

January 2003

Rick Davidson

Inshore Fishing Report

Inshore fishing has definitely hit the winter doldrums. As the grass and pinfish retreat from the flats, the trout, cobia and spanish go with them. Additionally severe winter tides have not helped. There are still reds to be found; Russ Roy and Brian Kiel found reds in shallow water holes, and they're also available in creeks if you can get into them. Because of the low rain amounts, the water is cold and clear and raises the possibility of sight fishing for reds. Trout have moved into the rivers at Steinhatchee and Suwannee but unfortunately at this point they are mostly 12-14 inches, with one keeper for every 4-5 short fish, and they are also not very plentiful. Hopefully this cold snap, with temps in the mid 20s will bring the larger fish in off the deeper flats. Fishing the river at either location can be stressful, since the fish congregate in relatively small areas, and always in the deepest water (which means the channel). If you've never seen the Steinhatchee River in the middle of the winter trout run, you'll be amazed to notice some of the more aggressive folks anchored right square in the middle of the channel., which is ringed with boats. We counted 45 boats in a 200 yard area. The real entertainment comes when one of the commercials, who would just as soon see all of the recreational fisherman go away, come barreling in through the channel without slowing down at all. I've seen canoes swamped, people dumped out of boats....great fun to watch. If you fish there, make sure you anchor a reasonable distance from the channel. Take the wind and tide into account, and make sure you are firmly anchored. Careful anchoring is important, because you want to be able to cast into the channel, so use light tackle and cast as far as you can upcurrent, letting the lures sink and working them very slowly. This year the trout have responded best to jigs with grubtails, but can be taken on freelined shrimp or sinking mirrorlures. You might want to throw down a bottom rig while you're at it. There are some large croaker and black drum on the bottom this time of year. If you can find structure, you always can try for sheepshead, even if it's inshore. On a recent trip with John Patrick, we found sheepshead around structure at Crystal River, only a few miles from the channel, which is an easy shot for an inshore boat. While most of the big spawners go out to the reefs, there are nice fish to be taken closer in if you can find the spot. In general, though, we're waiting for spring