

State Wants To Find Out If Eating Fish From Waccamaw Linked To Mercury Counts

BY SUSAN USHER

A state physician was to visit the Ash community Wednesday morning to collect hair and blood samples from people who live along the Waccamaw River in Columbus and Brunswick counties to test for exposure to mercury.

Samples were to be collected Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Waccamaw-Ash Community Building, next to Waccamaw Elementary School, by Dr. Greg Ward, an epidemiologist with the N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources.

Mercury levels were "slightly elevated" but not near the danger level in some of the samples taken Aug. 30 from a group of Columbus County residents who regu-

larly eat quantities of largemouth bass from the Waccamaw River, said Bill Furney, information officer for the state health director. "There was enough there to warrant finding out more. That first sample was not large enough to indicate what is really going on in the community. More testing was needed."

Smith's study is attempting to evaluate whether or not eating fish from the Waccamaw River is associated with elevated levels of mercury in body tissues.

The testing is being done at no cost to participants, with each participant receiving the results only of his or her own samples, said Smith. Any results deemed to be abnormally high will be discussed with the participant.

In August the state issued an advisory warning that

largemouth bass taken from the river showed elevated levels of mercury. Most adults are being encouraged not to eat more than a pound of bass over a month's time (about two servings), while women of childbearing age and children are advised not to eat largemouth bass at all.

Other species tested by the state last year and this spring did not show the same levels of mercury and are not covered by the advisory. The state is continuing to analyze tissue samples of a variety of fish species. Results are not expected to be available before some time in October.

During his three-day visit to Brunswick and Columbus counties, Smith's goal was to obtain samples of hair

(one finger pinch of about 100 strands) and blood (two tubes) from a large number of people in the Waccamaw River area, both those who have eaten fish from the Waccamaw River in the past year and "controls," people who live in the same area but have not eaten fish from the river.

All volunteers were also asked to answer a short questionnaire.

Smith collected samples in the Crusoe, Old Dock and Nakina communities Monday and Tuesday.

For more information about the mercury advisory or the testing contact either the Brunswick County Health Department or the Columbus County Health Department.

VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT FOR LOCAL TESTING



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

A Sign Of The Season

A passing rain cloud soon broke up the surf fishing one morning last week at Sunset Beach. It was a scene typical of the fall season across the South Brunswick Islands.

Offshore Fishing Produces Memories For A Lifetime

BY JAMIE MILLIKEN

I've always contended that anytime you cross the bar, you are truly in for either a great adventure or witnessing a few of God's creations that will result in a memory to last the rest of your life. Before I get into this week's adventures, I would like to share a story about one man's memory of an exciting day of offshore fishing.

The story begins in the early 1970s. Rube McMullan and his uncle Jeff Blackmon were fishing a small 20-foot boat off the Florida Keys. In those days the charter fleet was made up of large fishing vessels ranging from 38 to 50 feet. Small boats had not yet earned their now-accepted respect as true fishing machines.

Rube and Jeff were trolling dead bait and had five lines in the water. The radio talk among the charter fleet was mostly negative toward what they referred to as the skiff being out there in their ocean!

It was without warning that the fish sailfish slapped the bait and began his beautiful walk on the water. That in itself will cause a fire drill on board, so you can just imagine what was going on as, one by one, all five reels screamed with five sailfish hooked up and putting on a show.

The radio talk then turned to excitement as the starched-khaki-shirted captain shouted encouragement for the little skiff. Rube and Uncle Jeff managed to land two of the five sails and to keep all five on for a good while.

Early this year as the cold winds of February blew through the Appalachians, Jeff Blackmon was losing his hard-fought battle with cancer. He had requested earlier to be moved from a hospital bed to his home in the hills. It was there in his home, surrounded by family, that his mind began to fade. For three days he did not recognize anyone, and his words were not understandable.

On the third day, the final day of Jeff's life, he looked straight in his families' faces and said, "Let me tell you the story of when Rube and I hooked up five sailfish at one time." He then proceeded to tell the entire story as accurately as if it had hap-



CAPTAIN JAMIE'S OFFSHORE FISHING REPORT

pened the day before. I told you that you can carry these memories with you the rest of your days. Enough said.

Our adventure started Friday morning as Brant McMullan, Chip Maree and I began our quest for a king mackerel that would hopefully win us the prestigious Wrightsville Beach King Mackerel Tournament. The wind was out of the northwest, making the ocean surface slick as glass along the South Brunswick Islands.

All eyes were focused on the still water as the *Caribbean Soul* headed west in search of live bait. We were off Holden Beach when Chip said, "That may be mullets up there." I strained to see what he already had seen.

A dark spot on the surface lay close to a mile ahead of the boat. I tell you, this man has the eye of a hawk when it comes to looking for fish. Sure enough, he was right.

As we got closer, I could not believe what I was seeing—a school of mullet tightly packed, but big enough to cover a city block in Shallotte (if Shallotte had a city block). I bet you there were tens of thousands of pounds of fish. Chip called it a raft of mullet; if that was a raft, I'd hate to see a ship!

With one throw of the cast net, it took Brant and Chip to haul the net back on board, we had bait and we had supper for half the county.

The other memorable event of the

weekend was when a huge fish took the downrigger bait. Brant fought what we all figured was a large shark for more than an hour on a live bait Diawa rod, 50H reel and 20-pound Trilene line. At the one hour, 20 minutes mark, the shark showed himself for the first time.

He was at least 12 to 14 feet long, weighing between 400 and 500 pounds. Wow! This was a Hollywood shark! We started thinking of a possible record for light tackle, and I guess I may have been completely crazy. I unleashed the bow line and hastily put a slip noose in the end to tail rope this monster.

You know, God looks after His children, and I guess that is why the leader wire broke and the mother of all sharks slowly slid beneath the surface. It will be a while before I forget about that one.

Our kingfish efforts were not so good, as we only could muster an 18-pounder for our largest fish. I regret that I don't know the crew that landed a 38-pounder to win this year's event, but I have heard that it was a Brunswick County team.

Congratulations to them and my friends Wendall Vareen, Al Fulford and Kyle White, all of whom captained their boats onto the leader board.

Our season is winding down, and I probably will only write when the spirit moves me. I believe if you don't have anything to say, keep your mouth closed—in my case, keep your pen in the drawer.

Thanks to all of you who have let me know your comments concerning my articles. My thanks also to those who called to let me know who was catching what and where. That made these columns possible.

Thanks to the many who made up the different crews aboard the *Caribbean Soul*. I can honestly say I've had a ball.

Good luck, "Jolly Mon."

FISHING REPORT

Anglers Catching Blues In Surf

BY DOUG RUTTER

The fall spots haven't arrived yet, but there's still plenty of fishing going on in the South Brunswick Islands.

Pete Singletary of Captain Pete's Seafood at Holden Beach said fishermen have been catching a lot of bluefish and drum inshore and nice king mackerel outside.

"All in all, I think with the weather fishing hasn't been that bad with blues and drum," he said Monday. "The blues have been doing right well for the last two weeks."

Anglers have been pulling a lot of blues from the surf. Singletary said fishermen also caught drum last week averaging 6 to 9 pounds.

"Spots aren't that great yet," Singletary added. "We're going to have to have some cool weather to get them down from Virginia. If we get a couple good cool shifts they'll be trucking on down the coast."

Sea Mist Camping Resort

Anglers caught some nice flounder last week in the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway near Brick Landing, said Nellie Harrell of Sea Mist Camping Resort.

"It's not great but they're at least catching some," she said. "It's better than it was, but the water's still too warm."

Pier Fishing

Slowly but surely, pier fishing is starting to improve across the South Brunswick Islands.

"We haven't had any runs yet, but it's gradually picking up," Gil Bass of Holden Beach Fishing Pier said Monday.

Anglers caught drum, bluefish, spots and whiting last week. Alene Plattenberger of Holden Beach caught a 19-pound king mackerel over the weekend.

"It hasn't been real good but it hasn't been real bad either," Bass said. "We're thankful for what we got."

At Ocean Isle Beach Pier, spokesman Curtis Williamson said he's still waiting for the water temperature to drop and the fishing to



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED
JOHN WATSON of Rock Hill, S.C., shows off a 30-pound sailfish caught during a recent trip on the Alice E.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED
STEVE FOGLEMAN of Snow Camp landed this 22-pound king mackerel recently aboard the Alice E out of Holden Beach.

improve.

"It was awfully slow the whole week. It was about as sorry as I've seen. It was terrible," Williamson said.

"We're going to get a cool front on Thursday and maybe that will start things off," he added. "We're hoping this week will change the picture."

Local Angler Wins Tourney

John R. Hawes III of Long Beach landed a 38.75-pound king mackerel Sunday to win the Wrightsville Beach King Mackerel Tournament.

Hawes, captain of the *Shamu*, was fishing with Troy Speights and Curtis Willis as a first-time entry in the tournament.

The winning fish was worth \$34,220 in prize money to the local fishermen, said tournament public relations director Teresa McLamb.

Paul Greene of Wilmington placed second with a 37.95-pound fish, followed by Karl Mrozek of Durham with a 36-pounder.

Other local fishermen among the winners included Al Trunell of Southport, who placed 13th, and Joe Manning of Yaupon Beach, who finished 18th. Al Fulford of Shallotte was 31st overall.

Ray Harrelson of Long Beach was among the daily winners Saturday. Winning \$500 sponsor awards were Kyle White of Shallotte, Randy Way of Yaupon Beach and Frank Irving of Winnabow.

McLamb said the 11th annual tournament had 351 entries. The fishermen weighed in 375 king mackerel with a total weight of 6,310.45 pounds.

This Week's Tide Table

SEPTEMBER

Day	Date	HIGH		LOW	
		A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
Thursday	30	8:20	8:42	2:07	2:28

OCTOBER

Day	Date	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
Friday	1	8:55	9:14	2:43	3:07
Saturday	2	9:30	9:46	3:19	3:45
Sunday	3	10:02	10:17	3:54	4:22
Monday	4	10:36	10:49	4:28	4:59
Tuesday	5	11:13	11:23	5:05	5:40
Wednesday	6	11:59	-----	5:47	6:26

ADJUSTMENTS

- SHALLOTTE INLET—add 17 min. high tide, add 32 min. low tide.
- LOCKWOOD FOLLY—subtract 22 min. high tide, subtract 8 min. low tide.
- BALD HEAD ISLAND—subtract 10 min. high tide, subtract 7 min. low tide.
- SOUTHPORT—add 7 min. high tide, add 15 min. low tide.
- LITTLE RIVER—subtract 11 min. high tide, add 18 min. low tide.

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