

Basic Tips for Fishing

Including:

- Fishing Licenses
- Bag and Size limits
- Fishes of Cape Coral Canals
- Parks and Boat Launches
- Eating What You Catch
- Recycling Fishing Supplies

The City of Cape Coral is unique, surrounded on 3 sides by water: the Caloosahatchee, Matlacha Pass, and Charlotte Harbor. Even if you do not live directly on the water you are only blocks away from water in any direction. The City has 409 miles of waterways; 156 miles of freshwater, 222 miles of saltwater and 31 miles of shoreline. The canals provide flood protection, stormwater treatment, water for irrigation, waterfront property, recreation such as fishing and boating, and habitat for wildlife. While the City itself does not have specific regulations for species of fish, we follow all regulations and guidelines put forth by the State of Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, which can be found at www.myfwc.com.

Tides do influence our saltwater canals so check the tables online before fishing and boating. The first two hours of flood tide/high tides and the last 2-3 hours of the out-going tide will be best for fishing. Slack tide is the poorest; this is the short period in a body of tidal water when the water is not moving or right in between low and high. Most fish species are active and feeding during dawn and dusk.

Fishing Licenses

Fishing licenses are required in the City for residents and non-residents and are available at the County tax collector's offices, and many sporting goods stores that sell hunting or fishing equipment. You can obtain a license 24 hours a day at GoOutdoorsFlorida.com and begin fishing immediately. Licenses may also be obtained over the telephone by dialing toll-free, 1-888 FISH FLORIDA (347-4356), or online at www.MyFWC.com. You can also download the FWC Fish-Hunt-FL app for your iPhone or Android for instant access.

In Florida, it does not matter what type of water you are fishing in, it matters what type of fish you are keeping. If you catch a redfish in freshwater, to keep it you must have a saltwater license. The easiest way to keep what you catch is to buy a combination license that covers both Fresh and Saltwater. An exception is you may take mullet from fresh water with only a freshwater fishing license, even though they are normally considered a saltwater species.

There are some exceptions to requiring a license which include::

- A child under 16 years of age or a Florida resident 65 years of age or older and you possess proof of age and residency
- A resident who is fishing with live or natural bait, using poles or lines that are not equipped with a fishing line-retrieval mechanism, and you are fishing for noncommercial purposes in your home county (cane-pole exemption)
- A Florida resident certified as totally and permanently disabled and you possess a Florida Resident Disabled Person Hunting and Fishing Certificate. You have been accepted as a client for developmental disabilities services by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. The agency must furnish proof to such clients.
- A resident who is a member of the Armed Forces of the United States, you are not stationed in this state, and you are home on leave for 30 days or less
- You possess a Resident Freshwater Commercial Fishing License
- License-free freshwater days
 - First Saturday and Sunday in April
 - Second Saturday and Sunday in June
- License-free saltwater days
 - First Saturday and Sunday in June
 - First Saturday in September
 - Saturday following Thanksgiving

Size and Bag Limits

For many fishes found in our canals there are minimum and maximum lengths set for which fishes you can keep (also called a slot limit). A bag limit is the number of fish you can keep per day/fishing trip (also called creel limits). Closed season is when you cannot keep any fish of a given species for the duration of the season. These regulations help fish populations remain sustainable for future generations. Size limits allow fish to reach maturity to complete their breeding cycle and bag limits assist in sharing the resource. Good sources for regulation information include:

- eregulations.com/florida/fishing/
- myfwc.com/media/4219696/QuickChart.pdf
- myfwc.com/media/4234225/2017FLFWRegulations.pdf

Fishes of Cape Coral Canals

Fish are abundant throughout the canals of Cape Coral. Some of the saltwater fishes found in the canals include snook, black drum, sheepshead, snappers, and spotted seatrout. Freshwater fishes of Cape Coral include bass, crappie, and several species of sunfish. Grass Carp and Alligator Gar require a scientific collector's permit to take and cannot be taken with a regular fish license. We occasionally have endangered Small-toothed Sawfish in our waterways as well, please report all sighting to Sawfish@MyFWC.com or call 941-255-7403. Non-native fishes are

also, unfortunately plentiful in our canals. Species include tilapia, walking catfish and many species of African and South American cichlids. Non-native fish should be harvested and not released as there is no bag limit on exotic fishes. You may take as many as you can. Never release any aquarium fishes (or plants) into our waterways as it is illegal. Because aquarium fishes are bred to be hardy and survive in non-ideal conditions they often become invasive and displace native fishes. They can also introduce disease to natives. Please avoid using live non-natives for bait.

We also have lots of catfish in our canals. While you can't completely stop catching them, there are tips in how to avoid them. Get your bait off the bottom (where catfish feed) and try fishing under a bobber and experiment with depths. Live bait and frozen shrimp are going to attract them so try some artificial baits. Or use bait that is alive and too big for a catfish to eat, bait that is bigger than a quarter should reduce your rate of catching catfish. Try fishing with whole, small crabs (live is better). Try to fish over grass flats or on edges and when the tide is moving. And just try a new spot, if you always catch catfish off your dock try fishing at one of our local parks.

Parks and Boat Launches

- Bernice Braden Park, open 24 hours
- Four Freedoms Park, 24 hours
- Four Mile Cove Ecological Park, daylight only
- Glover's Bight, daylight only
- Horton Park, daylight only
- Seahawk Park (Lake Argosy), daylight only
- Lake Kennedy Park, daylight only
- BMX Park, daylight only
- Sirenia Vista, daylight only
- Yacht Club, 24 hours
- Jaycee Park, daylight only
- Founder's Park, daylight only
- Rosen Park, 24 hours

Public boat launches are located at several City Parks. The trailer fee is \$10 per day and can be paid by phone with credit card or cash at some locations. Annual passes are available for \$50 at the Yacht Club and City Hall. Find a map of the City boat launches at www.capecoral.net/departments/parks_and_recreationhome/parks_map.php. The City also has unimproved freshwater boat ramps that are open to the public and do not require a daily parking fee; these sites are unpaved with limited parking available and have no amenities on site. For more information on these please visit www.capecoral.net/departments/parks_and_recreationhome/boating.php.

Eating What You Catch

Often residents ask if they can eat the fishes they catch in Cape Coral. The Florida Department of Health and FWC work together to test fresh and saltwater fishes all over the state to determine safety. We recommend residents follow the guidelines at www.floridahealth.gov

Recycling Fishing Supplies

The City of Cape Coral is a participant in the Monofilament Recycling and Recovery Program (MRRP) which provides residents with the opportunity to recycle their used fishing line at many of our active fishing spots. This keeps fishing line out of our waters and away from wildlife. Large white PVC recycling bins located at boat launches and waterfront parks are a safe place to dispose of broken or used fishing line. The bins are emptied by City staff; hooks and weights are removed and line is recycled into new tackle equipment and artificial habitat products. We also offer free mini recycling bins at Rotary Park as well as City Hall. These small bins can be kept on the boat, in the car or in a tackle box and later emptied in the larger PVC recycling bins.

For any topics not covered please visit www.MyFWC.com. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission will always be the best resource with accurate and up-to-date regulations and wildlife information.