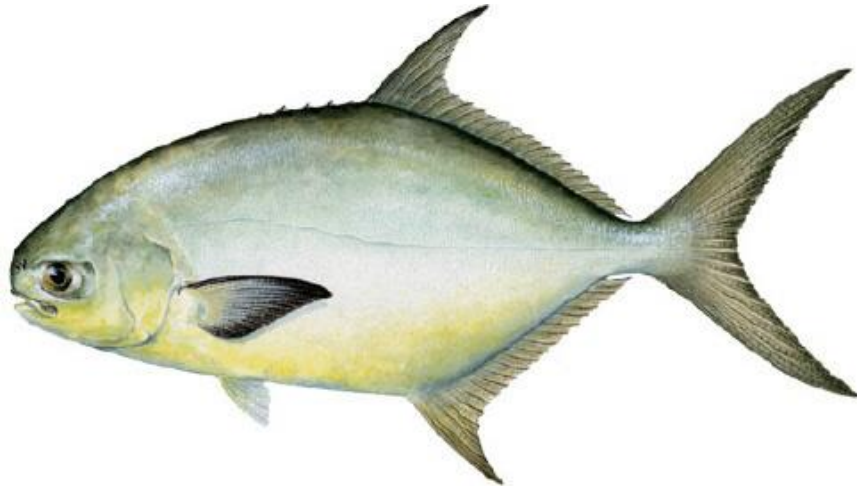


**JANUARY'S BEST BET
SEBASTIAN INLET STATE PARK**



POMPANO
(*Trachinotus carolinus*)

DESCRIPTION: Has a relatively deep body, almost entirely silver except for a dark to bluish back and sometimes a yellowish belly and/or anal fin area. Ranges from Massachusetts to S.E. Brazil, common in Florida. Pompano are a coastal fish often frequenting bays and estuaries (like the Indian River Lagoon) and especially the Atlantic surf zone. Pompano are common in the 3/4 to 1-1/2 pound range and sometimes scale up to four pounds. The all tackle record was caught in Flagler Beach, Florida and weighed 8¹/₂ lb 1oz. Pompano are a member of the jack family and are sometimes mistaken as jack crevalle, or vice versa. Other similar and closely related species are the palometa and permit. Pompano are considered one of the finest tasting fishes and are very important both recreationally and commercially, usually bringing the highest price paid for any fish on the market.

HEIGHT OF SEASON: Of course this varies geographically, but here at Sebastian Inlet January and February bring the best runs of pompano, with catches continuing into the late spring.

RULES AND REGULATIONS: A minimum fork length of 11 inches exists for both pompano and permit, with a maximum length of 20 inches (fork) for the slot limit. One fish in the bag limit can exceed the 20-inch maximum size limit. The daily recreational bag limit for pompano is six (6) per angler and is an aggregate limit also including permit. Pompano and permit greater than 20 inches cannot be sold and when fishing for these species with natural baits (dead or alive) the use of a multiple hook (example: treble hook) is prohibited. Permit may only be taken by means of hook and line fishing while pompano may also be taken by means of a cast net. Both pompano and permit must be landed in whole condition and are designated as restricted species. You will need a saltwater fishing license.

TIMES AND TIDES: Morning hours seem to be the best times for catching pompano at Sebastian Inlet—many fisherman who target pompano are here before the sun rises to stake out their favorite fishing spots. With morning hours being tops, a rising or high tide seems to be the next preference to the serious "pomp chasers." Certainly, however, fish can be caught at anytime or any tide throughout a day.

BAITS: Preferred natural baits for pompano at Sebastian Inlet include live sandfleas and cut clams. When these are unavailable, fresh cut shrimp pieces or frozen shrimp or clams will also work. I have seen dozens of pompano caught on small whole live shrimp while fishermen were snook fishing off the jetties in the late spring. Artificial baits are rarely used in this area to catch pompano, but small jigs work well, especially in the river.

TACKLE: Most of the serious pompano fishermen who consistently catch fish use heavy 13 and 14 foot surf

poles with large spinning reels that can be loaded with many yards of 12-15 lb test monofilament line. This is done so that a heavy 3-4oz pyramid sinker rig can be hurled 100-200 yards from the beach out into the surf line, where many of Florida's pompano lurk. Drop-loop rigs with two or three single hooks weighted by a dangling pyramid sinker are used almost entirely by pompano fishermen. Pompano have fairly small mouths and No.1 or 1/0 single hooks will work best. In any instance, hook size should as closely match bait size as possible. When not surf fishing for pompano, tandem rigs with lighter sinkers are used, as well as sliding sinker rigs. Some anglers feel that yellow, green, and red beads or floats placed near the baited hook(s) help to attract pompano and increase catches.

METHOD: Most of Sebastian's pompano are caught in the surf zone of the Atlantic. Some fish are taken inside the inlet channel on occasion. If fishing from the jetties, throw your baits into the ocean side of the jetty. The best pompano fishing lies off of the beaches immediately north or south of the inlet, up to a 1/2-mile in each direction. Fish early morning hours with the recommended tackle and bait and try to fish when the water appears green or blue (clean) and you should catch pompano this month. Just before fish move out of the river into the ocean, pompano can be caught fairly consistently in December on small jigs, just west of the inlet channel.

PREPARATION: The dressing of a pompano is done a few different ways, depending on angler preference. Some remove the head, insides, and fins and cook the pompano "whole". Others fillet the pompano leaving the skin and scales on the fillet; this is easily removed after cooking. I prefer to "outline" the skin area of the fish with a sharp knife, then remove the skin by pulling it off with pliers before I fillet the meat off the body. Skinning a pompano fillet with a knife only is sometimes difficult (as can be with Spanish mackerel). Pompano fillets are traditionally broiled skin side down in the oven but are also equally delicious deep-fried or lightly pan fried. Pompano are a very important food fish, probably so delicious for the fact the meat contains plenty of fish oils while remaining a very white and palatable flesh. Keep your catch iced-down/moist and especially out of direct sunlight. Wet burlap sacks are best if you can't keep a cooler with ice.

ALSO THIS MONTH: At Sebastian Inlet, look for decent bluefish action, spotted seatrout (especially at night), and black drum and sheepshead fishing. If it doesn't get too cold and drop river temperatures drastically expect the beginning of the shrimp runs this month.

Good luck, Ranger Ed Perry