Big Bend Angler

The Quarterly Journal of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club

Volume 48, Number 2 Spring, 2015

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Volume 48, Number 2 Spring, 2015

Big Bend Angler

The Quarterly Journal of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club Founded 1968

Your GOFC Team

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Vice President:	Hal Wilson
Secretary:	Jay Peacock
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GOFC Meetings

When:

4th Tuesday of each month.
Fellowship begins at 7:00 PM,
program begins at 7:30 PM

Where:

U.F. College of Veterinary Medicine's New Lecture Hall

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Events Calendar

Monthly Meetings

Monthly club meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of each month (note that this is ***not*** the last Tuesday in those months having 5 Tuesdays). Fellowship begins at 7:00 p.m., with the meeting program beginning at 7:30. No monthly meetings are held in February, June, November or December, being replaced, respectively, by the the **Seafood and Awards Banquet**, **Fish Fry**, the **Cookout & Auction,** and your own Christmas holiday activities.

Your GOFC Board of Directors meets at 7:00 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at the Northwest Grill. Interested GOFC members are invited to attend.

Coming Events

The **April 28th monthly meeting** will feature representatives from Interstate Batteries who will discuss maintenance, tips, tricks, and selecting the proper battery to power your boat and its accessories. They also will have some interesting info on upcoming new battery technology that makes batteries both much lighter and much more powerful.

John Patrick will lead members on a **Crystal River Spoil Banks Learnament** April 25th, departing from the Fort Island boat ramp at 8:30 a.m. This is a great way to start learning the ins and outs of fishing the Crystal River area.

The annual **Cobiathon/Mac Attack** tournament will be held May 9th, with May 16th as the alternate date in case of bad weather. This is a great opportunity to catch some really big fish.

Cover

Bob Hudson displays a two person limit of redfish. He says that airboat fishing is pretty special.

2015 Gulf Red Snapper Season is a Confused Mess

The final 2015 Federal recreational red snapper season dates for the Gulf of Mexico will be announced in May prior to the start of the season. The season length is dependent on the approval and implementation by the Secretary of Commerce of Reef Fish Amendment 40 - Sector Separation and the state water red snapper seasons. Red snapper season in Federal waters will vary depending on the region, whether charter and private recreational fisherman are counted as separate sectors under the overall recreational allocation, and whether or not the state has compatible seasons and bag limits. Depending upon the final decision, the federal red snapper season could be a short as 7 days or as long as 21.

Meanwhile, the State of Florida has essentially thumbed its nose at the feds and established a two part 70 day Gulf red snapper season for state waters. The 2015 season will start the Saturday before Memorial Day (May 23) and run through July 12, resume for all of Labor Day weekend (September 5-7) and finish with Saturdays and Sundays throughout the rest of September and all of October, with the last day of harvest being Sunday, November 1st.

Because state waters covered by this regulation extend only 9 miles from the coastline, only persons fishing from western panhandle ports will be able to take advantage of this more liberal season, and vessels may not be in possession of red snapper in federal waters during the federal closed season.

The bag limit for red snapper remains at 2 fish per angler, with a minimum size of 16 inches, fork length. Anglers are allowed only 10 total snappers of all species in aggregate. Thus catching a limit of 2 red snapper will allow for only 8 other snappers to be caught (in the Big Bend region this is primarily mangrove snapper, which has a 5 fish limit). However, lane and vermillion snapper are excluded from the aggregate and do not count against the 10 snapper limit.

President's Message

By Leroy Holmes

With the onset of nicer spring weather we have lots of activities planned for the next month that I am sure everyone will enjoy.

First up is a Crystal River Spoil Banks Learnament led by John Patrick, a life time GOFC member, former Club president, former commercial fisherman, and one of only four GOFC Elite Anglers. He will lead anyone interested in learning to fish Crystal River on a trip to the area's famed Spoil Banks. So show up with your boats at the Fort Island boat ramp at 8:30 a.m. this Saturday, April 25th and follow John's lead!

This month's meeting will feature speakers from Interstate batteries, who will discuss maintenance, tips, tricks, and selecting the proper battery to power your boat and its accessories.

Finally, we have the annual Cobiathon/ Mac Attack tournament scheduled for May 9th, with food and a social gathering following the weigh in.

Hope to see you at these events.

Gator Domino's is a Proud Sponsor of Doug Johnson's Reeling For Kids Celebrity Fishing Tournament.

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Doug Johnson's Reeling for Kid's Fishing Tournament August,22 2004

"Friends of the fisherman who hooked an Austin A40 in the Exeter Canal last week are already sick of hearing about the Cadillac that got away because it had bigger fins.."

— Author Unknown

Fishing Reports & Forecasts

All GOFC Members Are Invited to Submit Reports of Their Latest Fishing Trips

Our fishing report section include reports for the previous 3 months of fishing activity. In addition to our regular contributors, all GOFC members are urged to send us their reports for inclusion in the member reports section of the next quarter's issue of Big Bend Angler. By tracking these reports over the year, readers should gain a stronger understanding of how things change with the seasons and what to do about it, so that you too can catch your share of the big ones.

Cedar Key in April

By Hal Wilson

Justin Magnifico and I left Gainesville at 6:00 a.m. Wednesday, April 1st to meet John Patrick for a fishing trip to Crystal River. There was a heavy fog, and visibility was limited, which made for a slow ride. We called John as we approached the northern limits of Crystal River and he advised us to meet him at Grannie's Restaurant before starting out on the river due to low tide and fog.

We launched at Fort Island Trail Park and detoured up the river to John's house to pick up his gear and live bait he had in a trap. After one more stop at the marina just down river from the park, we headed out through two manatee zones and into the gulf. At the end of the Crystal River channel we plugged in our numbers and headed out 18 more miles to one of the artificial reefs.

As we approached our fishing spot, we encountered three other boats anchored up and fishing. We chose a spot about 1/4 mile between two of the boats. The reef has numerous piles of rock scattered over about a mile east to west.

The morning's catch

John started off with the first catch by landing a large 6 pound sheepshead. Justin and I followed with several mangrove snapper, and I caught a nice 3 pound hog snapper. We continued with nonstop action for about two hours and landed 5 or 6 Spanish mackerel. Then the tide changed, moving the boat, which allowed us to catch only white grunts. We headed in after one try at re-anchoring and catching more grunts.

The pictures were taken at the park after we returned with a bag of two sheepshead, 14 mangrove snapper, 1 hog snapper and 5 or 6 Spanish. Not a super day, but very good table fare with lots of action.

Ed and Tom with Spanish Mackerel

First Spanish

By Ed Ellett

Pictured above right is Tom Bacsik's first fish of the day — the first Spanish mackerel he ever caught — a nice 3 pound, 9 ounce fish. Also, pictured is Ed Ellett's first fish of the day, a rather "small" mackerel, to be kind we did not weigh this fish (as past GOFC member, Ed Freeman, used to say - "I thought they were born bigger than that"!).

Tom definitely held all bragging rights for the day. Fortunately, Ed caught a 2 pound, 4 once fish before the day ended to regain some respect.

Lots of Gulf runner and ladyfish action on the reef, yet, the mackerel were hard to come by. We ended day with eight Spanish that we kept.

We also, threw back a comparable number of "micro-mackeral" (yes, there were some out there smaller than the "small" mackerel pictured).

Lots of bait, water clear and nice weather.

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I never lost a little fish - Yes, I'm free to say.

It always was the biggest fish I caught, that got away.

— Eugene Field

Reports
Continued from page 4

Plan B: Cedar Key sheepies n' trout

By Brian Kiel

It's been a while since I've been fishing with hunting season getting in the way. Sadly, my adventures with my kids are slowing down too as they seem to have their own busy schedules.

However, with the kids off of school for Good Friday we had an opportunity to hit Cedar Key for some fishing. So after school on Thursday we hit the PVO bait shop (Palm Valley Outdoors) and picked up 2 pints of fiddlers. Friday's Cedar Key projected weather was pretty encouraging, and our two goals were to play with some sheepshead and then hit the trout flats. I was looking forward to running our *Plan B* boat too as it'd been a while since it was last run.

At the ramp we had a setback as the motor wouldn't start due to it not being run for 3 months (pretty sorry I know….). Seems Cedar Key is just far enough away from where we live in Ponte Vedra to NOT make it over there as much as I would like. So we pulled out of the water and two hours later I had it going so we went back to the ramp and launched.

It's 10:45 a.m. now, and seas were still flat with no wind. On the way out we stopped just off the main channel/flat interface and tried a couple of quick throws for sand trout. First cast and a sandi came aboard. It was looking like it was gonna be a good day. From there we lost a few jigs to small Spanish and one shark, which were on the flat as were ladyfish. After 20 minutes of that we picked back up and headed offshore.

At our sheepie destination there was another boat on the reef, and upon asking, they didn't mind if we anchored next to them (Thank You!). They were very nice about it and we all got along just great. Nice guys for sure!

On the first drop we knew the sheepies were there, and they were hungry. The current was moving with the full moon but despite that our fiddlers on the bottom had a life expectancy from 5 – 10 seconds, and it was on. A few small grouper were mixed in with them being released. We threw back a ton of smaller sheepies and played with them for over an hour. It was quite the bite.

At one point a seahorse floated by . Casey cast over it, and it grabbed his line with its tail. Pretty cool.

On account of our small cooler we stringered our sheepies as we caught them, and just kept them alive in the water. That is until two 6 foot sharks showed up swimming quick little circles behind the transom, with one being a tiger shark. From there we pulled the fish out of the water, took a couple of photos and stuck em in the cooler.

The sharks show up around slack tide, and the bite was slowing down significantly, so we packed up and headed inshore to try the trout flats. Once on the flats on a falling tide in 3.5 – 5.5 feet, we found trout on the first drift. In the next hour we caught quite a few trout keeping only nine from 16 – 19 inches. Our drifts were of short duration in the "zone" so I didn't take many trout photos. With a pile of fish to clean we headed back in early.

That was a heck of a lot of fun with the kids! Gotta love Cedar Key in the Spring!

A bunch of captured convicts!

Cedar Key Mac Attack

By Carlos Morales

On Saturday, April 18, Nia and I decided to see what all the mackerel fuss was about. Despite rougher than anticipated conditions, we were on the water at Cedar Key bright and early at 10:30am (...ok, so I'm not very good with mornings).

The plan was to first scout a few Cobia spots to see if anyone was home, then go find some mackeral. The first spot, a wreck some call the tugboat (in about 20' of water due south from CK), had one boat on it who were already targeting, but were not having any luck. They were kind enough to offer us a spot next to them, but we decided to move on to the Steel Tower at Seahorse Reef. By the time we arrived there, we saw that another 2 boats were anchored right on top of the structure, and similarly decided that was too crowded. So, off to the Whistle Buoy!... but that idea did not last long, as the swells were not worth the trouble.

At that point I made the call to head to the grassy parts of the reef to anchor up and play with the macks. Upon arriving to the area just north of the hook, we saw plenty of bait, all getting busted, and knew it wouldn't be long. We anchored with the iPilot (boy I love that thing), put out a block of chum, and floated a mud minnow under a cork. At the same time Nia and I began casting out small diving plugs and it didn't take long for the mackerel to find us.

Almost right away I hooked into a respectable Spanish, who went promptly into the cooler for sushi that night. Then, a few minutes later, Nia got a monster hit and the drag went crazy. I figured she had a stellar Spanish about to come aboard when I got a look look and saw that it was in fact a King Mackerel! I scrambled for the gaff, and warned Nia that when I brought the fish on board to keep her bare feet a good distance from those teeth. A quick swipe later, and her 10.5lb, ~33" King was on the deck and in the cooler. High fives were had, as this was Nia's first king fish ever!

We went on to catch a few nice Spanish after that, the biggest coming in at about 3.5lbs, and one of the few hits on the live

Mac Attack on Page 10

Fishing Forecast

by Captain Russ Roy

Fishing is picking up and about time! Spawning sheepshead are about over, but everything else should be improving. Ross McElroy and Dale Reed fished a Tournament in Steinhatchee on the 18th and Ross reported that five boats had a "slam" of three inshore fish: trout, redfish and bluefish, including the McElroy boat. Good numbers of fish were caught and some pretty good prize money was awarded. (Ross was not very forthcoming about his boat's $ winnings, but it was probably because of his modesty. We all see how quiet he is at Board meetings.)

Drifting grass flats with live bait, shrimp or pinfish, under bobbers will help you find trout schools. Working the edges of deeper sandy holes in the flats might turn up some larger trout, but you have to be very quiet and careful in your approach here. There are some great flats to the west of Horseshoe and Steinhatchee to try this; these usually have good water quality. Past Snake Island at Cedar Key are more good flats, and these have deeper "finger" channels cutting through them. (See remarks on bluefish below.)

Inshore waters are warming up and Spanish are starting to show up in their usual places. The "Hook" on Seahorse Reef is always a good place to look for them, as well as Spotty Bottom. The latter is a rather large area, so some exploring is a good tactic here. Look for birds working surface bait as a very good tactic. Schools of bait will be driven to the surface by predators below, so trolling around these schools is productive. You can also just drift and cast, but often the bait schools will be moving faster than you can drift. There are three standby lures to use for Spanish: jigs/feathers in either white or yellow, and spoons- I like Drone because they will vibrate enough to lose bits of floating grass. For the Spring, smaller spoons are better to match the size of the bait. Wire leader is a must and should be checked often for bends or kinks, especially after a strike.

For kings, and they are small right now according to reports, a larger trolled plug or spoon will work and here the idea is to get the lure or spoon deeper than you would for Spanish, especially if it is a bright sunny day and the water is clear. Thus a lipped plug or a slow trolled spoon would be the way to explore for kings. If you boat a small Spanish, this can be used as a king bait with a "stinger" rig. Troll it slowly and sweep your rod up every so often so the bait looks like a Spanish darting about. You can also cut strips off a Spanish and use smaller ones for more Spanish or bigger strips for kings.

If you want to try for bluefish, trolling will work especially if you pull flashy lures or ones with fresh strips. Blues tend to

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Electronic Delivery of Club Publications

By Jay Peacock, GOFC Secretary

As you may remember, starting in January of this year both the GOFC newsletter and magazine have been delivered to members by e-mail as well as by the US post office mail. The electronic version is in PDF format and is accessed by clicking on a link in an email sent to the membership.

We plan to do both print and electronic versions until July of 2015 when, we are considering going to all electronic delivery with no paper copies printed or mailed out. Making this change will save the club a substantial amount of money each year, and allow members to view the photos included in the publications in full color and at a much higher resolution than the print version.

If you would like to comment on whether we should go all electronic please send e-mail to jay.peacock3@gmail.com. If you are not currently receiving e-mail from our club please let our webmaster Carlos Morales know by sending him an e-mail at cmorales@d3f.org Please include your full name along with the email address you would like us to send GOFC communications and publications to.

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Letter to Rep Keith Perry

By Charlie Courtney

Last month I sent the following letter to Keith Perry, our local representative in Tallahassee. This far I hve only received an acknowledgement of receipt of the letter, and no follow up action has occurred. If you have an interest in this issue, I urge you to write a similar letter to Rep. Perry, or you local representative if you are out of his district.

To the Honorable W. Keith Perry:

I am writing in regards to a gross discrepancy in the pricing of saltwater fishing licenses in Florida. I have fished in Florida for my entire working life (I am now retired), I am a past president of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club, and at one time I held a charter captain's license. The discrepancy that concerns me is in regard to the Annual Recreational Vessel License (http://myfwc.com/license/recreational/saltwater-fishing/vessel-pier-licenses/). This license costs $2001.50 per year and allows anyone to fish in saltwater from the licensed boat without having to purchase individual fishing licenses. As near as I can tell, this license is intended to allow friends and family to fish from that boat, and the boat's owner or captain may not charge participants a fee for the fishing trip.

In contrast, a commercial charter operator pays as little as $201.50 for 4 unlicensed anglers (http://myfwc.com/license/saltwater/commercial-fishing/charter/). Higher amounts apply if more unlicensed anglers are to be allowed (for example, $401.50 for 10 or fewer

Perry on Page 7

Perry
Continued from page 6

participants, which exceeds the maximum Coast Guard allowed persons capacity for the vast majority of recreational fishing boats). Note that commercial charter operators are taking people fishing on a daily to weekly basis, depending on the weather and the size of their operation. In contrast, most recreational fishermen fish no more than once weekly, and the majority fish once monthly or less often. However, an Annual Recreational Vessel License costs 5 to 10 times as much, which almost entirely eliminates the use of this licensing mechanism by recreational fishing boat owners with a resulting loss of revenue to the state.

I strongly feel that pricing the Annual Recreational Vessel License the same as the Charter Boat License will result in more people fishing for the first time on a friend's or relative's boat. This likely will lead to the sale of more individual fishing licenses as these persons discover that they enjoy the sport and buy their own boats. It will also generate more economic activity in coastal communities as more persons purchase bait and tackle, stay in local hotels, and eat at local restaurants.

Take me for an example. At 68 years of age, I am exempt from having to purchase a fishing license. The people I regularly fish with either have licenses or are age-exempt like me. However, I have a number of friends and relatives with only a slight interest in fishing who do not feel justified in purchasing an individual license to fish with me one or two days per year. At a cost of $201.50 I would be happy to purchase an Annual Recreational Vessel License to provide these persons the opportunity to fish with me. I say this even though I do not need a license for myself and it likely would be less expensive, albeit inconvenient and somewhat embarrassing, for me to pay for their individual fishing licenses.

I therefore request that you sponsor a bill to set the price of an Annual Recreational Vessel License comparable to that of the Charter Boat License, at least at the 4 and 10 participant levels.

Thank your for your consideration of this issue.

Charles H. Courtney

Forecast
Continued from page 6

hang around edges, like the edge of Hedemon or Red Bank, so trolling these can bring in blues as well as Spanish.

Gags are still closed but there are a few reports of folks getting amberjack. If you are trolling near offshore structure like the Bridge or the Barge, a short stop at either of these might pay off, especially if you have live bait.

The trouble with weather forecasting is that it's right too often for us to ignore it and wrong too often for us to rely on it.

— Patrick Young

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A Dead Zone?

By Russ Roy

I have made several trips to the Suwannee area this year so far, and several more last Fall after the Red Tide outbreak ended. My results so far indicate that things are pretty bad in Suwannee near-shore and offshore waters.

There were reports, including one in Gary Simpson's recent column, that there were Spanish and even small kings on Spotty Bottom. About ten days later I trolled the Spotty Bottom area, from ten to more than twenty feet, of depth where the water was a clear healthy blue. Ross McElroy and I trolled a number of areas that had been productive in recent years with zero results. We had three poles working and varied the lures. We saw no sign of bait on the surface or on the fish finder, and no birds working whatsoever. The water temperature was 74 to 76 degrees and there should have been all kinds of activity at this time of year.

Several months ago, fisheries researcher Bill Lindberg gave a presentation to GOFC about grouper, artificial reefs, and new research techniques. During the discussion he was asked about the effect that Red Tide outbreaks have on fish populations on natural or artificial reefs. "It zeroes them out," he said, "and it takes about 4 to 6 years for them to recover."

Late last Summer during the Red Tide I had gone out to about twenty feet noting more and more dead fish as I went farther out. It was a flat day and I could see a dead fish about every 20 square feet in every direction as far as I could see. Figuring conservatively that I could see two miles, this comes out to more that four million fish. If that many died every few days for several weeks, hey- we could be talking about a lot of fish!

The FWC's website has some FAQ's about Red Tide (http://myfwc.com/research/redtide/faq/), but most of the information they give is stuff like Red Tide is a complex phenomenon, and lots of study will need to be done to understand it. This is standard scientific boilerplate, and you can read something similar in a piece on flat feet in chickens. A better approach is to note that a Red Tide outbreak is an algal bloom, and algal blooms are thought to occur during periods of lower salinity, higher temperatures, and higher nutrient content in the water. On the Live Science website (http://www.livescience.com/34461-red-tide.html) we read that:

"Red tides occur worldwide, and some reports indicate their occurrence is on the rise, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The phenomenon now takes place almost every summer along Florida's Gulf Coast, for example, and global warming may be contributing to the increase."

Remember that Red Tides often occur, but they vary in magnitude, so "almost every summer" is probably right. Thankfully we don't get the really big ones every summer.

The "global warming" phrase is not a good one. Global Climate Change is better. It is a fact that the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere is increasing. The temperature of a substance is an indication of how much energy is in the substance. (When this energy flows from one substance to another it is called heat and heat will tend to flow from a substance with a high temperature to one with a lower temperature.)

If the atmosphere is at a higher average temperature it has more energy and we expect more extreme weather. More violent thunderstorms, for example, and more violent blizzards too. If you average 60 degrees and 40 degrees, you get fifty degrees. If you average ninety two degrees and ten degrees you get fifty one degrees. The average temperature has gone up, but it also got both hotter and colder.

Let's get back to fishing. I fish offshore a lot out of Suwannee. Notable here is the Suwannee River, full of fresh water (lowers the salinity of the Gulf), hotter than usual in the Summer (less spring water in it, spring flow is way down due to aquifer pumping, so the river gets less cooling from this); and, full of nutrients (fertilizer runoff, manure — both fresh from the cows and washed off the pastures by rain, septic tanks overflowing, also less spring flow to dilute this). This might not cause any specific Red Tide incident, but it sure would make one worse if it did start.

In the March/April 2015 issue of Tide magazine (a CCA publication) there is an article about another kind of algal outbreak in the Gulf. Called In the Weeds by Doug Pike, he describes Sargassum weed — a macroalgae, coming ashore in huge, thick piles especially along the upper coast beaches of Texas. It also wrecked

Dead Zone on Page 9

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Dead Zone

Continued from page 8

fishing out on the water, clumping all over the place instead of lining up in tidy rows along rips.

In normal amounts Sargassum is a good thing, a nursery for lots of fish, and a home for lots of critters for fish to eat. Again, warmer, nutrient rich, waters certainly play a role here in explosive growth. There did not used to be a sustainable population of Sargassum in the Gulf, but now there seems to be one. Thick enough mats of this stuff could kill native sea grass. Near shore waters are accustomed to normal seasonal changes and cycles, but push past the normal range and bad stuff can happen. The more quickly these larger changes happen, the more abnormal results we get.

During my last trip to Suwannee, mentioned above, one of the Suwannee Marina employees told me that FWC personnel had been taking water quality measurements in the river due to a spill at a fertilizer plant. This might be Occidental Chemical's Suwannee River plant in Hamilton County. I don't really know if I want to look into this or not. Maybe just go north to Steinhatchee or south to Cedar Key?

Anyway, while this is sort of a fishing report, it is not one that is fun reading. Didn't have much fun doing the fishing for it, or writing it either. So if you read this far, go ahead and read about the pirate and how change can be bad:

A pirate walks into a bar and the bartender says "Hey, where you been? You look terrible!"

"I feel fine" says the pirate. "What do you mean?" the bartender asks, "you have a peg leg and you didn't used to have one." "Well," says the pirate, "we were storming a rich merchant ship, and a canon ball took off my leg. But I'm ok. I feel fine." "And what about that hook?" asks the bartender. "You used to have both hands." "Yup," says the pirate, "sword fight, but I got the hook and I'm doing OK." "But the eye patch," says the bartender, "how did you lose an eye?"

"I looked up just as some gulls were flying overhead and I got some bird shit in my eye."

"Ridiculous!" says the bartender, "you don't lose an eye from a little bird shit." "Usually, that's right," said the pirate, "but it was my first day with the hook." So change can be tough.

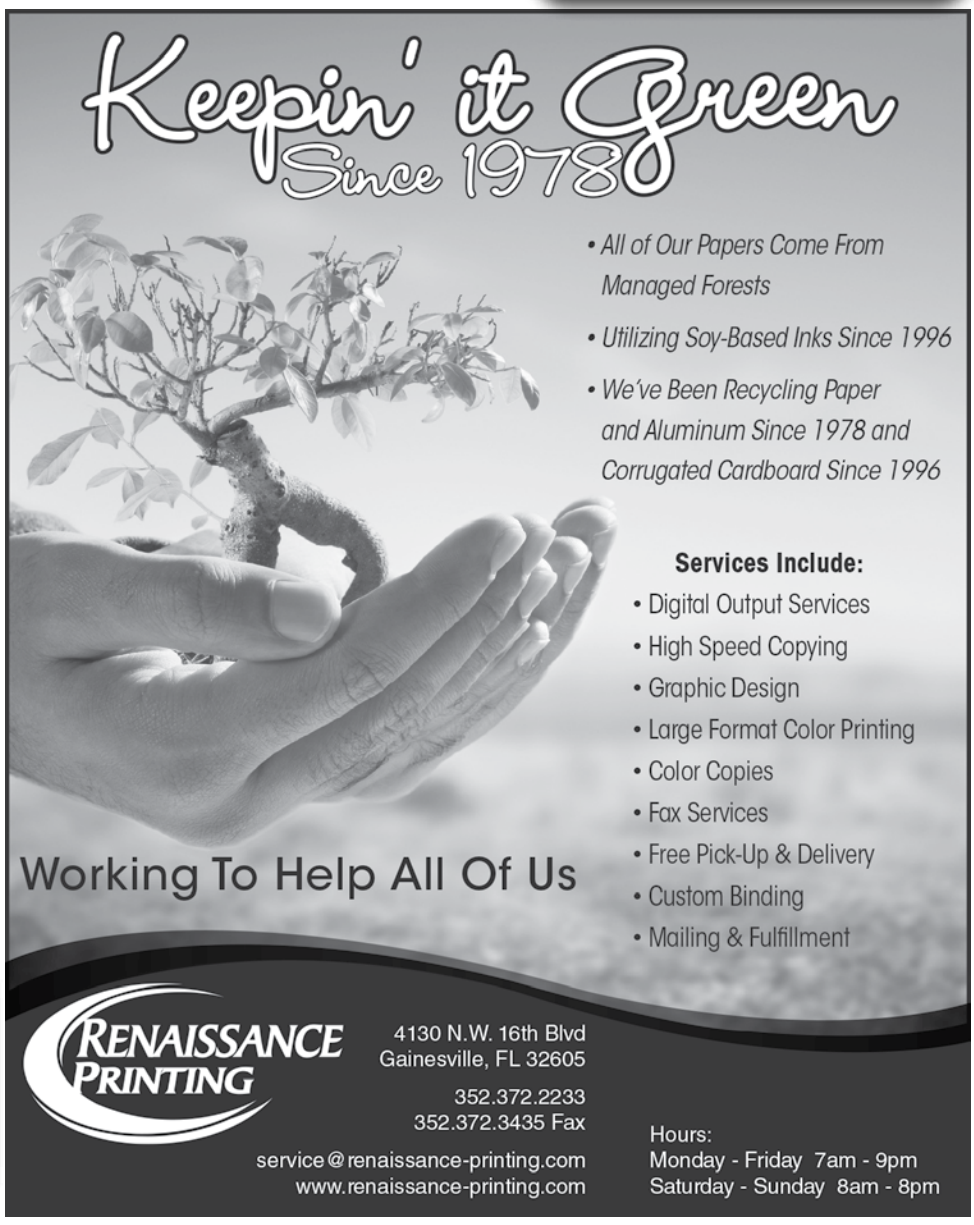
Fishing is unquestionably a form of madness, but happily, for the once bitten, there is no cure.

— Lord Hume

If you fish in the Gulf of Mexico (excluding Monroe County) from a private boat, and plan to harvest, possess or land any of the following reef fish:

Red and vermilion snapper;gag, black and red grouper; gray triggerfish; greater and lesser amberjack; banded rudderfish; andalmaco jack.

You must sign up to participate in the Gulf Reef Fish Survey at License.MyFWC.com, or by calling 1-888-FISHFLORIDA (347-4356). This is mandatory and includes anglers who are 65 and older.



Higher Red Snapper Harvest Limits on the Horizon

Gulf Council Fishery News

Lately, much of the buzz about red snapper management has been less than positive. With sector separation, ever shortening seasons, and allocation on the roster, it's easy to overlook the good news.

Here it is: The red snapper stock is getting healthier every year; fishermen, scientists, and managers alike know it, and when that happens, harvest limits can be raised.

In January, the Council's scientific advisors (the Scientific and Statistical Committee) met to review a red snapper update stock assessment. Although the assessment was completed before 2014 landings data were available, results of the assessment suggest good news. The Council could increase allowable harvest by two million pounds for 2015 and beyond. An increase from 11,000,000 pounds to 13,000,000 pounds would bring the allowable harvest to its highest level in history.

Preliminary landings data from 2014 was reported to the Gulf Council during its most recent meeting in Alabama. The provisional landings estimates for 2014 indicate that the catches last year were lower than they were in 2013. This means that more fish were left in the water in 2014 to spawn and contribute to stock biomass levels. The stock assessment scientists reviewed the 2014 provisional landings and reported that the acceptable biological catch could potentially be increased by nearly a million more pounds. However, the Council cannot use these increased projections to set 2015 quotas until its scientific advisors review the projections and approve new acceptable biological catch levels.

In an effort to ensure the highest catch levels possible for this year, the Council has scheduled some special meetings to make the changes necessary to increase the 2015 red snapper annual catch limit.

Mac Attack

Continued from page 5

mud minnows, which severely underperformed (I believe the extremely strong current made the minnows look pretty lousy in the water, because it wasn't until I held the bait rod in my hand and kept it in free

Nia's Kingfish.

spool did we finally get a proper hit on it.)

After the tide went slack, so did the bite, so we decided to check the Steel Tower and Whistle Buoy one more time for Cobia before going in for Redfish on the

Mac Attack on Page 15

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2015 Taylor County Reef Deployments

By Jody Courtney
Vice President
Taylor County Reef Research Team

The Taylor County Reef Research Team (TCRRT) is still working hard to develop Taylor County's artificial reefs. Thru pursuance of grants, the County has been awarded two $60,000 FWC grants for construction of reefs. And by the efforts of the County Marine Agent, the County was able to acquire the reef permit for the Steinhatchee Fish Management Area (SFMA); previously held by the University of Florida.

This is huge, in that it allows the County five square miles in which to build reefs. It is TCRRT's plan to deploy $120,000 worth of concrete structure to this newly acquired area. (Note: The SFMA is not the same as Steinhatchee Reef, which is no longer a permitted reef.)

The TCRRT has also been pledged from Georgia Pacific a barge load of scrap metal and $3,000 towards its deployment to Buckeye Reef. We are working with the Taylor Tourism Development Council and other business and organizations to acquire the remaining $10,000 for transport and deployment of the scrap material.

It is also our desire to identify an area for a 20 – 25 foot shallow water reef and increase the area of Buckeye Reef or identify an area for another deep water reef. Once identified, we would start the 2 year process of permitting new reef areas.

That said, below are our goals/plans for 2015.

- Deploy $120,000 worth of concrete material to the SFMA.
- Acquire funding and deploy GP donated scrap metal to Buckeye Reef.
- Perform bottom surveys and identify shallow water reef area.
- Perform bottom survey and identify deep water reef area.

As you can see, we have a busy year planned. We would appreciate support in any of these areas, although our biggest need is in funding for the scrap metal deployment. We are trying to gain funding in time for the scrap metal deployment to coincide with the FWC grant deployments, as to save in logistic and setup costs.

The TCRRT would like to again graciously thank the GOFC for its support of our reef efforts. Without GOFC support, several of our projects and development of reefs would not have been possible. The GOFC is definitely a group dedicated to reinvesting and protecting our marine resources. It is a privilege for us to work with the GOFC and we will be proactive in promoting the GOFC's continued support of artificial reefs.

[Editor's note: The GOFC Board has approved a donation of $2,500 to the TCRRT to support their 2015 artificial reef deployments.]

Men's Ellett Point Standings

20 April 2015

GOFC member	Amberjack	pts	Bluefish	pts	Cobia	pts	Flounder	pts	Grouper	pts	King Mackerel	pts	Redfish	pts	Sheeps-head	pts	Spanish Mackerel	pts	Trout	pts	Bonus points	Total points
Morales, Carlos		0.00	1.5	25.00	33.60	25.00	1.00	25.00		0.00	9.50	25.00		0.00	4.40	14.27	3.50	25.00	2.50	9.04	0	**148.31**
Cooper, Virgil		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	4.62	21.59	4.80	15.56	3.38	24.14	6.91	25.00	3	**89.30**
Reed, Dale		0.00	0.91	15.17		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.14	24.02	4.77	15.47	2.55	18.21	3.24	11.72	3	**87.59**
Wilson, Hal		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.26	24.58	7.71	25.00	2.50	17.86	1.67	6.04	3	**76.48**
Byatt, John		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	4.40	14.27	2.13	15.18	3.69	13.35	0	**42.80**
Mcdavid, Elliott		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.35	25.00		0.00		0.00	4.50	16.28	0	**41.28**
McElroy, Ross		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.50	17.83		0.00	4.50	16.28	3	**37.11**
Giordano, Craig		0.00	0.84	14.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	1.81	12.93		0.00	0	**26.93**
Ellett, Ed		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	2.25	16.07	1.75	6.33	3	**25.40**
Williams, Austin		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	7.00	25.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	0	**25.00**
Clark, Cliff		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	3.52	16.45	1.68	5.45		0.00		0.00	3	**24.90**
Horn, Phil		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.04	18.23	0	**18.23**
Kiel, Brian		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	3.38	10.94		0.00	2.00	7.24	0	**18.18**
Roy, Russ		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**	**5.00**	**16.21**		**0.00**		**0.00**	**0**	**16.21**
Graf, Lou		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	1.25	4.52	3	**7.52**
Magnifico, Justin		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	3	**3.00**
Cutright, Jack		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	3	**3.00**
Baillee, Waldon		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	3	**3.0**

Elite Angler Ellett Point Standings

20 April 2015

GOFC member	Amberjack	pts	Bluefish	pts	Cobia	pts	Flounder	pts	Grouper	pts	King Mackerel	pts	Redfish	pts	Sheeps-head	pts	Spanish Mackerel	pts	Trout	pts	Bonus points	Total points
Knopf, Ken	13.7	18.22		0		0		0		0	5.8	25		0	5.14	25		0	5.03	25	3	96.22
Knopf, Debby	18.8	25		0		0		0		0		0		0	3.35	16.29		0		0	3	44.29
Patrick, John		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	0	0
Turner, Allen		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	0	0

FWC News Releases

Triggerfish Size Limit Increase

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved increasing the minimum size limit of gray triggerfish in Atlantic state waters from 12 inches fork length to 14 inches fork length at its April 15 meeting in Tallahassee. This change will make Atlantic state water regulations consistent with pending federal regulation changes and will go into effect after the federal regulations are approved.

The change will also make the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in Atlantic state waters (from shore to 3 nautical miles) the same as it is in Gulf state waters (from shore to 9 nautical miles). This minimum size limit applies to both recreational and commercial harvest.

Four Counties Opened April 1 for Gag Grouper

State waters off the coast of Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson and Taylor counties opened to recreational harvest of gag grouper starting April 1.

This regional season will remain open through June 30, with the first day of the closure being July 1. The season also includes all waters of Apalachicola Bay and Indian Pass, including those in Gulf County, and all waters of the Steinhatchee River, including those in Dixie County.

Gag grouper caught in state Gulf waters (from shore to 9 nautical miles out) off the four counties can be landed on the Gulf County side of Indian Pass and the Dixie County side of the Steinhatchee River, but may not be taken ashore in other areas that are closed to harvest.

In the remainder of Gulf of Mexico state waters, anglers will be able to keep gag grouper from July 1 through Dec. 3, with the season closing Dec. 4. State waters off Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson and Taylor counties will not be open during the

FWC News on Page 13

Women's Ellett Point Standings

20 April 2015

GOFC member	Amberjack	pts	Bluefish	pts	Cobia	pts	Flounder	pts	Grouper	pts	King Mackerel	pts	Redfish	pts	Sheeps-head	pts	Spanish Mackerel	pts	Trout	pts	Bonus points	Total points
Haynes, Nia		0		0		0		0		0	10.5	25		0	5	25	2	25		0	0	75
Ellett, Marcia		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	1	25	3	28
Rothfork, Brittany	23.7	25		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	0	25
Cutright, Melvina		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	3	3

Youth Ellett Point Standings

20 April 2015

GOFC member	Amberjack	pts	Bluefish	pts	Cobia	pts	Flounder	pts	Grouper	pts	King Mackerel	pts	Redfish	pts	Sheeps-head	pts	Spanish Mackerel	pts	Trout	pts	Bonus points	Total points
Kiel, Casey		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	4.06	25		0	2.13	25	0	50
Kiel, Kaitlyn		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	3	18.47		0		0	0	18.47
Wagner, Riley		0		0		0		0		0	14.5	25		0		0		0		0	0	25

FWC News

Continued from page 12

July-through-December season. Monroe County state waters follow Atlantic grouper rules.

The season in all federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico also opens July 1 but closes Dec. 3, with the last day of harvest being Dec. 2.

In the Gulf, the gag grouper recreational harvest minimum size limit is 22 inches total length and the bag limit is two gag grouper per person. Recreational anglers targeting groupers in the Gulf may harvest no more than four grouper per person per day (within this four-fish limit, anglers may keep only two gag grouper). The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), in support of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, has new conservation measures for American eels.

FWC Conservation Measures in Place for Unique American Eels

Staff from the FWC proposed the changes at the September 2014 Commission meeting, which the commissioners subsequently approved for implementation.

"This amendment brings Florida into compliance with the interstate Fisheries Management Plan and ensures the future of Florida's eel fishery," said Jim Estes, deputy director of the FWC's Division of Marine Fisheries Management and the FWC representative to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

A 9-inch minimum size limit for American eels harvested in Florida (commercially or recreationally) and a recreational bag limit of 25 eels per angler per day is now in effect. A wholesale/retail purchase exemption is provided for recreational anglers purchasing American eels for bait. Anglers must retain proof of purchase to claim the exemption. American eel permit application and reporting forms have been updated.

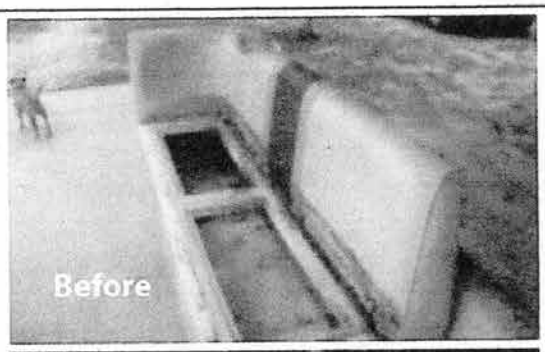
These measures will help conserve this unique species of fish. Eels spend most of their lives in fresh water, but must return to the Sargasso Sea to spawn. The eggs hatch into a leaf-shaped larval form that floats with the currents until they come near shore, when they morph into nearly transparent glass eels. Then as they swim farther upriver, they develop a brownish coloration and grow into what biologists refer to as pencil eels, due to their size. As maturation continues, they enter the more typically encountered yellow-eel phase, which is when they are most commonly harvested for food or use as bait. After 8 to 24 years, the mature eels return to the Sargasso Sea to spawn, changing yet again into blind silver eels. After spawning, silver eels die, never returning to fresh water.

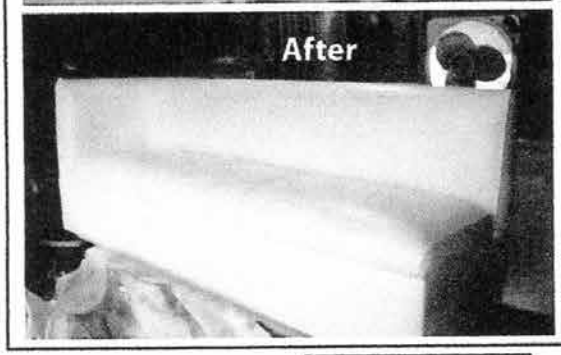
Harvest of eels peaked around 1980, with commercial fishermen harvesting well over 3.5 million pounds along the Atlantic seaboard. In recent years, harvest declined to less than 1 million pounds but was valued at nearly $2 million.

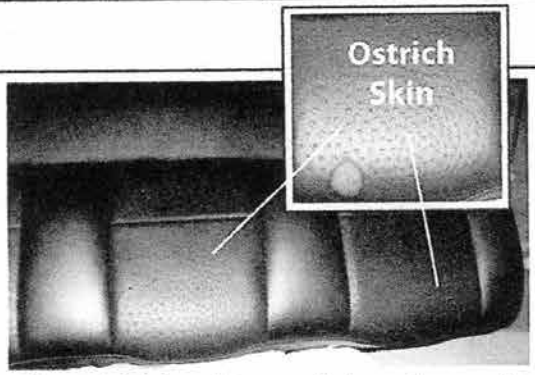
This complex life history and the harvest pressure from commercial and recreational anglers who use eels as bait, necessitated creation of the "Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Eel" in the mid-1990s. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission has repeatedly amended the plan to keep pace with population and harvest trends, as well as new research. Florida's new eel rules will help ensure compliance and the future of this valuable and novel fishery.

FWC News on Page 15

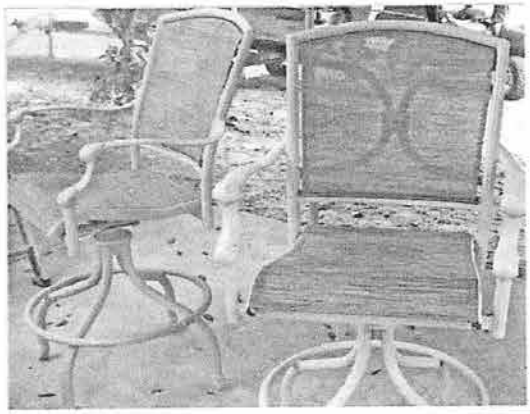
Susan's Affordable Upholstery

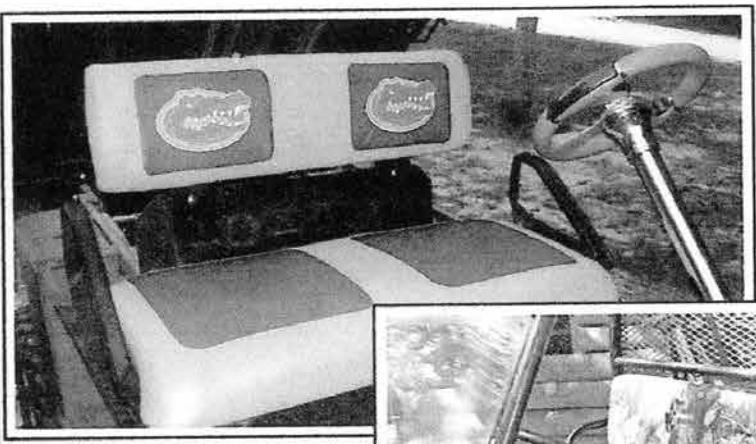






Though it's hard to see, this seat cover is black ostrich skin and leather.





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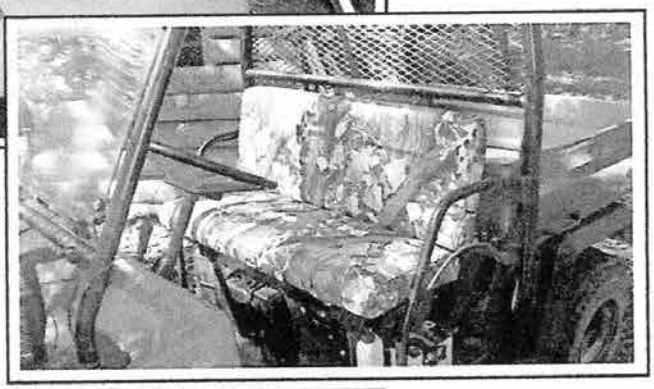

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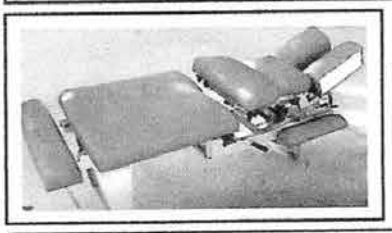

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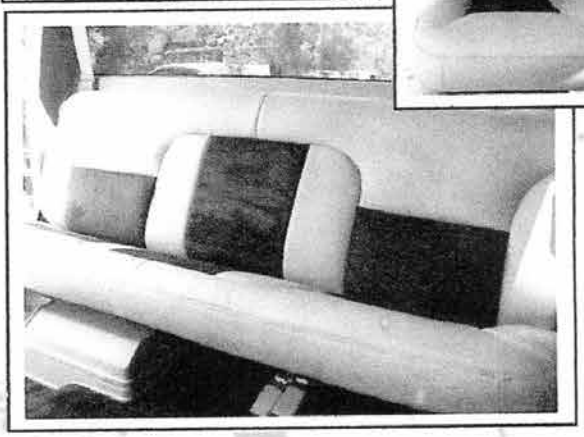

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FWC News

Continued from page 13

Springtime Brings Close Encounters of Manatees, Boaters

As springtime arrives, chances increase that manatees and boaters will have close encounters.

Boaters can enjoy opportunities to observe one of Florida's unique species but to avoid colliding with manatees, people on the water should take basic steps such as slowing down, watching out for the animals and complying with regulations in manatee zones.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) law enforcement officers will be on patrol in state waters to remind boaters of the seasonal manatee speed zones that go into effect in April. They will be taking enforcement actions when necessary.

"Our officers do their very best to support conservation of this species," said FWC Capt. Gary Klein. "We ask that boaters take notice of the zones and do their part as well."

In effect from April 1 through Nov. 15, seasonal manatee zones require boaters slow down in certain areas to prevent manatees from being struck by motorboats or personal watercraft.

In spring, manatees leave their winter warmer-water habitats, such as freshwater springs and power plant discharge areas, and disperse along Florida's Atlantic and Gulf coasts and inland waters.

Because manatees are large, slow-moving and difficult to detect when underwater, operators of boats and personal watercraft need to take basic steps to avoid causing injury to the marine mammals: Wear polarized sunglasses to help spot manatees, and look for the large circles on the water, also known as manatee footprints, indicating the presence of a manatee below. Also look for a snout sticking up out of the water. Finally, slow down and comply with manatee speed zones.

The FWC also asks anyone seeing an injured, distressed, sick or dead manatee to call the agency's Wildlife Alert Hotline, 888-404-3922 (FWCC) or dial #FWC or *FWC on a cell phone.

People can support the FWC's manatee research, rescue, rehabilitation and management efforts by purchasing a "Save the Manatee" Florida license plate at BuyaPlate.com, or by donating $5 to receive an FWC manatee decal by going to MyFWC.com/Manatees and clicking on "Decals."

Biologists Tally a Record High Manatee Count

Warm temperatures and clear, sunny days between some of the coldest weather of the year assisted FWC biologists and partners in counting an all-time high number of manatees during this year's statewide aerial survey.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) reported a preliminary count of 6,063 manatees statewide. During the February count, a team of 20 observers from 11 organizations counted 3,333 manatees on Florida's east coast and 2,730 on the west coast of the state. This year's synoptic survey count exceeded the previous high count for 2010 by almost 1,000 animals.

"Manatees used warm-water sites and other winter habitat areas to cope with a strong cold front that recently moved through the region," said FWC biologist Holly Edwards. "In many of the regions surveyed, warm, sunny weather caused manatees to rest at the water's surface, which facilitated our efforts to count them in these areas. Calm waters and high visibility also contributed to the high count."

"We were very fortunate to have near-optimal conditions for our survey this year," said FWRI Director Gil McRae. "The high count this year is especially encouraging, given the large-scale mortality events that resulted in over 800 deaths in 2013."

Aerial surveys are conducted annually, weather permitting, to provide researchers with a count of manatees visible in Florida waters at the time of the survey. Because researchers have no way to estimate the number of manatees that were not visible during these surveys, scientists consider these results a minimum count of the statewide population. While this year's results do not mean that the manatee population grew by nearly 1,000 animals in a single year, they do tell researchers there are at least 6,000 manatees in Florida waters.

"Counting this many manatees is wonderful news," said FWC Chairman Richard Corbett. "The high count this year shows that our long-term conservation efforts are working."

Mac Attack

Continued from page 10

high tide. No one was home at the tower, however, and similarly at the Buoy, but I decided to channel my inner John Byatt and toss a bucktail jig around while I impatiently waited for a Cobia to visit. On the very first cast, I had a strong hit off the bottom, followed by a great drag-pulling run. I instantly thought Cobia, only to have my hopes dashed as I felt the line break off.... more mackerels (60lb leader might as well as have been floss!) I then grabbed an already rigged medium light spinning setup that had a diving plug with wire rigged, pitched it out, and within a few cranks I was on again.

The second king came in slightly smaller than Nia's (she has a knack for always catching the biggest fish of the day), but boy was it a fun fight (my first king in probably ~15 years). Nia also gaffed the fish (a first), and I decided at that point to not tempt fate and call it an early day. By 3pm we were already heading in.

All fish were caught on 20lb braid/3000 series spinning gear, which used to be my old Trout/Redfish setups, so it was proper fun! Both King Mackerels were caught using small lipped diving plugs, in Spanish Mackerel patterns.

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