

# WATERFRONT TIMES

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## FISHING TOURNAMENT TO HELP FUND NOVA SCHOLARSHIPS

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### Red snapper season starts in the Gulf on May 7

**ARNOLD MARKOWITZ L WATERFRONT TIMES** Spring is fishing tournament time in southeast Florida, with prize contests for catching almost everything but starfish and plenty of ancillary activities to raise money for worthy causes.

Here's one featuring fire: the Blazing Mako Tournament and Festival, scheduled for Father's Day weekend, June 16 to 19 at the Islander Resort in Islamorada.

It's a Guy Harvey Outpost-branded spot, and that is not a coincidence. All profits of the event will go into the Guy Harvey Foundation for funding scholarships to Nova Southeastern University's Halmos College of Natural Sciences and Oceanography and Guy Harvey Research Institute.

The tournament itself takes up just one of the four days — Saturday June 19, which should leave enough time to save or raise the entry fee — \$5,000 for the offshore division with four to six anglers per boat or \$2,500 for the offshore division with two to three per boat.

The offshore prize species are dolphin, wahoo, tuna, kingfish and billfish (sail and marlin). Backcountry targets are permit, bonefish, tarpon, snook and redfish.

The fire feature is a mako shark sculpture built from disposable materials by Islamorada artist Roberto "Pasta" Pantaleo, who specializes in Keys fish and wildlife.

Other than the fishing tournament, the festival includes an "Artist and Conchervation Village" on the beach, with 100-plus vendors offering art, food and science information, plus other events.

For all the info, go online to [www.guyharveyoutpost.com/blazing-mako](http://www.guyharveyoutpost.com/blazing-mako). Click the fishing link there for tournament registration and more details.

#### Commercial fisherman pleads guilty to poaching

If you pay attention to the movements of commercial crab and lobster boats on Miami's offshore waters, you may have noticed that El Donny hasn't been at sea for about a year. The 43-foot trapper was busted for poaching last May 9 in Biscayne Channel, which runs through Stiltsville in Biscayne National Park.

You won't see it again until it's eventually auctioned off along with other state or federal equipment seizures. Owner Donny Caridad Gonzalez, 54, and his uncle Nemesio Gonzalez Garcia, 77, lost possession as part of a deal to plead guilty and serve three years of probation for trapping lobster out of season, possession of undersized lobster and wringing tails from bodies while still at sea and other fishing violations.

They also lose their commercial fishing and saltwater products licenses. Neither man may register, operate or captain a commercial vessel while on probation for three years.

El Donny, well known to marine police for its history of fishing law violations, was pulled over last year by FWC wildlife officers and national park rangers in Biscayne Channel, ostensibly for a routine safety inspection.

According to FWC, an officer looking in the engine room noticed a plastic bag containing lobster tails. Then more bags of tails were found. The final score was 87, of which 66 were illegally undersized.

At the same time on the boat, officers also arrested Josefina Diaz Garcia, now 69. Charges against her were still pending when the sentences of the others were announced in mid-April.

#### Lionfish king or queen

If the invasion of Indo-Pacific lionfish eventually succeeds in taking over Florida's offshore waters, it won't be for lack of counter-warfare. Florida is fighting back bravely, its latest strategy to crown a lionfish king or queen for catching the most lionfish between Saturday, May 14 — that is Lionfish Removal and Awareness Day — and the end of September.

In Pensacola, the base of the worst infestation, there's a whole lionfish weekend, the 14 and 15.

Achieving royalty may not be easy, but the rewards will be worth the work. The lionfish queen or king will be awarded a lifetime saltwater fishing license, a photo portrait on the cover of next year's saltwater regulations, a place of honor in MyFWC.com's online Lionfish Hall of Fame and public recognition at the November 2016 meeting of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation commission.

Other active competitors will be almost as celebrated. Everyone who turns in at least 50 captured lionfish will get a commemorative coin, a lionfish T-shirt and a listing in the Lionfish Hall of Fame. They also will be entered in drawings to win fishing licenses, lionfish hunting gear, fuel cards and dive tank refills. If they qualify before the lobster mini-season (July 27-28) they will be allowed to keep one lobster over the limit.

While that is going on statewide, a separate lionfish action takes place in waters off the Panhandle counties of Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Gulf and Franklin counties, where lionfish density is highest.

There, everyone who turns in 100 or more lionfish between this May and next May can have a tag to take one more legal-size red grouper or cobia than the bag limit. Anyone who catches 500 or more in that time span will get to name an artificial reef.

Eligible fish must be brought to official check-in stations, which will include state-sponsored tournaments. Go to [MyFWC.com/Lionfish](http://MyFWC.com/Lionfish) for updates.

#### Gulf snapper

Here is the latest schedule for a fragmented 78-day red snapper season in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico: Beginning Saturday, May 7, red snapper can be kept on weekends only until May 28, when the season will be open daily through July 10.

Then the season will be closed until Sept. 2, when it will reopen on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through October, plus Labor Day on Monday, Sept. 5.

The minimum size is 16 inches, with a bag limit of two per person per day.

The catch-and-keep season in federal waters of the Gulf had not been announced by April 22. FWC, which expects it to be only six to nine days, usually reports it on the FWC website's snapper page, [myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/snappers](http://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/snappers).

Charter and headboat seasons for red snapper are expected to open on June 1, their length not yet determined.

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