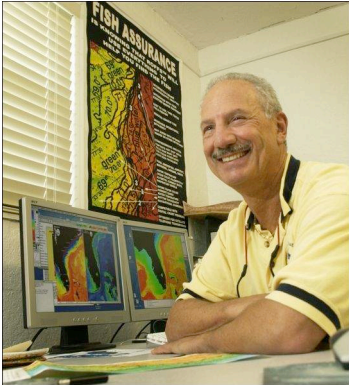


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Hook, line and science help anglers Local scientist's forecasts reduce the 'luck' factor *BY MARK DeCOTIS FLORIDA TODAY*

West Melbourne's Mitchell Roffer can lead offshore anglers to fish, substantially reducing the need for luck.



The renowned scientist, who recently relocated to Brevard County from Miami, has made a name for himself and his Roffers Ocean Fishing Forecasting Service, Inc. through his involvement with fisheries, oceanography and environmental science dating back to 1987. But no matter how sophisticated and celebrated his satellite-driven road maps to the fish have become, skill is still required when it comes to boating the big ones.

"We tell our clients that they can't use rubber hooks, meaning that they still need to use their skill in hooking and boating the fish," Roffer said. "We feel that with our science-based fish forecasting analyses that we substantially reduce the luck factor in the catch equation."

And with the level of fishermen Roffer interacts with -- we're not talking about the guy standing on the bulkhead with a Wal-Mart rod and reel and a bucket of worms -- precise and accurate forecasts that go for \$50 a pop can be vital.

"I think as the price of fuel is going up . . . people are realizing now that if they make a mistake just on the order of 20 or 30 minutes they are going to burn \$50 worth of fuel," Roffer said. "Or, an hour. If they go an hour the wrong way and they've got to come back, they are burning more than \$50 worth of fuel and therefore they say, 'I just wasted two hours going the wrong way and the time.' "

Roffer will be one of a host of speakers at the 2007 Salt Water Sportsman National Seminar Series stop on Saturday at Astronaut High School in Titusville. The seminar begins at 9 a.m. and runs until 4 p.m.

Tickets are \$55 and can be purchased by calling 1-800-448-7360 or by visiting www.nationalseminarseries.com

At a glance

What: The 2007 Salt Water Sportsman National Seminar Series

Where: Titusville's Astronaut High School on Saturday

When: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Guests: For a list of the 10 faculty and topics, visit www.nationalseminarseries.com/locations.htm

Tickets: \$55 and can be purchased by calling 1-800-448-7360 or at www.nationalseminarseries.com

Roffer's tournament-legal service uses GPS and Loran (latitude and longitude-based) satellite mapping beamed to his \$100,000 satellite system and a high-powered network of Macintosh computers to produce a color-enhanced map and full-page analysis of water temperature and conditions that could be conducive to good fishing.

And while any angler would find his service useful, he has a core group of aficionados.

"We have plenty of romantics, but basically we're looking at people who have boats . . . 26 feet and above," he said. "If you look at the investment of a 26-foot new boat today for a variety of manufacturers, you're in \$100,000 invested and you can go way up to a \$150,000 easily, plus the mortgage, plus dockage or storage so they're an investment. Plus, their time is limited, so these are the guys who now also have these \$500 fishing reels. They may have six or eight or 10, and they have made this a very serious, expensive hobby and they want to go out there and catch fish."

And if they pay for his service and they don't catch anything?

"If you go out and get skunked, and we're saying that fishing conditions are good and you're likely to have good chances for good fishing and you call us back the next day, we will provide you with the next analysis for free," he said. "If the conditions are mediocre -- we don't make the ocean -- if the ocean is unstable, meaning the Gulfstream is coming in one day and pulling off the other, it's moving back and forth, the conditions are unstable, and we state that and say fishing is likely to be slow and scattered over a broad area, and you go out there and you find that, then we have been accurate.

"You may not be happy that you didn't catch fish, but we have been accurate. If a customer tells us our analyses is not accurate, for whatever reason, then we evaluate the analyses and if we find them to have a valid argument then we want these clients to use us forever. We don't want them just to use and forget about us."

Roffer also sells his services to sailboat racers who need up-to-date data on currents, and provides routing information and data on ocean currents to oil companies.

And what are his daily observations from the satellites and from his living in Melbourne Shores telling him?

"Some places (in the ocean) have improved and some places it has degraded," he said. "If you go up and look at New York Harbor and parts of Chesapeake Bay and Baltimore Harbor, those places have cleaned substantially. However, if you go to areas that have developed in the last, let's say five or 10 years, their environmental conditions are degrading. Off of Jacksonville, off of Daytona, unfortunately off of Melbourne, Fort Pierce, certainly Miami and Fort Lauderdale.

"We're seeing an excess amount of nutrients going in from runoff from lawn fertilizer, from leaking septic tanks now going into the ground water, which is a terrible problem that needs to be considered. That water's getting into the Intracoastal and then that's getting washed offshore.

"So it first seemed to be good for enrichment purposes because it created more plankton, but now we're getting too much plankton and we're getting the wrong kinds of plankton, like red tide. Offshore, I think the conditions are probably better today than they were 15 years ago because we have new laws about dumping oil, we have new laws about dumping trash, we have new laws about plastic. This is an exception to the cruise lines off of Canaveral that are still dumping their mess into the ocean. That's a problem, but overall I think the ocean might be a cleaner place today, the offshore ocean, than it was 10 or 15 years ago."

So, consequently, the fishing should be better, but there's so much that goes into it.

"One of our expressions is, 'it's a big ocean, and the day is short,' " he said.

West Melbourne's Rob Beckner, Vice President, Office and Industrial Properties, for Lightle Commercial Inc. can speak to that.

"For the most part, anytime I go offshore I use it," he said of Roffer's service. "In fact, about two weeks ago, I got a report and hadn't really planned on fishing that day. We went out with the report and we caught tons of kings, we caught some bonita, and we got into some cobia, as well. In an hour and a half, we were out of bait, we were out of everything. It was just one of those magical days."

For Beckner, any trip out of Sebastian Inlet on his 20-foot Mako needs to be productive.

"Here's the deal. Part of the challenge of offshore fishing is knowing where to go, it's a big ocean. Anytime I get Mitch's report, it's very detailed on specific areas that should be holding fish. I'm able to go to those areas. It saves gas. It gives me more fishing time."

So if it works that well, is there a danger of overfishing?

"Our philosophy is we want fishermen to go out there and catch fish, and we also want them to release most of the fish that they catch and save them for the next day," Roffer said.

"If everyone caught all the fish today, they would not have fun the next time they went out because they would deplete the resource. In the recreation fisheries if people are good conservationists, return to the water their second, third or fourth and fifth fish there should not be a problem with overfishing due to our service."

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