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THE FALL BITE

By Captain Aaron Kelly

After a fantastic summer of fishing, we look to the fall fishing. Will fish stay in the warm water summer pattern or will they start moving and funneling out the inlets? This all depends on the cold fronts that approach. Usually around August 24th, we get a little northeaster for a couple of days to set things off.

Around Oregon Inlet there will be the runs of finger mullet. Working around marsh points with a small cast net should do the job. Also, all the tackle shops carry fresh mullet this time of year. A Carolina rig with a live mullet is always a great starting point.

If the water is dingy, try fresh cut mullet. We encounter puppy drum, blues, specks, gray trout, and flounder to name a few. You may also get a weird exotics like lizardfish, puffer, stargazer (don't touch), baby grouper, rays, baby sharks all drifting bait in the inlet. Some of these are not great eating but catch a kid a blow toad and watch him get excited! The point is, we just seem to get a lot of bites this time of year.

If hurricanes stay away, we can still catch cobia outside the inlet working tide lines. This is my personal favorite. You will see them around structure, under turtles and rays. A well placed jig or live eel will normally do the job. Cobia has to be over 33 inches (fork length) to keep. They can be anywhere from throw back 10 pounders to 80 plus pounders!

The big schools of redfish (40lb class) are always a possibility this time of year. Sometimes they show roughly 2-5 miles off the beach. If you see them, carefully ease up to the school. Toss your jigs. Twitch a few times and hang on!

The key to finding redfish are: visually (100 plus fish swimming in a pack, shoving a wake), marking them on a depth sounder, seeing white picky birds working, or

even a free jumping spinner shark can tip the hand! These guys will be over the slot; so they have to be released, but are great sport!

Sheepshead around the pilings remains great with some bigger 10 lb plus fish moving back in. Sand fleas and crab seem to do the trick here. Just bring small, stout hooks and plenty of patience because they are well trained bait thieves! You can find specks on the grass flats until the water temperature drops below 70 degrees. Live bait, jigs, and top water early can do the trick with these. Spanish, albacore, and a few kings can be caught using trolling spoons in the ocean. There will be a few stripers around pilings that can be caught on live baits. Striper season should open in October.

If storms create muddy conditions, don't quit. Just change up tactics. Fresh cut bait, on little whitewater bars will catch drum. Deep holes like Green Island Slough will hold keeper gray trout.

Whatever you choose, inlet fishing in fall is where there are plenty of bites and opportunity this time of year!

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