Whether to Weather the Weather – or Not
Making Informed Decisions for Off-Shore Fishing Trips

A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO MAKING YOUR OWN BEST GUESS ON THE MARINE CONDITIONS YOU WILL ENCOUNTER IN YOUR AREA

By Tony Murray

When people ask me, "So, when is the best time to go fishing?" I always reply, "When you've got time to go fishing." The real adage of watching the weather is "You never know – Till you Go." Of which the truth of the matter is you only really know – After you've Been. There is no better way to have a wonderful day than a gorgeous day on the water catching fish; and conversely there is no worse, or more dangerous way, than to underestimate and misplan what to expect on the water from the weather. When in doubt, play it safe.

When I discuss, weather and fishing with people it becomes clear to me that everyone has their own ritual of determining when to go and when not to go. The real tough calls are those gray-zone calls: Should I stay or should I go. Throw in the fact that the bite always increases directly infront of a large front moving through and you are attempting to fine-tune your approach, departure and travel time and to do so safely. How many times have I loaded up the boat on the front line of a biblical torrential downpour with lightening cracking over my shoulder and my hair standing on end with water spouts about (and a full cooler of fish) and swearing that this will never happen again? Let's just say more than once, or twice, or…. For the Hard-Corers Repeat 3 times and print this out and put it in the top of your fishing hat: Remember: #1: Safety first; Fishing second; #2: The trip is supposed to be fun the whole time, which includes the last 5 miles to the hill; not just the first 95% of the trip.

Fortunately now I am a bit wiser albeit disproportionally older for some reason. Here is my weather watching routine with associated websites and a specific example of what I am looking at; incorporate it into your own method as you feel necessary.

If you can pick a single day out of 2 or 3 possible

days try and pick the best day to be out on the water. Know how far out you are going and what type of waters you feel you can comfortably handle; as well as that of your crew. There does seem to be a certain correlation with 'cheerios chuming', a term I learned 35 years ago, desperately sea-sick myself at age 12 and vomiting on a 4/0 reel and happily catching fish left and right. There is a high correlation between Cheerio (English/ Bloke Version) Chumming and Catching Fish for some untold reason….but it is best if not from the Captain.

First: the local Intellicast for our area weather (Tallahassee) for the 10 day forecast; only 4 days are presented here.

Current Weather

Currently
9 AM

Sunny

View Historical Averages and Records for today

Temp	Feels Like
64°F / 18°C	64°F / 18°C

Relative Humidity: 75%
Wind Speed & Direction: Not Available

10 Day Forecast

Thursday
04/13/2006

Sunrise: 7:13 am UV Index: 9, Very High Sunset: 8:04 pm
Moonrise: 8:19 pm Phase: Waning Gibbous Moonset: 7:03 am

Sunny

High	Low
86°F / 30°C	56°F / 13°C

Thursday:
Abundant sunshine. Warm. High 86F. Winds ENE at 5 to 10 mph.
Thursday night:
Mostly clear. Low 56F. Winds SSE at 5 to 10 mph.

Friday
04/14/2006

Sunrise: 7:11 am UV Index: 10, Very High Sunset: 8:04 pm
Moonrise: 9:17 pm Phase: Waning Gibbous Moonset: 7:31 am

Sunny

High	Low
89°F / 32°C	58°F / 14°C

Friday:
Mainly sunny. Warm. High 89F. Winds W at 5 to 10 mph.
Friday night:
Clear. Low 58F. Winds WSW at 5 to 10 mph.

Saturday
04/15/2006

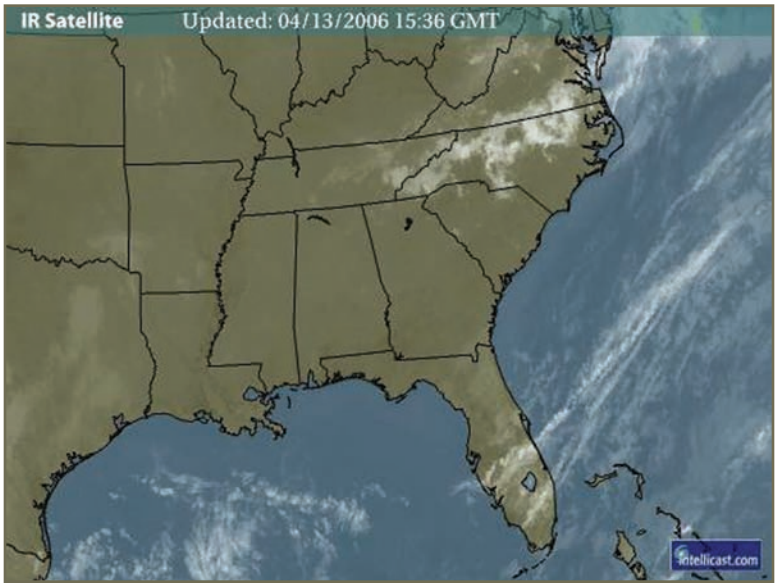
Sunrise: 7:10 am UV Index: 10, Very High Sunset: 8:05 pm
Moonrise: 10:18 pm Phase: Waning Gibbous Moonset: 8:04 am

Mostly Sunny

High	Low
89°F / 32°C	59°F / 15°C

Saturday:
A few clouds. Highs in the upper 80s and lows in the upper 50s.

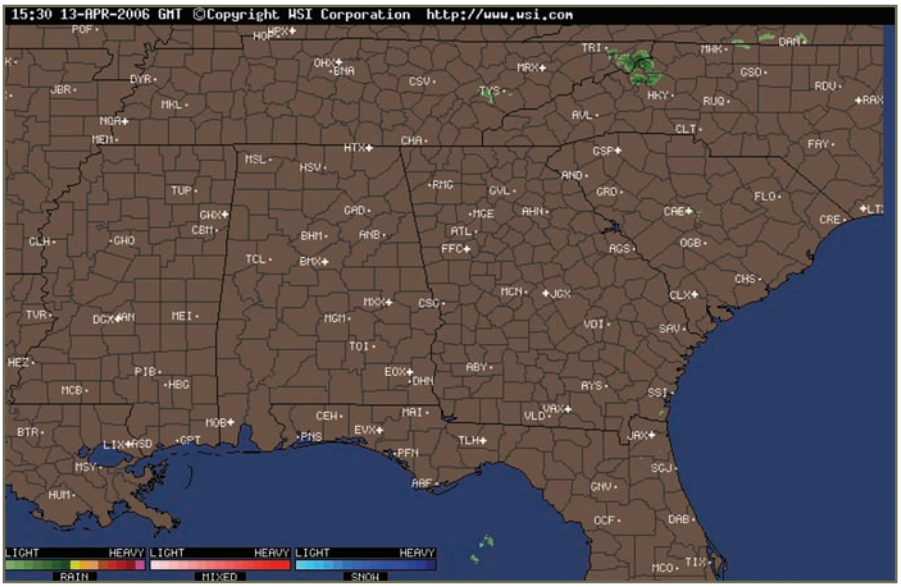
http://www.intellicast.com/IcastPage/LoadPage.aspx?loc=ktlh&seg=LocalWeather&prodgrp=Forecasts&product=Forecast&prodnav=none&pid=none



Tallahassee's Current Time:
11:38 which is 15:38 GMT

Second, I go to the IR Satellite View on this link:

http://www.intellicast.com/IcastPage/LoadPage.aspx?loc=ktlh&seg=LocalWeather&prodgrp=SatelliteImagery&product=Satellite&prodnav=none



I put these (current; but static) views into motion on the loop and note the steering and feeding currents and major bands.

Then I go to the Radar and put this in motion also and note the steering and feeding currents and review any weather producing bands.

Third I go to two separate sentinel buoys over 100 miles out in the Gulf and specifically look at wave height, wind direction and speed and the period of the waves and I look to see if they are trending up, down or relatively stable. I compare the data from these two buoys and make sure that this information correlates with the previous weather patterns reviewed. This data is from the National Data Buoy Center of the Gulf Mexico that brackets my area (Station 42036 – W. Tampa and 42039 of Pensacola at this address: http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/station_page.php?station=42036 (for W.Tampa); Note this Buoy is 106 NW West Northwest of Tampa. I also actively look at a convergence of the Water Temperature, Air Temperature and the Dew Point because (unsubstantiated by the way) these are the conditions (based on relative humidity) that bring about sea fog.

Conditions at 42036 as of (10:50 am EDT) 1450 GMT on 04/13/2006:

Top of Form

Unit of Measure: Metric Time Zone: Station Local Time Select

Bottom of Form

Click on the graph icon in the table below to see a time series plot of the last five days of that observation.

Wind Direction (WDIR):	NE (50 deg true)
Wind Speed (WSPD):	11.7 kts
Wind Gust (GST):	15.5 kts
Wave Height (WVHT):	2.6 ft
Dominant Wave Period (DPD):	5 sec
Average Period (APD):	3.8 sec
Mean Wave Direction (MWDIR):	E (96 deg true)
Atmospheric Pressure (PRES):	30.23 in
Pressure Tendency (PTDY):	+0.02 in (Rising)
Air Temperature (ATMP):	70.2 °F
Water Temperature (WTMP):	70.9 °F
Dew Point (DEWP):	62.2 °F
Combined plot of Wind Speed, Gust, and Air Pressure	

Note here that you have hourly updates of current conditions for the last 24 hours and specifically you have the Wind Direction, Windspeed (with gusts); Wave Height, Period of the waves, Barometric pressure with changes per 24 hour period, Air Temperature, Water Temperature and Dew Point.

Continuous Winds

TIME (EDT)	WDIR	WSPD
10:50 am	NE (49 deg)	12.6 kts
10:40 am	NE (50 deg)	12.4 kts
10:30 am	NE (45 deg)	13.0 kts
10:20 am	NE (53 deg)	13.2 kts
10:10 am	NE (56 deg)	13.6 kts
10:00 am	NE (54 deg)	13.0 kts

Previous observations

MM	DD	TIME (EDT)	WDIR	WSPD kts	GST kts	WVHT ft	DPD sec	APD sec	MWD	PRES in	PTDY in	ATMP °F	WTMP °F	DEWP °F	SAL	VIS mi	TIDE ft
04	13	9:50 am	NE	13.6	15.5	3.0	5	4.1	E	30.22	+0.03	70.2	70.9	61.9	-	-	-
04	13	8:50 am	ENE	11.7	13.6	3.0	5	4.1	E	30.21	+0.03	70.3	70.7	62.4	-	-	-
04	13	7:50 am	E	9.7	11.7	3.3	5	4.3	E	30.21	+0.03	70.0	70.7	61.7	-	-	-
04	13	6:50 am	E	9.7	13.6	3.0	6	4.1	E	30.19	+0.01	69.8	70.9	60.8	-	-	-
04	13	5:50 am	E	11.7	13.6	2.3	4	3.5	E	30.18	-0.02	70.2	70.9	61.3	-	-	-
04	13	4:50 am	E	13.6	13.6	2.6	4	3.4	E	30.18	-0.03	70.3	70.9	61.0	-	-	-
04	13	3:50 am	E	13.6	17.5	2.6	4	3.3	E	30.18	-0.04	70.5	70.9	60.8	-	-	-
04	13	2:50 am	E	15.5	19.4	2.3	3	3.1	ENE	30.20	-0.03	70.7	70.9	62.4	-	-	-
04	13	1:50 am	E	15.5	17.5	1.6	3	3.1	ENE	30.21	-0.01	71.6	70.9	62.6	-	-	-
04	13	12:50 am	ENE	11.7	15.5	1.6	3	3.2	NNE	30.23	+0.02	72.1	71.1	63.7	-	-	-
04	12	11:50 pm	NNE	11.7	13.6	2.0	4	3.3	ENE	30.23	+0.03	71.6	71.1	63.7	-	-	-
04	12	10:50 pm	NNE	11.7	13.6	2.0	4	3.4	ENE	30.22	+0.03	71.4	71.1	63.7	-	-	-
04	12	9:50 pm	N	13.6	15.5	2.0	4	3.5	ENE	30.20	+0.00	71.4	71.1	62.4	-	-	-
04	12	8:50 pm	N	13.6	15.5	2.0	5	3.6	E	30.20	+0.00	70.7	71.1	64.0	-	-	-
04	12	7:50 pm	N	9.7	11.7	2.3	5	3.6	ENE	30.19	-0.03	70.7	71.1	63.5	-	-	-
04	12	6:50 pm	N	9.7	11.7	2.6	5	3.7	ENE	30.20	-0.03	71.2	71.2	63.0	-	-	-
04	12	5:50 pm	N	11.7	13.6	2.6	5	3.8	E	30.21	-0.04	71.1	71.2	63.3	-	-	-
04	12	4:50 pm	NNE	9.7	11.7	3.0	5	3.9	E	30.22	-0.04	71.2	71.2	63.0	-	-	-
04	12	3:50 pm	NE	11.7	15.5	3.0	5	4.0	E	30.23	-0.03	71.1	71.2	62.8	-	-	-
04	12	2:50 pm	NE	9.7	11.7	3.3	5	4.1	E	30.24	-0.03	70.7	71.1	62.6	-	-	-
04	12	1:50 pm	ENE	13.6	15.5	3.6	5	4.1	E	30.26	+0.00	70.9	71.1	62.4	-	-	-
04	12	12:50 pm	E	15.5	17.5	3.6	5	4.0	E	30.27	+0.01	70.7	70.9	62.2	-	-	-
04	12	11:50 am	E	15.5	17.5	3.9	5	4.2	E	30.27	+0.03	70.7	70.9	62.1	-	-	-
04	12	10:50 am	E	15.5	17.5	3.9	5	4.2	E	30.26	+0.04	70.7	70.7	61.9	-	-	-

Here is the Pensacola Buoy (115 NM Southeast of Pensacola) for comparison:

Conditions at 42039 as of (10:50 am CDT) 1550 GMT on 04/13/2006:

Top of Form

Unit of Measure: English Time Zone: Station Local Time Select

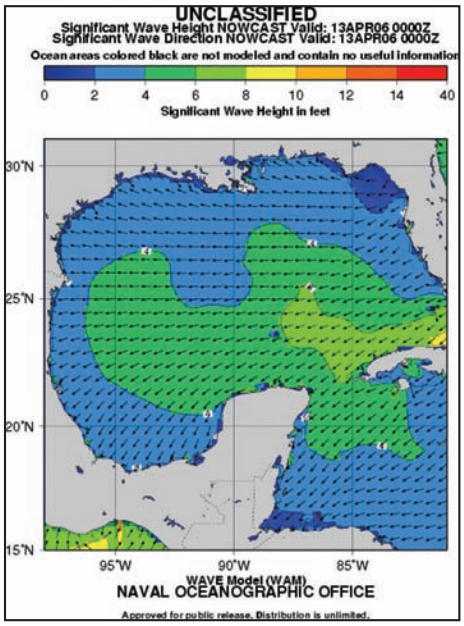
Bottom of Form

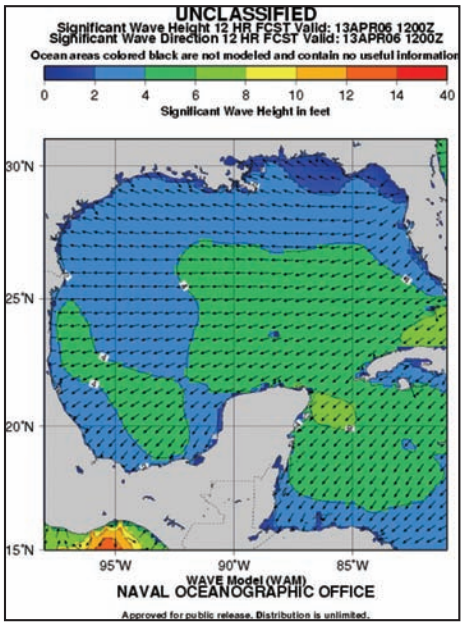
Click on the graph icon in the table below to see a time series plot of the last five days of that observation.

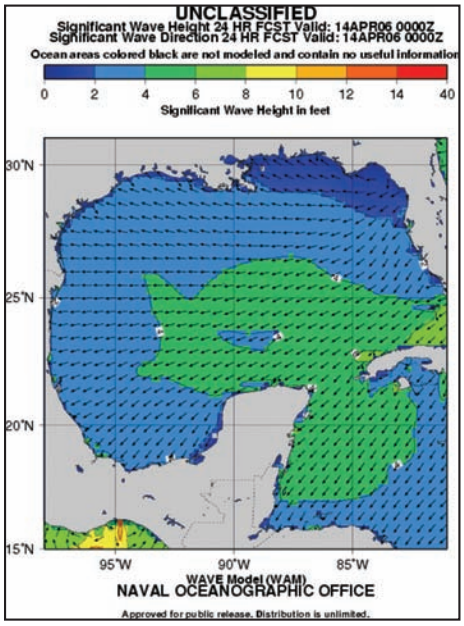
Wind Direction (WDIR):	ENE (70 deg true)
Wind Speed (WSPD):	9.7 kts
Wind Gust (GST):	11.7 kts
Wave Height (WVHT):	2.0 ft
Dominant Wave Period (DPD):	4 sec
Atmospheric Pressure (PRES):	30.26 in
Pressure Tendency (PTDY):	+0.02 in (Rising)
Air Temperature (ATMP):	69.4 °F
Water Temperature (WTMP):	72.0 °F
Dew Point (DEWP):	54.5 °F
Combined plot of Wind Speed, Gust, and Air Pressure	

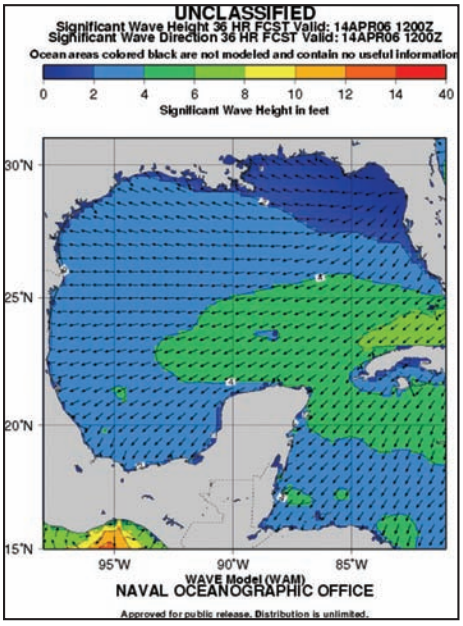
Previous observations

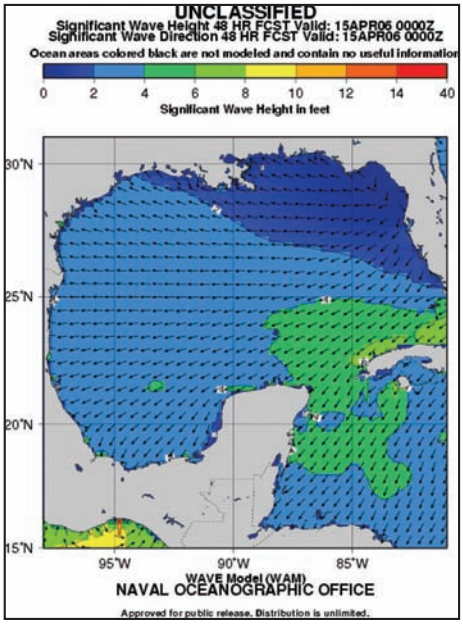
MM	DD	TIME (CDT)	WDIR	WSPD kts	GST kts	WVHT ft	DPD sec	APD sec	MWD	PRES in	PTDY in	ATMP °F	WTMP °F	DEWP °F	SAL	VIS mi	TIDE ft
04	13	9:50 am	ENE	9.7	11.7	2.0	3	3.6	E	30.25	+0.04	69.8	71.8	59.0	-	-	-
04	13	8:50 am	E	9.7	9.7	2.3	4	3.7	ESE	30.24	+0.04	70.0	71.4	56.3	-	-	-
04	13	7:50 am	E	11.7	13.6	2.3	6	3.6	SE	30.23	+0.04	69.8	71.2	59.0	-	-	-
04	13	6:50 am	E	11.7	13.6	2.3	6	3.8	SE	30.22	+0.02	69.6	71.2	60.1	-	-	-
04	13	5:50 am	E	11.7	13.6	2.6	6	3.9	SE	30.20	-0.01	69.4	71.4	51.8	-	-	-
04	13	4:50 am	E	9.7	11.7	2.6	6	3.9	SE	30.20	-0.02	69.1	71.4	53.6	-	-	-
04	13	3:50 am	ENE	13.6	15.5	2.6	6	4.1	SE	30.20	-0.04	69.3	71.6	59.2	-	-	-
04	13	2:50 am	NE	11.7	13.6	2.6	5	4.4	E	30.21	-0.04	70.0	71.6	58.3	-	-	-
04	13	1:50 am	NNE	9.7	11.7	3.0	5	4.6	E	30.22	-0.04	70.0	71.4	58.8	-	-	-
04	13	12:50 am	NNE	9.7	11.7	2.6	6	4.8	ESE	30.24	-0.02	70.0	71.4	54.0	-	-	-
04	12	11:50 pm	NNE	7.8	9.7	3.0	6	4.8	ESE	30.24	+0.00	70.0	71.4	53.8	-	-	-
04	12	10:50 pm	N	7.8	9.7	3.0	6	4.8	ESE	30.25	+0.02	69.6	71.4	47.5	-	-	-
04	12	9:50 pm	N	9.7	11.7	3.0	6	4.9	SE	30.26	+0.03	69.3	71.4	44.2	-	-	-
04	12	8:50 pm	N	7.8	7.8	3.3	6	4.9	ESE	30.25	+0.00	69.1	71.4	44.4	-	-	-
04	12	7:50 pm	NE	7.8	9.7	3.0	6	4.8	ESE	30.24	-0.01	68.7	71.4	40.8	-	-	-
04	12	6:50 pm	NE	5.8	7.8	3.3	6	4.9	ESE	30.23	-0.03	68.5	71.4	41.2	-	-	-
04	12	5:50 pm	NNE	5.8	7.8	3.0	6	4.6	ESE	30.24	-0.03	68.7	71.6	49.8	-	-	-
04	12	4:50 pm	ENE	9.7	9.7	3.3	6	4.7	ESE	30.25	-0.03	68.9	71.6	45.5	-	-	-
04	12	3:50 pm	ENE	9.7	11.7	3.6	6	4.6	ESE	30.26	-0.05	68.9	71.6	45.1	-	-	-
04	12	2:50 pm	ENE	9.7	11.7	3.9	6	4.6	ESE	30.27	-0.03	68.9	71.6	47.1	-	-	-
04	12	1:50 pm	ENE	9.7	11.7	3.9	6	4.5	ESE	30.28	-0.01	69.1	71.4	39.4	-	-	-
04	12	12:50 pm	E	11.7	13.6	4.3	6	4.6	E	30.30	+0.02	69.4	71.4	41.5	-	-	-
04	12	11:50 am	E	11.7	13.6	5.2	7	4.8	ESE	30.31	+0.04	69.4	71.2	32.4	-	-	-
04	12	10:50 am	E	13.6	17.5	4.6	6	4.6	E	30.29	+0.04	69.6	71.2	37.9	-	-	-











Fourth, I go to the Naval Oceanographic Office and look at the significant Wave Heights currently, 12 hours, 24 hours, 36 hours and 48 hours;. Note, I placed the website above each image; by just changing the last digit from /mex0. to /mex2. to /mex4. to /mex6. to /mex8. each image comes up; then you can proceed forward and back and view a pseudo-simulation of the movement of the fronts. It's crude but it works.

Note the Dark Blue; are 0 to 2 foot seas in the Panhandle Area; the arrows are giving the direction of the predominant wind at the given time.

https://128.160.23.54/products/SWAPS/mex0.gif
https://128.160.23.54/products/SWAPS/mex2.gif

Forecast as of 10:29 am EDT on April 13, 2006
Synopsis For The Suwannee River To Destin Out To 60 Nm
Synopsis A surface high pressure ridge will build over the northern Gulf waters over the next couple of days. This will result in low winds and seas for the remainder of the week. Winds and seas will increase slightly late this weekend as a front approaches from the north.

Forecast as of 10:29 am EDT on April 13, 2006
Coastal Waters From Apalachicola To Destin Fl Out To 20 Nm-
Coastal Waters From Suwannee River To Apalachicola Fl Out To 20 Nm-
Today East wind 5 to 10 knots. Seas 1 to 2 feet. Protected waters smooth.
Tonight Northwest wind 5 to 10 knots...becoming northeast after midnight. Seas 1 foot or less. Protected waters smooth.
Friday Northeast wind around 5 knots becoming southwest 5 to 10 knots in the afternoon. Seas 1 to 2 feet. Protected waters smooth to a light chop.
Friday Night West wind 5 to 10 knots. Seas 1 to 2 feet. Protected waters smooth.
Saturday Southwest wind 5 to 10 knots...increasing to 10 to 15 knots in the afternoon. Seas 1 to 2 feet...building to 2 to 3 feet. Protected waters smooth...increasing to light to moderate chop.
Sunday Southwest wind 10 to 15 knots. Seas 2 to 3 feet. Protected waters a light to moderate chop.
Monday West wind 10 to 15 knots. Seas 2 to 3 feet. Protected waters a light to moderate chop.

https://128.160.23.54/products/SWAPS/mex4.gif
https://128.160.23.54/products/SWAPS/mex6.gif
https://128.160.23.54/products/SWAPS/mex8.gif
Fifth, I review the Marine Forecast at

http://www.wunderground.com/MAR/GM/755.html

This example was presented with a review of conditions for Friday 14th for the morning and afternoon and possibly into the evening. For the location that I am heading out of and where I am going; I am as confident one can be that given our Spring weather patterns that I am looking at great conditions. All separate web-sites conditions jive with each other; these are all separate sources using separate technologies and modeling equipment.

Sixth, I listen to the Marine Band Radio in the morning of my trip; prior to leaving and I also check it when on the water. Now, I check the tides, the moon rise and set times, game activity forecasts. Once these web-sites are marked on your computer and placed under your Mariner's Forecast File; it takes me approximately 2 minutes to determine what type of weather I most likely will be looking at.

Having presented this information to my friends and wife; on more than one occasion I have called into them from the water and asked for them to review a current radar for me; the steering currents, the wind, and the conditions behind it.

Most importantly when on the water, it is so important to keep up with 'situational awareness': one eye to the sky and keep the Marine Radio tuned to listen for any reports of sudden weather changes which Florida is so famous for. Live to fish another day; right now, I've got to go prep those rods! It's Hammer Time….