Photo – Bruce Comrie has come to a happy medium when choosing his fishing boat for Amelia Island waters, which is 22-foot Shearwater bay boat. Bay boats can navigate Amelia Island bays and ocean waters too.

Photo – Back country fishing boats can be outfitted in a variety of ways to navigate shallow bays where sight fishing for redfish is a serious boat rigging consideration.

Photo – Light-weight kayaks are able to navigate shallow bays and are super quite when sneaking up to a school of back country game fish.

 “Amelia Back Country Boating”

 By Terry Lacoss

 Without saying if you haven’t ever been grounded on a bar or oyster out cropping, you simply are not going to every enjoy Amelia Island back country fishing to the fullest. With this in mind, there are several types of fishing boats that are specifically designed for fishing our local Amelia Island waters. This in many cases can be rigged by fishermen to fit their personal boating needs.

 By far on of the more popular fishing boats for both navigating and fishing Amelia Island waters is the “Bay Boat”. Several fishing seasons ago boat manufactures saw the need for designing a fishing boat that would not only allow fishermen to fish in the shallow water bays, but also fish near shore reefs when weather permitted. Many boats can navigate in water depths from 11-15 inches of water due to locating the fuel cell in the middle of the boat. Also electric motor and cranking batteries are also located in the middle of the boat and typically under the center console so the boat runs flat and also floats level when fishing

 Bay boats are also rigged with multiple live wells including a small 20 gallon live bait well for keeping fin fish and shrimp alive and a large 60-gallon release live well to keep game fish alive as well. Single, or twin “Power Poles” are a must which allow fishermen to anchor their bay boat quietly and without disturbing the environmentally sensitive bottom. A 36-volt GPS model electric motor allows fishermen to also anchor on the spot as well and at the same time, navigate shallow water without the spooky noises made by the outboard motor. Also a must is an on board battery charger when plugged in to a 110 power cord fully chargers all of your boat batteries.

 Simply the heart of a bay boat is a large screen fish finder/GPS combo that when used in the split screen mode shows fishermen where they are navigating and on the remaining screen, fish, depth of water and water temperature. Here a handy option is saving your navigational trails. This feature not only shows you where your fishing boat is navigating, but also saves your trails so that you can return to deep waters safely after fishing on a shallow bay.

 Finally a good float on trailer allows back country fishermen to unload and load their fishing boat without any help. Float on trailers also have low bunks where fishermen can unload and load their fishing boat in shallow water as well.

 Kayaks are a great choice when launching your fishing boat in Amelia Island bays where you will be fishing close to the same area you launched your fishing boat. The large sealed portion of a kayak provides for a super floating platform where fishermen can easily access super skinny waters from 6-10 inches of water.

 Kayaks also lack the high sides of a typical fishing boat where the gunnels of a kayak may only be a few inches higher than the surface of the water. This feature allows kayak fishermen to navigate on windy days without the wind blowing them off their targeted fishing waters.

 Today kayaks are definitely a more popular choice when fishing on shallow Amelia Island bays simply because kayak manufactures are continually improving the designs of their kayaks while offering customers several models which are designed for a wide variety of fishing applications.. There are also a wide variety of accessories available for kayaks including live wells, special coolers, storage and special tracking where a variety of fishing aids can be mounted including rod holders. Hobie kayaks are outfitted with mechanical paddles that speed kayakers to and from their targeted fishing waters.

 A good rule of thumb when fishing Amelia Island shallow water bays is to first make sure you have a combo GPS/fish finder outfitted on your back country fishing boat. Before navigating into a shallow bay, locate the deep channel, or channels that lead into the bay. Zoom in on the screen so that you make sure your boat is navigating in the deep waters of the channel at all times. Typically GPS fish finders will show the location of your boat on the screen. It is extremely important that you navigate at a boat speed that will allow you to stop, or simply steer away from landing on a shallow bar.

 If you do begin to navigate on to a shallow water structure, first pull back on the throttle, trim your out board motor up and begin to back off from the structure. Some fishermen will try to steer to the right or left to turn their fishing boat around, this simply puts you and your fishermen further on the structure!

 Finally whether you fish from a bay boat, kayak, or small fishing boat, be super careful to not disturb our shallow water habitat!

 The 68th Annual Jacksonville Boat Show will take place January 26th – 28th at the Prime Osborne Convention Center. Several boats will be on display from skiing to cruisers. Guests will be able to visit several fishing seminars as well.