Phot0- (Special) Ella Kay Haddock is pictured with a monster red snapper her father Robert Haddock caught this past weekend!

Photo – Florida Wildlife’s Ashely Beasley is pictured weighing a nice red snapper during last weekends mini red snapper season.

Photo – Bernard Reidy, Jr. reeled up this beautiful gag grouper that tipped the scales at 24-pounds while fishing aboard the charter fishing boat “Even Better”.

Photo – Captain David Hagins hooked up this nice catch of deep water bottom species recently while fishing from 120-160 feet of water. Pictured on back row from left to right are Martin Jackson and Jason Robinson. Front row right to left, Steve Madden, John Morgan, Aron Hutcherson and Donald Rich.

 “Big Snapper Bite”

 By Terry Lacoss

 Northeast Florida saltwater fishermen have been waiting an entire year for the Southeastern Fishery Service to open the red snapper season for recreational fishermen. At last the SEFA opened red snapper fishing during the past long weekend from August 10th-12th. This coming weekend will be also open for recreational fishing for red snapper as well, August 17th – 19th. Fishermen can keep one red snapper per day of any size limit.

 However last Friday, August 10th found several recreational deep-sea fishermen wondering where all the red snapper they had been catching during the summer disappeared to. Recreational fishermen targeting close in fish habitats were coming back to their boat slips and favorite boat ramps with empty fish boxes. It seems that the majority of red snapper had moved further offshore where water depths ranged from 80-120 feet of water.

 “We didn’t find many red snappers at many of the nearshore fish havens this past Saturday,” Captain Kenny Crawford said. “On Saturday we decided to take our fishing charter further offshore to the “Forty-Mile” bottom where water depths range from 90-100 feet of water. Bottom fishing here with live cigar minnows and fresh squid produced an easy limit of red snapper and other deep-water species including grouper, amberjack, triggerfish and more. We even caught a thirty-five-pound kingfish while free-lining a live bait off from the stern of our “Crawfish” charter fishing boat”!

 Captain David Johnson has been scoring well while sport fishing at the “Forty-Mile” bottom as well and recently guided his sport fishing boat “Even Better” to a limit of red snapper and a real “Smoker” king mackerel that weighed just over forty-pounds!

 Standard red snapper bottom fishing gear includes a six-foot 80-class bottom fishing rod and level wind reel that has a 4/1 gear ratio for putting the heat on large bottom species when they power their way back to nearby bottom structures. Fishing reels are typically spooled with eighty-pound braided fishing line with a five-foot length of one-hundred-pound fluorocarbon shock leader. A sinker slide is attached to the terminal fishing line just ahead of the barrel swivel which allows different size weights to be employed. A 7/0 kahle hook is then attached to the tag end of the shock leader using a “Uni-Knot”.

 Best red snapper baits are typically including live cigar minnows, grunts, menhaden or fresh local squid. Once your red snapper bait reaches the bottom engage your fishing reel while holding the rod tip close to the surface. When a large red snapper takes your bait set the hook hard while lifting the rod tip. Make short pumps with your rod while reeling in the slack fishing line.

 This past Saturday all the boat ramps on Amelia Island that offered access to red snapper offshore fish havens were filled. Once fishermen reached their targeted offshore red snapper havens, they also found a full parking lot of sport fishing boats as well!

 “It was simply crazy,” Captain Tony Peoples said. “The minute one of my charter guests would hook into and land a nice size red snapper, a nearby fishing boat would navigate right beside my boat and drop their red snapper baits”!

 “I never saw so many fishing boats in one area. I know there were at least forty-fishing boats fishing at the “FA” live bottom”!

 A mini red snapper season will also take place this coming Friday from August 17th-19th. Deep sea fishermen will be able to keep one red snapper per day with no size restrictions.

 Fishing in the backwater has been somewhat slow lately with a lot of undersize sea trout and redfish being caught. However, tarpon and redfish are schooling at the St. Mary’s inlet particularly during a flooding tide.