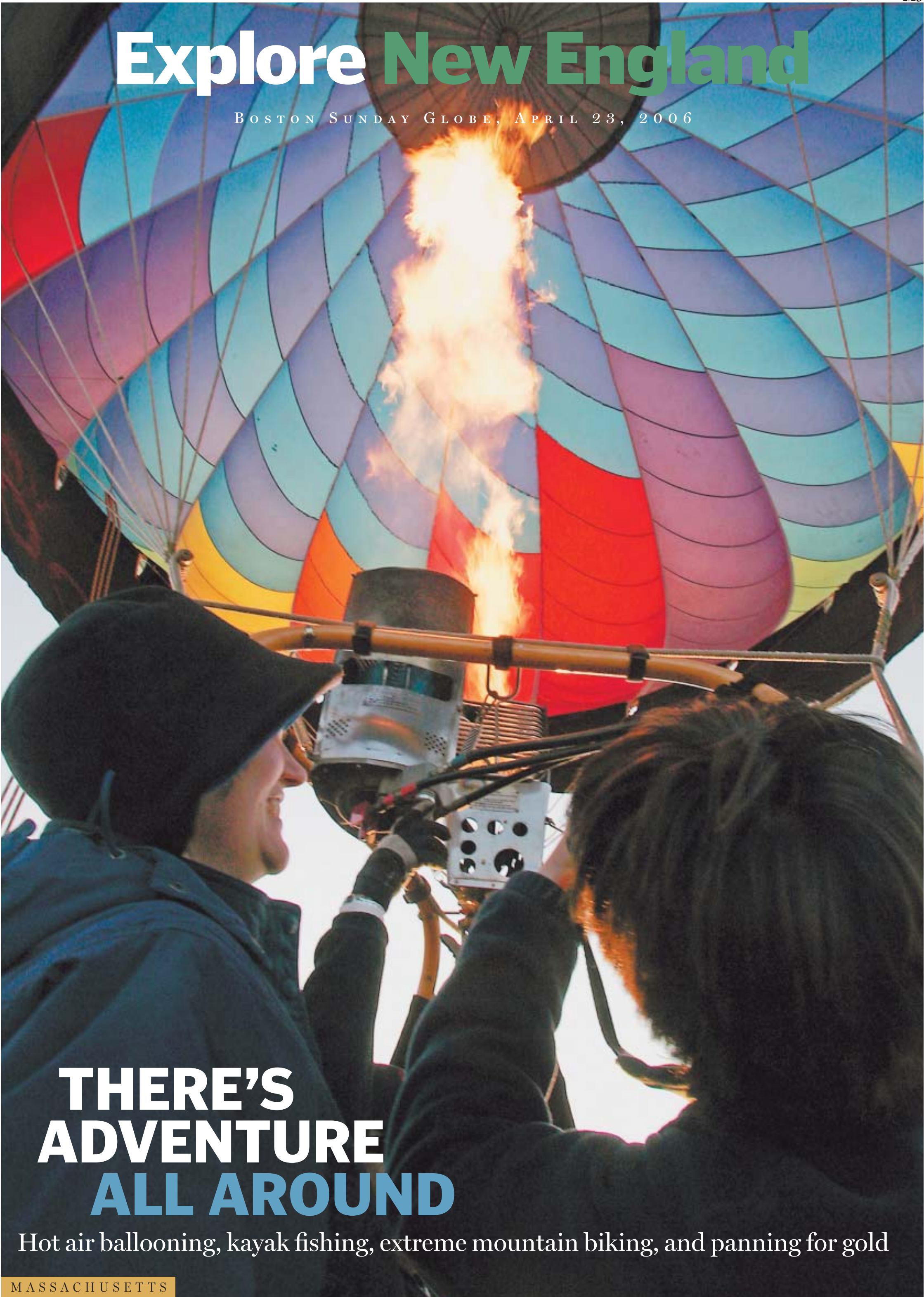




Explore New England

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE, APRIL 23, 2006

THERE'S ADVENTURE ALL AROUND

Hot air ballooning, kayak fishing, extreme mountain biking, and panning for gold

MASSACHUSETTS

BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Passenger Mary Thayer, left, and pilot Lisa Fusco get fired up for liftoff in Northampton, where one learns that hot air ballooning requires some degree of faith.



CONNECTICUT

KARI J. BODNARCHUK/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



MASSACHUSETTS

ERIK JACOBS/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

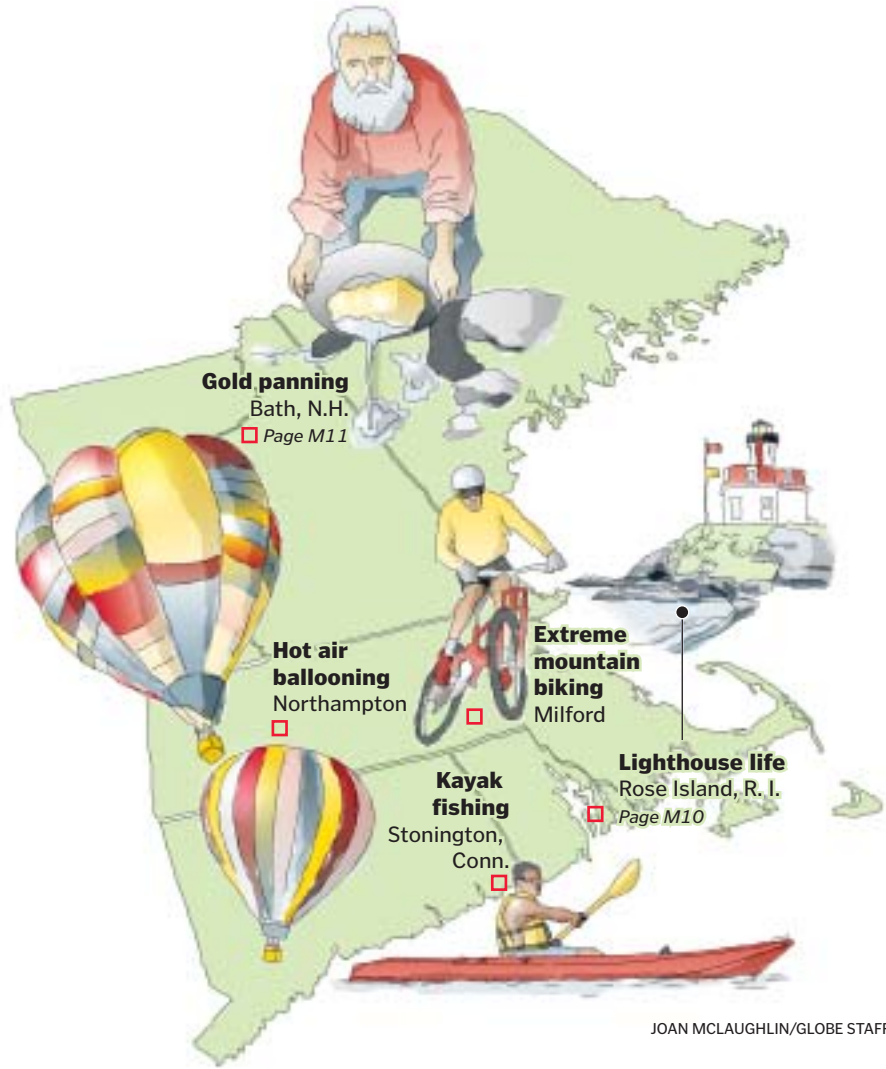


NEW HAMPSHIRE

GEOFF FORESTER/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Kayaker Jerry Sparks fishes in Little Narragansett Bay; Dane Berke gets some air on a bike trail in Milford; and an optimistic prospector gears up to pan for gold in the Ammonoosuc River in Bath.

Guide to adventures across New England



KAYAK FISHING

You know paddles — how about boils, casts, and reels?

By Kari J. Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

STONINGTON, Conn. — It was 5 a.m. on a crisp morning, too early for anything but delivery trucks, expectant anglers, and with luck, fish to be stirring. Jerry Sparks, a local fishing guide, and I had set off to hook striped bass and bluefish on Little Narragansett Bay. The hitch: We were casting our lines from kayaks.

“The cool thing about a kayak is that you’re so close to the water, you can see every wave and ripple,” Sparks said.

Sparks, 55, runs Northeast Kayak and Guide Services in Stonington and is a professional fisherman for the Wilderness Systems Kayak-Fishing Team. He has been fishing for 50 years and kayak fishing for nearly a decade. I, on the other hand, haven’t gone fishing much since I was a kid.

I am in the minority when it comes to kayak fishing, a kayaker becoming an angler instead of the other way around. I had heard that fishing from a kayak can be a great challenge and, if you hook a big fish, pretty exciting — there are stories of salt-water anglers getting towed for miles while reeling in a fish.

“Look at that one boil,” Sparks said,



KARI J. BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Howard Wright of Portland, Maine, off Peddocks Island in Boston Harbor.

while we were casting in a place he called Bluefish Cove. “The fish are running. Let’s shoot a few casts here.”

I wasn’t sure what a boil was, but I followed his advice and cast in the direction he had pointed. Sure enough, within seconds I felt a tug on my line and then watched my rod arc dramatically. I started reeling, while the fish yanked and flapped on the line. The tip of my rod dipped underwater, my paddle slipped off my boat, and my kayak was quickly towed across the cove by that feisty little fish. Then the line went slack.

“That’s too bad — he had some weight,” Sparks said. “Give it a few more minutes and we’ll clean this place up,” he added, always the optimist.

Native Americans have been fishing from kayaks for centuries, but kayak fishing, as a sport, has taken off in New Eng-

land (and beyond) only in the past several years. It has gained in popularity as gas prices have gone up and more waterfront property has been developed, and recreational anglers have discovered its appeal.

“It’s all about the stealth of the kayak,” Jeff Lopez, 33, of Winthrop, said. “You can just glide in over the fish and they don’t even know you’re there.”

Another advantage is that “you can get to where the big fish are in the skinny water,” said Lopez, who has won several kayak-fishing tournaments and was named the Extreme Edge 2005 Northeast Kayak Angler of the Year.

You can also launch in six inches of water without a boat ramp, and then paddle miles of coastline and shallow, untouched inlets where the big boats can’t go. And you can drift-cast along shore without worrying about access issues.

Kayak fishing can be as low-key or high-octane as you make it. Some people, like Damian Bungard of Burlington, Vt., spin cast and fly-fish from kayaks on New England's quiet inland waterways.

"I'll go up to Lake Carmi [in northern Vermont] and catch walleye, bass, perch, and pike all on the same day," Bungard, 29, said. "And I'll catch 20 a day."

Other people prefer casting in surf zones, saltwater fishing at night, bailing off their sit-on-top kayaks to wrestle with a fish, or even going for wild rides towed by fish that tip the scales at 40, 50, 100 pounds — or more.

"It is as close as you can get to 'The Old Man and the Sea,'" said Frank Hugel-meyer, a kayak fisherman who grew up in the Northeast and is now president of the Colorado-based Outdoor Industry Association, which tracks the growth of outdoor sports. "When you hook a fish from a kayak, you don't know if you're going to get towed to the next continent."



ANGLING FOR A KEEPER

See a photo gallery on kayak fishing at explorenewengland.com/travel.

Some fishermen get in over their heads when the weather turns or the waves kick up because they don't know enough about paddling and/or safety. That's why people like Scott Shea of Seaspray Kayaking in Brunswick, Maine, teach skills classes and offer instruction on navigation and paddling through surf. Orvis will launch a kayak-fishing school at its downtown Boston store in June.

In fact, many kayak retailers, bait and tackle shops, and outdoor outfitters across New England offer clinics, workshops, question-and-answer sessions, guide services, on-water instruction, and equipment for sale or rent.

The number of kayak-fishing tournaments is also growing as anglers take the sport from a hobby to a competitive level. Tournaments in the Northeast are generally "paddle-catch-photo-release" events,



KARI J. BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Jerry Sparks with a bass he caught at a Rhode Island tournament.

and offer thousands of dollars in cash and prizes. Almost all tournaments donate some of the proceeds to charity or nonprofits. The Kittery Trading Post, for instance, is hosting an event in June and donating a portion of the entry fees to Stripers Forever, a nonprofit organization working to make the striper a game fish and help protect it.

Regional websites are also being developed. Last year, Mark Attardo of New Hampshire launched NewEnglandKayak-Fishing.com, which has more than 500 members. The site offers kayak-fishing news, articles, forums, resources, and an events calendar, plus information on weather, gear, and launch sites.

Though kayak fishing is still a niche sport, there are dozens of fishing-specific kayaks on the market. Some simply have a rod holder and a paddle lease, but others have specially designed hulls with enough stability so you can stand and cast, multiple rod holders so you can paddle and troll, outrigger systems, anchors, fish finders, GPS systems, compartments, and lights. One kayak has an insulated ice chest built into its hull.

"Rigging is half the fun," said Lopez, who uses rod holders he made from PVC piping and milk crates bungeed onto the

deck of his sit-on-top for holding gear.

But even with the latest equipment, I discovered that it helps to have some good "fish sense" or a good mentor, like Sparks. During those first few hours, I broke my line twice, lost some nice bait, managed to pull the reel off my rod, and hooked little more than weeds.

After battling a stiff current, I joined Sparks in a cove ringed by tall reeds and dotted with great blue herons and swans. We watched a seagull with a fish in its bill swoop down and land on a rock to eat.

"Keep your eye on the birds," said Sparks. "They'll tell you what the fish are doing."

A striper jumped on my red and yellow popper, then swam away. Just as I was about to switch bait, I felt something jolt my line and watched my rod hunch over and bob around in front of me. I gave it a good tug and then started reeling, quickly stopping to adjust the drag a few times.

"Keep going!" Sparks yelled from a hundred yards away. "You're wearing him down."

That was a good thing because my arms were turning to rubber.

"Don't give him any slack or he'll slip away," Sparks commanded, paddling to keep up with me as I drifted.

It wasn't a huge fish, but it was a fighter and pulled my kayak sideways. I kept reeling and playing out the line, and by the time I finally got the striper on my boat, it had towed me hundreds of yards.

Sparks helped me measure, weigh, and photograph the fish, a tricky maneuver that required a long plastic ruler, a waterproof camera, a good fish gripper with a scale, an extra set of hands, and a few unprintable words. It turned out to be a 9-pound, 25-inch striped bass. It wasn't big enough to be a keeper, but it was, after all, more about the experience than the catch. At least it was bigger than a golden shiner.

Contact Kari Bodnarchuk, a Portland, Maine-based writer, photographer, and novice angler, at travelwriter@karib.us.

If you go . . .

Information

Tournaments and events, and outfitters that offer guided trips and instruction:

Kittery Trading Post

Route 1, Kittery, Maine

888-587-6246

www.kitterytradingpost.com

Hosts a Wade, Walk and Paddle-Fishing Rodeo June 23-24 to benefit Stripers Forever, a nonprofit organization dedicated to making the striper a game fish. Kayak-fishing seminars are scheduled the week of May 15, leading up to Kayak Demo Day, May 20.

Charles River Canoe and Kayak

2401 Commonwealth Ave., Newton

617-965-5110

www.paddleboston.com

Clinics May 8 and 16 address how to rig a kayak for fishing and provide general kayak-fishing tips.

King Cove Kayak Center

Wequetequoct Cove, Stonington, Conn.

860-599-4730; kingcovemarina.com

Hosts the Third Annual Northeast Kayak-Fishing Rodeo June 10-11.

Bent Rod Charters

242 Ocean Ave., Block Island, R.I.

401-524-2235

www.blockislandsportfishing.com

Hosts the Block Island Kayak-Fishing Tournament Sept. 22-24.

Mountain Road Trading Post

68 Mountain Road, Raymond, N.H.

603-895-3501; www.mrtp.net

Hosts its second freshwater kayak-fishing tournament June 25 on Pawtuckaway Lake in Nottingham, N.H.

NewEnglandKayakFishing.com

Hosts the 2006 Mass. Bay Striper Shootout Aug. 4-5 on Winter Island in Salem.

Northeast Kayak and Guide Services

Stonington, Conn.

413-219-8455; jsparks132@yahoo.com

Run by Jerry Sparks, offers kayak-fishing trips

and instruction along the Connecticut and Rhode Island coasts; \$135 without rental gear, \$190 including kayak and fishing gear, for four hours.

Fin and Feather Lodge

95 Frenchtown Road, East Greenwich, R.I.

401-885-8680, www.finfeatherlodge.com

Offers individual and group lessons (\$65 an hour or \$150 for three hours for individuals; group lessons vary) and guided trips (\$295 for four hours and \$450 for six hours).

Goose Hummock Shops

Route 6A, Orleans

508-255-0455; www.goose.com

Offers guided kayak-fishing trips and instruction in the Nauset Estuary, Monomoy Flats, Cape Cod Bay, and rivers around Orleans. Four- to six-hour guided trips, with instruction, range from \$225-\$395 for one person; \$75 extra for an additional person, maximum two people.

Seaspray Kayaking

412 State St., Brunswick, Maine

888-349-7772, seaspraykayaking.com

Offers guided kayak-fishing trips with instruction and kayak rental (\$75 per person for three hours and \$150 for six hours; children half price). Hosts the Maine Saltwater Kayak-Fishing Tournament July 16-17.

Orvis

8 North Market Building, East End

Faneuil Hall Marketplace, Boston

617-742-0288; www.orvis.com

Runs kayak-fishing seminars throughout the year, and begins offering one- to two-day kayak-fishing courses in June.

Seacoast Kayak

210 Ocean Blvd., Seabrook, N.H.

603-474-1025; www.seacoastkayak.com

Kayak-fishing specialists offer a two-hour talk and slid show on kayak-fishing gear and techniques, May 22, 7 p.m.; kayak-fishing talk and a tour of the Seabrook/Hampton Harbor, June 24.