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HOT SPOTS: What's biting and where

By NICK WALTER
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The recreational and commercial harvest of grouper in federal waters (past 9 nautical miles) is officially over until March 15.

It remains open in state water, however, and anglers can catch mostly gag grouper over rocks in state waters, especially around the Sunshine Skyway. Deep-diving plugs, cut baits and live baits work well.

Water temperatures dropped from about 75 degrees on Wednesday to as warm as 68 degrees in Terra Ceia Bay on Thursday, slowing down much of the fishing.

"It's going to take a couple days," Capt. Ray Markham said. "By Saturday, we should be back in business."

Sunshine Skyway Pier

Piers manager Jamie Foster said on Wednesday, after the front came through, Spanish mackerel were going crazy. In fact, Foster said Richard Leitz, a part-time worker at the piers, caught his limit of Spanish mackerel in 25 minutes. Bonito and trout had been biting as well.

Terra Ceia Bay

Capt. Ray Markham on Thursday caught trout, redfish and ladyfish in many different areas of Terra Ceia and Miguel bays.

Manatee River

Phillip DiCarlo from Rivers Boaten & Stuff has received reports of keeper redfish moving along shallow areas around oyster beds, sheepshead and snook bites picking up, a lot of ladyfish, and trout that have moved around the Green Bridge. Trout may be loaded up around the I-75 bridge this weekend as well.

Tampa Bay

A series of reef balls reportedly have held sheepshead grouper and mangrove snapper. Sheepshead and redfish had been milling around Egmont Key.

Anna Maria Sound/Palma Sola Bay

Capt. Zach Zacharias took David Klamfoth (from Iowa) and Karam Guergis (Ontario) to a respectable catch of spotted sea trout in Palma Sola Bay on Tuesday in between an approaching warm front and a cold front. The fish bit in spurts, possibly due to jumps in the barometer. The trout were taken drifting broken grass in 4 to 7 feet of water using ¼-ounce jigheads with root beer or motor oil tails.

Sarasota Bay

Capt. Rick Gross found trout over grass flats in 3 to 5 feet of water, which he landed on Cajun Thunder corks and D.O.A. shrimp.

Longboat Pass

Capt. Gross landed bluefish, sheepshead, small grouper and Spanish mackerel over rocks.

Capt. Zacharias led a pair of anglers to a number of juvenile gag grouper, bluefish, Spanish mackerel and sheepshead in the Gulf off Longboat Key. One yellowtail snapper was taken as well, an unusual catch in shallow water here, especially in February.

Beaches and Gulf

Capt. Larry McGuire has found gag grouper in 45 to 120 feet of water and red grouper from 85 to 120 feet over a flat, hard-rock bottom. An occasional kingfish has come through as well.

Braden River/Lake Evers

Capt. Doc Lee said with the full moon upcoming, and assuming the weather holds up, there should be phenomenal fishing for specked perch and bass, which should be spawning. Bluegill should be on structure in deep water. We're about one or two months away from a bluegill spawn.

Myakka River State Park

Penny Crawford from Mr. B's Fishin Hole said anglers are still catching tilapia and small bluegill, but water levels likely are far too low to put a boat in.

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