

So you want to find fish? Start by finding a professional fishing forecasting service

by Mitch Roffer

WEST MELBOURNE, FL – As all of you out on the water already know, time and fuel costs are always important considerations when fishing.

Deciding on where you are going to fish before you leave the dock is as critical today as it was in the days before the various electronic aides that we have today existed.

Too many times we hear of fishermen who “know” where the fish are – based on dock rumors or private networking with secret reports.

While these can sometimes be useful techniques in finding concentrations of fish, one also hears more stories about how the fish “moved” or perhaps were never there in the first place.

Does “should have been here yesterday” sound familiar?

After many years of research and fishing experience it has become clear that fish will be found in areas where they can find necessary amounts of food – as eating is critical for growth and survival.

And that is where a good, professionally prepared fishing forecasting analysis can make all the difference in the world to your fishing experience and potential success.

What do fish like?

All fish have preferred habitats of depth, bottom type, water temperature, oxygen, salinity, clarity, and perhaps magnetic paths.

Preferred habitat zones are often relatively large areas relative to where one can travel by boat in several hours, so one has to learn where to find concentrations of fish inside the preferred habitat.

For this, turn to the physics of the ocean as it is the physical-chemical nature of the ocean that controls where fish will concentrate.

Most fishermen have seen “rips,” “streaks,” “breaks,” or current “edges” when fishing.

If they haven’t, then it is time they spent more time on the water with good polarized sunglasses looking at

the ocean instead of focusing on their electronic devices in the pilothouse.

These “edges” are typically the boundary of a pool of water or water mass.

What is interesting about water mass boundaries is that when the boundaries are persistent, particularly over “good bottom,” then these are the locations where there are concentrations of phytoplankton and zooplankton, the microscopic plants and animals of the ocean.

These organisms are pulled to the water mass boundary by a process called convergence – which is when the water along two water mass boundaries mixes and sinks because the new water that is formed by the mixing of the two different water types is heavier than each individual water type as a function of temperature and salinity.

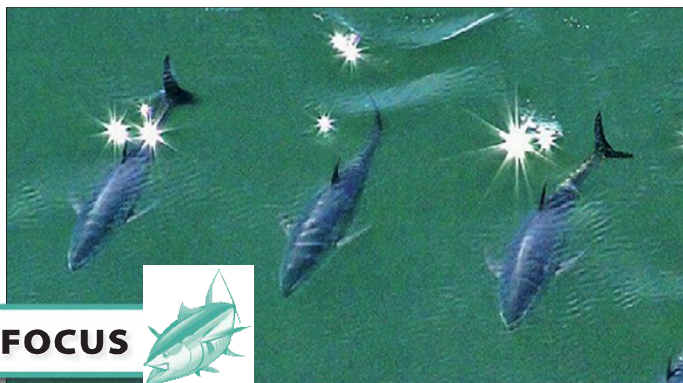
The sinking pulls the plankton to the mixing zone resulting in a concentration of plankton. The fish (such as herring or mackerel) concentrate in these zones, to eat either the plankton or eat the plankton feeders (everything else from cod, hake, to sharks and tuna).

Bigger fish then come and eat these smaller fish and so on. The food chain build-up over time is a critical factor.

The concept of using convergence zones, water mass boundaries, or ocean frontal zones is not new to fishing. And it is the main reason why fishermen use sea surface temperature gauges – since most of the density of the important water masses in New England (and elsewhere) are dominated by water temperature.

The key then is to be able to locate these convergence zones and particularly know which ones are stable (likely to remain) and how long a convergence zone has been concentrating fish.

Research and experience indicates that the longer the water mass boundary (convergence zone) has been stationary the greater the concentration



CFN/OceanAerials.com/W.Davis photo

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of fish that will be there.

A professional fishing forecasting service can be instrumental in helping you locate and utilize these zones.

Choosing a service

As more and more fish finding services and internet websites become available that show water temperature and ocean color products, choosing the right service may be a difficult decision for many fishermen today.

Today, there are a number of so-

called services that offer anything from simple sea surface temperature, chlorophyll, altimeter contour maps, to very pretty color satellite images, including ocean models.

However, the best ones:

- Provide a comprehensive fishing analysis that is designed for fishing;
- Integrate all the important ocean conditions (satellite and non-satellite);
- Evaluate how these conditions are related to locating feeding

See *FISH FORECASTING*, next page

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Fish forecasting

Continued from previous page

concentrations of fish;

- Have an extended fishing information network in your area;
- Send the information in an easy-to-use format; and
- Provide the most value for your money and time.

Providing comprehensive fishing forecasting analyses is an intensive process that requires expertise in a variety of scientific disciplines, including fisheries biology, physical oceanography, satellite remote sensing,

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image analysis, and computer science – to name a few.

Be sure to select the service that has developed advanced image analysis techniques, particularly when working with water motion and cloud reduction.

Find the ones that do not limit their products to simple sea surface temperature contour maps, pretty color images, models, or altimetry data.

Often a simple sea surface temperature map or a pretty color image will only provide a combination of cloud cover, other atmospheric effects (such as uneven humidity, fog, haze), and computer artifacts from automated processing of the satellite data.

It certainly will not allow you to understand the subtle changes in the short-term history and motion of the ocean currents which are critical to fishing success.

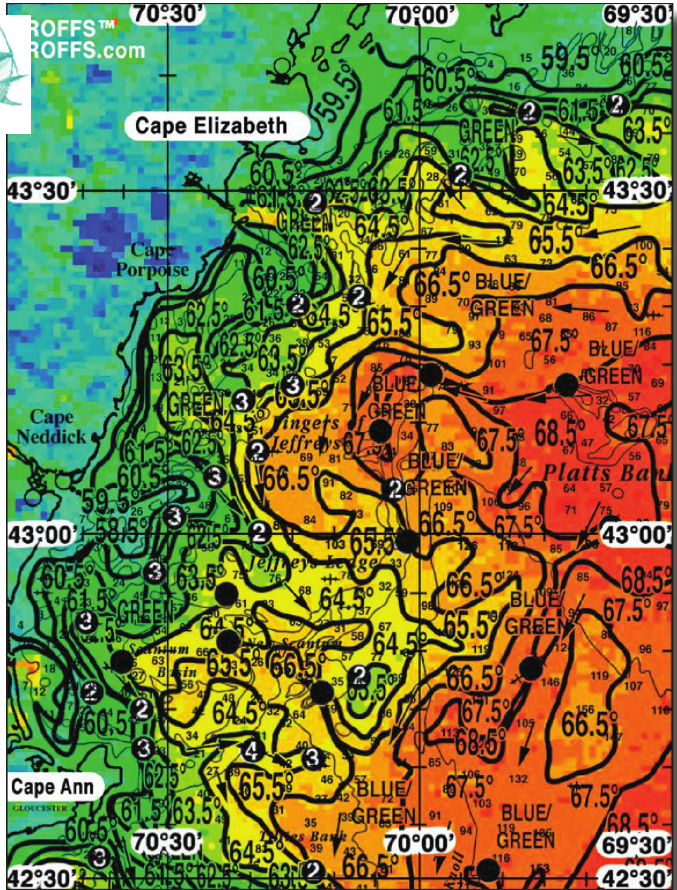
Find someone who integrates infrared, ocean color, chlorophyll (plankton and clarity), altimeter, radar, current meter, and meteorological data derived from national and international sources.

Be sure to get the highest spatial and temporal resolutions (5/8 mile).

While we have all grown accustomed to using computers, e-mails, and texts in our everyday life, find a forecasting service that



CPN/ Paul Murray photo



provides personalized attention when you contact them – along with the ability to communicate via computer or even satellite phone.

When you call, are you put on hold for long time periods or do you immediately speak with a knowledgeable person – not an

automated answering system or computer?

Find a service that is open at least five days, if not six, and sometimes seven days per week, 8-10-15 hours per day.

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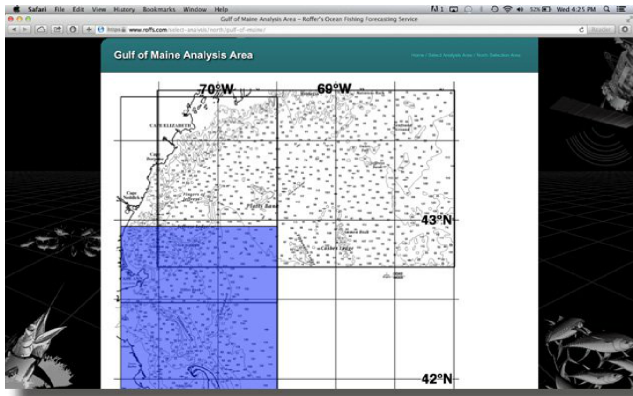
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or small the vessel and be sure to find a service where the staff oceanographers are available to discuss the analyses with all clients.

And, you know that there are already so many complications in daily business and life that you probably do not want to add complex software programs that may conflict with others on your computer. So use the keep-it-simple principle.

Good service specifics

A good service provides easy-to-understand graphics.

In the graphic accompanying this article (on page 20) a sample area fishing oceanographic analysis covers the area from east of Cape Elizabeth to Cape Ann.

The analysis was derived for bluefin tuna and sharks for July 31, 2014.

This shows water temperature, water color, navigation coordinates, bottom topography in fathoms, and arrows indicate current direction.

The important water mass boundaries are outlined and "hot spot"

black dots are placed over areas with favorable convergence conditions.

Numbers inside the dots indicate how many days consecutively that the conditions have been favorable.

For example, east of Cape Ann there is a #4 over

good bottom structure associated with a 1°F boundary (63.5°F-64.5°F) nearby another (65.5°F) boundary.

The text analysis indicated that this was the most favorable area for finding bluefin tuna among other items.

Other "hot spot" dots are marked with #3 which indicates that good chances for fishing action occurs there.

There are other subtleties to finding fish using currents and water mass boundaries that one learns through a combination of experience and by studying the analyses while fishing.

The bottom line is: When you consider the costs (fuel, time, and investment) involved in searching for fish, the price of a true fishing forecasting analysis is well worth the savings in just fuel and time alone.

Find a service that takes every step

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CFN/Ben Weiner Photography photo

to make every fishing day a success – as we all know that every fishing trip is important.

Why limit yourself to dock or radio rumors, static sea temperature or water clarity maps, colorized images or models and images, or "super-secret" fishing reports, when there are services that provide expertise, professional experience and service?

Remember by the time you read about it on the fish blogs, Facebook or elsewhere, it is history.

Find a service that forecasts where the fish will be concentrated when you are fishing. Find one focused on both finding fish and providing quality service.

Find a service that has flexible pricing for the integrated fishing analyses.

Some services make great promises with inexpensive derived products, and mass-produced colorized satellite images, that are inferior imitations of others.

Some universities and governmental

organizations provide a variety of satellite data for free.

However, with images you still have to guess where the fish will be found.

So how much extra time and money do you have to lose when producing an amateur's guess – considering that there are professional oceanographers that provide interpreted comprehensive analysis as part of a dedicated business with years of experience and success?

What is your time and investment in your boat worth?

Can you really afford to guess?

In closing, remember to work your fishing spots when and where it is safe and be sure that your hooks and harpoons are sharp and that your nets are wide open.

Good fishing. *lefn!*

Mitchell A. Roffer, Phd, has been operating Roffer's Ocean Fishing Forecasting Service (ROFFS) since 1987. He can be reached via e-mail at <munadoctor@me.com>. For more information on the services his company provides visit <www.roffs.com>.

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