

# Moon Phase and Surf Fishing

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Turning over the page from my June 2023 CCA Sportfishing Tide Calendar to August really caught me by surprise. August this year had not one but two full moons...A double doozie for super high tides and grunion runs.

Two full moons in one month are called “Blue Moons” and are rather unusual. Blue moons occur when a month has two full moons in the same thirty-one day period. This year, the later full moon in August is astronomically very close to earth producing a “Super” Blue Moon. On average, a blue moon occurs once every 33 months, 41 times per century, or about seven times every 19 years. Blue moons occur once every two to three years but a super blue moon is much more rare and occurs only about once every decade.

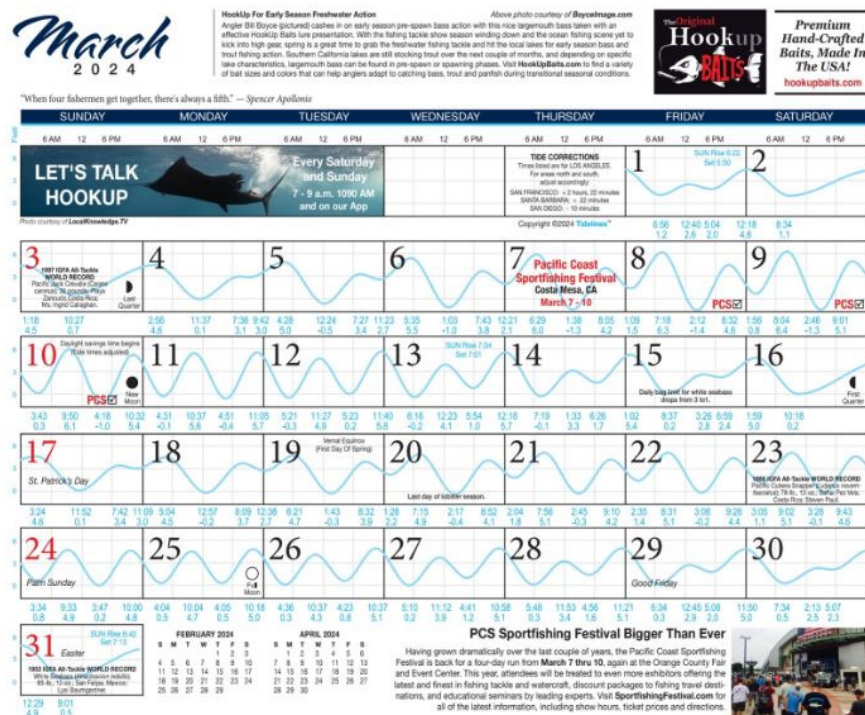
Tidal movement and moon phase are two of the least understood natural phenomenon yet combined they have one of the most pronounced

influences on surf fishing. Higher tides expose more food and provide more underwater structure than low tides. Full moon phases give fish more light to feed and can dramatically change the hours of the day that fish forage.

There is much speculation about how the moon affects fishing. Many long-range anglers swear by the notion that a full moon means a great bluefin tuna bite. But this is mostly a myth, and for many of us, rarely seems to work out this way.

One thing we do know about the moon phase is that during a full moon fish will feed at night because they are able to see and track bait. During new moon periods (when the moon is dark) fish feed most actively in the very early morning and evening when the light is bright enough to see their forage but low enough to hide them from predators.

During a full moon period the biological clock for fish is pushed back while they digest what they have caught and eaten during last night's full moon. Morning fishing during these periods may well prove unproductive. Often, full moon nights signal surf fishing may be better in the afternoon and evening.



## What Causes Tides

It is important to understand the relationship of tidal fluctuations and moon

phases because of their pronounced affect on the quality of fishing. Tidal theory includes the interaction between gravitational and centrifugal forces.

The levels of the ocean fluctuate daily as the sun, moon and earth interact. The earth's inward pull, known as gravity, affects the moon by holding it in orbit. The moon's gravity, at the same time, is also pulling at the earth. The gravitational attraction of the moon causes the oceans to bulge out in the direction toward the moon, (sub-lunar point). The earth itself is also being pulled toward the moon (and away from the water on the far side). This creates another bulge on the opposite side of the earth away from the moon, (antipodal point).

The combined gravitational forces as the moon orbits around the earth, and as both, together, revolve around the sun, causes the world's oceans to rise and fall. With the earth rotating on its axis while all this is happening two tidal cycles occur each day, (in most places). Variations in coastline topography can have significant affects on localized tides.

### ***What Tide Is Best For Surf Fishing***

Experience tells us that there are generally three tides periods that make for good surf fishing.

An optimal tide would allow for roughly a six-foot tidal swing. For example, a morning low tide of 0.2 feet and an afternoon high tide of 6.2 feet would allow for this six-foot swing. Tidal movements greater than this create strong upcoming and receding water movement. These excessive movements make it difficult for fish to see and catch bait. Tidal movement less than four feet, and especially during diurnal or neap (small swing) tides, cause the opposite condition: very little water movement and thus much less rotation of bait through the strike zone.

In most circumstances, the best time to surf fish from beaches that have been dredged and enlarged by the dumping of sand (mostly done in the 1960's to widen beaches) is on an upcoming high tide. Two hours before through two hours after the high tide.

Incoming and outgoing tides during the high tide period afford us with two separate times to fish. I like to fish for corbina and spotfin on the incoming tide because each successive wave moves them farther up the beach and

over the sand crab beds. For surf perch I like fishing the high tide going to low tide as it seems the receding waves and water help to pull my bait into the offshore trough where fish feed.



When fishing during the slack high tide periods (the time exactly when peak high tide is reached) water movement is at a minimum and many times the bite will fade away and then become dramatically active again as water begins to turn, receding on the low tide cycle.

There is an exception to this rule when fishing for halibut, near rocks and from undredged beaches. At these times fishing at peak low tide and peak high tide may be essential. Targeting halibut one-half hour before to one-half hour after peak low and high tide allows them freedom of movement, without the devastating effect of strong currents.

A good case in point would be for fishing halibut which seem naturally lazy and love to bury themselves in the sand and wait for bait to pass by. They are most active at both peak high and peak low tide. This is when tidal current is slowest and they have to work the least to eat.

Also, when fishing areas that are rocky (or adjacent to rock, rivermouths

and natural beaches) many of the most favorable areas may not be accessible until the tide drops. Try your favorite spots at both high and low tides to find when and where the best places to fish are. You may be surprised to find the best structure can only be reached at the lowest tide.

Generally, the largest tidal changes are during the full and new moon phase. This will cause the largest movement of water and provide both opportunity and challenge to the fisherman. Some of the best fishing and bait catching conditions occur during these moon phases.

Accomplished surf anglers refer to their tide and moon calendars regularly and plan their trips around corresponding phases. High tides on dredged beaches (Ventura, South Bay, Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, etc.) seem best for perch, corbina and croaker. Diurnal/ neap and slack tides on both dredged and undredged beaches seems to be the best time for fishing halibut (Undredged beaches: Malibu, San Clemente, Carlsbad, San Elijo, etc).

One exception may be when kelp and eel grass become a nuisance. The best tides for fishing these beaches begins about one hour after low tide, going to high tide, when most of the grass and kelp is still on the shore and not on your line.