

FISHING ON THE HIGH TIDE

Summertime on Charlotte Harbor means high tides and good fishing. The angling challenge with the extra high tides of summer is where to find the fish. With each incoming tide redfish, snook and trout meander their way into the feeding grounds. Starting from the lower tide phases, gamefish will warily make a trek into the backcountry. The middle tidal phases can be difficult because the fish are spread out over our expansive flats. As the flow of tide adds inches to the water depth, the range of exploration expands.

The expanding waterline floods mangroves, oyster beds and weedy bottom that previously were too shallow for safe feeding. Savvy anglers need to position themselves to take advantage of the incoming water. There is indeed a certain strategy that needs to be employed. Many strategies have come from extensive hours of not catching any fish compared to the short scopes of time where and when the fishing is hot. In short, many fishing spots have short windows of time where the fish are either passing through or positioned in a feeding mode for a length of time. There are incoming tide spots and outgoing tide spots and a rare few are both.

Incoming vs. Outgoing Tide- If you consider that fish are migrating with the rising tide to feed then it would seem that they would be hungrier and more aggressive on the incoming. Conversely, on the outgoing tide the fish have already been feeding and are gearing up to migrate back out of the shallows as the tides recede. Which fish is going to be more aggressive, an incoming tide fish that has been led by the dinner bell of the high tide or the outgoing tide fish that has been feeding for hours and is heading out?

Most anglers I know love the incoming tide. Obviously, this is because they catch more fish on the incoming tide. For the high tides of summer I prefer the top of the outgoing tides, but the last 2 hours of incoming are pretty hard to beat. Perhaps some anglers are just better at understanding the predatory instincts of redfish and snook on certain tide phases.

The next question is where do fish go on a high tide? Generally speaking, they move further into the

backcountry with rising waters. They choose funnel areas that modify water flow and they look for shoreline irregularities that will allow them to position themselves to ambush prey. Finding them sounds simple enough but it requires persistence. There are so many great looking spots when the bushes are flooded.

A few things to look for are:

- Mangroves with indentations that are flooded on high tide and void on low tide (preferably located next to deeper water).
- Mangroves that have adjacent oyster beds.
- Mangroves with obvious current flow.
- Creek channels leading from the backcountry.
- Mangroves that contain hard banks.
- Baitfish activity of any kind.
- Mullet jumping or swirling.
- Oyster beds.

Fishing techniques are basic. For artificials, high tides are the perfect time to become a “bassmaster”. Cast spoons and weedless soft plastics in rapid fire fashion and cover lots of water. This is a great time to work a topwater bait as well. Bait fishing requires more patience, but is hard to beat. Fish pinfish or cut bait on the bottom and hang on. The most important key is to make accurate casts with your bait tight against the bush. A cast two feet from the bush is usually a wasted cast as gamefish will usually not stray far from their water flushed sanctuary.

There are some other considerations for high tide fishing. The huge influx of freshwater will create extra current flow particularly on the outgoing tide. Fish may position themselves to take advantage of the extra water flow and the groceries that flow out with it. With huge rainfalls you may have to consider the varying salinity. If the water becomes too fresh, then baitfish may avoid the area as well as what your fishing for. Lastly, super high tides that are wind driven can be the kiss of death for fishing. Extra flooded waters give the fish way too much room to roam however the lack of tide flow that usually comes with it does more to shut down the bite than the extra water.

Fishing is always about being in the right place at the right time.