

Outdoors

Keep an eye out for tagged trout

Hey, I'm glad to see fishermen are ready to go and paying attention. Thanks for the calls and emails I received over the weekend after Scales and Tales emerged from winter hibernation last week. I'm glad to report the water (and air) is warming again and that should get a few fish moving after our cold weather interruption at the end of March.

Sunday afternoon the temperature monitors of the Carolinas Regional Coastal Ocean Observing System (Carolina RCOOS, <http://carolinascroos.org>) were showing water temperatures in the Brunswick County surf at 61 and 62 degrees. I know that isn't exactly warm, but there is something about the water temperature rising above 60 degrees that seems to stimulate the fish. Now that has happened, so we should see what comes next.

There are scattered reports of puppy drum, speckled trout, flounder, black drum, bluefish and flounder in the creeks around the lower Cape Fear River, Elizabeth River and Intracoastal Waterway. Some days they bite fairly well and some not so well. That will improve as the water warms. While the water is still cool, pieces of shrimp and live baits fished on the bottom are good techniques. Soft plastic grubs and shrimp shapes will also catch most of these fish.

Remember that speckled trout season is closed until June 15 in Coastal and Joint Waters, so when you catch one, just take its picture and quickly unhook and release it. The minimum size for flounder has increased to 15 inches and the limit has reduced to six. Puppy drum remains at one fish per day, with a slot size of between 18 and 27 inches.

Some whiting are being caught in the Ferry Channel on the Fort Fisher side, in the mouth of the river and right around the corner at Fort Caswell, between the Inlet and the lighthouse. A few whiting, bluefish and blowfish are being caught from the piers and pieces of fresh shrimp are the bait of choice there.

Weather windows to get offshore are widely scattered, but fishermen who make the trip are finding some kings and bottom fish in the 90 to 110 foot deep range. Check the regulations on the bottom fish at www.ncdmf.net and only keep those that are legal. A word of advice is black sea bass and grouper seasons are closed. Check on the others. Non-stainless steel circle hooks are required for bottom fishing once beyond three miles offshore.

Hook rules

I mentioned the new circle hook regulations last week and received several calls and e-mails about them. First and foremost, please don't shoot me; I'm on the messenger! I thought I should mention here what I have relayed to those folks.

I would suggest posing any questions you have on this to someone at the NC Division of Marine Fisheries (www.ncdmf.net) or at the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (www.safmc.net). Unfortunately, what they told me may not matter if the interpretation of the enforcement officer checking your catch is different. Ask your questions in writing, save the answers and print a copy to take with you.

In general, what I was told is that circle hooks are required when using any natural or synthetic bait that can be ingested by a fish and when fishing in waters inhabited by any of the 72 species covered in the snapper – grouper complex and three miles or more offshore. Offshore is measured from the nearest point of land and is shown on most fishing charts. A word to the wise is that sheephead and spadefish are among the 72 species in this group. SC has adopted this regulation in state ocean waters also, but NC has not and I was told there are no plans to.

Those boats venturing to the eddies along the edge of the Gulf Stream are finding some wahoo and blackfin tuna when trolling. One boat even caught some dolphin a week ago, so it is possible to run into an early school of them also. Stopping over structure and jigging can add amberjacks and cobia to the fish box.

Trout-tagging

I had the pleasure two weeks ago to go on a trout-tagging trip with Capt. Ricky Kellum of Speckled Specialist Charters (www.speckled-specialist.com). Ricky is from Jacksonville, but has family in the Southport area and occasionally fishes locally. On this trip, we would be targeting one of the creeks off the New River near Jacksonville.

The tagging trip was part of a speckled trout tagging program run by NC State, through the Center for Marine Sciences and Technology in Morehead City. The program, coordinated by Tim Ellis, is studying the habitat use and movements of speckled trout in Carolina waters. Ricky said some of the trout venture much further than North Carolina and he has had tags returned from as far as Virginia and Georgia.

The tags have rewards for being returned and one of the first things to note is that you do not have to keep the trout to return the tag. If you can get a quick length measurement of a fish to be released, that is appreciated, but cut the tag off and call the toll free number. They ask that you cut the tag off and mail it in rather than trying to get the number and releasing the trout with the tag intact.

Yellow tags, which are used more often, are eligible for a reward of \$5, a tagging program hat, or a tagging program t-shirt. Some fish may have two yellow tags. Red tags are eligible for a \$100 reward. The number to call (1-800-790-2780) is printed on the tags. You can also use this number or email taellis@ncsu.edu for more information about the trout-tagging project.

On our trip, we only tagged four trout, but all were healthy and swam off well. Two of the fish received yellow tags, one received double yellow tags and one received a red tag with a \$100 reward. The tags are just behind the pectoral fin and are locked to the fish with a toggle in the stomach cavity. Do not try to pull the tag free; it will seriously injure the fish. The tags must be cut off.

Our trip was on the morning after the last cold front and we slipped on ice getting in the boat and returned to the ramp that afternoon with just light jackets. It was quite a change and a nice trip, even if we didn't catch a bunch of trout to tag. We had hoped the sun and warming day, with a rising barometer, would spur them to feed, but it was only marginal. Other fish helped keep us on our toes and provided periodic excitement. We also caught a dozen or more puppy drum that were all released and one not quite legal flounder that woke up early and hungry.

I would advise keeping a sharp eye out for tagged trout. Even those that weren't tagged locally have to travel by to get to SC and GA and multiple tags have been returned from there. One of those red \$100 reward tags would buy gas for another fishing trip or two. Once we get to June 15, you can keep the trout for dinner too. That's definitely a win-win situation.

Regulations and legislation

I received a notice Monday morning that the Coast Guard is planning to close Oregon Inlet this week due to shoaling so severe a dredge can't keep up with it. Larger vessels had been using the inlet only near high tide for several months, while hoping additional dredging funds would be allocated. This is a devastating blow for the area, especially commercial and charter fishermen, as the closest inlet is Hatteras Inlet, approximately 40 miles to the south.

House Bill 353, the bill to give gamefish status to red drum, speckled trout and striped bass, is currently waiting in the House

Committee on Commerce and Job Development Subcommittee on Business and Labor for several studies to be returned before being scheduled for discussion and a vote. Several sponsors said they were gathering economic information and being sure the wording was correct.

Fishermen are urged to contact their local legislators and the members of the committee to express their feelings regarding this bill. The bill, with information on its sponsors and its progress, plus a list of state legislators, their committee assignments and contact information, is available at www.ncleg.net. Rep. Dewey Hill,

of western Brunswick County, is a co-sponsor of the bill.

Rep. Frank Iler introduced HB 421, entitled Fuel Tax Refund for Marinas. This bill would allow marinas to get a quarterly refund of the excise tax for gas delivered to tanks marked for boat use only or something similar that designated it was not use in licensed road vehicles. Several marina owners have stated this would allow marinas to refund the excise tax of approximately 16 cents per gallon to boaters and fishermen at the time of the sale, but the bill does not state this. This tax is currently available for annual refund to boaters and other off road users, but only if they keep records and file for it. For more information, view HB 421 at www.ncleg.net and use the links there to let your legislators know if you support this bill.

HB 187, which requires gas pumps dispensing ethanol blended products to be marked as whether they dispense ethanol at 10 percent or less or at more than 10 percent, became Session Law 2011-25 when Governor Perdue signed it on Thursday, April 7. This law is a bonus for boaters (and others using small engines that don't handle ethanol well and owners of vehicles older than 2002) as most marine and other small engines can tolerate ethanol up to a 10 percent mixture, but no more. The law was to become effective when signed, so the stickers should begin showing on gas pumps at any time. This is necessary because the EPA has approved ethanol at 15 percent for use in cars and trucks of year 2007 and newer. For more information on this bill/law, visit www.ncleg.net.

Upcoming meetings

Several federal fishery meetings are scheduled this week that should be of interest to fishermen that fish in federal waters (more than three miles off the coast). Unfortunately I received the notice for the king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, cobia and spiny lobster meetings after last weeks paper had gone to press. The closest meetings were New Bern on April 11 and Charleston on April 12. Other meetings will take place throughout the week down to Key West, FL and those dates and locations can be found on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's website at www.safmc.net.

These were part of a round of seven public hearings taking place from New Bern to Key West, FL. They were regarding Amendment 18 to the Coastal Migratory FMP (king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia) and Amendment 10 to the Spiny Lobster FMP relative to establishing ACLs and AMs to prevent overfishing and other management measures. The SAFMC is accepting written comments until April 29 and directions are on their website at www.safmc.net.

The SAFMC Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel will meet April 13 and 14 at the Town and Country Inn in Charleston, SC to review and provide recommendations on several amendments addressing management measures for the 72 species covered in the Snapper Grouper FMP including: the Comprehensive ACL Amendment as it addresses measures for snapper grouper species; Regulatory Amendment 11 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (options for the current restrictions in place for deepwater species in waters greater than 240 feet deep); Amendment 18A addressing golden tilefish and black sea bass commercial regulations; Amendment 24 addressing rebuilding of the red grouper stock; and regional management approaches.

The Marine Fisheries Commission/Wildlife Resources Commission Joint Coastal Recreational Fishing License Committee will meet April 14 at 10:30 a.m. at the Division of Marine Fisheries Conference Room in Morehead City and via conference call. For more information contact Nancy Fish at 1-800-682-2632 or Nancy.Fish@ncdenr.gov.

The NC Marine Fisheries Commission Blue Crab Management Plan Advisory Committee will meet March April 18, at 6 p.m. at the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources Regional Field Office in Washington. For more information visit the NCDMF website at www.ncdmf.net or contact Sean McKenna at Sean.McKenna@ncdenr.gov or 1-800-338-7804 or Lynn Henry at Lynn.Henry@ncdenr.gov or 1-800-405-7774.

Tournament info

The first Annual Big Rock Fishing Tournament was held Saturday, April 9, in Weldon, NC. While the sudden cool front slowed the bite a little, 39 boats with more than 100 fishermen participated and most weighed fish. The tournament was based on the aggregate weight of two fish and Steve Ciccarello won with 8.93 pounds.

Less than a half-pound separated the top three places with John Hale finishing second with 8.74 pounds and Howard Tolbert placing third with 8.48 pounds. Josie Jones was the Top Lady Angler and Trevor Harrison collected Top Junior Angler honors. Plans are already underway for the 2012 tournament. For more information, visit www.historicweldonnc.com.

The 2011 Grifton Shad Festival is an annual event highlighting the shad run in Grifton, NC. This year's festival began yesterday (April 12) and is scheduled to continue through Sunday, April 17. For more information and a schedule visit www.griftonshadfestival.com.

The East Coast Canoe and Kayak Festival will be held at the James Island Regional Park in Charleston, SC this Friday through Sunday, April 15-17. The Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission present this event. There will be vendors with everything canoe or kayak and most manufacturers bring their demo fleet. There is a lake in the park and folks will be able to try and compare a wide range of kayaks. There will also be seminars on a wide range of topics. A schedule and more information can be found in the special events section of the Recreation Commission website at www.ccprc.com.

The Oak Island Parks and Recreation Dept. will be hosting a kayak-fishing seminar on April 20. The seminar will be held at the Oak Island Recreation Center and will begin at 6:30 p.m. and last approximately 2 1/2 hours. The seminar will cover selecting and rigging a fishing kayak, safety, inshore fishing for trout, flounder and puppy drum and launching through the surf for Spanish and king mackerel. The primary instructor will be none other than myself. There will be several kayaks and accessories on display. The registration fee is \$20 and registrations can be made at the Recreation Center. For more information call 910-278-4575 or 910-279-6760.

The Cape Fear River Shad Festival will be held at Cape Fear River Lock and Dam Number 1 on Saturday, April 23. Lock and Dam Number 1 is off NC-87, just a few miles above Riegelwood. The activities will include a shad tournament, food, many activities related to the lock and dam and shad fishing and an Easter Egg Hunt. The Lower Bladen – Columbus Historical Society, sponsors the festival. For more information call 910-685-6735 or 910-655-2801.

The Oak Island Parks and Recreation Department will hold their



Photo by Capt. Jerry Dilsaver
Capt. Ricky Kellum with a nice trout that was tagged and released. This trout has a yellow tag that has a reward choice of \$5, a tagging program hat or a tagging program T-shirt. Kellum's tags have been returned from as far away as Virginia and Georgia.



Photo by Capt. Jerry Dilsaver
This yellow tag is worth a choice of \$5, a tagging program hat or a tagging program T-shirt. Similar tags that are red could be worth up to \$100. Cut the tag off and release the trout (until June 15). The toll free number is on the other side of the tag.

annual W.A.I.T. (Women Anglers In Training) ladies only fishing school on Saturday and Sunday April 30 and May 1. Saturday will be a classroom day learning about tackle, equipment, knots and techniques for catching different species and Sunday will be a day on the water for the ladies to put all that information to use. Options for Sunday include pier fishing, inshore fishing from boats and ocean fishing from boats. For more information call 910-278-4747.

The Fayetteville Fly Tiers in association with the Fayetteville Area Anglers Network (FAAN) and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission will hold a Fly-Tie-A-Thon at the John E. Pechmann Fishing Education Center in Fayetteville, NC on Saturday, April 30. Proceeds from the event will benefit the March for Babies program of the March of Dimes. In addition to the fly tying exhibition and tutorial, there will be fly-casting demonstrations, activities for the kids, items for sale, silent auctions, refreshments and more. For more information visit www.flytieathon.com.

I offer information on this tournament with a heavy heart. Eric Powell, who managed New River Marina in Sneads Ferry and is the son of Dale Powell who runs Power Marine Outfitters at the same location, was diagnosed just before Christmas with rapid onset ALS (Lou Gherig's Disease). He recently returned home after a lengthy stay at Duke Medical Center and his friends are organizing a redfish tournament in his honor and to help offset some of his medical expenses. The Eric Powell Redfish Tournament will be held April 30 from New River Marina/Power Marine Outfitters in Sneads Ferry. On the same day there will be a barbecue dinner, raffle and auction at New River Marina after the weigh-in.

Guaranteed prizes will be offered, including Lady and Junior Angler Awards. Unlike many redfish tournaments, participants will not be limited to two fishermen per boat and fishermen are welcome to carry their wives and children. For more information call Capt. Ricky Kellum at 910-330-2745.

Jerry Dilsaver may be reached at captjerry@captjerry.com.

Good fishing

Southport Tides

Tide	Height	Sunrise	Moon Time	% Moon
Thursday, April 14				
High	4:47 AM	4.7	6:43 AM	Set 4:06 AM
Low	11:19 AM	0.2	7:42 PM	Rise 4:04 PM
High	5:31 PM	4.9		
Low	11:47 PM	0.2		
Friday, April 15				
High	5:50 AM	4.7	6:41 AM	Set 4:42 AM
Low	12:14 PM	0.0	7:43 PM	Rise 5:14 PM
High	6:29 PM	5.1		
Saturday, April 16				
Low	12:47 AM	0.0	6:40 AM	Set 5:18 AM
High	6:48 AM	4.8	7:44 PM	Rise 6:25 PM
Low	1:07 PM	-0.1		
High	7:24 PM	5.4		
Sunday, April 17				
Low	1:44 AM	-0.1	6:39 AM	Set 5:56 AM
High	7:42 AM	4.8	7:45 PM	Rise 7:38 PM
Low	1:58 PM	-0.2		
High	8:17 PM	5.5		
Monday, April 18				
Low	2:38 AM	-0.2	6:38 AM	Set 6:37 AM
High	8:34 AM	4.8	7:45 PM	Rise 8:50 PM
Low	2:48 PM	-0.2		
High	9:08 PM	5.6		
Tuesday, April 19				
Low	3:31 AM	-0.2	6:37 AM	Set 7:24 AM
High	9:26 AM	4.7	7:46 PM	Rise 10:01 PM
Low	3:38 PM	-0.1		
High	10:00 PM	5.5		
Wednesday, April 20				
Low	4:22 AM	-0.1	6:35 AM	Set 8:16 AM
High	10:20 AM	4.6	7:47 PM	Rise 11:06 PM
Low	4:27 PM	0.0		
High	10:54 PM	5.3		