

## PORT ST. JOE, FLA. WADING TRIP

By Mike Buss

What a great trip! I didn't catch as many fish as I would have liked, but the experience more than made up for that. I'm talking about my trip to Port St. Joe on the panhandle of Florida.

I had read about the area being a wader's paradise in one of my fishing magazines, so I decided to go down and check it out.

I left the Tidewater area around 8 am Tuesday, March 14 and drove straight thru and arrived in Panama City, Fla. around midnight and checked into space available housing on Tyndall Air Force Base. I couldn't check into my cabin until 3 pm on Wed., so I did some exploring. I went out to St Joe State park and just fell in love with the area. It has miles and miles of shallow grass flats in crystal clear water. I stopped at the boat ramp parking lot and changed into my waders.

After getting rigged up, I walked right into the water and scared off a flounder and some puppy drum! Big lesson learned, for the rest of the week, I entered every area with caution and it paid off a number of times. Some of these fish were in water no more than 6" deep! Didn't catch any fish, but made a mental note to come back later in the week when the tide was running.

I had made reservations to stay March 15<sup>th</sup> thru March 22 at one of the military installations in the area and hired a guide for March 16. The plan was for the guide to give me some ideas on where to wade fish for trout and puppy drum. Any fish caught with the guide would be a bonus. It turned out I missed out on the bonus! But he did put me into some great spots for wading and that paid off later in the week.

There are so many wading spots, you could go out every day for a year and not fish the same place twice. The place is loaded with shallow grass flats in addition to some spots that had huge oyster beds. All of them looked very fishy, but the guide did zero me in on a few places that had been producing and I headed out.

I waded out and after avoiding a number of Horseshoe Crabs and rays found a spot that looked inviting. Made a couple of casts and was fast into some nice trout of about 2-3 lbs. I caught a number of them this size all week in various places.

I also caught a number of puppy drum 2-5 lbs. I also had the fish of the trip on-a puppy drum I would estimate 10-12 lbs. I had played him all the way in to about 15 feet with no problems. Then I saw how big it was and panicked! I thought I should get 'on my reel' since it was so big and as a result ended up with a tangle when I started to wind in the loose line. That was just what he needed and we soon parted company!

I also chased numerous puppy drum up and down the shore, but for some reason, they wouldn't take anything I threw at them. Will have to do some research and come up with a better game plan for them next year.

I plan on going again next year, but a week or two later. Everyone I talked with told me things really got going in April, so I plan on going down next year the first week of April. If anyone is interested in going next year, please see me. If we can get enough interest, we may turn this into an annual club event like our Harkers Island trip in November. I'm already making plans for the trip, thanks and tight lines,