

Capt. Rick Grasset's Fishing Forecast for February 2010

This is one of the toughest months of the year to fish due to frequent fronts and cold water. However, if you fish smart you can be successful. Snook will be found in rivers, creeks, canals and around docks in the ICW during February. Reds and trout might also be found in potholes or in creeks and canals, particularly where there is dark bottom that will absorb heat. Docks are another winter time area to find a variety of fish, including reds, sheepshead, flounder and more. You should also find trout, bluefish, ladyfish and possibly pompano on deep grass flats depending on conditions.

Due to the recent freeze and resulting snook mortality, **snook** season will not reopen until Sept. 1st (details can be found at www.myfwc.com) so handle them gently and release them quickly. It is important to use tackle that is heavy enough to land them quickly, so they won't be overly stressed. You might find snook in creeks and canals this month where they will congregate to find warmer water. Outside bends of creeks and canals will have deeper and possibly warmer water. Afternoon and early evening may be the best time of day to fish due to warmer water. There are several small creeks in Sarasota Bay and Little Sarasota Bay that may hold snook in the winter; Bowles Creek, Whitaker Bayou, Hudson Bayou, Phillippi Creek, North Creek and South Creek.

Night snook fishing can be very good in February depending on conditions. When water temperatures dip below 60 degrees, I don't recommend targeting them. However, I have seen snook gorging themselves on glass minnows around ICW docks at night with the water temperature in the low 60's. They'll eat small white flies, jigs and plastic baits in these areas. The ICW from Sarasota to Venice is one of my favorite night snook areas.

Reds may be found around docks and in creeks and canals. They may venture onto warm, sunny flats in the afternoon to feed. When the tide is low, you should find them in potholes and along drop offs of sand bars. You may find them tailing on shallow grass flats in Gasparilla Sound and lower Tampa Bay when the tide is low. Work jigs, flies and plastic baits slowly along the bottom for the best action. You'll need a weedless lure or fly, when targeting tailing reds due to the thick grass they'll be found in. I like to target sand bar edges and potholes since these areas may provide some sight fishing opportunities. Shad tails on jig heads or rigged weedless are one of my favorite lures for reds. Fly anglers should score with shrimp or crab fly patterns, like my Grasset's Flats Minnow.

Trout will be found on deep grass flats along with **jacks, ladyfish, bluefish, pompano and flounder**. I like to drift and cast ahead of my drift with jigs or flies to locate fish. Once you find fish you can shorten your drift and zero in on them. You might also find trout in deep areas, such as creeks, canals or turning basins, especially when it is cold. Work baits slowly near the bottom for the best action. Sarasota Bay has some of the most productive deep grass flats that you'll find anywhere. I look for good tidal flow, a good mix of grass and sand and other activity such as birds and baitfish.

You might find some activity in the coastal gulf this month, but it will depend on conditions. Look for “breaking” fish, little tunny, blues, jacks or ladyfish and cast jigs and flies to them. In the absence of surface activity, look for tripletail around crab trap floats and buoys. You’ll find them on the surface best when we are in a southeast wind pattern. Make your first presentation count. They are much tougher to catch once they know you are there.

Although fishing can be challenging this month, you’ll increase your chances for success if you fish smart. Fish may be more active on sunny afternoons following fronts. You’ll be more successful if you target species that are more tolerant of cold weather, such as sheepshead, flounder, blues and redfish. Try to find warmer water to locate baitfish and predators. If you think you are fishing too slowly, slow it down even more. Cold water slows the metabolism of fish. They don’t require as much food nor do they exert a lot of energy to feed. Whatever you choose to do, **remember to always limit your kill; don’t kill your limit!**

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