

# Beach Fishing

Springtime in West Central Florida – and anywhere on the Gulf or East coasts of the U.S. – is a very special time for sports fishing. While some people think that we have 'no seasons,' nothing could be further from the truth as water temperatures are predictable from year to year. Water temperatures hit the 80s in the summertime here, and can fall well into the 50s in the winter. Fish know and expect such changes, and when the temps start climbing above 65-to-70 degrees, just about every species we hunt, target, and sometimes even eat knows that it's time to eat and breed. They move, they make beds, they swim in circles, they eat, and when they eat its baits. Long rods let you cast far outside the first ridge where you may catch large sharks, cobia, and big snook in the surf this time of year.

## Tips for Beach Fishing

This is the kind of article that is sure to have dozens – hundreds of dozens – of anglers saying, "but you forgot to say" and you can fill in your own blanks. Surf fishing is like golf. Everybody has their own look, feel, smack, approach, cast, or whatever, and you can fish on the beaches from the time you are six until the time you are ninety-six and keep learning stuff. It is when you stop learning stuff you should be afraid. Surf fishing is good fishing. It is quiet, there are no boats running over your lines, and man, are there fish on those beaches.

## Species you will find on the Beaches in the springtime

At this time of the year, the snook that were in deep offshore spots are moving into the big (and small) passes for their springtime breed – something called "balling." The snook that were deep in the residential canals come out to join the fun in the passes too, but running up and down the beaches gives them far more food to find, and in the springtime, it's there that the big fish are caught. Springtime surf fishing for big snook – on baits, on lures, or with a fly rod -- is something everybody into this sport should experience.

Mackerel swim the beaches in the springtime too. The biggest King Mackerel – often there to eat their smaller Spanish cousins – are common surf catches too. So too are big Cobia. Called 'Crab Eaters' by the old-timers, they earned that name for a reason. Fishing for Cobia with a quarter blue crab – or small live pass crab – can produce fish way above 50 pounds any time of the day.

Surf fishing has its quiet rewards.

Shark swim those beaches all year long, but in the springtime they know full-well that the common prey they seek themselves are feeding on smaller baits and too distracted to listen to the deep throb of that scary shark music until it's too late. Sort of like the girl

in the beginning of that old movie. Me? If I heard that music, I would have stayed out of the water in the first place. The surf is shark heaven, and you are never in the water here without being within 100 yards of some shark. They might be small, they might be big, but they are surely out there.

Did you ever hear you could beach fish for tarpon? Yes, tarpon. You can use a jig, spoon, lure, crab, whitebait under a bobber, or a piece of squid, and catch the most incredible tarpon in the world right here on our beaches in the springtime and all the way through the summer. That is worth a story in of itself, but trust us and do not hook a 120-lb. Silver King on a seven-foot spinning rod. They will take everything you own and still be hungry for more. But jumping one – forget landing one – is something anybody who fishes here should try at least once in their lives.

Whiting caught here are not the true whiting you catch from piers in New Jersey, mind you. Up there they are called Kingfish and are caught – just like our whiting – in the short, close surf. You can catch them on shrimp pieces, and they work very well in a wide variety of recipes. They fight well also and if you catch three or four they can make one hell of a meal.

### Tackle for Surf Fishing in the springtime

Most of the beaches here have two lines – one trough is close to the edge of the beach -- and another one is off about 100 yards where you see birds standing in shallow water. Barely one foot deep on low tides (sometimes dry in the winter), these ridges are the edge of a drop-off that even here – where we do not have true drops – represents a change in depth and structure that attracts fish. The reason this matters is that it can define what kind of tackle (or assortment of tackle) you take to the beach.

We usually take three or four rods. A few eight footers much like we use anywhere. Even a 7'-6" snook rod is fine for putting baits anywhere inside that shoreline and that first ridge. However, if you want to put heavy baits out – and put them out with four ounces (or more) of lead and four ounces of dead bait past that ridgeline – you need weight in tackle. Many surf anglers who do it all the time swear by 10' and 12' rods, capable of throwing six or eight ounces of lead a long way with no problem. Shark anglers, for example, do not mess with light tackle on their journey; they stick to long rods, heavy reels, and the ability to cast eight ounces past that ridgeline. In addition, they land Bull sharks weighing hundreds of pounds, too. So pick your poison and match the tackle to the fish you are fishing. Line is another personal call. Some people prefer monofilament, some braided line. There are trade-offs for both.

### Baits for Surf Fishing in the springtime

Baits are like anything else on the surf. You can use artificials, of course. For example we always keep some silver spoons that can cast a million miles when surf fishing. We

also take two long rods – 12 footers – and sand holders. They are equipped with heavy-duty reels, but we do not overload on the line strength. Twenty-pound mono or 50 lb braid is fine, but if you are shark fishing with heavy weights, go to fifty braid. Much more than that and your casting is limited. You can land a fish on very light line, given the open water and room to play them.

Dead baits are fine. You might try salting them – bringing them – to toughen them up. This reduces the amount of times you have to replace them because little tiny fish ate them off the hooks.

Live baits always work best. Live shrimp and any live baitfish such as Scaled Sardines, Threadfin, or Pinfish. You can catch a wide variety of live baits on the beaches using the standard Sabiki rigs we use when we are fishing on boats for tarpon, grouper and other fish. They work fine in the surf. Take a bait rod with a few Sabiki and the right weights to toss them. The bait is usually closer than the fish chasing them to the beach.

In addition, do not forget your coolers, sunscreens (!), sodas, foodstuffs, families, and music. It is all good when fishing in the surf. Make sure you wear good polaroid glasses, too