

Take the Bait

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By

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Seagrasses are what I like to refer to as the roots of life. How important are they? At some stage in their lives 70 per cent of the worlds harvested seafood is dependent upon seagrasses and other estuarine habitat for survival. Manatees, sea turtles, pinfish, and sea urchins all eat seagrass. Florida has seven seagrass species – Cuban, manatee, turtle, paddle, shoal, star and Johnson’s seagrass. They are all descendents of land-based plants that have adapted to living in salt water.

Plankton and seagrasses form the base of the food chain for fish and shellfish. The natural shedding process and blades lost in storms begin to decay producing detritus that is rich in nutrients and bacteria, which in turn feeds mullet and shrimp. They then become forage for a wide variety of game fishes like redfish, snook and sea trout. Because of their productivity and diversity seagrasses should be considered as the tropical rain forests of the marine world and are worthy of our respect and protection.

Inshore action has been on the upswing. Longer daylight hours and sunny skies have water temperatures on the rise. Small glass minnows and white baits are invading the flats in lower Tampa Bay and some snook and redfish have followed them. There have been a few reports of large schools of black drum in the Skyway channel and just west of the Meissner Bridge. These fish are all in the 30 to 40 pound range. Use at least 20 to 30 pound class tackle. Pinfish, live shrimp and crabs are among the preferred baits. Black drum are not real high on the list of edible fish and are often full of parasites. Big drum can provide a formidable battle and make for good photo opportunities but should be released to fight another day.

Offshore enthusiasts should be anticipating some mackerel action along the beaches. It wouldn’t be a bad idea to oil the reels and check your drags. Run a Q-tip

swab around the inside of your rod guides to check for cracks and scratches. If there are fibers snagged anywhere in the guide, replace it. Spool your reels up to full capacity with new line if needed. Make sure the outriggers and downriggers are working properly. Also check to ensure the bait well pump will get you through another season. Stock up on sabinki and stinger rigs which are the essentials for kingfishing. If you need some repairs on rods or reels or line replacement take them down to Terry and the staff at Gulf to Bay Bait and Tackle at 6920 Gulf Boulevard, St. Pete Beach, (727) 367-4756.