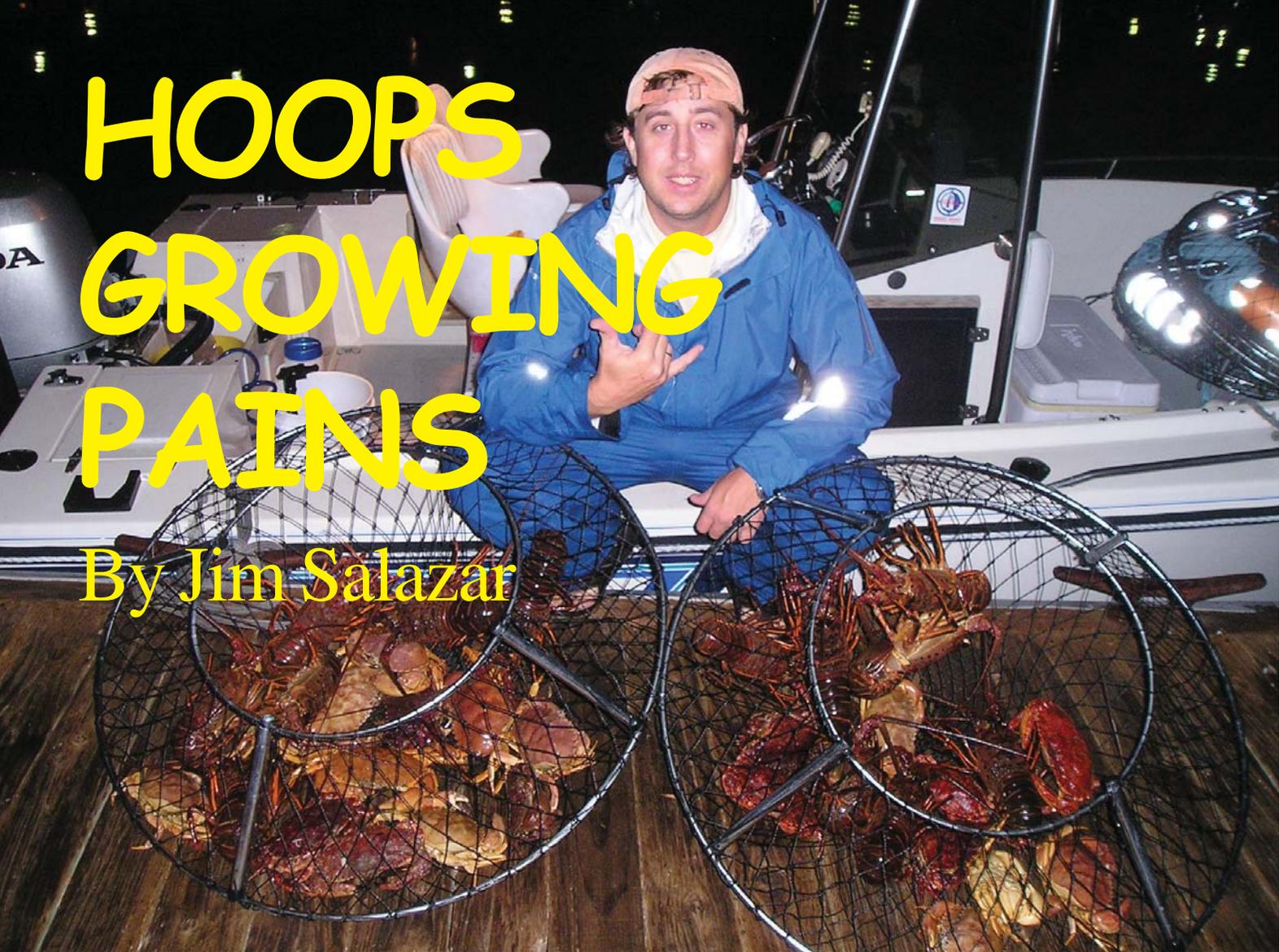


HOOPS GROWING PAINS

By Jim Salazar



Jason Morton has double limits of lobster and some tasty rock crabs in the Eclipse nets.

Hoop netting for lobster is fun and delicious, and it's also one of the fastest growing facets of wintertime sportfishing. Like all rapidly developing sports, it's experiencing growing pains. Many of the older hoopers and divers are starting to grumble at the growing number of hoop nets on their favorite local spots. What was once a closed club is now open to anyone with a hoop net and some bait. Conflicts between hoopers and divers and even between hoopers are rising to frightening levels.

Here is an excerpt from my recently released book, "Hoopin' It Up".

Hoopin' Safety and Etiquette

Lobster and crab hooping should be something we do for fun. We just might be lucky enough to come

home with some really good quality seafood, but basically we're out there for recreation.

Unfortunately, the last few seasons have seen a few people getting way too serious about their hooping and diving. The quest for crustaceans almost seems to have reached the intensity of "gold rush fever." The allure of a free lobster dinner is just too much for some! On-the-water arguments between hoopers and divers, and even among hoopers, has occasionally risen into some frightening conflicts.

Please be mature, and rise above the petty and greedy behavior displayed by some others. It's only lobster we're after. Dropping seal bombs on divers and threatening other boats with violence will only lead to stiffer regulations in locations where there is already plenty of competition for hooping or diving space. If

someone is hooping or diving “your spot,” or if it’s really crowded in the area you usually frequent, try another area, or just come back later. If the area is putting out limits, it shouldn’t take others very long to finish and move out. You might even be civil and ask someone if they wouldn’t mind if you hooped in the area along with them. Just be sure to set your nets far enough apart to let boats get in and out safely, without any danger of catching a prop in either hooper’s ropes.

Ventura Harbor had such extreme conflicts at the beginning of the 2007–2008 season that the harbormaster closed the breakwall. The inner breakwall reopened with some major restrictions for hoopers, and the outer wall was limited to diving only. These restrictions were far too lenient on divers, in my opinion, and hopefully any future restrictions will be more equitable. If divers and hoopers must be kept apart, I suggest having alternate days for hooping and diving: even days of the month would be for hooping only, and odd days for diving. Something more equitable than a complete ban is all most hoopers are looking for. Harbor patrols and DFG wardens have enough work on their hands with regular enforcement without a few knuckleheads obliging them to act as referees in hooping conflicts.

Harbormasters up and down the coast talk to each other and exchange information regularly, just as we fishermen and hoopers do. What happened in Ventura and the tough regulations that resulted are no secrets to other harbormasters. It could just as easily happen in your local spot.

It’s up to us as hoopers and divers to grow up and take charge. If someone is diving in an area where you’d like to hoop, don’t drop your nets on top of him. And if you’re already hooping an area, dive boats should be courteous enough not to drop divers on top of your nets. The danger of a diver coming up and getting hit by a boat or prop is just too real!

Show a little common sense and maybe even some courtesy to your fellow fishermen. Don’t let our local breakwalls be taken away from us just because of a few bad apples!

According to harbormasters I’ve spoken with, the second biggest complaint after personal conflicts comes from boats that have gotten ropes wrapped around their props and need immediate assistance. This always seems to happen right next to a breakwall in rough weather and on windy nights. Taking control of your excess rope and marking your floats are two important rigging safety tips that I can’t stress enough. Either



Opening weekend produced quick limits quick limits for Author Jim Salazar and Arnie Quivera.

weight the end of your rope or tie up the excess to keep it from floating around and causing a boating hazard. Use Promar’s reflective tape and some kind of lights on your floats (chemical sticks or Promar’s waterproof LEDs), especially if you are hooping in a heavily fished or well-traveled area.

You are going to be doing your hooping at night, and although you may take being out on your boat in the dark for granted, your guests may be new to this fun and exciting experience. Do as the sport boat skippers do, and give a little safety talk to your crew before heading out. Let them know where the ditch-bag is and where the life jackets are stored. If they can handle it, show them how to drop the anchor and how to operate the radio and switch it to channel 16 to send a Mayday to the Coast Guard or Harbor Patrol.

When you are approaching your marker floats, your crew should hold their positions on deck and not move around on the bow and block your view of the floats as you power up to them. This is especially important on windy nights, when wind swells or whitecaps can hide your floats momentarily. If you are alongside the float and lose sight of it, let the skipper know immediately so that he can cut the power to the prop. Never power up until all the excess rope is in the boat or until you know where the float and rope are.

Always bring backup headlamps, spotlights, and flashlights. Headlamps for the crew can really help the skipper keep his night vision. Promar’s LED headlamps are the way to go. LEDs greatly extend battery life. The new headlamps are pretty lightweight, and the more



Denis Nagahiro went home with some good eats for the opener.

expensive ones are waterproof too. On really dark nights you can use red LED lights, which help you keep your night vision and work especially well on kayaks. The less you need to turn on the cabin or overhead lights, the better your vision will be in dim light. Whatever you do, try not to get so excited that you blind everyone with your headlamp while showing off that big lobster to the whole boat.

A good-quality rechargeable handheld 1,000,000+ candle-power spotlight with a 12-volt lighter-type

adapter can help make it easier to locate unlit floats near the harbor entrance on dark nights, and is a perfect partner to Promar's reflective tape. One swipe of the light across the horizon will usually reveal your floats brilliantly.

Along with the responsibility of the safety of your crew and your mature interaction with other crustacean lovers comes the added responsibility of conserving the resource. The DFG is so concerned about the impact of recreational hoop netting that they have implemented the Lobster Report Card this season. Anyone "fishing for or taking lobster" needs to have one, even kids under 16. The information on the report cards "will allow the CDFG to determine the number of recreational lobster fishers and effort expended, the number of lobster caught, catch locations, and gear used in the recreational lobster fishery. With this information, biologists will be able to determine whether the lobster resource is healthy and if current fishing regulations are working correctly."

You can help to keep our spiny lobster population healthy by taking only what you'll use (you don't need to feed the whole neighborhood) and by releasing the larger female bugs.

The survival rate of newly hatched baby lobsters is extremely low, so lobsters produce a huge number of eggs. A lobster's capacity for egg production increases exponentially with her size. A small female of about two and a half inches in carapace length can produce about one hundred thousand eggs, and a female of more than six inches can produce close to one million eggs. A rough calculation suggests that over a period of five years, one five-pound female could produce as many as twenty-seven one-pound females. Please let the big breeder females go! If you have your limit and you are culling the smaller ones, please consider releasing the larger females!