Charlotte & Fort Myers Fishing Cheat Sheet

Charlotte & Lee Counties — FishSonar.com

Top Species: Tarpon / Snook / Cobia | Best Months: Apr – Jun (Tarpon), Oct – May (Snook) | Water: Pass, Harbor, Flats

Tarpon

Megalops atlanticus

Apr – Jun Peak | World Famous | C&R



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Boca Grande Pass — the Tarpon Capital of the World
- Charlotte Harbor flats — rolling schools in May and June
- Gasparilla Sound channel edges on incoming tides
- Pine Island Sound during summer months
- Fort Myers Beach area nearshore in April and May

BEST TIMES

April through June is the legendary Boca Grande tarpon run. Thousands of tarpon stage at Boca Grande Pass to feed on spawning hardhead catfish. This is arguably the greatest tarpon fishery on earth. Book a guide — it is worth every penny.

REGULATIONS

Catch-and-release only unless you purchase a $50 tarpon tag. Boca Grande Pass has additional gear restrictions — verify current rules at myfwc.com. Do not remove fish from water. Revive completely before release.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Live crabs — the signature Boca Grande Pass bait
- Jig & crab combo — the traditional Boca jig presentation
- Live mullet free-lined on the flats of Charlotte Harbor
- Large swimbaits and paddle tails for rolling fish

TACKLE SETUP

Heavy spinning or conventional, 50–80lb braid, 60–100lb fluoro leader. Circle hook 5/0–8/0. At Boca Grande, heavier weights (2–4oz) are needed to reach bottom in the deep pass.

Common Snook

Centropomus undecimalis

Oct – May | Slot 28–33"



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Matlacha Pass mangrove shorelines — excellent snook habitat
- Pine Island Sound grass flat edges and channel mouths
- Fort Myers Beach bridges and dock lights at night
- Charlotte Harbor mangrove points on falling tides
- Caloosahatchee River mouth and residential canals

BEST TIMES

Fall mullet run (October–November) stacks snook at pass mouths throughout Charlotte and Lee Counties. Spring is also productive before summer closure. Night fishing under dock lights is reliable October through May.

REGULATIONS

Slot: 28"–33" total length. Limit: 1/day. Season closed June 1–Aug 31 (Gulf side). Saltwater license + snook permit required.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Live pilchards or threadfin herring at pass mouths
- DOA Shrimp 3" or paddle tail swimbait on flat edges
- Hogy Paddle Tail swimbait along mangrove shorelines
- Live pinfish drifted near dock and bridge structure

TACKLE SETUP

Medium-heavy spinning, 20–30lb braid, 30lb fluoro leader. Circle hooks 3/0–5/0 for live bait. 3/8oz jig head for soft plastics.

Red Drum (Redfish)

Sciaenops ocellatus

Year-Round | Slot 18–27"



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Pine Island Sound shallow grass flats — world-class redfish
- Charlotte Harbor grass flat edges and oyster bars
- Matlacha Pass spoil islands and channel edges
- Gasparilla Sound tailing fish on low tides
- Estero Bay and Fort Myers Beach area flats

BEST TIMES

Year-round throughout both counties. Pine Island Sound is one of Florida's premier redfish destinations. Fall and winter produce consistent tailing fish on shallow flats. Look for nervous water on low tides.

REGULATIONS

Slot: 18"–27" total length. Limit: 1/day per angler. Saltwater license required.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Gold weedless spoon over grass — the classic redfish bait
- Bucktail jig 2oz worked along channel edges
- Live blue crab near oyster bars and shallow structure
- Cut mullet for larger bull reds near deep channels

TACKLE SETUP

Medium spinning, 20lb braid, 20–25lb fluoro leader. 1/0–2/0 weedless hook or 1/4oz jig head. Go weedless in heavy grass.

Cobia

Rachycentron canadum

Spring Beach Run | 33" Minimum



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Fort Myers Beach nearshore — spring beach run in March–May
- Near cownose rays migrating along the Gulf beaches
- Boca Grande area nearshore during tarpon season
- Channel markers and navigational buoys offshore
- Charlotte Harbor mouth and nearshore wrecks in spring

BEST TIMES

March through May is prime. Cobia follow rays in enormous schools along the Lee County beaches. This is a sight-fishing opportunity — spot fish from elevated platforms or a tower boat. High-speed strikes make this an exciting fishery.

REGULATIONS

Minimum: 33" fork length. Bag limit: 1/day per angler, 2/vessel. Seasons and limits can change — always verify current rules at myfwc.com before keeping cobia.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Hogy Paddle Tail Swimbait — excellent for sight-casting
- Large bucktail jig 2oz cast ahead of moving fish
- Live eel or large pinfish on a fish-finder rig
- Live crab drifted near rays or channel markers

TACKLE SETUP

Medium-heavy spinning or conventional, 30–50lb braid, 40–60lb fluoro leader. Hook 4/0–6/0. Use a stout rod — cobia are explosive and powerful fighters at the boat.

Sheepshead

Archosargus probatocephalus

Dec – Mar Peak | 12" Minimum



WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Dock pilings and bridge structure throughout Charlotte Harbor
- Fort Myers Beach pier and dock structure in winter
- Boca Grande Causeway bridge pilings
- Matlacha Bridge and Pine Island Sound structure
- Oyster bars and rocky outcroppings in Charlotte Harbor

BEST TIMES

December through March is the spawning run — sheepshead stack on pilings and nearshore structure in large numbers. Structure-dependent year-round, but winter concentrations make them easy to target during the cold months.

REGULATIONS

Minimum size: 12" total length. Bag limit: 15/day per angler. Saltwater fishing license required. No closed season in Florida Gulf waters.

BEST BAITS & LURES

- Live fiddler crabs — the undisputed #1 sheepshead bait
- Fresh shrimp (whole or pieces) near pilings
- Oyster flesh scraped from structure
- Barnacles knocked from dock pilings into the water

TACKLE SETUP

Light-medium spinning, 10lb line, Kahle or wide-gap hook 1/0–2/0. Little or no weight. Set the hook hard at the first subtle "thump" — sheepshead steal bait in an instant.

Tides & Timing — Charlotte & Fort Myers

Falling Tide — Best for Snook

Snook and reds funnel bait through Matlacha Pass and Boca Grande Pass channel edges on falling tides. Work the last 2 hours of outgoing water with live pilchards or swimbaits along mangrove points and channel bends.

Rising Tide — Best for Redfish

Redfish flood onto Pine Island Sound and Charlotte Harbor flats as the tide rises. Look for tailing fish and nervous water on the shallow flat edges. The first 2 hours of incoming tide is most productive.

Strong Incoming — Boca Grande Tarpon

The best tarpon action at Boca Grande Pass happens on the first strong incoming tide after a calm night in May and June. Arrive before sunrise, position upcurrent, and drift live crabs naturally through the current seams in the pass.

Spring Beach Tides — Cobia Run

Cobia follow migrating cownose rays along Fort Myers Beach and Boca Grande regardless of tide stage. Spot fish visually from elevated positions, then cast 10–15ft ahead of the moving school. One shot per fish.

Top Gear for Charlotte & Fort Myers (Amazon)

Hogy Paddle Tail Swimbait

Top lure for snook along mangroves and cobia sight casting

~$13

Buy on Amazon

Penn Battle III 6000 Spinning Reel

Built for tarpon — tough enough for Boca Grande Pass

~$130

Buy on Amazon

Seaguar Blue Label 60lb Fluoro

Heavy leader required for tarpon and large cobia

~$35

Buy on Amazon

Bucktail Jig 2oz

Go-to for redfish channels and cobia sight fishing

~$10

Buy on Amazon

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