

## **Spring Broke . . .**

**By: Captain Ted Wilson**

The weather man catches a lot of flack throughout the year, but he's been spot on the last few weeks. "It's gonna be windy folks!!" You got that right, pal, and we're not just talking about a little breeze. We're talking about a plan changing, fishing trip cancelling, vacation curtailing, and relentless, honking wind. With so many fishermen praying for a little less wind, it makes me wonder if God is just doing this to make sure we're paying attention. Nearly every party I've fished with this month have asked the same question before departure. "Is it worth going out on a day like this, Captain?" This is a good question. It is a question that needs to be answered carefully and with some diplomacy to give all parties involved a fair shake. However, the better question would be what *can* we do, on a day like this. There is always *something* you can go catch out there. That's the beauty of our fishery. You just need to have an open mind and be prepared for the conditions.

So what can you do when the wind just won't ever seem to stop? First of all you need to figure out what it is you really want to achieve during your day on the water. You must also be realistic. Most people down deep just want to get out in the boat, see some things they don't normally get to see, catch some fish (hopefully big ones and lots of 'em) and have some fun. If you fit that description you're in luck, because that scenario can be achieved on just about any day of the year.

One type of fish that can be caught under virtually any condition is the mangrove snapper. They are plentiful, aggressive fish that are also very good on the table if that's your thing. Most restaurants in town will cook your catch and snapper are always a crowd favorite. Because they are so plentiful, I like to think of them as a guiltless pleasure. Bag limits are generous enough to make a nice meal, but wisely shrewd enough to eliminate over harvesting. They also inhabit the mangrove island which are some of the most beautiful and weather protected areas of the backcountry.

Seatrout are another fish that doesn't mind a little nasty weather. They typically inhabit channels and the open basins of Florida Bay. An old trick to catch seatrout starts by first finding large schools of mullet. Mullet are herbivorous fish about the size of a corn cob that feed on decaying vegetation. When they school up and begin to graze along the bottom they kick up sediment. A little sediment multiplied by thousands of mullet form a sprawling swath of chalky water that may cover acres of bay bottom. We call these swaths "muds" and they are clearly visible even to the untrained eye. In addition to sediment the mullet also "kick up" shrimp, crabs, small fish and everything else that gets in their way. The trout have learned that by following these roving schools of mullet they'll likely get a shot at a critter that just got temporarily "goosed" out of it's hiding place. Fishermen will drift through these muds casting either jigs or shrimp trying to take advantage of the frenzied fish. Trout are also good candidates for the table. Catch and release of smaller fish tempered by responsible limits on the larger trout have kept stocks of these fish relatively healthy. In addition to seatrout, ladyfish, jack crevalle, pompano, sharks, and mackeral are frequent visitors of muds. You just never know what might cruise through a mud.

If you have a full day to play with and don't mind a long, sometimes painful ride, Flamingo can be an excellent place to spend the day fishing. Flamingo is what we call the area around the Flamingo Ranger Station in Everglades National Park along the southern tip of

continental Florida. It's about an hour ride each way, but once you're there it is somewhat protected and the fishing and wildlife is diverse. Bird watchers are in heaven at Flamingo. In addition to millions of waterfowl, you might catch a glimpse of an alligator, manatee, saltwater crocodile, sea turtle or a dolphin. Fishing on windy days is usually centered around the channels that fill and drain the immense grass flats in the area with each tide. Snook, redfish, seatrout and small tarpon are at the top of the list of sought after fish around Flamingo. Even if the more glamorous fish are not cooperating, there is always something biting at Flamingo, even on the nastiest days. Ladies will appreciate the visitor center bathrooms at Flamingo and it can be a nice place to eat lunch or just stretch your legs.

Fishing and weather are unpredictable. That's one of the things that makes it interesting. What we can control is our attitude. When the wind is howling there are many things you can't do on the water. Fortunately, there are many things you *can* do out there as well. Some of my most memorable days have started with the question, "Do you think we should go out there, Captain?" So, as long as it's safe enough to launch, if you want to go fishing, go.