and labs don't come cheap either. All I'm saying is that perhaps all of this money could be better spent doing something like teaching wiener dogs to talk or balancing the Federal Budget?

Perhaps this discovery will lead to even more valuable research studies to determine the effect that fish farts are having on the Ozone layer. In recent years the US Government has given nearly 20 million dollars (I am not making this up) in Conservation Innovation Grants to 51 different projects studying the environmental impact of cow farts and belches, fish flatulence will surely be next. I have to wonder which fish are the most flatulent? Does it depend on their diet or does it vary by species. Does Mrs. Shark tell Mr. Shark, "you have got to stop eating those blowfish, they give you such terrible gas?" Did they find that young male fish were more likely to sneak up behind their friends and rip a big bubbler? Could they also hear nervous fish giggles after the toots?

A veteran sonar tech from submarine duty said that none of this came as a surprise to him. Apparently the size of humpback whales is not the only thing that is monumental about them. Thar she blows may have had more than one meaning to early whalers. It really only makes sense that fish too would have some gas to pass. I can't really see why this is such a big discovery, I realized, many years ago, that my dog farts and you never saw that in the news (till now).

Most of the information in this column is actually true or at least based on truth, which may be slightly embellished for my amusement. This is definitely another instance of when the truth is stranger than anything I could make up.

*Merle & Flip*



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**ON THE COVER:**

A proud angler with a beautiful juvenile Goliath Grouper caught and released on a recent trip with our very own Captain Sergio Atanes. Read more by flipping to page 30 of this issue!

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# ROCK PILES, REEFS & WRECKS, OH MY!

by Captain George Hastick

In the heat of summer in Tampa Bay, sometimes it is good to shift gears and get away from flats fishing where the water can get extremely hot and make fish slow to bite. The deeper water in 10-45 feet can be charged with a variety of fish that are willing to feed. This water will be cooler, the fish will be more apt to feed and be more aggressive.

Tampa Bay is loaded with natural and man-made structures, some intentional and some not. We have many artificial reefs that hold plenty of fish, but the gold mines are the rock piles and shipwrecks that you can find for yourself. Many areas where they have dredged channels have exposed rock bottoms and where they have dumped the dredged material can be a fish haven also.

There are also a lot of natural hard bottom areas in Tampa Bay that have great fishing. There are many shipwrecks from large to small that will hold a variety of fish. Different areas and different



structures will hold different types of fish that will change with the seasons. A rock pile in the summer might be loaded with mangrove snapper, but the same pile might get loaded with sheepshead in the winter, but we are talking about the heat of summer right now. So,

what type of fish can you expect to find during these hot months?

Let's talk about the artificial reefs of Tampa Bay like St. Petersburg Bay reef, Egmont Key reef and Port Manatee Reef to name a few. These reefs are made up of con-

crete bridge rubble, slabs culvert pipes and more, some even have sunken boats on them.

Since these artificial reefs can hold a variety of fish it is a good idea to bring a variety of bait like shrimp, scaled sardines, pinfish and cut bait, especially when you are first searching for your new spots to you. Sometimes one end of the reef will hold one type of fish, and the other end will hold different types of fish, hence the need for different baits. Now the same holds true for many of the rock piles and wrecks.



So, what type of fish can you expect to find in the middle of summer at these areas?

This is where the fun begins! You can find a wide variety like Mackerel, Mangrove Snapper, Seatrout, Grouper, Tarpon, Cobia, Black Seabass, Flounder, Key West Grunt, Pompano, Permit, Snook and more!

The real fun though, is finding your own little hot spots in the bay. One way is to buy one of those chips from various companies that have much of the bay mapped out.



Years ago, I really enjoyed going online or to the library to look at old charts and I bought chart #155F that would show various wrecks and hard bottom areas and try them out. With the new apps it is much faster and you can do it at home and mark a bunch of areas to try and then upload them into your bottom machine.

As you try them out you can name them accordingly if they produce fish or delete them if it is a dead zone, but before you delete them make sure you try the spots at a different time of the year because they could hold fish only at certain times or water temperatures.

So beat the heat, go explore the water and find your own set of fishing hot spots! 🎣

**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.Fish-Tampa.com](http://www.Fish-Tampa.com).**



## 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.



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. ■

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-



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# THE GREAT AMERICAN "BUG HUNT"

by Misty Wells

On July 4, 2026, the United States will mark its 250th birthday—a historic milestone known as the Semiquincentennial. Two and a half centuries after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the nation is coming together for the largest, most synchronized celebrations in its history. This landmark anniversary is more than just a massive weekend of fireworks, tall ships, and parades; it is a global moment of reflection on the American journey. I know this year Floridians and outdoor enthusiasts will be celebrating in numerous ways, this year me and my family will be celebrating by kicking it off scalloping. In some area's scalloping is already open and in most area's starting July 1st is the season kickoff.



Every summer, Florida's Gulf Coast transforms into an underwater treasure hunt. As clear, warm waters roll in, thousands of snorkelers grab their masks and fins for the annual bay scallop season. Unlike deep-sea fishing, scalloping requires no heavy gear or advanced skills—just a pair of keen eyes to spot the glowing blue eyes of scallops hiding in the lush seagrass beds. It is the ultimate family-friendly adventure, blending the thrill of outdoor exploration with a fresh, delicious seafood

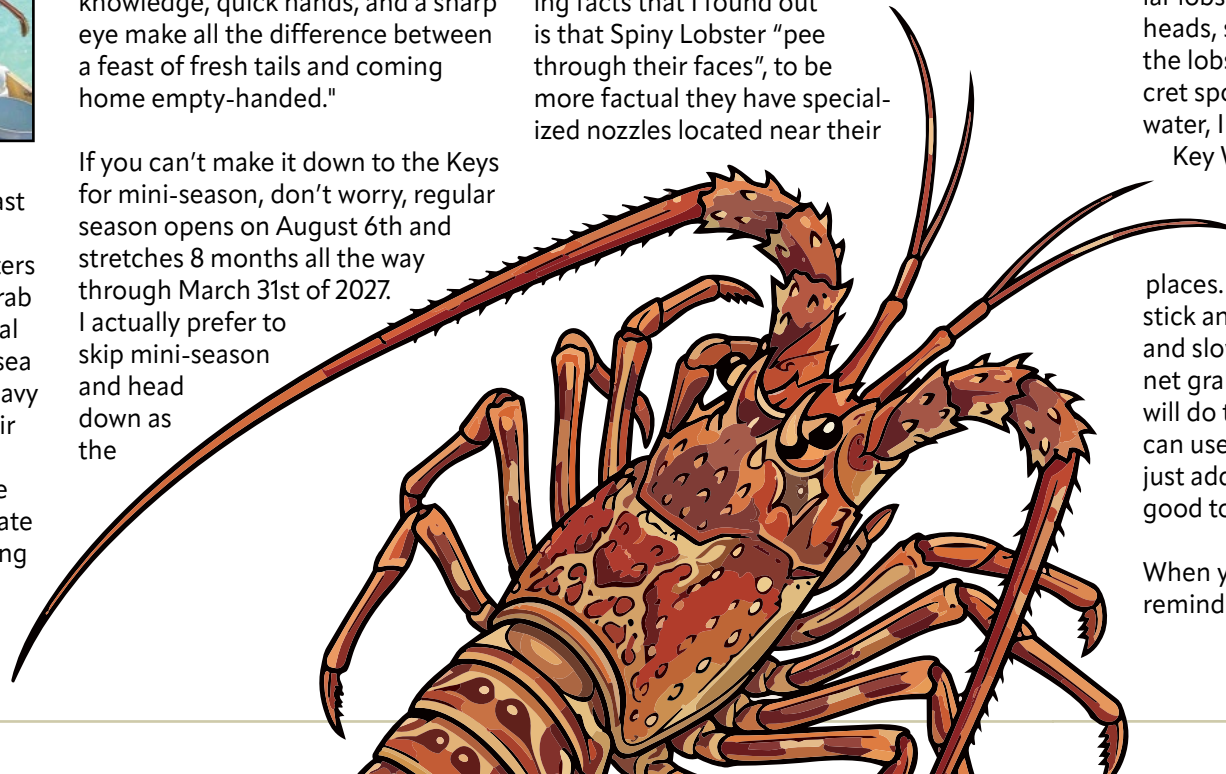
harvest at the end of the day. From the pristine shores of Steinhatchee down to the spring-fed waters of Crystal River, this seasonal tradition is Florida's favorite way to beat the summer heat.

The great news is July is also the start of Spiny Lobster season, Florida's mini-season will be open July 29th and July 30th. If you are foodie and an outdoor enthusiast like me you are in for a real treat. Florida's mini-season "Is the most chaotic, adrenaline-fueled 48 hours on the Florida water". Every July, thousands of divers, free-divers, and weekend warriors descend upon the Florida Keys with one singular mission: the Spiny Lobster Sport Season. Better known as 'Mini Season,' this two-day sprint gives recreational harvesters a head start on the water before the commercial traps drop. It's a high-stakes treasure hunt where local knowledge, quick hands, and a sharp eye make all the difference between a feast of fresh tails and coming home empty-handed."

If you can't make it down to the Keys for mini-season, don't worry, regular season opens on August 6th and stretches 8 months all the way through March 31st of 2027. I actually prefer to skip mini-season and head down as the

summer crowds begin to thin out. I feel like the true local tradition begins with the opening of the regular season in the Florida Keys. From Key Largo down to the reefs of Key West, snorkelers and divers slip into the crystal-clear, late-summer waters to search the coral ledges, rock holes, and sponge flats for the telltale antennae of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster. Unlike other regions, harvesting "bugs" in the Keys comes with strict conservation rules, unique bag limits, and a deep respect for the marine sanctuary ecosystem. It is a seasonal rhythm that defines life in the islands, where a rewarding day on the water translates directly to a fresh lobster dinner on the dock at sunset.

When it comes to lobster, I did not realize what a complex and interesting creature the Spiny Lobster was, honestly, I just thought about them as dinner. One of the most interesting facts that I found out is that Spiny Lobster "pee through their faces", to be more factual they have specialized nozzles located near their



eyes that excrete urine. Lobster urine contains pheromones, which lobsters use to communicate with each other during both fighting and mating rituals. Lobsters use this "pee-communication" to establish dominance during fights and to attract mates, particularly during mating rituals when the female need to signal her receptiveness.



at least three inches, this indicates the lobster is roughly two years old and has reached maturity.

Regardless of whether you are a beginner or expert, one of the most important things is location and knowing how to find the sometimes-elusive bugs. One of the important things about Florida Spiny Lobster is they are nocturnal so that does make them easier to catch during the day. Popular lobster hangouts are ledges, patch reefs, holes, big coral heads, sunken boats and just about any type of structure the lobster can hide. A lot of seasoned "pros" have their secret spots and many of these gems can be found in shallow water, I have limited out of lobster in 3 feet of water in the

Key West. A tell-tale sign to look for is their antennae's sticking out, like I said they use these extremely sensitive appendages to detect danger and if touched they will then start to go deeper into their hiding places. Once you locate a set of antennae, take your tickle stick and place it behind the lobster to gently urge them out and slowly walk them into your net. Once they are in your net grab the excess material to quickly close the net or they will do the "tail dance" and be gone. The great news is you can use the same equipment from scalloping to lobstering, just add a Tickle Stick, Gloves, and a Lobster bag and you're good to go.

When you are searching for the Spiny Lobster an important reminder is to have your measurement gauge attached to

Spiny Lobster are nocturnal and emerge from their hiding spots during the night to forage on crabs, clams, and other invertebrates. They also have two large antennae that are used for fighting and defense, and the smaller ones are mainly sensory organs that can detect chemicals and movement in the water. That explains a lot because every time I try to swim up to one, they know that I am there well before I even get close. As a Spiny Lobster grows, they molt and lose its hard protective exoskeleton.

To harvest a Spiny Lobster they must have a carapace length of

your tickle stick for lobster, remember they must be measured in the water. The lobster's carapace must be larger than 3 inches, this means the lobster is at least 2 or 3 years old and has reproduced at least one season. To measure the lobster, place the end of your gauge between the horns and the other at the end of the carapace, if it is under 3 inches release and keep looking. Make sure you have a dive flag, put it UP when diving and take it DOWN when underway. Divers must stay within 300 feet of their dive flag and 100 feet if you are diving in a channel, however I don't recommend swimming in channels. Be careful out there, even when you have your "Diver Down" flag. It is best to have someone stay on board the boat to keep a watch and ward off boaters that may get too close. There have been some serious incidents in past years and injuries caused by careless boaters, so don't trust that other boaters know practical boater safety.



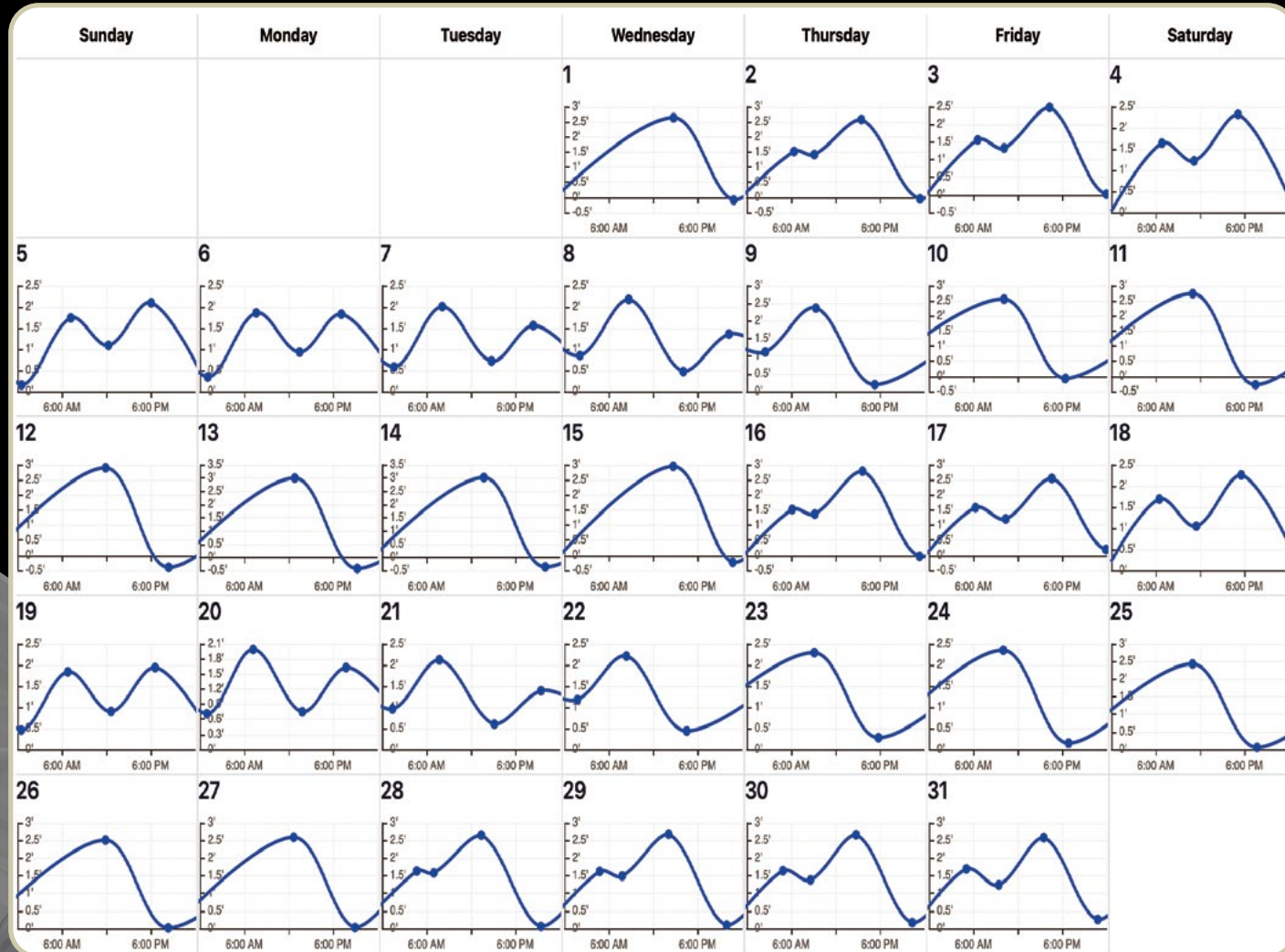
Know your limits as each lobster hunter only gets (6) lobster per day. Please do not 'double-trip' during season and be sure to have your fishing license and your Lobster Stamp, so you don't get a fine or ticket. Go to [www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com) and you can get setup online quickly.

Lobster and scalloping are a lot of fun and can be great memories with your family and friends, but only if you come home safely. If you are looking to make it easy book a local charter guide, they have

the lobster and scallop locations dialed in and you don't have to worry about towing or launching a boat.

Be sure to check your safety equipment on your boat before you go, keep a look-out on the vessel while swimmers are in the water and make sure the person in operation of the vessel is the designated driver for the day. I hope to see you out on the water and remember Florida is the best place to "Take it Outside" and "Celebrate America's 250th Birthday" especially this summer. Happy Birthday America! 🇺🇸

**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](http://mistywells.com).**



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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
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# FATHER'S DAY IN ALASKA

BY BRAD KENYON



From the moment we arrived at the airport, there was a sense of excitement about the journey ahead. Boarding our Alaska Airlines 737, we settled into our seats and imagined the glaciers, wildlife, and breathtaking scenery waiting for us.

I began by meeting up with my family and the Bartlett family in Anchorage to overnight and rest up for the drive to Seward. We reserved the boat "Legend" of Saltwater Safari Charters and a room in the Safari Lodge. This was the start of a fantastic Father's Day. Two fathers and their daughters, sons and grandkids. What could be better? The drive from Anchorage to Seward is remarkably scenic, with many look out points and stops of interest are along the way.

We stopped at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center and saw a full array of Alaska Wildlife. The grandkids really loved this spot. They had every imaginable native Alaskan animal. The bears were really impressive and on the way there, my grandson spotted a Dall Sheep high up in the mountains. We stopped and watched as a mother and calf navigated the steep, rocky terrain effortlessly.

The family stayed in a motorhome we rented and the wife and myself took a room in the Safari Lodge. After a good night's sleep, we were ready to board the Legend. The Legend is a sistership to the Legacy. Both boats are fine and nicely equipped 53 footers. These vessels are USCG inspected long range fishing machines.

Captain Bob Candopoulos met us in the morning and seemed to have fun joking with my grandkids. He was impressed that both Tallulah and Blu had experienced the offshore and did not get seasick. After a safety briefing, tackle rundown and additional housekeeping, the lines were cast and we were off.

Leaving Seward, the water molds to the mountains. In the inlet, the Kenai, the water was as glassy as it gets. In this area you commonly see Seals, Sea Lions, Otters and Whales. My hopes for a calm trip were diminished as we neared the pass. A moderate chop appeared with some squalls but the boats were comfortable and handled it well.

Today, we were in search of big Halibut. This is not the kind of trip that is for the faint of





heart. Jarrod, my Son-in-Law, (bless his heart) did not get sick. He did think about it, but prevailed. Captain Bob questioned the kids, but not the adults. I guess he figured adults knew better. Jarrod prevailed with various techniques and won.

As for the rest of us, we were all fine. The seas laid down and we caught our limit of large Halibut. I had the thrill of helping my Daughter, Chandra land her first Halibut. The look in her eyes while feeling the power of the large Halibut that pull like the big Rusty Bellies that I am used to, but do not take you into the rocks was priceless. Drag ripping in deep water is quite a feeling!

We also caught all the Rockfish varieties native to Alaska and we released some very large Ling Cod. The season on this particular species of fish were closed but soon to open.

As quoted from their business web page, "Saltwater Safari Company has spared no expense in our commitment to excellence in providing you with very best Alaska fishing experience!"



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All I can say is if you want the ultimate Halibut fishing experience, you will not go wrong with Saltwater Safari. I have been several times and they produce every time!

As for the Fathers out there reading this...HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

I encourage all of you out there to make time for family and cherish the memories; whether on a trip of a lifetime like this one in Alaska or just enjoying each others company locally. 🍷

**Brad Kenyon**

# MIGRATORY FISH OF FLORIDA'S BIG BEND

## Seasonal Visitors of the Gulf

by Terri B. Huffmaster

Florida's Big Bend is one of the most productive and unique fishing regions in the Gulf of Mexico. Stretching from the Panhandle to the Nature Coast, this area is known for its shallow grass flats, oyster bars, tidal creeks, and clear coastal waters. These habitats support countless marine species and serve as an important destination for migratory fish throughout the year.



Every season brings new visitors to the Big Bend. Some fish arrive searching for warmer water. Others come to feed on abundant baitfish, shrimp, and crabs. Many species use the region as a temporary stop during their travels along the Gulf Coast, while others remain for several months before moving on.

For anglers and nature lovers, these migrations provide exciting opportunities to witness the natural cycles of the Gulf. From the lightning-fast Spanish mackerel to the powerful cobia and the unusual tripletail, the Big Bend becomes a gathering place for many fascinating fish species. Why Fish Migrate to the Big Bend Fish migrate for many reasons. Water temperature is one of the biggest

factors. During winter, many species move south or into deeper offshore waters where temperatures remain more stable. As spring arrives and Gulf waters begin to warm, fish start moving back toward the coast.

Food is another important reason. The Big Bend contains one of the largest seagrass ecosystems in North America. These grass beds provide shelter for shrimp, crabs, baitfish, and other creatures that serve as food for larger fish. The area's shallow waters, healthy estuaries, and nearshore reefs create ideal feeding grounds. Because of this, many migratory species return year after year.

### SPANISH MACKEREL *Spring's First Arrival*

For many anglers, the arrival of Spanish mackerel signals the beginning of spring fishing season. Spanish mackerel are sleek, silver fish covered with bright yellow spots. They are known for their speed and aggressive feeding behavior. These fish migrate northward along Florida's Gulf Coast as water temperatures rise.

Large schools often appear in the Big Bend during spring and early summer. They can be found around channels, nearshore reefs, grass flats, and schools of baitfish. When feeding, Spanish mackerel slash through schools of minnows with incredible speed. Birds diving into the water often reveal where mackerel are feeding below. These fish are popular among anglers because they are exciting to catch and readily strike artificial lures and live bait. Although they are

not among the largest migratory fish, they are certainly among the fastest.

### COBIA *The Most Anticipated Migrant*

Few fish create as much excitement in the Big Bend as cobia. Every spring, anglers watch the coastal waters for signs of these large migratory fish. Cobia are long-bodied fish with broad heads and dark brown coloring. Many weigh between 20 and 60 pounds, while larger fish can exceed 80 pounds.



One reason cobia are so popular is that they often swim close to the surface. Anglers frequently spot them cruising along beaches, channel markers, crab trap buoys, and shallow flats. Cobia are curious fish and sometimes approach boats unexpectedly. They feed on crabs, shrimp, squid, and small fish, all of which are plentiful in Big Bend waters. Their migration typically peaks during spring when warming temperatures encourage them to move along Florida's Gulf Coast. The annual cobia run has become one of the most anticipated fishing events in the region.

### JACK CREVALLE *The Gulf's Powerhouse*

Jack crevalle may not be prized for eating, but they are respected for their incredible strength. These fish migrate throughout the Gulf and Atlantic coasts and often move into Big Bend waters during warmer months. Their deep bodies and powerful tails allow them to fight harder than many fish of similar size. Jacks often travel in schools and aggressively chase baitfish. When feeding, they can create large disturbances on the water's surface that can be seen from hundreds of yards away. Fish weighing 10 to 20 pounds are common, and larger specimens can exceed 30 pounds. Many anglers consider jack crevalle one of the toughest fighting fish in the Gulf. Once hooked, they make long runs and test both equipment and endurance.



### PORGY *An Overlooked Visitor*

Porgies may not receive the attention of cobia or Spanish mackerel, but they are an important part of the Big Bend fishery. Several species of porgy migrate through Gulf waters and gather around reefs, rocky bottoms, and artificial structures. They often move between offshore and nearshore habitats depending on water temperatures and spawning activity. Porgies feed primarily on shellfish, crabs, shrimp, and other bottom-dwelling creatures. Their strong teeth allow them to crush hard shells with ease. These fish are known for being dependable biters and provide excellent table fare. Many anglers enjoy targeting porgies because they offer steady action and delicious fillets.

### TRIPLETAIL *Masters of Disguise*

Tripletail are among the most unique fish found in Florida waters. These fish get their name from their large dorsal and anal fins, which make it appear as though they have three tails. Their unusual appearance is matched by unusual behavior. Tripletail often float on their sides near the surface beside crab trap buoys, floating debris, channel markers, and patches of seaweed. At first glance, they may look like a floating leaf or piece of driftwood. During spring



and summer, tripletail migrate into Big Bend waters where warm temperatures and abundant food create ideal conditions. These fish are ambush predators that wait quietly for shrimp and baitfish to swim close before attacking. Tripletail are highly sought after because they fight well and produce excellent table fare.

### POMPANO *A Coastal Favorite*

Florida pompano are among the most prized eating fish in the Gulf of Mexico. These beautiful fish have bright silver bodies and are known for their speed and powerful runs. Pompano migrate along Florida's Gulf Coast and often move through Big Bend waters during spring and fall. They are commonly found in sandy areas near beaches, channels, and passes where they feed on sand fleas, shrimp, and small crustaceans. Pompano travel in schools and are constantly searching for food. Their migrations often follow changes in water temperature. Many anglers consider pompano one of the finest tasting fish in Florida. Their mild flavor and firm texture make them highly desirable both recreationally and commercially. The arrival of pompano is always welcomed by coastal anglers who appreciate both the challenge of catching them and the quality of their meat.

### SHARKS *Ancient Migrants of the Gulf*

Several shark species migrate through the Big Bend every year. Blacktip sharks, spinner sharks, bonnetheads, bull sharks, and other species follow schools of baitfish along the Gulf Coast. As food becomes plentiful in the Big Bend, sharks move into the area to take advantage of feeding opportunities. Blacktip and spinner sharks are especially famous for their spectacular leaps out of the water. During feeding frenzies, these sharks may launch several feet into the air while chasing baitfish. Sharks play an important role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. As top predators, they help regulate fish populations and remove weak or sick animals from the food chain. While sharks are often misunderstood, they are a vital part of the Gulf's natural balance.



**REMORAS**

*Nature's Hitchhikers*

Remoras are some of the strangest fish found in the Gulf. Often called suckerfish, remoras possess a specialized suction disc on top of their heads that allows them to attach themselves to sharks, rays, sea turtles, and even boats. Rather than making long migrations on their own, remoras travel wherever their hosts go. As migrating sharks and other large animals enter Big Bend waters, remoras frequently arrive with them. By attaching to larger animals, remoras gain protection and access to food scraps. Scientists believe they may also help remove parasites from their hosts. Their unusual lifestyle makes them one of the most fascinating fish in the Gulf ecosystem.

**LIZARDFISH**

*Ambush Predators of the Bottom*

Lizardfish may not be famous, but they are common residents of Big Bend waters. These fish have long bodies, large mouths, and rows of sharp teeth. Their reptile-like appearance gives them their name. Lizardfish spend much of their time resting on sandy bottoms, grass flats, and shallow reefs. They remain motionless until prey comes close, then strike with remarkable speed. Although they are not usually targeted by anglers, lizardfish are important predators within the marine food chain. They help control populations of smaller fish and in turn become prey for larger species. Seasonal changes in temperature and food availability often influence their movements throughout the region.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF SEAGRASS**

The migrations of many Big Bend fish species depend heavily on healthy seagrass beds. The Big Bend region contains thousands of acres of underwa-

ter grass that provide shelter and food for marine life. Young fish, shrimp, crabs, and countless other creatures depend on these habitats for survival. Without healthy seagrass, many migratory fish would struggle to find the food they need during their seasonal journeys. Conservation efforts aimed at protecting water quality and coastal habitats help ensure these migrations continue for future generations.

**ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE TO OUR COASTAL COMMUNITIES**

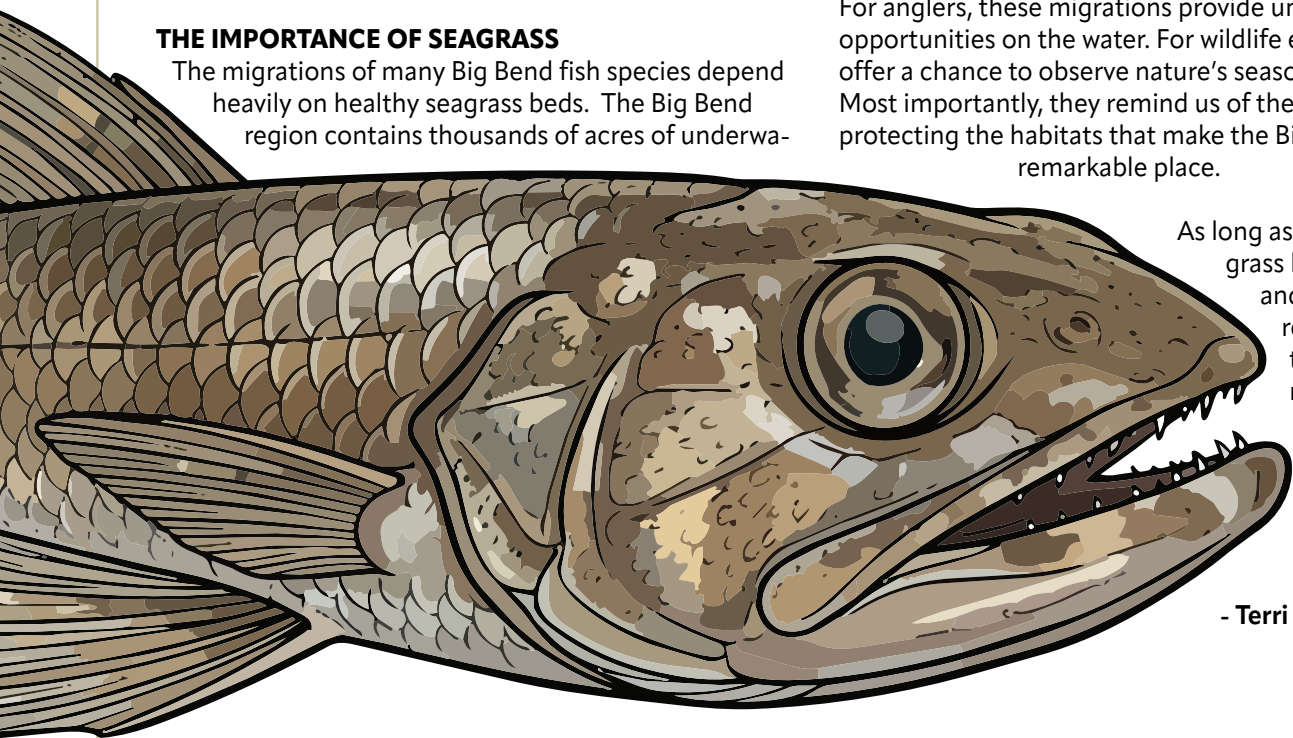
Migratory fish do more than support healthy ecosystems. They also support local economies. Each year anglers travel from across Florida and neighboring states to fish the Big Bend. Charter captains, bait shops, hotels, restaurants, and marinas all benefit from the arrival of seasonal fish. The spring cobia run, Spanish mackerel migration, and summer tripletail season attract thousands of visitors to coastal communities. For many small towns along the Gulf Coast, fishing tourism is an important source of income.

The Big Bend of Florida serves as one of the Gulf of Mexico's most important migratory fish destinations. Every year, Spanish mackerel, cobia, jack crevalle, porgies, tripletail, pompano, sharks, remoras, and lizardfish move through these productive waters. Some arrive seeking food. Others follow warmer temperatures or spawning instincts. Together they create one of the most diverse and exciting fisheries in Florida.

For anglers, these migrations provide unforgettable opportunities on the water. For wildlife enthusiasts, they offer a chance to observe nature's seasonal rhythms. Most importantly, they remind us of the importance of protecting the habitats that make the Big Bend such a remarkable place.

As long as the region's seagrass beds, estuaries, and coastal waters remain healthy, these annual migrations will continue to be one of the Gulf Coast's greatest natural spectacles. ▣

- Terri B. Huffmaster



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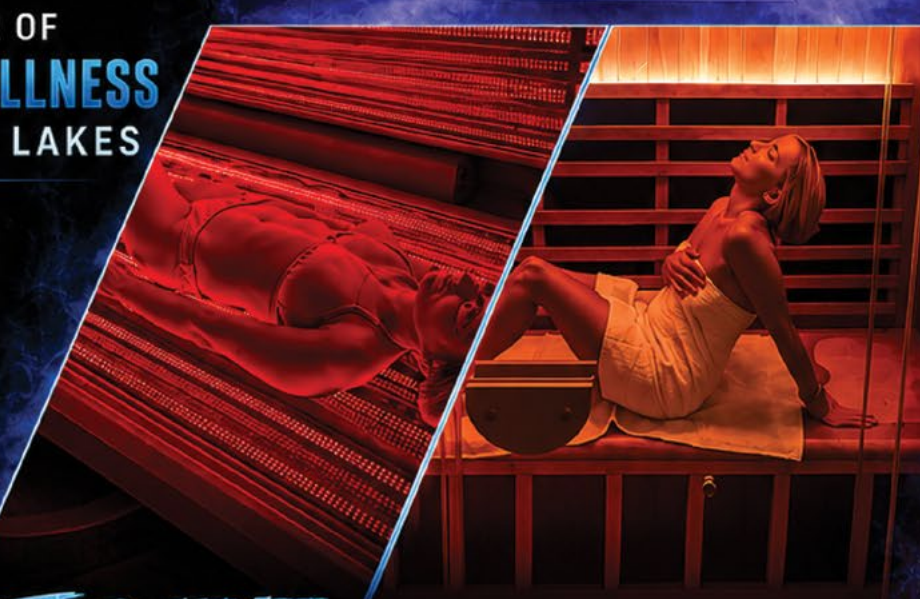
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# FLORIDA GULF COAST SUMMERS

by Captain Justin Searcy

There's something about July in Boca Grande that always reminds me why I love Florida and the lifestyle we're fortunate enough to enjoy. As I write this, I'm sitting here in Boca Grande watching another Gulf Coast sunset after a day on the water. The pace is slower than it was just a few weeks ago during tarpon season, but in many ways, that's what makes this time of year so special.

Once the crowds leave and the excitement settles down, you get back to what coastal living is really about. Early mornings. Afternoon thunderstorms. A good tide. Family, friends, and appreciating the simple moments that make memories.

Even after spending countless days on the water growing

up in Tarpon Springs and fishing all over Florida, Boca Grande still feels special. There's history here. You can feel it at the marinas, the old homes, and especially out on the passes where generations of fishermen have chased silver kings before us.

July is one of my favorite months because it offers something for everyone. Snook are active around the beaches and passes, redfish are beginning to group up, and if the weather cooperates, there are plenty of opportunities offshore as well. Of course, keeping an eye on those afternoon thunderstorms becomes part of the daily routine this time of the year.

Summer is also when I find myself appreciating



preparation and maintenance just as much as fishing. Making sure the boat is ready, the gear is organized, and everything is ready for another day on the water makes all the difference. For me, Boat & Motor Superstores continues to be my go-to source for keeping things running right, and when I need fresh bait or a last-minute piece of tackle, I usually stop by "Get Bent Bait" right on the Anclote River before heading out on the water.

Outside of fishing, July brings a different energy to our Gulf Coast communities. Waterfront restaurants are busy, marinas are full, and there always seems to be someone heading out before daylight or cleaning fish at the dock after sunset. Communities like Tarpon Springs and Boca Grande share a connection that



revolves around the water. It's part of our identity and something worth preserving.

That's why conservation remains so important. Healthy fisheries and clean water ensure future generations will have the opportunity to experience the same things many of us have enjoyed



throughout our lives. Supporting organizations and efforts that protect our resources is an investment in the future of our coast and the traditions we hold dear.

As summer rolls on, I hope everyone finds time to slow down and enjoy it. Some of my favorite days have never been about filling the cooler. They've been about watching the sunrise, sharing stories with friends, and appreciating the places that make Florida feel like home.

From Boca Grande, wishing everyone tight lines, calm seas, and safe boating.

See you on the water. 🎣

@capt\_justin\_searcy

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# FISHING FORECAST

THIS MONTH'S OUTLOOK WITH CAPTAIN SERGIO ATANES



Fishing in the month of July usually slows down due high water temperatures; especially on the flats. Due to this, I prefer to fish deep cuts, channels and weather permitting, the main ships channel in Tampa Bay for Grouper, Mangrove Snapper and Mackerel. Early in the morning till 11:00 am is my favorite time and yes slow tides are helpful. Live Pinfish, Greenback Sardines and when the Snapper get picky, live shrimp does the trick. Port Manatee Channel is also a good ol' stand-by when things slow down or winds start to pick up. A chum bag is helpful but not necessary and does increase your chances for a bitter bite. If tides aren't right in the morning than my second choice would be anytime after 4:00 pm until sunset.

## 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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# LEARNING TO FISH DIFFERENTLY

by Captain Sergio Atanes

Over the years, the way we fish has changed dramatically with advances in tackle technology, GPS, and sonar systems. While these tools have made anglers more efficient, they have also increased pressure on fish populations. I still remember the early days of my youth, running out of Clearwater Pass and judging our position by the size of the buildings on shore.

Once we arrived at the right area, we would shut everything down, put an ear to the gunwale and listen. If we heard the familiar “snap, crackle, and pop,” we knew we were over good bottom and could begin our drift for grouper.

Those days are largely behind us now, and it often feels like we have to run farther offshore to find decent fish—hoping the spot hasn’t already been marked and heavily fished by others.



That reality is what brings me back to the idea of fishing differently. Over the last 10 years, I have found keeper Grouper, Mangrove Snapper and some impressive Grunts, one of my personal favorites, inside Tampa Bay. Fishing these

areas has helped me cut down on travel time and fuel costs, which is especially important with today’s high gas prices. Several software products can help anglers identify promising new areas, including C-MAP, Navionics and Fish Reveal.

Finding productive water takes both time and money. I have spent countless hours on a tablet studying mapping software, marking potential locations, and downloading them to my Simrad GPS/Sonar System. I have also spent plenty on fuel, running to each spot to see whether it holds fish. In many cases, the location I marked ended up being 5 to 20 yards away from the actual structure, but even then, I still found a new place to fish. The key is not to get discouraged. Sometimes a location that looks excellent on the software turns out to be less impressive in person, and it is best to move on and keep searching.



When fishing in 20 to 45 feet of water, lighter tackle is often the best choice. For mangroves, grunts, and seabass, I prefer a 7-foot medium-action rod paired with a 3000-size spinning reel spooled with 15-pound braided line. It is a well-balanced setup that performs very well, even though you may occasionally lose a larger fish—that is simply part of the game. When the bite turns on, I switch to a 7-foot medium-heavy rod with a 6000-size spinning reel loaded with 40-pound braid.

### GEAR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- OHero Hyper 7' Medium & Medium-Heavy Action Rods.
- Florida Fishing Products Salos 3000 and Resolute RES-6000 Reels.
- FINS Windtamer 15 & 40-pound lines.
- Infinity Leader by Florida Fishing Products in 30 & 40-pound tests.
- Fish Reveal Software.

I also moved away from the traditional circle hook and sinker approach years ago and began using jigheads instead. In my experience, jigheads help keep the bait on the bottom more effectively, and I believe they have improved my catch rate by roughly 40 percent over the last few years. If you have questions, I am always happy to help and share what I have learned. I genuinely enjoy educating anglers of all ages and experience levels! 🎣



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





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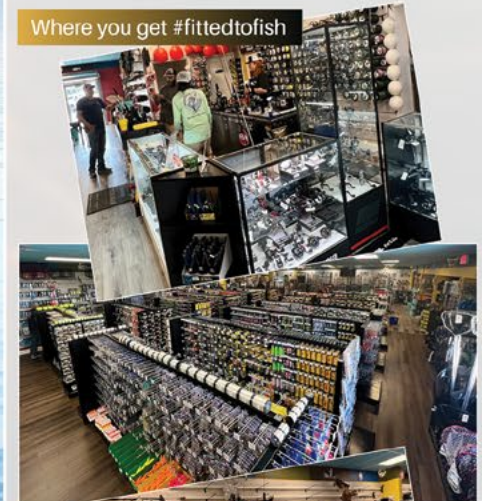
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