

**INTRODUCTION
TO
SALTWATER FLY FISHING
IN
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA ©**

by



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1. Introduction

Fly fishing in southwest Florida has unlimited opportunities. For purposes of this guide, “backcountry” refers to the estuaries, bays, back bays, creeks, and associated mangrove islands along the Gulf coast of southwest Florida and includes the 10,000 Islands area of Everglades National Park. Most of the saltwater fly fishing in southwest Florida is in the backcountry, but there are also fly fishing opportunities in the Gulf of Mexico and in the freshwater of local lakes and canals. Whether you are new to fly fishing or an experienced fly fisherman but new to saltwater, this guide will help get you started on the exciting adventure of saltwater fly fishing. The term “fisherman” is used generically in this document to include men, women, and children.

2. Equipment

Below is a starter list of equipment commonly used in southwest Florida when fly fishing followed by a detailed explanation of each item:

- Rod – medium fast to fast action fly rod, 9 foot, 7- to 9-weight
- Reel – requires good drag system and minimum capacity for line plus 100 yards of backing
- Line – match to the weight of the rod, weight forward floating line commonly used
- Backing – minimum of 100 yards of 20-pound test Dacron line
- Leader – tapered leader to 20-pound test either monofilament or fluorocarbon material
- Leader tippet – spools of 20-pound and 40-pound test monofilament or fluorocarbon leader material
- Flies – half dozen to a dozen flies, a mix of baitfish, shrimp, and crab patterns
- Fly box – container to carry the flies
- Clippers – nail clippers or scissors for cutting leader material
- Forceps/pliers/dehooker – for removing hooks from fish

Salt water will corrode tackle not designed for use in these conditions. Tackle choices should be limited to those specifically intended for use in salt water. Rinsing your gear including flies immediately after fishing with fresh water will prolong the life of your gear.

2.1. Rod

Rod weight depends in part on the fish species targeted and on personal preference and casting ability.



Hardy 8-weight graphite rod



The 7-weight is probably the low end for everyday use. It will be difficult to handle a large fish with a lighter weight rod. Not that one cannot land a large fish on a 5-weight rod, but playing a fish to exhaustion is not good for the health of the fish. An 8-weight rod is the most commonly used rod and works for all but very large fish. A 9-weight is a second choice. There are a variety of brands and price ranges to choose from when selecting a fly rod. Backcountry Fly Fishers (BFF) casting classes provide the opportunity to try various rods. The local fly shop, Mangrove Outfitters, will also help you with selecting a rod that meets your requirements and budget.

2.2. Reel

A high quality reel designed for saltwater use is important. While a trout fishing reel does little more than hold the line, a saltwater reel has a more significant role when fighting a fish. The two main factors in selecting a high quality saltwater reel are the drag system and line





capacity. The drag system provides the braking mechanism that is critical in fighting a fish as it pulls line off the reel. An easy to reach external adjustment knob for the drag system is essential because you may need to adjust the drag while fighting a fish. At a minimum, the reel must have the capacity to hold the fly line and 100 yards of backing (line capacity).



Drag adjustment knob

2.3. Fly line

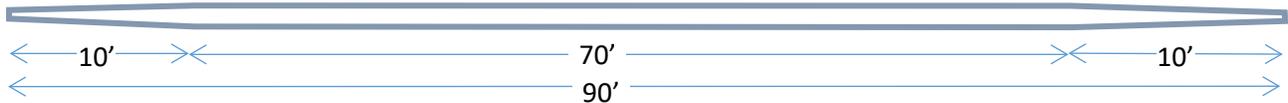
The fly line provides the weight that flexes the rod when casting and carries the fly to the fish, rather than the weight of the lure flexing the rod when casting and pulling the line off the reel as in other forms of fishing.

There are three general types of fly line: floating, sinking and sinking tip. For most fishing situations in southwest Florida, a floating line is the only type required. Floating line comes in two general categories: double taper and weight forward.



Note: dimensions shown below are approximate to show relative relationships only.

Double taper line is tapered on both ends of the line and level on the remainder. It is a commonly used line for trout fishing, especially where casting distances are short.



Weight forward line has the weight concentrated in the forward section of the line. Behind the forward section is a thinner running line. Weight forward line is the most commonly used fly line in southwest Florida and comes in a large array of tapers based on planned fishing activity. For fishing in southwest Florida, two popular tapers are the “Redfish taper” and the “Bonefish Quickshooter taper”, both made by Rio Fly Lines. Another manufacturer of fly lines is Scientific Anglers. For additional information on fly lines go to the websites of the two fly line companies mentioned above at (www.rioproducts.com) and (www.scientificanglers.com).



Matching the line to the rod manufacturer’s recommended line weight is usually the best approach for optimal performance of the rod. However, sometimes in windy conditions or when fishing from the bow of a boat, a line that is 1 or even 2 weights above the recommended is helpful (e.g., using a 9-weight line on an 8-weight rod).

2.4. Leader and Leader Tippet

Leaders made of either monofilament or fluorocarbon are utilized to connect the fly line to the fly. Fluorocarbon is more abrasive resistant and less visible in the water, but more expensive. Leader types can be a single piece of monofilament, hand tied tapered leader, manufactured tapered leader or twisted leaders.

Some form of taper is better to transfer the momentum from the fly line through



Manufactured tapered leader



the leader to the fly when casting. This results in the fly landing on the water with the leader and fly line in a straight line back to the rod tip. To make a hand tied tapered leader, start with a 4-foot piece of 40-pound leader material to be tied to the fly line; tied to a 3-foot piece of 30-pound leader material; tied to a 2-foot piece of 20-pound leader material to which the fly is tied. A good choice for a manufactured tapered leader is a 7-1/2 to 9-foot leader tapered to 20-pounds.

The final section of the leader material that is attached to the fly is called the tippet. For hand tied tapered leaders as described above, the final section of 20-pound leader material serves as the tippet. For manufactured tapered leaders, add 18 to 24 inches of 20-pound tippet. For catching snook, larger or toothy fish use 30- to 40-pound leader material for a “bite” tippet.

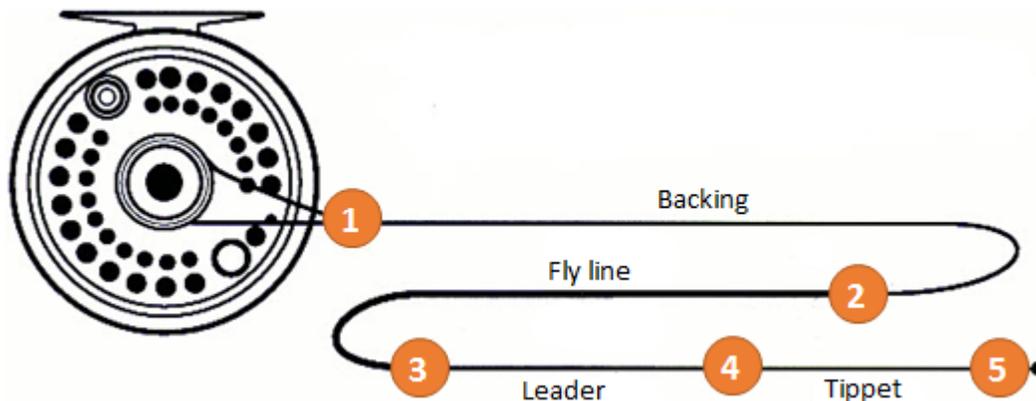
2.5 Backing

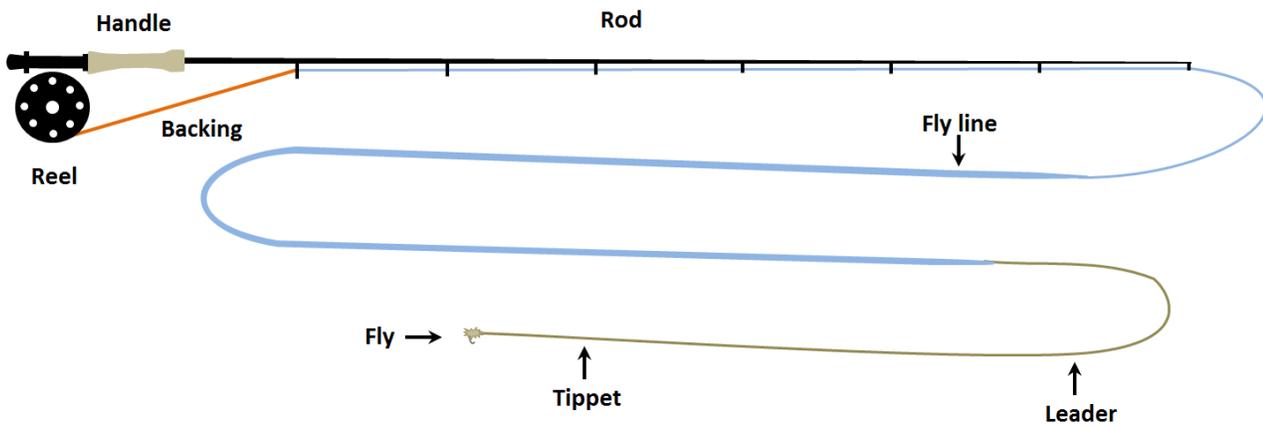
Backing is a soft thin Dacron material attached between the fly line and the reel. Because it is thinner than fly line, it takes up less room on the reel. It is important in saltwater fly fishing because a large fish will at times pull all the fly line and some of the backing off the reel. Therefore, a minimum of 100 yards of backing should be placed on the reel in addition to the 90-100 feet of fly line.



2.6 Knots

The backing is tied to the arbor (1) in the event that a fish pulls out all the backing. That will save you from losing your fly line to the fish. Backing can be tied to your fly line (2) with a Nail Knot or a loop to loop connection. One especially good loop knot for this purpose is a Bimini Twist. With this knot the loop is large enough to pass the reel through it to make changing fly lines easier. To connect a leader to the fly line (3), use either a loop-to-loop connection (some fly lines come with a loop on the end for that purpose) or a Nail Knot. To build a leader or to add tippet (4) use either a Blood Knot or Double Surgeon’s Knot. To tie the tippet to the fly (5) use either an Improved Clinch Knot or the Nonslip Mono Loop Knot. For details on how to tie the various knots ask a club member or visit the Resources Page on the club website www.flyfishingnaples.com for links to websites with detailed tying instructions.







2.7. Flies

Your fly collection need not be extensive. Baitfish imitations come in natural colors and dark (purple-and-black or solid black) in sizes 4 to 1/0, unweighted and weighted. Add to these as many as you like. Poppers, gurglers, shrimp, crab and flashy streamers are all good choices.



Purple and black baitfish



EP Mullet



UV Baitfish



Shrimp



Crab

Fly selection is based on the type of fish targeted and the water being fished. Flies generally imitate either baitfish, shrimp or crabs. Fly sizes depend on the size of bait being imitated. For baitfish imitations, there are surface flies and subsurface flies.

Surface flies include poppers and gurglers, both of which make a disturbance on the surface that imitates an injured baitfish. Subsurface flies are designed to sink at various rates depending on their weight. The lightest flies have no added weight beyond the hook and are good in shallow water or when fish are feeding at the surface. Plastic eyes, bead chain eyes (varying in size), and dumbbell lead eyes (varying in size) increase the fly weight. The heavier the fly, the faster it will sink and more rapidly it will drop back to the bottom after each movement of the fly. The choice of fly weight depends on the depth of water being fished and the type of fish being targeted.



Gurgler

After weight, the next consideration of fly choice is color. Simplistically, all white flies and all black flies are very popular. White flies imitate the local baitfish well. In discolored or cloudy water, black flies are more visible and seem to work better. When imitating shrimp and crabs, various shades of tan are common. Beyond that, the colors and combinations are limited only by the imagination of the fly tier. Check out the Fly Tying Page on the BFF website (www.flyfishingnaples.com) for examples of favorite flies for the local waters.

If you are interested in tying your own flies, the club offers a 6-week Introduction to Fly Tying course annually beginning in January. Visit the BFF website for more details about the classes. If you are familiar with fly tying and would like to learn how to tie local patterns, Mangrove Outfitters offers classes for experienced fly tiers.

2.8. Fly Boxes

The size of fly box needed is dependent on the intended use and number of flies to be carried. When walking the beach a small pocket size box is convenient. When on a boat or in a kayak, space is available for larger and/or multiple boxes. Plan ahead of the outing to ensure that you have the various patterns, sizes and colors that may be needed.



2.9. Tools

- Clippers - Standard nail clippers, leader scissor, or forceps with a cutting blade all work to cut the leader material when tying on a fly or changing leaders. A very good clipper is the Boomerang Tool available at ACE Hardware: <http://tiny.cc/b507iy>
- Forceps/Pliers/Dehooker - Removing hooks is sometimes easier and safer with these tools than with fingers.



3. The Fish

The following is a short overview of a variety of species available to a fly fisherman in southwest Florida.

3.1. Snook

The snook is an aggressive ambush feeder most often caught along the edges of mangroves. Baitfish pattern flies are a favorite for this species. The sandpaper-like mouths of the snook abrade a leader and typically require a 40-pound bite tippet or replacement of the abraded portion of the leader after each fish caught. If you keep fish to eat, be advised there are closed seasons during the year when it is illegal to keep snook. At the time of this writing, the closed seasons are December 1st through February 28th/29th and May 1st through August 31st. Also, the “slot size” for keeping a snook on the Gulf Coast is 28 to 33 inches. Check with Florida Fish and Wildlife (www.FWC.com) for current information.



Snook

3.2. Redfish (Reds, red drum)



Red

Most redfish encountered by fly fishermen in southwest Florida are between 18 and 32 inches and are caught from the beaches, throughout the bays and into upper creeks. At this size they are shifting their dietary preference from mostly crabs and shrimps to small fish. Sight fishing oyster bars, grass flats and shallow mangrove shorelines with either crab, shrimp or minnow patterns can be effective. Falling tides improve water clarity and concentrate prey in back bays and creeks. Reds are also caught blind casting to mangrove shorelines and oyster bars and associated deeper channels. Dark and/or noisy flies, especially during muddy or low light conditions, may get the attention of a redfish.

3.3. Tarpon

In southwest Florida, tarpon are most commonly seen “rolling” (similar to the way dolphins porpoise) in the morning. They roll to breath air. They have air bladders connected to their throats. They force air into their air bladders and extract oxygen to supplement oxygen from their gills. The rolling pattern will provide a clue to their travel direction and depth when low light or water turbidity will not. The fly should be cast far enough ahead of the fish to allow it to sink to nearly the same depth as the fish by the time the tarpon arrives at the fly. Tarpon in deep water that are rolling quickly are often staying deep in that location and may be lost to a fly fisherman without a sinking line. When you encounter a concentration of small tarpon in a deep creek that you cannot get a fly to, look for stragglers in the nearby shallow bays or shorelines. Tarpon in southwest Florida range from small juveniles to brutes weighing over 100 pounds.



Tarpon

3.4. Mangrove Snappers

Mangrove snappers are commonly found from off-shore into upper creeks. They are structure oriented, meaning they will usually be found close to mangroves, rocks, oyster bars or pilings. They have strong jaws, sharp teeth, stiff dorsal spines, and should be handled cautiously. It is helpful to have a “dehooker” that you know how to use.



Mangrove snapper



3.5. Jack Crevalles and Ladyfish

“Jacks” and ladyfish are the most common pelagic species along shorelines where baitfish are typically found. They commonly travel in schools of like-sized individuals. Schools are most often located when they chase bait to the surface and attack, often attracting birds. A quick cast to the outer edges of the school is likely to result in a take. Jacks can range from 6 inches to around 15 pounds in the bays. Larger fish are usually found close to the Gulf water. Ladyfish usually range from 12 inches to 2 pounds. Both species are commonly located along the beach and at passes where rivers flow into the Gulf.



Ladyfish



Jack Crevalle

3.6. Mullet

Mullet are almost everywhere and jump, flop and swirl constantly looking and sounding like feeding fish. They only eat algae and most likely will not take your fly; however there are exceptions.



Mullet

3.7. Other Saltwater Species

Other species caught in southwest Florida include sheepshead, Bonita, barracuda, Spanish mackerel, sharks, saltwater catfish, pompano, bonefish and permit.



Pompano



Barracuda



Spanish mackerel



Sheepshead

3.8. Freshwater species

Freshwater species such as largemouth bass, peacock bass, bream (sunfish) and cichlids are caught in the freshwater lakes and canals.



Largemouth bass



Cichlid



Peacock bass



4. Access to the water



Boats permit the angler to move quickly from one area to another in search of fish or to take advantage of the tide. A number of BFF club members own boats and can provide information about types of boats, brands and accessories. Seek them out at a BFF meeting.

Kayaks provide another way to explore the mangroves of the backcountry. While limiting in terms of the distance one can travel, kayaks permit access to areas boats cannot reach. Again, check with BFF club members who kayak for more details.



Walking and wading along the beaches is another way to access the waters of southwest Florida.



5. Things to consider when planning your outing

5.1. Time of day

Early morning for most of the year is always a good time to be on the water. During and immediately after a cold spell, wait until mid-day to allow the water to warm up. However, tide is more important than time of day.

5.2. Tides

Water movement and depth often influence fish activity and in coastal areas tides play an important role on both. An incoming tide brings the fish into the mangroves. At the beginning of the outgoing tide, the fish start to move out of the mangroves. The southwest coast of Florida has mixed semi-diurnal tides, meaning there are two tidal cycles a day with the highs and lows of different heights. Additionally, the tide heights are strongly influenced by winds and distance from the Gulf. Generally, easterly winds delay incoming tides and result in lower tides, while westerly winds have the opposite effect. Tide charts for major passes and bays are available from numerous sources including marinas, newspapers and online. Due to the shallow conditions of many bays, the strength of the low tide can have a huge influence on where you can navigate. With experience, you learn to estimate tidal conditions in areas that are not listed based on nearby listed locations. Visit the Resources Page on the club website www.flyfishingnaples.com for links to tide chart websites.



5.3. Moon

Spring Tides

When the moon is full or new, the gravitational pull of the moon and sun are combined. At these times, the high tides are very high and the low tides are very low. This is known as a Spring Tide (not related to the spring season). Spring tides are especially strong tides. They occur when the earth, the sun and the moon are in a line.

Neap Tides

During the moon's quarter phases, the gravitational forces of the moon and the sun are perpendicular to one another (with respect to the earth), reducing the gravitational pull on the water. The result is a smaller difference between high and low tides and is known as a Neap Tide. Neap Tides are especially weak tides.

5.4. Water Temperature

Fish in southwest Florida are sensitive to water temperature and especially sudden changes in temperature. Snook prefer water temperature between 75 and 85 degrees. When temperatures drop into the 60s, snook will move to deeper water. If the water temperature drops to the low 50s, the snook become inactive. Below 45 degrees snook will die. Tarpon prefer water between 75 and 90 degrees and move to deeper water as the temperature drops below 70 degrees. Redfish are more tolerant of colder temperatures but prefer between 70 and 90 degrees. On a sunny winter day, water with a dark mud bottom can warm up 10 to 15 degrees by early afternoon.

Climate Chart for Naples FL:

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Avg. High (°F)	75	76	80	83	87	90	91	91	90	87	82	76
Avg. Low (°F)	54	54	58	62	67	72	73	73	73	68	62	56
Avg. Precipitation days	7	7	6	5	7	15	17	17	15	8	5	7
Sunshine Hours	7	8	8	9	10	9	8	8	8	8	8	7
Avg. Water Temperature (°F)	66	66	71	77	82	86	87	87	86	81	73	68

5.5. Salinity



The incoming tide raises the salinity in the bays as the saltwater flows through the passes into the bays. The outgoing tide lowers the salinity as the freshwater of the creeks and rivers flow through the bays and out the passes into the Gulf. Most fish in this area can tolerate wide ranges. However, as the salinity changes, fish may relocate within the bay.

6. Fishing Destinations

6.1. Mangroves

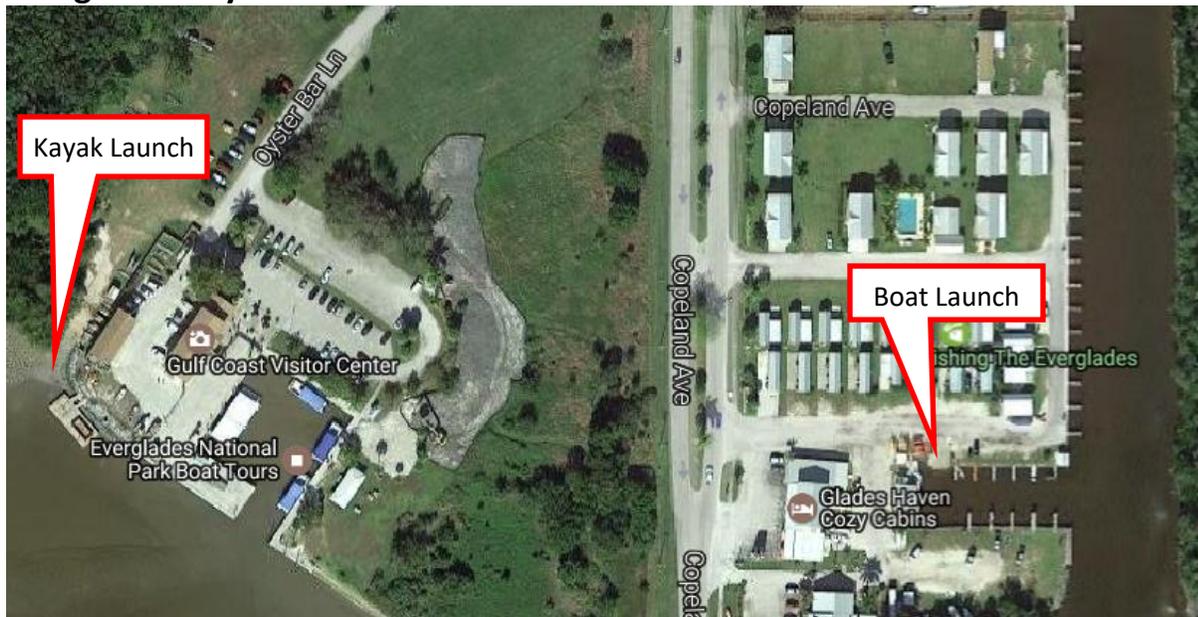
Fishing the mangroves requires either a boat or kayak. Another option is to hire a guide, discussed elsewhere (see 7.6 Guides). Launch sites are listed below from south to north:

- Everglades City/Chokoloskee
- Port of the Islands
- Goodland
- County Road 951
- Bayview Boat Ramp
- Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park
- Estero Bay

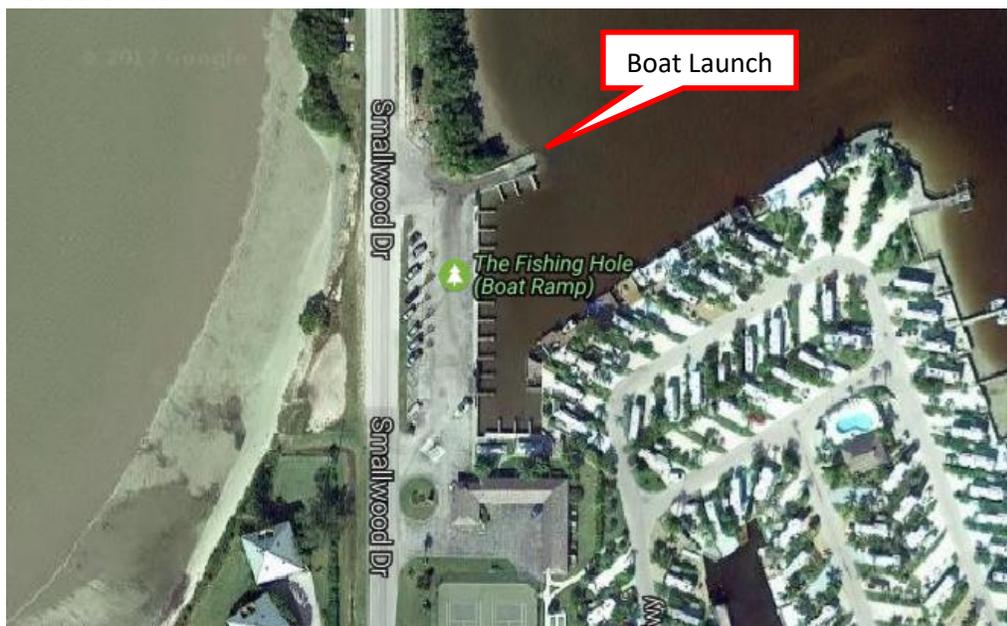


Note: Fees are charged at some launch sites, including some with cash only drop box payment systems. Check the Collier County Parks and the Florida State Parks websites for information on fees, park passes and available services. For private marinas, contact the marina directly. Fees vary from \$5 to \$20 dollars and frequently apply to kayaks as well as boats. Fines for non-payment of fees are significantly higher than the launch fees. Make sure you pay the fees and place the receipt on the dashboard of your vehicle or follow other procedures as instructed. Kayaks can be launched from most boat launches, but boat ramps are not available at kayak launch sites.

Everglades City



Chokoloskee





Port of the Islands



Goodland





County Road 951

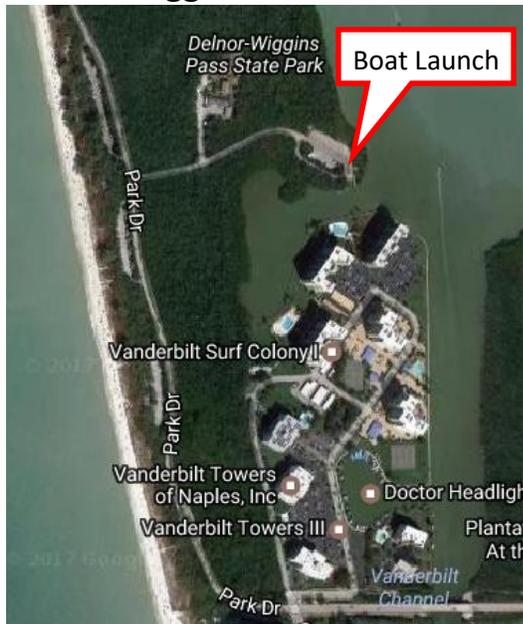




Bayview



Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park



Boat launch inside state park



Cocohatchee River Park launch site



Estero Bay



For navigating around the mangroves, NOAA Nautical Charts are the standard; GPS (and electronic chart systems) are extremely useful backups. GPS systems are considered backup because satellite coverage is not always available. Additionally, mangrove shorelines look very similar and areas without high rises have very few visual references. Many areas outside of marked channels are very shallow and due to colored waters and easily suspended muds there may not be visual clues of depth. It takes time to gain “local knowledge” of waters. Some private nautical charts have additional information added that may be useful and some are waterproof. A popular local expression is: “The question is not ‘Will you run aground; instead it is ‘When will you run aground’”!

6.2. Beach fishing

The beaches on the Gulf coast are great for early morning fishing. The east rising sun provides great visibility into the water. Unfortunately by 9:00 or 10:00 AM, the beaches become crowded and casting becomes difficult. One option to extend the fishing time is to wade out into the Gulf and fish back towards the beach.



Tides are less important on the beach than other areas. However, most beaches will fish best at some point in the tidal cycle depending on target species and proximity to the closest pass where the river flows into the Gulf.

Small to medium sized snook often feed in the trough within a few feet of the beach. They generally want small waves, at least a half foot of water depth and waves breaking shoreward of the trough. Stand back from the water’s edge 10 feet or more and search for passing snook. Cast ahead of the snook and move the fly as the snook approaches.

Structures such as pilings, rocks or a pass are more important than troughs especially if the structure also attracts baitfish.



DT

A good fly pattern for beach fishing is the easy to tie "DT". Other patterns for the beach are Clousers (chartreuse and white), bait fish patterns and crab patterns. Smaller hook sizes such as a 2 or maybe even a 4 are best. Visit the Fly Tying Page, Patterns and Tying Instructions sub-page on the club website www.flyfishingnaples.com for more information.



Clouser

Sight fishing is often possible. Watch for feeding fish at the edge of bait schools. Watch your shadow; it will alert fish in clear water of your presence. Jacks and ladyfish are present year-round. Snook are common along the beach from May through October. Spanish mackerel, pompano, spotted seatrout, tarpon, bluefish and sharks may also be encountered.

The following are some beach access points, starting on Marco Island and working north.

Tigertail Beach County Park, 480 Hernando Drive, Marco Island. Walk west from the parking lot (entry fee) until you reach the lagoon then turn right, north, and walk to the inlet of the lagoon. This site is best at low tide as you can wade across the lagoon and fish anywhere along the inlet or walk over and fish in the Gulf. Another benefit to this location is the absence of beach goers so you can fish more hours. If you fish here in the evening, verify with the attendant at the parking lot that the gate will be open when you want to leave. There are restrooms and a snack bar by the parking lot.

33rd Avenue South Take Second Street (Gordon Drive) south to 33rd Avenue South and turn west. If you have a Collier County beach sticker on your car park in the designated parking spaces, otherwise park in a metered parking spot. If there are no places to park, go back north to 32nd Avenue South and park there. After you park, walk to the beach and head south. You can fish all the way to the inlet of the Gordon River. If the tide is low you can wade up the Gordon River. Be sure to get back to the beach before high tide or you may have to swim! In addition to cruising along the beach, snook also hang out among the pilings that jut out from the beach. There is also the possibility of Ladyfish or Jacks to cast to from the beach. Look for pods of bait fish being attacked.

Clam Pass Beach Park Take Pine Ridge Road west (it becomes Seagate Drive west of Tamiami Trail, Highway 41) until it dead ends at the Clam Pass parking lot (fee). There is a small tram that takes people to the beach but in the early morning you will have to walk. From the beach, walk north to the inlet and begin fishing or fish anywhere along the beach. At low tide some people wade across the inlet. The problem is you will have to swim back if you are still there at high tide. There are restrooms and a snack bar on the beach.

Vanderbilt Beach Take Vanderbilt Beach Road west until you reach the beach parking garage. The garage is on the left (fee). Walk to the beach and look for snook. There is no fresh water inlet at this location and therefore it is not as good a destination as the other locations for fishing.

Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park Take Immokalee Road west to the entrance to the park (entry fee). Drive inside the park to parking lot number 5, the last parking lot, and go to the far end to park. Walk to the beach and head north. This beach is divided between fishing and no-fishing areas. The fishing area is north near the inlet. Fish the inlet area and at low tide you can wade up the inlet to the east and then south. Again, be aware of when the tide changes. There are restrooms by the parking lot and a snack bar at the beach. The park opens at 8:00 AM but if you have an annual state park pass, the park rangers at the entrance will give you the gate codes to enter earlier.

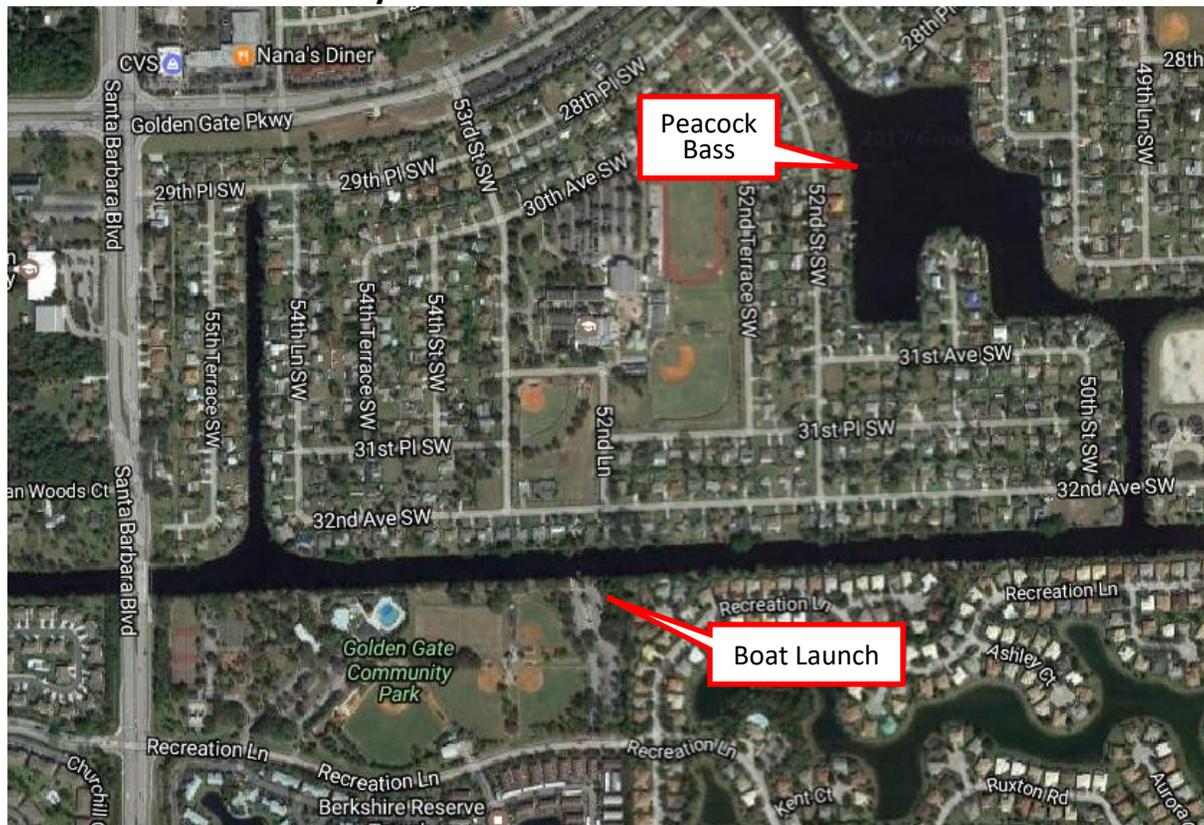


In general, fishing the inlets at all the beaches is best during the first hour of the incoming tide. On the outgoing tide fishing can be good until the water changes colors. When the fresh water from the river, which is usually stained and/or turbid, reaches the inlet, the fish stop biting. Fishing is then over until the tide turns and clean water from the gulf comes in.

6.3. Canals

Canals and associated lakes have snook, occasionally tarpon, and a variety of freshwater species, including Peacock Bass.

Golden Gate Community Park Launch Site



7. On the water

7.1. Checklist of things to consider for a day on the water

- Trip/Float Plan – where you plan to fish, when you're returning, boat description. Give this to someone before you leave to fish.
- Wind – interferes with casting and in the case of squalls, affects small craft safety
- Tides – asymmetrical, varies with wind, season and distance from pass
- Mangrove shorelines - look similar and require some navigational skills
- Shoals and oyster bars - inside areas are typically shallow and turbidity often prevents visual detection of shoals (sand bars) and oyster bars



- Waterway speed zones - not always clearly marked. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) publishes “A Boating and Angling Guide to Collier County” that contains maps and information about the waterways of Collier County.
- Water clarity – inside waters are often turbid due to suspended sediments or colored due to mangrove runoff.

7.2. Fishing

7.2.1. The cast

Casts to moving fish should be placed ahead and slightly beyond the path of the fish. Casts to schools of fish attacking bait fish should be aimed at the outer edges. Casts to feeding fish should be placed as close to the head of the fish as possible.

7.2.2. The retrieve

The retrieve (fly retrieval or movement of the fly) should mimic the movement of the type of bait the fly imitates. Baitfish patterns are typically worked with fairly rapid strips of varying length. Crab and shrimp patterns work best with a strip-pause-strip technique.

7.2.3. The hook set

Saltwater fish require a “strip strike” to consistently hook the fish. The strip strike is accomplished by a long quick pull of the fly line with the rod tip pointed down at the fly. This is necessary to provide enough force for the larger saltwater hooks to penetrate the fish’s mouth. The freshwater trout technique of lifting the rod tip to set the hook does not provide enough force to consistently result in a good hook set.

7.2.4. Playing and landing

Keep the rod tip low and apply as much retrieval force as possible. Play the fish quickly to improve the survival rate of the fish. Heavy leaders and tippets utilized in saltwater do not require a gentle touch.

7.2.5. The release

Use caution and consider the following when removing the hook from the fish:

- Catfish, both hardhead and sail catfish, have venomous barbed dorsal and pectoral fins that should be avoided.
- Snapper, mackerel, bluefish, and sharks have teeth that may require special handling. Dehookers with longer handles are recommended.
- Snook have sharp bony edges on their gill covers that can slice hands and need to be avoided when handling.

7.2.6. Photos

Remove gloves and wet hands before holding a fish for a photo. Hold the fish horizontally and support the mid-section of the fish. Do not hold the fish vertically by the jaw. This is physically harmful to larger fish. Return the fish to the water quickly and revive it before release. It is a violation of Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) regulations to remove tarpon over 40 inches in length from the water for any reason.

7.3. Hazards

7.3.1. Lightning

Thunderstorms and fronts may create lightning and/or strong winds. Thunderstorms are most prevalent from May to October. Lightning is not to be regarded lightly. If you see lightning stop fishing, put your fly rod down and get off the water. Graphite fly rods make excellent lightning rods.



Fly rod struck by lightning

7.3.2. Wind

Winds are more prevalent in coastal areas than typical freshwater areas. If the wind is high enough that offshore advisories are issued, respect them and stay home or go home if you are out. Practice casting in the wind with the tackle you plan to use prior to fishing. Techniques are taught in BFF casting classes that will assist in windy conditions.

7.3.3. Emergency Assistance

In the event of an emergency while fishing, in addition to a cell phone or VHF radio, consider these two choices for signaling: an EPIRB (emergency position-indicating radio beacon) or a PLB (personal locator beacon). A wearable flotation device is required when boating or kayaking. Kayakers must also have a whistle.

7.3.4. Sun

The sun is very strong in Florida. Wear sun screen and cover-up with cap or wide brim hat, buff, sunglasses and sun gloves or stripping glove/finger cot. Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.

7.3.5. Critters

- Stingrays like to lie on the bottom and are difficult to see so when you wade, shuffle your feet. Locally, this is called the “stingray shuffle”.
- Sharks are frequently seen in the backcountry. They are not usually a problem but be aware.
- Alligators are common in freshwater lakes and canals. Little ones will usually leave you alone, but big ones should be avoided and given a wide berth.
- Snakes come in both venomous and non-venomous forms. When fishing freshwater canals and lakes, especially from the bank, be aware of your surroundings. If you know the difference, avoid the venomous ones. If you do not, avoid all of them! To the south in the 10,000 Islands, pythons are rarely seen but are present.



7.3.6. Bugs

- Mosquitoes abound at dawn and dusk but disappear for the most part during the day while on the water in a kayak or boat. If you launch at dawn or before or fish dock lights at night, use lots of bug spray.
- No-see-ums are another really annoying bug that you encounter while launching a kayak near mangroves at dawn. Again, use lots of bug spray and/or wear a head net.



7.4. Casting

To really enjoy the local fishing, you should be able to cast to a target at 50 feet. Attend BFF casting classes to learn how. If you can cast that distance, work on general accuracy at various distances, quick casts with minimum false casts, casting in the wind, and sidearm casting to get under the mangroves. Again, BFF casting classes will help with all of the above skills.



7.5 BFF Outings

Each month that there is a BFF meeting there is also a BFF club outing. The outing destinations vary and are another way to learn about fishing in the area. Outings are usually smaller groups and a great way to meet club members. Details about the outings are in the monthly newsletter and on the website. Both kayakers and boaters are welcome to participate. If you do not have a boat, the person organizing the outing will help pair you with a boater. If a club member takes you fishing on his/her boat, please be sure to offer to pay for the gas for the boat and car, as well as the launch fee if there is one. An offer to bring lunch and beverages might be accepted and also appreciated!





7.6 Guides

Guides are a great way to learn about fishing in southwest Florida. The guides are on the water every day and they move quickly from place to place to put their clients on fish. As a courtesy to guides, do not go back in your boat and fish the same spots the guide took you the day before. There are unlimited numbers of places to fish. If you have a boat, find your own secret spots. Do not use the guides' spots. That is how they make their living. The Guide page on the club website www.flyfishingnaples.com is a good reference source for local guides.

7.6.1 Arrangements

- Tell the guide if someone will be fishing with you.
- Ask about his fee.
- Ask what rods to bring.
- Inform him about your and your buddy's experience level.
- Ask what food/beverages he provides.
- Find out where and when to meet.
- If you want to fish for a specific species, e.g. tarpon in tarpon season, discuss that with the guide.
- If you have a problem with balance, ask the guide if he has a lean bar for the casting platform that he can bring.

7.6.2 Preparation and checklist

- If possible, arrive with your rods already strung. If not possible, arrive at the dock early enough to assemble and string them before your scheduled meeting time.
- Tape measure to measure fish for the BFF Fishing Tournament.
- Forceps/pliers/dehookers to remove hooks, 20- or 40-pound monofilament or fluorocarbon tippet. The guide can help with removing hooks from fish, tying flies on, adding tippet, etc. But once you are fishing and he is on the poling platform, the more you can do yourself the more quickly your fly will be in the water ready for you to catch a fish!
- Cash or check to pay the guide. Often a 10-20% tip is given.
- Plenty of liquids.
- Rain jacket/pants; squalls may develop even when not forecasted.
- Medicines you have to take during the day.
- Microfiber cloth, towel, or lens cleaning tissues for sunglasses.

7.6.3 Casting

- Practice casting before your guided trip.
- Attend BFF casting clinics to learn:
 - Tight loop, pick up and lay down, change direction, distance and direction control, vertical cast, sidearm cast, double haul, etc.



7.6.4 Fishing

- If two anglers are on the boat, one fishes while the other sits. The one who is not fishing should help with the angler's fly line to keep it in the boat, advise if it is under the angler's foot, undo tangles in the line, etc.
- When the guide sees a fish, he will often direct you to the fish by giving you the distance and direction referencing the clock face; e.g. "There's a redfish at 10 o'clock, 40 feet, cruising from right to left."
 - Establish with the guide if the clock is where you are standing, the middle of the boat, or where he is standing. This will avoid confusion when you start casting to the fish.
 - Take your time and make your first cast your best cast.
 - You may want to make one false cast to establish the correct direction and distance.
- Once a fish is hooked, bring it to the boat quickly. Your fishing partner can release or bring the fish onboard for you. If you are alone, retrieve the fish yourself or the guide can do it. Lift a snook out of the water by grabbing its lower lip firmly; lift a redfish by reaching under its body and grabbing its tail.
- To take a photo, follow the techniques in Photo Section 7.2.6.
- You may want to change flies or rods while fishing. Your fishing partner can help by changing the fly for you or handing you a fly for you to change. If you have another rod rigged, your buddy can hand you that rod and take your rod from you. He or she can stow that rod quickly by placing it on the deck facing backward.

7.6.5 Expectations

Be realistic. Our sport is called "fishing" not "catching." There are days when many fish will be caught and other days when no fish will be caught. Think of those days as "eco-tours." Most days will be somewhere in the middle! Your guide will take you to different locations and have you use different flies. Understand that he is working hard to help you catch fish. Relax and enjoy the experience of fishing in our beautiful waters while appreciating the wildlife that you will see.