

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 4

JAN - FEB, 2026

NORTHWEST FISHING

EXPLORING THE REEL LIFESTYLE

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CHASING THE ELUSIVE BURBOT

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EDITOR'S CORNER:

This has been a weird winter in Central Montana, with one snowstorm and cold snap, and then steady days in the 40s and 50s. The ice on the Missouri River has come and gone, and pheasant season is over. I find myself chomping at the bit for cold nights and solid ice to form so we can get in some ice fishing. Yes, I enjoy true four-season weather. I'm excited to try out my new "Smitty" sled this year. Anything to make life a little easier! Check out my article on do-it-yourself sleds and other ice fishing articles in this issue.

And of course, 'tis the season for sports shows throughout the Pacific Northwest. Hannah gives a nice rundown of this season's shows, where you can find the latest innovations and new products in the fishing industry. NW Fishing will be at many of these shows, so be sure to stop by and find out what new products we'll be coming out with.

Stay safe and see you at the Shows!

- Mike Carey, Northwest Fishing



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1/25: #189 HOMER, ALASKA:
HALIBUT CHARTER FISHING

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2/7: #179 LAKE WENATCHEE SOCKEYE

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2/15: #184 MUCKLESHELL CAST & BLAST

2/22: #191 CLEARWATER IDAHO SPRINGERS

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NORTHWEST FISHING

A Digital Anglers LLC & Northwest Fishing Publication

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**All of the articles do not necessarily represent the opinion of Northwest Fishing magazine.*



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TRADESHOW ROUND-UP

HANNAH PENNEBAKER

The new year is here, and it's trade show season again! Trade shows offer a rich experience to both beginners and experienced anglers alike. Brush up on your knowledge and take in a free seminar from an expert guide! Get your hands on some discounted gear from hundreds of different vendors! Set up a guided fishing or hunting trip with a legendary outfitter! There's something for everyone. Who knows, you may get to meet your favorite fishing celebrity!

Take a look at this list of trade shows in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, and jot down the dates. I highly recommend planning out your day in advance. Leave plenty of time for exploring all the vendors and activities. Trade shows tend to be very family-friendly and offer a variety of free fishing

and non-fishing related activities for all ages, so don't hesitate to bring your kids. Hope to see you all there!



STEELHEAD EXPO

January 9th-11th at the Hells Canyon Hotel in Lewiston, ID

Sitting at the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater rivers, Lewiston is renowned for its steelhead fishing. This show is unique because it also features a steelhead fishing derby! You can buy a combined derby/show ticket. The show also offers seminars, hundreds of fishing gear vendors, and family-friendly activities.



TRI-CITIES SPORTSMEN SHOW

January 23-25 at the HAPO Center in Pasco, WA

This show is very family-friendly and offers a huge list of activities to keep your loved ones entertained, even if they aren't interested in fishing. There are climbing walls, an air rifle range, and even a mechanical bull. Door prizes are announced every hour.

There are fishing and hunting seminars, boats and motors for sale, and more.



WASHINGTON SPORTSMEN'S SHOW

January 28th- February 1st at the Washington State Fair Events Center in Puyallup, WA

Don't miss out on this one if you're in the area- it's Washington's largest trade

show. There's a Heads and Horns competition if you've got a special trophy to bring in. Bring the kids to the trout pond while you're there! There are over 70 seminars with experts in the industry as well.



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SEATTLE BOAT SHOW

January 31st- February 8th at Lumen Field Event Center in Seattle, WA

This boat show promises over 800 boats on display, 150 free seminars, and almost 300 vendors. This is the place to go if you're looking for a deal on anything from a kayak to a yacht. Each day of the show, there are different events, so be sure to check out the calendar before going.



PACIFIC NORTHWEST SPORTSMEN'S SHOW

February 12th-16th at the Portland Expo Center in Portland, OR

This is the Pacific Northwest's biggest trade show. You can find deals on camping supplies, boats, tackle, RV's, and apparel. Many vendors and guides offer special trade show deals. Get here early and leave yourself plenty of time to explore!



THE FLY FISHING SHOW

February 14th 15th in Bellevue, WA

In contrast with most of the other shows on this list, this one is more focused on fly fishing. Don't let that scare you off though, beginners are welcomed, and there is even free fly fishing instruction on both days. Try out a new rod at the casting pond and sit in on a seminar from an expert. Celebrities and authors as well as exhibitors from the industry will be there.

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BIG HORN OUTDOOR ADVENTURE SHOW

March 19th-22nd at the Spokane Fair and Expo Center in Spokane, WA

This show truly has something for everyone. There are seminars on fishing, hunting, survival skills, outdoor cooking, and conservation. There is a different event every day, from Veterans' Day to Family Day. The show has live music, good food, and a 21+ beer garden. It's a great way to spend a day!



MONTANA OUTDOOR EXPO

March 27th-29th at the Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds in Helena, MT

This Montana-based show offers RVs, hunting/fishing gear, boats, and more. Get your hands on the latest gear and talk to experts about your next adventure. There are special raffles throughout the show with the chance of winning some big prizes.

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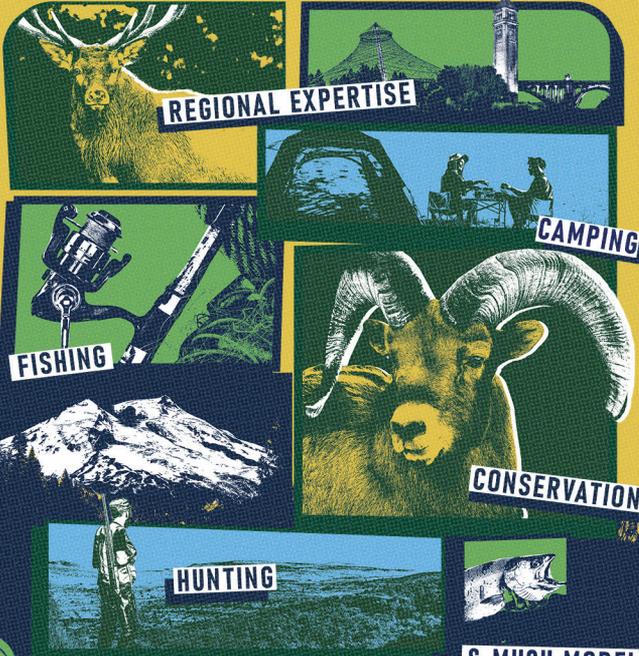


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Slow and Deep **SPINNER FISHING FOR STEELHEAD**

Gary Lewis

MORE FLASH AND DEPTH TRANSLATES TO MORE HOOK-SETS ON WINTER RIVERS.

Not every fish in a pod of steelhead will bite. What we count on is that one or more in any school is the aggressive one. The spinner, like the swung fly, targets the aggressive fish, the biter, and the chaser.

Spinner water in the winter is different than what we look for in the summer. Classic steelhead water that moves at the speed of a fast walk is still a good bet, but I like to target deeper holes and slower-moving current.

In the colder flows of winter, when the metabolism slows down, steelhead are not as likely to chase a lure as far. For this reason, we want to put the lure at the level of the fish and keep it there longer. Casting and retrieving might work, but a swinging presentation is preferred, where the inline weight or the weight of the lure takes it to the bottom.

What contributes to a fast sink rate? The weight of the lure and its mass (or lack of mass) are factors.

Also, a braided line with less resistance will sink faster than mono. If the fish are six to 18 inches off the bottom, the spinner should run in the same place in the water column.

And the lure should thump. Test drive the spinner before the first cast. Get a feel for the thump of the blade as it rotates.

On the cast, let the lure hit the water, then keep the bail open long enough for more line to peel off the spool as the lure sinks.



Now close the bail and let the current grab the blade. Hold the rod tip low.

THE PRESENTATION

Use a retrieve that makes the blade flash like a strobe; if the blade blurs around the shaft, it is going too fast. Steelhead strike out of aggression, curiosity, defense, and feeding impulses, and flash moves the fish longer distances to the lure. Carry spinners in the whole range of blade finishes, with most emphasis on the flashier finishes: silver and brass.

There was a time when I made my own spinners, both to save a little money and to make the lures I needed for each situation. These days, there are more choices available in good fishing departments and on the internet.

For the waters I fish, I start with Wicked Lures with a 30-inch-plus leader and an inline weight, and Blue Fox (Nos. 3, 4, and 5) and heavy-bladed No. 4 custom-tied spinners.

The most common finishes on spinner blades are, in order of most flash to least flash: Silver-plate, brass, tarnished brass, nickel (mirror-finish), and black. On medium-sized western rivers, use medium-sized spinners like Nos. 3-4 with brass, nickel, and black finish. Smaller rivers call for smaller lures. Black, nickel, and tarnished brass are good producers in these rivers. Use larger spinners in bigger pools and size down in lower, clearer water.



GARY LEWIS BIO

Gary Lewis is an award-winning author, TV host, speaker and photographer. Recent books include *Fishing Central Oregon*, 6th Edition, *Fishing Mount Hood Country* and *Bob Nosler Born Ballistic*. Gary has hunted and fished in eight countries on three continents and in the islands of the South Pacific. Born and raised in the Northwest, he has been walking forest trails and running rivers for as long as he can remember. Lewis is twice past president of the Northwest Outdoor Writers Association and a recipient of NOWA's Enos Bradner Award.



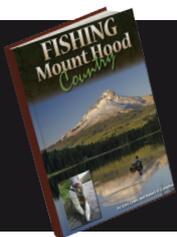
Almost as important as the proper size and flash is using the right color. An angler can add color with prismatic tape. In the cold months of winter, I like to use pinks, oranges, and reds to dress up my spinners.

The decorative tape goes on the inside of the blade. Think about the spinner moving through the water. The fish sees a shiny, flashing thing approaching. As it swings in front of the fish and moves on by, suddenly, there is a

bit of color showing. That element of surprise might incite a follow-up and a strike.

More important than flash or color is the presentation, and the confidence it will catch fish. Fish it slowly so that the lure is presented in the same plane as the fish. Let it tumble, but keep the blade turning, tantalizingly slow. A fast-moving spinner is more apt to spook fish. Slow it down, almost to the point where it stops spinning.

Because fish are apt to be slower to move in cold water, and because the lure is presented at the same depth as holding fish, expect the strike to be softer than in the summer. The bite often just stops the lure. If the angler adds weight on the line, the shock-absorbing nature of the rig is accentuated, and the bite can feel like a wet sock. Set the hook and set it hard. A fish may also swim with the lure, snap its jaws around it, and swim with it. Set the hook hard!



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ICE SLED HACK TO SAVE YOUR BACK

MIKE CAREY



My fondest memory of my grandfather is visiting his shop and looking at all his woodworking tools. He would show me what they were for and how to use them. Stanley and his wife, Martha, were from the old country, immigrants of Czechoslovakia. I credit my grandfather with my woodworking and tinkering skills. Anytime I use my hands to build something, I think of grandpa.

I can't take credit for the following hack. I stumbled on it one evening surfing through ice-fishing videos on YouTube. I filed it in the back of my head last year as a project to work on before this year's ice fishing adventures.

As luck would have it, we've had a warm stretch here in Great Falls and, combined with a nice ten-day off stretch, I decided to get my act together and make the Ice Sled Ski Hack.

Those of you who ice fish are probably familiar with ice sleds. Piled high with our always-growing essential items, these sleds are designed for transporting your gear across the snow and ice of frozen lakes. Sleds are functional and a must for ice anglers. That said, as "essential" gear grows, anglers (especially we senior citizen anglers) get to deal with heavier sleds. Dragging a sled a few hundred yards can get to

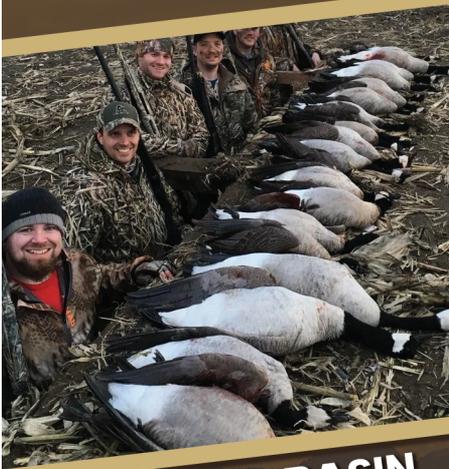
be a pain in the back, to be felt hours after the fishing day is done. The Ice Sled Ski Hack makes it easier to pull your sled across snow or ice. It's an ingenious hack and works exactly like it looks, elevating the sled on two skis, allowing the sled to slide more easily, with less resistance.

This hack is a breeze to build, requiring a minimal number of tools. A saw, a power drill, screws, and a screwdriver will get the job done. There are a variety of designs posted on YouTube, and it's easy to come up with your own design once you see what others have made.



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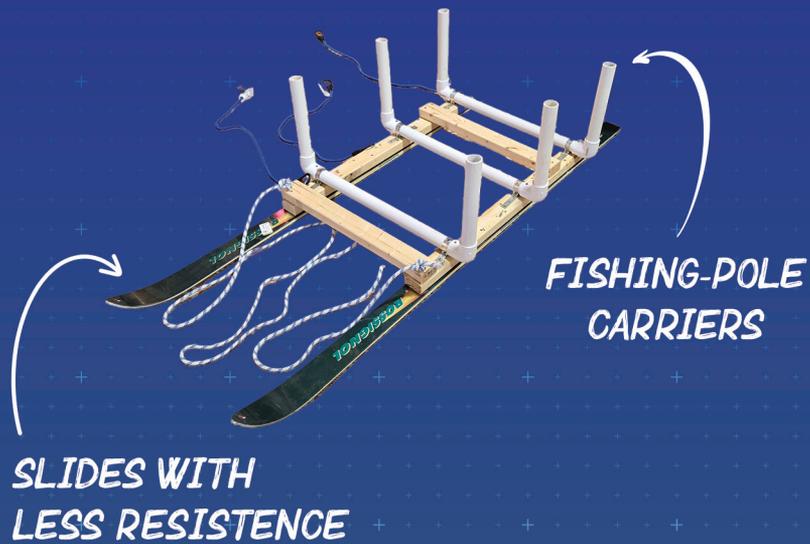
The most important part of the ice sled ski hack is (of course) the skis. Fortunately, the investment is minimal. There's no need to go out and buy a new set of snow skis.

Instead, pay a visit to your nearest Goodwill, St. Vincent DePaul, or Salvation Army store. There, you'll find a variety of inexpensive used skis perfect for our purposes. You'll want to buy downhill skis, not cross-country skis. The reason for this is that downhill skis are shorter, wider, and thicker. You don't need a long, thin cross-country ski. If you have a smaller sled, find a pair of used kid skis; otherwise, adult skis for a full-size sled are perfect.

The first thing that needed to be done was for me the hardest part of this project, removing the ski bindings. The bindings are screwed into the skis, and you'll have to find what to remove to get access to those screws. Fortunately, between YouTube and an internet search, I was able to figure it out (and you will, too).

With the bindings removed, the next step is to construct a platform on which your sled will rest. I spaced the width of the skis to the width of the sled. Onto each ski I screwed on a four-foot-long 2x3-inch board, which matched up perfectly with the width of my skis. The purpose of the wood is two-fold.

THE SLED MOUNT



First, it gave me a solid structure to build from, and second, it raised the sled up off the snow. The whole point of this hack is to ride the sled on the skis and not have the sled drag on the snow. You may have seen some sleds that come with runners installed already, and while those runners certainly help, the sled is still dragging along the ice. The beauty of the ski hack is that the sled is gliding on the skis. And for those of you who have ever skied, you understand the advantage of this system.

The frame structure that the sled will rest on can be made with a variety of materials and ways. For my project, I decided to use 1 1/4" PVC tubing, lining

up three cross-frames, and securing them with plumbing straps, then a couple of screws through the tube into the wood. Be sure to square up the skis so they are parallel, otherwise your ski sled will not track straight. I added two cross beams made of 2x3 wood to strengthen the frame.

Wrapping up the project, I added 90-degree elbows on the PVC tubes and then 14" vertical tubes for side support and as rod holders. Finally, circular eye bolts on the front and sides of the frame serve as connection points for the tow rope and bungee cords that will hold the sled to the frame.

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Project completed, I tested the ski-sled on carpet - December 24th, and we have no snow on the ground here in Great Falls (that won't last!). The ski-sled slides effortlessly with just a fraction of the effort of pulling the sled without it. Success!

This was a fun and simple hack that will make my life much easier on the ice. If your sled is feeling a bit heavy with all your essential gear, give this setup a try!

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SAFETY

SAFE SURF ESSENTIALS

BY JOSH DEBRULER

Back in July of 2017, while driving up the Olympic coast on a surf trip, I stumbled upon a beach campground just south of La Push, Washington. A large northwest swell pushed in sets of violent waves that towered up to around 10 ft in height. The waves lacked the shape required for any attempt at surfing, yet the campground was beautiful and provided excellent views of the Pacific Ocean. Impressed by the campground, we decided to settle down there for a day of camping.

The atmosphere around the camp was strangely quiet and somber, and as we were about to learn, it was for good reason. A man approached us and began to inform us of a tragedy that had happened just hours earlier that day. Apparently, a fisherwoman who was surf perch fishing with her family that morning had been knocked off balance by an incoming wave. Despite the efforts of the anglers around her and the rescuers who appeared soon after the incident, the woman succumbed to the power of the sea that day.

Fishing in general can be a dangerous pursuit. Whether it's crossing the infamously deadly Columbia bar in search of salmon in the Pacific Ocean, encountering inclement weather on your kayak during a spring lingcod trip, or treading about on a thinning sheet of ice during late season ice fishing. With all fun outdoor adventures comes risk. This is not to say that risks should keep us from going outside, yet risks should be something that we evaluate with great attention.



Winter is a perfect time of the year to practice your risk assessment skills; this is especially true on the coast when the weather and seas can become violent. Winter is surf perch fishing season for me. Salmon season is for the most part over, the perch are out of their spawning period, they're fat, and they're plentiful. Furthermore, with the winter razor clam season well underway, it's quite feasible to combine a razor clam trip with a surf perch trip if that's your thing. But wintertime is when the seas are at their highest, so how do we stay safe while

fishing off the beach or while wading in the surf?

TIDE, SWELL, & BEACH TERRAIN

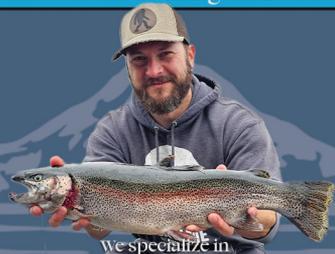
Before going out, it is crucial to understand what is happening with the ocean. Resources like the NOAA website are a great place to figure out important information like tides, swell height, and weather. Winter is the season of King tides, so it is imperative to make sure the tide level isn't going to be at an extreme high for your trip. Average swell height for the Washington coast during the winter ranges from 6-10 feet, but

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JAN - FEB 2026 | 23

A vibrant sunset over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, red, and pink. The ocean is a deep blue, with white foam from a wave breaking in the foreground. A dark surfboard is visible on the right side of the frame, partially obscuring the view of the water.

it often will get even higher. A good practice is to avoid the beach if both the tide height and the swell height are forecasted to be higher than average.

Not all beaches should be treated equally. The most productive spot I've ever fished, the north coast of the Olympic Peninsula, the same spot where the unfortunate tragedy previously mentioned happened years ago, can be a particularly dangerous spot due to the beach terrain. Most of the beach in this spot is steep. Being that I fish at high tide (the best time for surf perch), I choose to spend the entirety of the high tide

atop the slope, out of the water. Venturing down the slope and wading into the water essentially pins you between the ocean and a steep hill behind you, leaving little to no room for escape.

If conditions are a bit too extreme for this spot, I only have to travel about 5 miles south, where there's access to several miles of flat beach. Flat beaches are significantly safer for surf perch fishing and should be favored during sketchy conditions. At flatter beaches, the waves typically break further offshore and have a much wider swash zone (the portion of white water in front of the waves nearer

to the beach). With a wider swash zone, you have more time to retreat back if needed while wading in the water. These areas can be very productive as well if you have scouted at low tide and successfully found depressions on the beach where surf perch like to school up and feed.

SKIP THE DIP

Many people think it's a requirement to wade waist-deep into the water when chasing surf perch. There are many spots, especially those where the waves break close to shore, where you gain little more than 10 yards or so by getting wet. Most of your surf perch fishing can be had

without ever touching the water. To compensate for the distance to the fish you might lose by staying dry on the beach, simply add more weight to your rig so you can cast further out. In many cases, during a high tide, the fish will congregate very close to shore, and a far cast isn't even necessary. The point is, becoming overzealous with wading out is what can easily get you in trouble in the water. It doesn't take much for a wave to catch you off guard, and suddenly you're in over your waders. If possible, skip the dip and stay on shore when conditions are at all questionable.

ROLLING LOGS

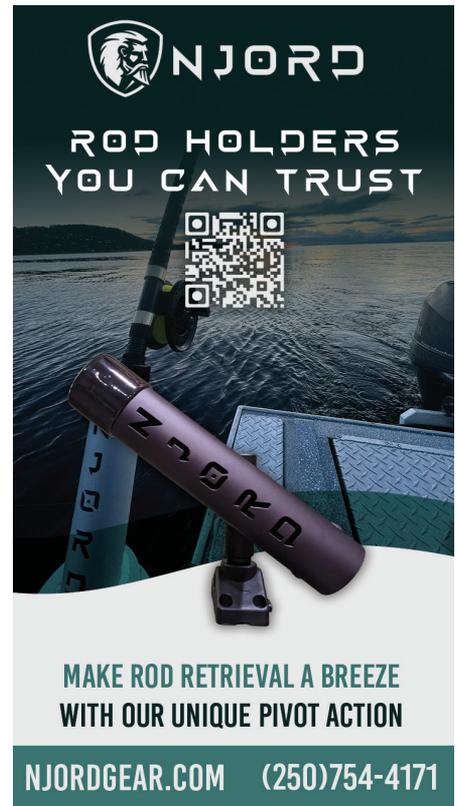
By all means necessary, stay far away from beach logs that are anywhere near the path of the incoming tide. Logs are very buoyant, and it only takes a small amount of water to lift a log that may be well over a thousand pounds. Logs that become adrift are responsible for many accidents and deaths amongst beachgoers who are unaware of the dangers. As shore anglers, we are often confronted with logs on the beach, especially up on the Olympic coast.

Always stay far behind logs that have potential for movement.

WADERS

All modern waders come with a wading belt that, when cinched tight, is effective in keeping water out if you happen to fall or if a wave were to overtake you. When waders fill with water, they become a dangerous trap, so keep your belt tight and stay as shallow as possible.

Sometimes, during the harsh of the winter, I'll tell someone I'm heading to the coast to fish, and they proceed to give me a funny look as we sit inside protected from the elements. What they likely don't understand is that when surf fishing, 75% of your body is already completely protected by your waterproof waders. With a good polyurethane jacket, you can get back into your truck at the end of the day just as dry as you were when you left. Plus, you get a haul of tasty surf perch to bring home. Perhaps you can get out there this winter and bag your limit of surf perch. I hope this article will be helpful in staying safe. Tight lines!



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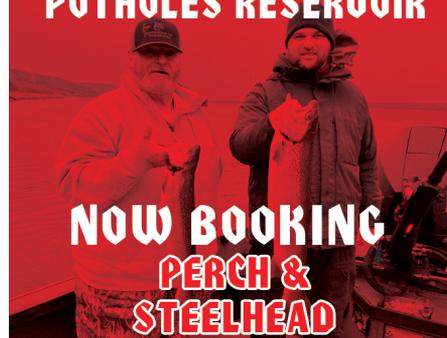
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MOLSON ICE FISHING DERBY

SIDLEY LAKE - January 17

- 8 am to 1 PM – This is an annual event strongly supported by members of this small community just south of the border of Canada. Last year, 200 anglers participated, including 25 youth anglers.

Things kick off at the Molson Grange with a pancake breakfast for \$12 from 7 to 10 AM. Sitzmark provides lunch in the grange in the early afternoon. Raffles take place for ice fishing gear and 25 different baskets with donated items.

Prizes for the biggest fish, smallest fish, and for the participant who traveled the furthest and more are awarded here. The biggest fish is worth \$500 cash and a \$500 gift card to Country Store. Registration costs \$15 for youth up to 12 years of age and \$30 for adults. You can also add an extra \$20 and win at least \$300 for the heaviest weight of up to five rainbow trout. Register online at the Oroville Chamber of Commerce website. orovillewachamber.com/events





Molson Ice Derby
Big Fish Winner

BONAPARTE ICE FISHING DERBY

BONAPARTE LAKE RESORT -

January 24 – This is another popular annual derby, and this will be the fourth year the event is being held. Last year, 280 participants and another 120 lookers-on were there. There are three divisions of fish. They include the Adult Biggest Fish and an Adult Multi-species. There is also a category for the biggest fish caught by youth anglers. There are six species of fish in the lake (tiger trout, rainbows, brook trout, kokanee, lake trout, and smallmouth bass). The angler who weighs the biggest weight of 3 to 6 fish wins.

There is a combination of ice fishing gear and cash given to winners. Last year, an ice auger was given to the biggest fish winner, and a one-man ice fishing shelter to the adult multiple species winner. Register through the Bonaparte Lake Resort Facebook page.

In addition to the resort restaurant that will be open, there will also be a number of other vendors on site. Last year, there was one vendor who was grilling up reindeer sausage for customers. There are no cabins available (they sell out a year in advance), but there are potentially some RV spots available.

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BONAPARTE LAKE RESORT

January 31 - Operation Catching Freedom is a non-profit that gets veterans, active-duty soldiers, and their families out for no-cost fishing trips. This will be an inaugural event and different in that there are no registration fees and no cash prizes awarded for the biggest fish, smallest fish, or any other category.

Tony Warren, the President of Operation Catching Freedom, said that he just wants veterans and the community at large to come out and go fishing. There is an in-person registration from 8 to 10 AM. Fishing takes place from 8 AM to 2 PM, and raffle prizes will be given away throughout the day. The event is taking place at Bonaparte Lake Resort, and there will be a BBQ for all attending between 11 AM and 1 PM. You can find further details at the Operation Catch Freedom Facebook Page.



HOW TO CATCH THEM

Want some advice on how to catch these fish? Eric Magnuson, a well-known ice fishing angler and pro-staffer for Mack's Lure, says, "*Just like open water fishing, it's all about forage and matching the hatch.*" Magnuson continued saying, "*If I notice the fish are after gorging more on bugs, I'll tie on a 3mm or 4mm tungsten jig and tip it with plastic or a couple of maggots. If I notice they are in more of a minnow feeding pattern, I might up my profile to a Swedish Pimple or Mack's Sonic Baitfish spoon.*"

And if that does not work, you can always tip a jig with a worm or nightcrawler, which will catch about anything. The bottom line is this: whether you just want to fish and have fun, or win cash or prizes, there are three great opportunities waiting for you at North Central Washington's Sidley Lake and Lake Bonaparte this winter.

Editor's Note: Check out Eric Magnuson's article on ice fishing for burbot at night on page 37



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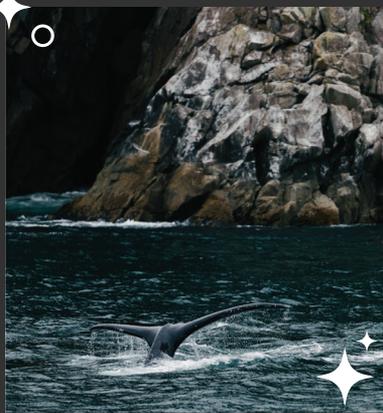
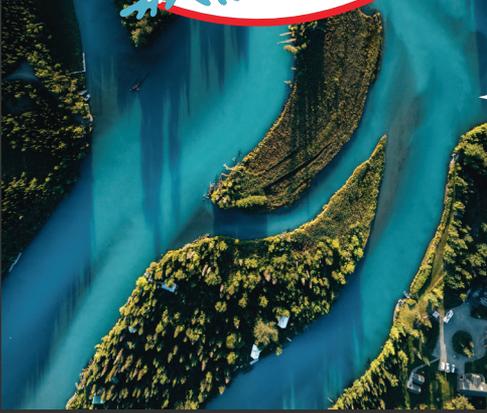
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FISHING FOR A BUDDY



MATT CAREY

I'm a pretty introverted guy, believe it or not. Confident enough to enjoy time by myself and not feel like I'm missing out in my social life, but I am still a person. And people were meant to be around one another, enjoy each other's company, find commonalities, and work together in this thing we call "society". Fishing, of course, offers the chance to enjoy a passion with another person. Sometimes that person can be a significant other, a child, or a parent. More often than not, when on the water, you'll encounter a fishing party with folks just like you

all enjoying time together, fishing for their limit. So, the question becomes, what to do when a friend to go fishing with seems hard to find.

Finding a fishing buddy can transform a solitary pastime into a shared adventure, deepening both skill and enjoyment for all involved. While fishing alone has its quiet charm, having a partner beside you adds camaraderie, safety, and a sense of connection to each outing. Fear not, as finding someone who shares a love for the water isn't as difficult as it may seem. With a bit of intention and openness,

anyone can build the kind of partnership that turns ordinary fishing trips into memorable experiences with a new friend.

One of the most effective ways to find a fishing buddy is to start with your existing social circle. Friends, coworkers, neighbors, or family members may already have an interest in fishing, even if they've never mentioned it. I can't tell you how many times my wife reminds me that "so-and-so"'s husband likes to fish too, or that I seemed to be excited a while ago when mentioning a co-worker who often wets a line.

Casual conversations often reveal surprising overlaps in hobbies.

Mentioning your weekend plans or sharing a recent catch can spark curiosity in someone who has been wanting to try fishing but hasn't had the opportunity. Even beginners can make excellent fishing partners; teaching someone the basics can be rewarding, and the shared learning process often strengthens the bond. Think of mentors you've had in your own life. The appreciation you feel for them as they taught you a skill, technique, or trade. If able to teach another person the finer details of fishing, the sense of loyalty and camaraderie between you both will only lead to more fishing adventures.

If your immediate circle doesn't yield a partner, local fishing communities offer a wealth of possibilities. Many towns have fishing clubs, angler associations, or conservation groups that welcome newcomers. These organizations often host events, workshops, and group outings, making them ideal spaces to meet people who share your enthusiasm. Joining a club not only helps you find a buddy but also exposes you to new techniques,

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WILDLIFE SCULPTURES IN GOLD
BY FRANK MCCUBBINS



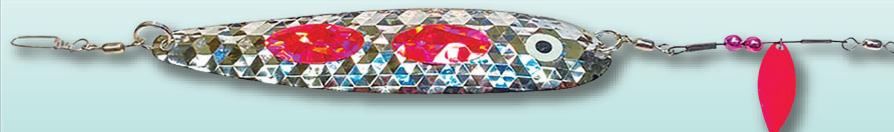


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local knowledge, and a supportive network of experienced anglers. For someone new to an area or new to fishing entirely, these communities can be invaluable. How many episodes have you seen on Northwest Fishing TV where we are out with community groups or organizations? Fishing with the Ilwaco Tuna Club? Check. Fishing a Salmon Derby?

A great opportunity to connect with other anglers.

In the digital age, online platforms have become powerful tools for

connecting with fellow anglers. Social media groups, fishing forums, and specialized apps allow people to meet others who fish in the same region or target the same species. Northwest Fishing's roots come from the days of blogging in the 90's (Washingtonlakes.com), where anglers could share tips, tricks, and friendly banter about fishing around the region. Now resources like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X give us the chance to quickly filter and search for those with similar interests as us.



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Our Northwest Fishing Group on Facebook alone has nearly 54k members, and our Northwest Fishing TV page has 35k followers! I'm willing to bet those platforms can connect you with someone who wouldn't mind hitting the water. These spaces are full of trip invitations, gear discussions, and shared photos that help break the ice. Posting a simple message like: "Looking for a fishing partner around Helena, MT" can lead to multiple responses from people eager to share their favorite spots. Online communities also make it easy to vet potential partners by reading their posts, seeing their experience level, and

getting a sense of their personality before meeting in person.

Local tackle shops are another underrated resource. These small businesses often serve as informal hubs for the fishing community. The staff usually know regular customers, local hot spots, and upcoming events. Striking up a conversation while buying bait or asking for advice can naturally lead to meeting other anglers. Many shops keep bulletin boards where people post fishing reports, club announcements, or partner requests. Because everyone there already shares a common interest, it's one of the easiest places to make connections.

Once you've found someone who seems like a good match, communication becomes essential. Discuss expectations before heading out: preferred fishing styles, target species, early-morning start times, and whether you're fishing for relaxation or competition. Even something as simple as where you plan to meet up, what kind of vehicle you drive, or that your favorite food is bananas and you plan to bring a bunch on board with you can't be assumed. Aligning these details helps avoid misunderstandings and ensures both people enjoy the experience.

It's also wise to talk about practical matters like gear sharing, transportation, and safety habits. Ideally, you'll click with this person and have many more fishing trips planned in the future.

Finally, be open-minded. The ideal fishing buddy might not look exactly like you expect. They might be older, younger, more experienced, or brand new to the sport. What matters most is compatibility, respect, and a shared appreciation for the water. Sometimes the best partnerships form between people who bring different strengths to the boat or shoreline.

In the end, finding a fishing buddy is about more than just catching fish. It's about building a connection rooted in patience, nature, and shared adventure. With a little effort and a willingness to reach out, anyone can find someone to cast a line with, and maybe even form a friendship that lasts far beyond the fishing season.



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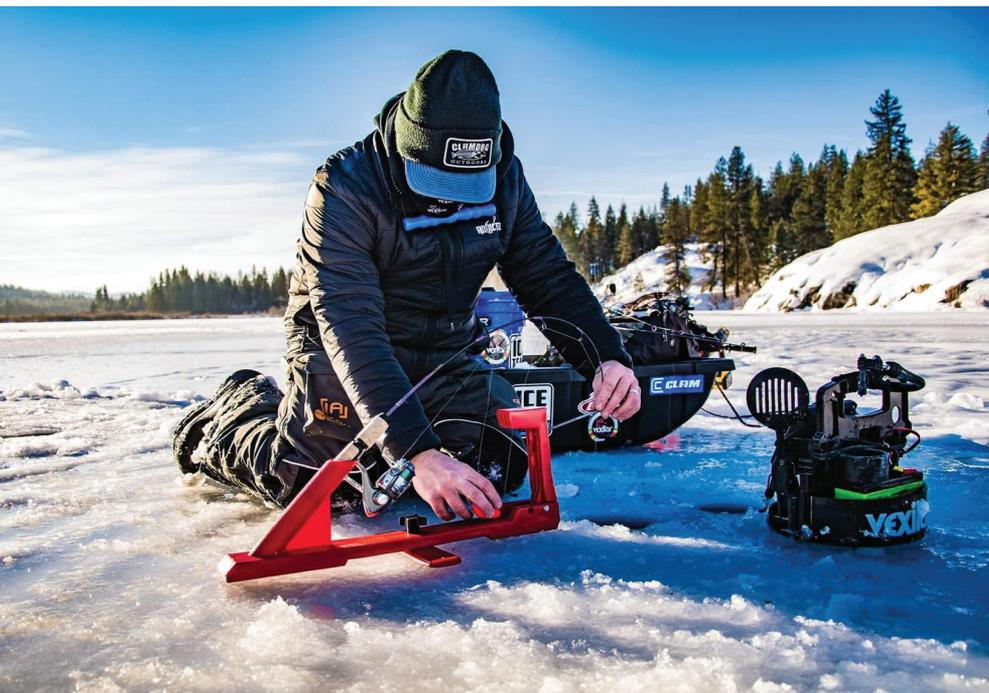
Midnight Magic

By Eric Magnuson

Chasing the Elusive Burbot in the Dark of Winter

There's a certain kind of angler who willingly trades sleep, warmth, and convenience for the chance to tangle with a fish most folks have never seen, let alone pursued on purpose. If you ask me why I have spent so many nights sleeping on the lake, hunched over a glowing hole, waiting on a creature that looks sketched from a memory of someone who had once seen an eel. I will say this, burbot fishing isn't a pastime – it's a pilgrimage.

Most species reward you with a mid-day sun or an early morning bite window. Burbot prefer the dark. Truly the dark. The kind that settles over the lake like a wool blanket, thick and muting everything else around you, except for your breath. That's when they slip across the lakebed, hunting and haunting the edges of structure, and that's when you need to be present and on top of them.





Preparing for burbot means dialing in gear that feels more expedition than recreational. I've come to rely typically on a Medium-Heavy rod with enough backbone to wrestle a surprised, twisting fish from 30-80ft. But enough sensitivity to detect that soft, hesitant pickup burbot are notorious for. A quality reel with a dependable drag is key; these fish, at times, will take runs and have vicious head thrashes, while spinning and twisting in a ball. Pair your reel up with a braided line and a fluorocarbon leader for minimal stretch during deep water hooksets.

The tackle box for burbot is its own mystical museum of creature baits. The uglier the bait, the better! I've noticed over the years, fishing these bottom dwellers, that GLOW is

better. Everything should GLOW that you fish. From Spoons, Rattle Traps, Blade Baits, Jigs, Tubes, Curly Tail Grubs, whatever it may be, it had better be GLOW! I've spent more time charging baits with a UV light than I care to admit. But in the dark below the ice, that soft halo of light is key to helping these fish to find your offering. It can be the difference between a passing glance and a decisive strike.

The technique is nothing graceful, just constant jiggling. With burbot, it's almost like putting in a day's work. You drop your jig or spoon, and bang it on the bottom several times, lifting it to pause. Keep repeating that cadence over and over, disturbing the bottom. They use the noise and vibration to home in on your offering,

giving them the illusion of something rummaging in the territory. When they do bite, it's subtle -- just a faint pressure, followed by a heaviness on your line. When that burbot takes hold of your lure, you realize patience has been your best asset.

I've been known to set up spreads of Tip Ups when I find where they are hanging out, waiting for the burbot to come to me, take a dead stick, or cut bait below the tip-up. I do prefer to stay mobile and hunt them, jigging one or two holes aggressively.

If I set up camp for the night, I will drill a constellation of holes around my shack in various depths, fishing those holes throughout the night, till I find them.

Burbot are a special species, and anglers should be selective on harvest, especially depending on the body of water. What makes burbot special isn't their fight and rarity, or even their nocturnal mysteries. It's the commitment they demand. They ask you to be patient, to be uncomfortable, to embrace the cold and quiet

and the uncertainty. They ask you to show up when most people are heading home. And when they finally arrive, slithering out of the dark to take your lure, it feels earned in a way few catches do.

Get out there, enjoy the peace and quiet of the dark, as it's like nothing else. The Elusive Burbot is elusive for a reason, and it takes those mystic midnight hours to pull them up from their depths. OH, did I mention that they are really good eating?

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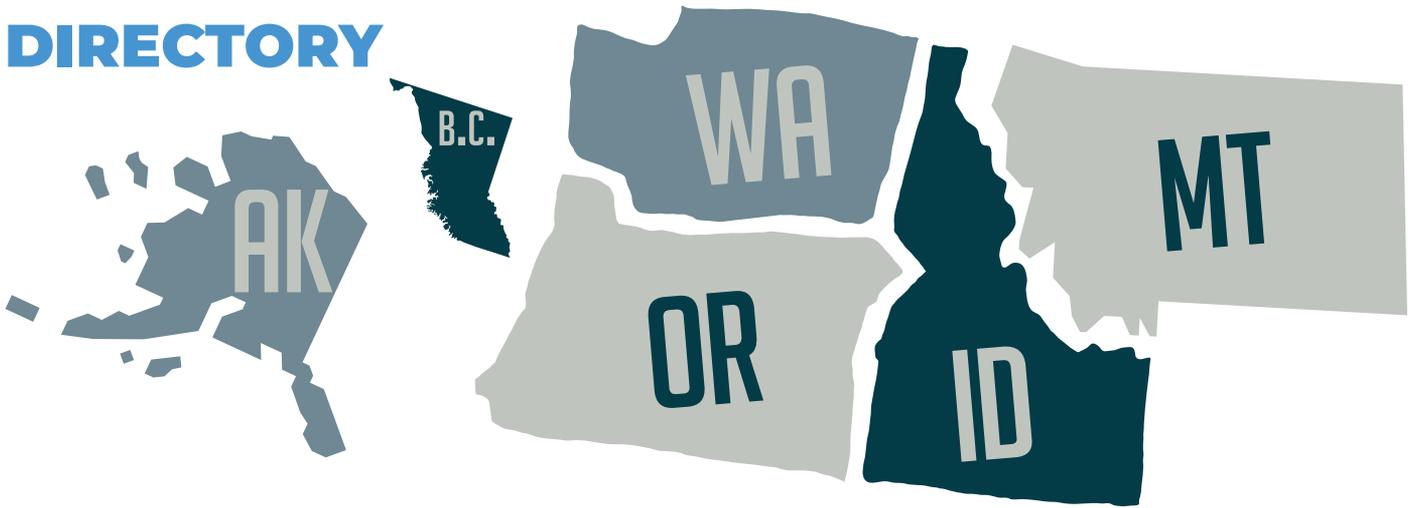
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SHOVEL



Photo by Mandy Hergert



Washington Department of
FISH & WILDLIFE



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