

# Lessons Learned in the Flood Grass

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After fly fishing my 1<sup>st</sup> year in the flood grass I must say that it was a great learning experience that was full of excitement and many surprises. With every trip I saw something different that I may not have been completely prepared for. This made me think about better tactics and alternatives for the next adventure. It was also a great test of your hunting skills which included some great sight fishing which also included careful listening. It certainly made it a fun challenge! This included gearing up with the right equipment, flies, rods, fly lines, approach and dealing with the forever changing Redfish behavior, weather conditions, etc. Below is my list of important things I've learned and feel need special attention in order to be more successful in the hunt for Redfish in flood grass.....

**When:** Starting in early summer through early fall. It's always best around the full moon period. Look for your tidal height to be around 5.3' or better in the Mayport area only. Locations further north or south will have much different tidal height requirements. The wind direction, barometric pressure, etc. also have a great effect on the final tide heights.

**Watercraft:** My first and best choice is by kayak. Why? Because you're simply able to see and cover a lot more Spartina grass flats by being able to cross over those deeper cuts and feeder creeks to see more flats. Plus you have the advantage of stealth. Also having a kayak that you can stand up in and pole yourself is a major advantage for optimum visibility. I could recall being able to see tails probably more than 100 yards away!

**Flat Access:** When first approaching a flat that you want to fish you need to avoid the finger creek areas and outer deeper cuts that feed into the flat. The Reds use these areas as their main roadway into and out of the flat and will generally be there first when it starts to flood. You don't want to spook them off the flat before getting an opportunity to cast at one. Try to enter the opposite end or through the thicker higher grass as shown in lower left photo. Note the feeder creek in upper right corner of the photo. The lower right photo below shows the Spartina grass flat prior to flooding.



Photo by Rich Santos



Photo by Rich Santos

**Wading & Approach:** Slow down and be patient! Move very slowly with minimal wake and keep your ears open. Many times a Red will be only 10 ft. in front of you without giving you a sign. The tip of his tail might just pop up. When you see a fish keep your eye on him the whole time and figure out how he's eating and moving. I found that a 25' to 35' cast works best for not spooking the fish and still have good accuracy. Presentation and accuracy really matters here with minimal false casts.



*Photo by Rich Santos*



*Photo by Rich Santos*

**Rod, Line & Leader Selection:** My preferred rod weight is a 6 wt. - 8wt. with a 7weight as my first choice with a clear floating line. The lighter the rod and line the softer the landing and the less the fish will feel your presence. I like short leaders made up of fluorocarbon that are no more than 7 ft. long. You want a soft to medium type tip flexed rod that will load easily for a quick response and still give you accuracy.



*Photo by Rich Santos*



*Photo by Woody Huband*

**Fly Selection:** The most important detail about your fly is the weed guard.... weed guard..... and a good weed guard that works! I can't stress that to you enough! That's priority! My favorite type is using 16 lb. Hard Mason brand with a double loop guards around the hook heel or bend and tied off to the hook eye(see photo below). My second major issue is using a soft landing fly that won't plop like a rock hitting the water! These fish will often spook very easily. I like to wrap the hook shank with .25 lead wire because the weight can be easily distributed over the shank for a softer landing. I recommend a crab pattern made with Glimmer Braid tubing, Hackle or another soft material that will have a subtle impact on the water. The key also is to build a small fly around the size of a dime or a little larger. When the grass gets thicker I recommend a fly with less weight so it stays up higher in the water column. When the Red is cruising they will see it better instead of the fly sinking down and getting lost in the deep grass. You will also need to use an extremely sharp hook. Many times these Reds will not get a good hook set due to the angle you are at and the direction they will run.



*Photo by Rich Santos*



*Photo by Rich Santos*

**Storage and Equipment:** Travel Light! It will save you energy! I do recommend carrying 2 rods with one broken down and stored away as a back up rod. It should be one rod size bigger for the changing wind conditions. Carry a minimum of 15' rope with clip to tow your kayak if needed when the water level gets to low. Keep your active rod tip angled high with the fly reeled in and butted up to the rod tip. This will avoid grass snags that could break your rod tip! A stake out pole is needed to anchor your kayak for when you get out and wade. Make sure you keep it clipped to your kayak because it can get lost poling yourself around in the grass. This I learned the hard way! This includes all equipment, etc. It should be tethered to the kayak because it can easily get lost.



*Photo by Rich Santos*



*Photo by Rich Santos*

**Safety:** Most of all while wading beware of mud holes. Stay close to your kayak. Secure your paddle when you get out and wade away from you kayak. It's your most important tool that you don't want to lose. They can easily get blown away where you might not be able to get to it. I also highly recommend using a GPS. When the tide starts going out and getting low you will want to find those feeder creeks and trail you came in on fast to help you get off the flat.



*Photo by Rich Santos*



*Self-Photo by Rich Santos*

Weather is another major concern especially when lightening is approaching. Immediately head in if you are near your launch spot. Otherwise I recommend taking cover in the high grass and NOT a nearby island. Trees on islands attract lightening! Rod tips down!



*Photo by Rich Santos*

Tight Loops and Lines!

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