



Weekly Sportfishing Rundown

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Someone told me that spring is coming early, in two weeks. I suppose I'll believe it when I see it. But with one frigid storm front after another, spring is a welcome thought. In the meantime, now is a good time to reorganize, restock, and perform much needed maintenance on fishing equipment before the springtime fishing season hits. Be sure to check your gear, update and replenish your tackle, and re spool your reels. Local tackle shops can help you prepare for the new fishing season, and all the new products from the winter tackle shows are now on the shelves.

Feisty puppy drum are still hitting in the Elizabeth River. Although speckled trout action slowed significantly this week, anglers who braved the cold, sleet, and snow managed a few nice fish from the Hot Ditch, the discharge area, and near the Cove. Sheldon Arey of Virginia Beach scored with a respectable 24-inch release citation while throwing a Mirrolure in the Elizabeth River this week. Sheldon also tagged this fish, as he does most all his trout. In fact, he tagged over 900 speckled trout last year, which earned him the top speckled trout tagging award for 2009. Robert Sufficool of Virginia Beach also managed a nice 25-inch release from the same area. Jon Lucy of VIMS reminds anglers that speckled trout provide vital information for the state's tagging program.

With winds keeping most boats near the beach over the last week, there is not much to report off the coast. But once anglers can get out, tautog will be on the top of the list. If you plan to go, be sure to make arrangements for the proper offshore tog bait, crabs. Tackle shops are watching the weather closely, and will stock tog bait accordingly. Toggers will find good results on the more offshore structures, with fish also available on wrecks at about 25-miles out.

Interest in striped bass is lagging way behind, but for those diehard rockfish anglers still targeting fish in ocean waters, prepare for a long run to the south. Law enforcement has been tightening up on illegally targeted rockfish in the EEZ lately, so make sure you stay well within the 3-mile limit. A few big fish pushing to over 50-pounds have hit the docks lately.

Deep water bottom dwellers are still luring anglers out to waters deeper than 300 feet when the wind allows. Boats venturing out are finding mostly good numbers of big blueline tilefish when they can weed through the relentless onslaught of dogfish. Some nice grouper, blackbelly rosefish, and golden tilefish are also available. Seabass will also take your bait, but be sure to throw them back for now while the season is closed.

Many anglers are throwing their up hands at the local weather, and traveling down to Carolina to hop on charter boats for bluefin tuna. Many folks are savvy enough to

manage success on their own boats instead of chartering. Either way, the bluefin bite has been good, with several fish pushing well over 100-pounds.

Wintery weather is an excellent time to attend seminars or courses. Bass Pro Shop in Hampton is hosting its Annual Spring Fishing Classic, with many national and regional experts lined up to give informative fishing-related seminars over the next week.

Another good course is the IGFA Certified Observer Training Class. I am assisting with the organization of the next Virginia Beach course to be hosted at **Ocean's East 2** tackle shop, on Saturday, March 20, 2010 at 9 a.m. The class instructs experienced anglers, boat captains and crew members as observers for fishing tournaments held across the globe. The IGFA OTC covers topics such as species identification, IGFA saltwater fishing rules and tackles regulations, safety at sea and boating etiquette. Space is limited to 40 people. IGFA OTC applications are available online at

http://www.igfa.org/PDF/COP_Application2008.pdf. Pre-registration is required and the \$150 fee covers the cost of the training class, course materials, and a one-year IGFA membership. Please contact IGFA Conservation Director Jason Schratwieser at 954-924-4320 or email him at jschratwieser@igfa.org for additional information.

For more information, go to www.drjball.com