

## **RECENT TARPON SEASONS SHOW GREAT IMPROVEMENT**

Needless to say, those familiar with Boca Grande, both local residents and visitors, have experienced some degree of stress during the past decade or so in response to a changing tarpon fishery. Worry about the future of the resource, along with the future of local businesses, has been a real concern. It did appear that the battle might be a losing one.

However, most local fishing guides agree that things have steadily improved during the past few years and tarpon fishing this year has been absolutely fantastic. Both day and night results have been far better. The old saying, "Don't worry, it will take care of itself" seems to be coming true for Boca Grande Pass. Even without any real help from the state thus far, the boating overload and questionable fishing tactics during tarpon season by many boaters from out of our area have both reversed in favor of the longstanding tarpon fishing guidelines that are traditional.

To start the season in traditional form, the Boca Grande Chamber of Commerce Ladies Day Tarpon Tournament was fantastic. Lots of action and many happy ladies describe the affair

Also, the Boca Grande Fishing Guides Association Invitational Tarpon Tournament completed its fourth year this season. Beginning in 2005 and with steadily increasing results during the past several years, the 2008 tournament in May was a fantastic success with 96 tarpon caught and released in 8 hours of fishing (4 hours per day) by 22 boats. Many tarpon were caught and entrants were ecstatic. It seemed that everyone was in the game and had a chance for the big one. Hookups became so simultaneous that the six judge boats had a hard time keeping up with the activity.

This season also included the third annual Billy-Bo Memorial Tarpon Tournament hosted by island resident and traditional tarpon fishing supporter Peggy Denby. The event proved also to be successful and gave traditional tarpon anglers another chance at friendly competition during daylight hours. On the flip side of the time clock came the fourth year for Sandy Melvin's Howl-at-the-Moon nighttime tarpon tournaments, expanded to include several. Of course, they were all a great success.

There is no doubt that traditional live bait tarpon fishing ruled the pass during the season and we are still experiencing great results through July with the same probability for August. Without as much outboard powered boat pressure, the tarpon have not disappeared as fast. What we have now are fewer boats, plenty of tarpon and peaceful fishing.

So, maybe the once bigger problem is "taking care of itself"... "maybe the worm has turned"...let's hope so. The past three seasons have definitely shown an improvement for local tarpon guides and their clients.

