

Lobster Mobsters . . . Beware

By: Captain Ted Wilson

Lobster season is upon us. The locals in the Keys have a “love/hate” relationship with the two-day Sport Season (July 25th - 26th) affectionately known as “mini-season”. Many appreciate the financial shot-in-the-arm during a typically slow month, while others go hide until the dust settles. Many locals participate in the mini-season and who can blame them, it’s pretty fun. Time to dust off the old mask and fins and take the plunge with all the crazies.

Rules and regulations are very accessible. Just about any tackle shop in town has official copies, or try online at www.MyFWC.com for all the information you need. No sense into going into all that. However, there are a few changes that have occurred in recent years that some might have overlooked (especially visitors).

One change is specific to Islamorada, which includes Windley Key, Plantation Key, Upper and Lower Matecumbe Keys, the city of Key Colony Beach and Marathon. There is no diving and snorkeling within 300' of any improved residential or commercial shoreline. In addition, any manmade or private canal or manmade or private marina is off limits. Which means stay away from peoples’ docks and back yards, the bridges shorter than 300', rip-rap fill at the base of bridges or roadsides. This sucks for the mass of people who for years relied on the bridges to fill their limits. The spirit of this change is to keep people from getting run over in high traffic areas and to provide some privacy for the local property owners. Key Colony Beach has additional rules so be sure to check those if you’re in that area.

Another newish change involves artificial habitat (a.k.a. lobster condominiums). Artificial habitat is defined as material (e.g. wood, metal, concrete, plastic) that has been placed to provide cover for spiny lobster and harvesting lobster from them is off limits. This is a biggy. No more car hoods, washing machines, PVC pipes, ice cans or 55 - gallon drums, nothing of the sort. This is in part due to the unnatural distribution of lobsters in these habitats. The lobsters really like them and don’t go into the traps. Also in part due to the need to keep people from dumping all there household items into the water. Let’s face it, it is littering folks. Not to mention that it’s ugly and some things could contain materials that could be hazardous to the environment (petroleum products, detergents etc.). So, no more condos. Don’t make them, don’t pull bugs from them.

After mini-season is over is a great time to go fishing. Many out-of-towners take the whole week off so they can do some fishing after the circus is over for good reason . . . the bite is on.

Backcountry fishing is on fire. Tarpon are still around. Try the local bridges early and late with crabs and pinfish and you’ll get some bites. We’re not talking about jumping 15 fish, but if you grind it out you’ll probably get a few bites and might just catch one or two.

Bonefishing is very good on both ocean and bayside flats. Early and late seems to be the ticket. Permit are everywhere. Sight fishing for them in the shallows with a small crab is one of the most gratifying types of fishing out there. For those who prefer to look for the mass schools of spawning fish on wrecks and structure don’t worry, they’re still there as well. A monster permit recently caught weighed in at 48 pounds on a boga-grip scale, so bring a gun to a gun fight.

Whether it’s tasty tails or some of the year’s finest flats fishing you’re after, this is the week. There’s no reason to go hide inside with the AC cranked down with all the Keys has to

offer. Everybody just needs to be careful, obey the laws, and use your head and we can enjoy one of the best weeks of the year.