

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 5

MARCH, 2026

NORTHWEST FISHING

EXPLORING THE FISHERMAN LIFESTYLE

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EDITOR'S CORNER:

The only thing certain is change, and as we head out of this year's winter, that saying has never been truer. Here in Montana, it was the winter that wasn't, with only a few light snowstorms and brief cold spells. Heck, 70 degrees in February?? Needless to say, "no ice fishing for you!"

March is one of those transition months that holds the promise of a new year filled with fishing adventures. As you can see from this month's articles, there is a nice variety of adventures awaiting you. The key is being willing to try new things. Expanding your horizons will bring you fresh experiences and opportunities. Don't remain stuck in the same fisheries and locations. This year, make it a goal to explore new destinations and fisheries. Embrace change, and you'll find your horizons grow with fresh adventures. For that, we can all feel very grateful and blessed as we march through this new year.

- Mike Carey, Northwest Fishing



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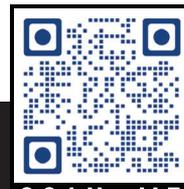
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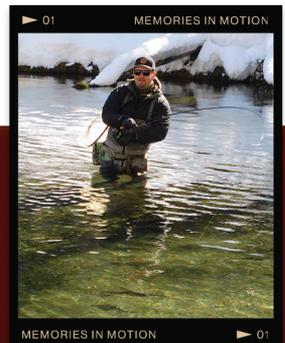
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In Like a Mayfly, Out Like a Brown

by Gary Lewis

All photos by Gary Lewis



The emergence of the Western March Brown marks the end of winter for many trout fishermen. It may still be cold outside, but this mayfly can heat up the fishing when it makes its first appearance in March.

These mayflies live among the rocks in swift-flowing currents. Look for insect activity in slower water adjacent to riffles. Present emergers like the March Brown Spider to rising trout, dead-drift a gold-ribbed Hare's Ear or Pheasant Tail nymph beneath a strike indicator. If the fish are feeding on top, cast dry flies like the March Brown Upright to surface-feeding fish.

Use the March Brown Parachute when casting to finicky feeders in shallow water. The parachute presents a lifelike silhouette when viewed from a trout's living room. Be ready with a Pheasant Tail spinner if the flies are falling, spent, to the water.

In March, a Blue Winged Olive hatch might happen at any time. And in some waters, you might see both BWOs and March browns on the water at the same time.

In Oregon, surrounded the way we are by hundreds of great places to fish, it is hard to remember that there are some great waters off on the eastern horizon.

At this time of year, places like Chickahominy, Beulah Reservoir, and the Owyhee River spring to mind.

If you crave solitude under an azure sky, the last weeks of winter often bring early green-up to the desert, awaken the aquatic insect life, and fire the appetite of rainbows and browns. And not a lot of people are back on the water yet.

Chickahominy fished well the last couple of years with a restock of hatchery rainbows. Chickahominy grows fish fast. A hundred miles east of Bend, it is a narrow reservoir with many coves and fingers and lots of shallows. Early in the season, dragonfly nymphs, scuds, and leech patterns will be productive.

The reservoir reaches a maximum depth of 25 feet, but early in the year, the shallows hold the most fish.

One of the best trout fishing destinations in early spring is the Owyhee River below Lake Owyhee. Rainbows are in the riffles, and browns are everywhere else. Owyhee rainbows average 14 to 18 inches, and browns run to 24 inches.

Right now, with water temperatures still low, small red and black midges produce fish. But go armed with March browns, blue-winged olives in both emerger and dry patterns.

Another early spring fishery is Beulah Reservoir. Fed by the North Fork Malheur River, this big reservoir, from now until Memorial Day, is a good bet for holdover hatchery rainbows. Bring a float tube or a small boat because the low water may limit the usefulness of the boat ramp.

Prowl the shorelines, fishing just outside of the shallows, or explore around the inlet. Fish can grow big in this food-rich reservoir as well. Use leech patterns to spark a strike from the bigger fish. If you land a bull trout, it must be released unharmed.

Other good early spring bets include Krumbo Reservoir and the Blitzen River. Krumbo is one of the lakes that gets early stocks of hatchery trout.

Flowing out of the Steens, the Blitzen River can grow trout big. Spend some time watching the water for clues and for feeding fish.

Put gas in the tank and string the rod. There is nothing like a road trip to greet the early spring green-up. And what better reason to take to the highway than hungry trout?

Tying the March Brown Parachute

Tie the March Brown Parachute with tan thread on a No. 12-14 dry fly hook.

For the tail, use brown hackle fibers. Tie in a strand of dark brown 3/0 thread to use for ribbing.

Twist on tan dubbing, tapering the body as shown. Wrap ribbing forward.

Tie in a wingpost of mallard flank or wood duck fibers. Wrap a grizzly and a brown hackle around the wingpost, parachute style.

Build the head with the tan tying thread and finish.



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 Nessler 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.



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SPRINGTIME MEANS BIG NATIVES

BY BRENT KNIGHT



Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Washington's iconic anadromous rainbow trout, return from the ocean to freshwater rivers to spawn. Across the state, they exhibit two general seasonal runs, winter and summer, though exact timing varies by river and region.

Run timing is critical when pursuing these coveted fish, so it is important to understand when the fish will begin to return, and for those of us looking for the largest, natives, it means timing it perfectly.

In general, winter steelhead runs tend to follow the following schedule.

- *Begin:* Typically, in late fall (around November), as ocean-migrating fish start moving upstream.
- *Peak:* Most winter steelhead arrive in December through February, with some

systems seeing strong numbers returning into March and April.

- *Best for big wild fish:* Many of Washington's large native (wild) steelhead, especially in coastal rivers of the Olympic Peninsula, are most abundant mid-winter through early spring. Local guides note that hatchery fish often peak earlier (e.g., December), with wild steelhead showing up in good numbers soon after and extending into early spring.

While both hatchery and wild steelhead can contribute to runs, depending, of course, on the river system, native (wild) fish, which are often bigger and more prized, tend to peak slightly later than hatchery fish in most systems. For example:

- *On the Olympic Peninsula and coastal rivers:* Hatchery fish are known to start trailing in around Thanksgiving and trail off in January, whereas large wild steelhead often show up in their prime numbers from late December through February, into March, and even April.
- In Puget Sound watersheds, winter runs that include wild fish also peak in December–January, but local timing can vary by watershed, and even by year, depending on weather, ocean, and river conditions.

Note that after entering their natal waters, steelhead often remain in the river for many months prior to spawning and returning to the salt.

The length of time that they stay in the river really depends on the river system, the run timing, and their genetics and instincts.

Unlike salmon, steelhead can return to the salt water for another cycle, and some steelhead have been recorded returning to spawn for 3 or 4 spawning cycles. Of course, a 3 or 4-salt fish will often tend to be larger than a 1 or 2-salt fish; thus, these fish are highly sought after and chased by serious anglers.

When reviewing the WDFW or ODFW regulations, you will often

see rivers closing at the end of January, mid-February, or in March. There is a reason for this. The recreational seasons are generally set to provide anglers with opportunities to fish for steelhead, whether that be for catch and release of native fish or a retention fishery for hatchery fish. The seasons are timed to close about the time that the main runs of native fish are expected to return based on historical run timing. For this reason, the fisheries are closed to protect the native fish in an attempt to restore runs back to acceptable

numbers. A great example of this is the Sauk River. The Sauk has long been a coveted fishery since it is an all-native river, and the fish tend to be large, genetically mean, and extremely aggressive. These fish are wired differently, and catching one is unlike any other fishery that I have experienced. The Sauk River winter/spring wild steelhead fishery has experienced multiple closures due to low wild returns, with significant closures occurring around 2008, 2010–2017, and 2020–2022.

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The fishery often closes or faces restrictions when wild steelhead forecasts fall below the 6,000-fish escapement threshold, as noted by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. A few years ago, WDFW and NOAA agreed to a ten-year plan based on return data, in an effort to offer a recreational catch-and-release fishery on the Sauk. We finally received some long-awaited good news. Unfortunately, our current governor and his cabinet slashed budgets for 2026, and this fishery was taken from us, as there was not enough budget to staff and monitor the fishery. This is devastating for the local communities and the anglers who enjoyed spending time on this epic river system. The Sauk is not the only system experiencing this fate. Good for the fish, bad for us anglers!

Speaking of big, mean, native winter steelhead, in early April 2025, I fished with guide Cary Hofmann on the Sauk. We were bobber dogging 20mm beads that day, and I hooked the largest steelhead of my life.

My float was just above the drift boat as we entered the bottom of a run, and my float disappeared. I jumped on my reel, and as I did, my float popped back to the surface. I opened my bail to let out some line, and after a moment, my float dropped again and started racing upstream through fast water. My bail was open, and as I tried to close the bail and slow the fish, my hand got hung up for a moment, and the fish broke a 15lb fluorocarbon leader like it was nothing. I have hooked into some 20lb class steelhead and landed a few, but this was another level of mean and powerful. Even though I did not see this fish, just the experience of feeling it on the end of my line was a moment that I will never forget. For die-hard steelheaders chasing big, native fish, this is what we live for.

Some of the best opportunities in Washington to encounter large native steelhead (especially in late winter through spring), focusing on places known for quality wild fish rather than solely hatchery-enhanced fisheries include:



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OLYMPIC PENINSULA RIVERS

These are widely regarded as some of the best wild steelhead runs in Washington, often producing larger native fish and extended late-season opportunity.

- *Hoh River* – Classic wild steelhead water with deep pools and strong late winter/early spring runs.
- *Bogachiel River* – Known for productive winter steelhead fishing and scenic access.
- *Sol Duc River* – Holds big wild fish; excellent spring timing as flows moderate.
- *Quillayute / Calawah / Clearwater tributaries* – Smaller but good opportunities for spring natives.

Run Timing: On the Peninsula, steelhead enter

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these rivers from late fall through spring, with some of the largest natives arriving in January through April. I have found that Mid-March through early April can be prime for large wild fish entering holding water behind hatchery runs. I try to time my trip for mid to late March, and I am never disappointed unless we get rained out. This is not uncommon due to the immense rainfall that hits the coast, as much as 16 feet per year in places.

COASTAL & SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON RIVERS

Smaller coastal systems (outside the Peninsula proper) can also be excellent in late winter when conditions calm after storms.

- *North River, Naselle River, Willapa River system* – Offers wild runs with spring opportunity.

- *Grays Harbor rivers* (e.g., Satsop, Wynoochie, and Humptulips) — though smaller, they can produce quality fish from late fall into the spring.

These fisheries are more dependent on rain and water clarity, but when conditions stabilize in late winter/early spring, fish concentrate in holding water.

PUGET SOUND AREA – WILD RUNS

Puget Sound tributaries see winter and early spring returns of wild steelhead, though overall numbers are lower than on the coast. It is also important to note that most North Puget Sound rivers are closed for 2026 by January 31st, so no recreational fisheries to enjoy this year. As mentioned, this is primarily due to budget cuts, so please remember this the next time that you vote.

- *Skykomish River* – Historically decent winter/wild runs; larger fish possible early season. Small, hatchery broodstock program still in effect from the Reiter hatchery near Goldbar. Like the Cowlitz, this is not a secret spot, but if you have not fished it, it is epically beautiful and a fun bank fishery.
- *Stillaguamish & Snoqualmie Rivers* – Smaller, technical fisheries that can hold native winter steelhead. Tokul Creek also has a hatchery program that is winding down, but returns that continue to produce.

It is important to mention that many Puget Sound wild runs are sensitive and subject to stricter release regulations, so as always, check WDFW's current rules before going.

LOWER COLUMBIA TRIBUTARIES (LATE WINTER-EARLY SPRING)

While many lower Columbia systems are enhanced by hatchery programs, wild components, especially winter runs, still migrate in:

- *Cowlitz River* – Huge late winter steelhead opportunity; big fish



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show up in February–March. The Cowlitz is renowned for its hatchery program and generally strong A and B run returns. Note that this is not a secret spot, so when the steelhead arrive, it is very congested.

- *Kalama & Lewis Rivers* – Good late winter spring runs; mixed hatchery/wild.
- *Washougal & Elochoman* – Smaller systems with winter fish in March–April.

Note: While these fisheries include hatchery fish, big overwintering wild fish also pass through in late winter/

early spring, especially on bigger tributaries like the Cowlitz.

When targeting large native fish, we are generally seeking quality, not quantity. For this reason, our approach tends to change a bit. Upsizing gear and presentations are common. Sure, you can catch a 20lb native steelhead on light tackle, but we try to match the gear to the fish. Keep in mind that big fish are big for a reason; they are not stupid. Their instinct is strong, and they don't bite at everything that passes by them.

I cannot think of a bigger example of survival of the fittest. My mantra is that big fish are not stupid, so I do my best to fool them, or more likely, piss them off. An aggressive fish will protect its territory and extinguish any threat that appears, so I try my best to threaten them with bold presentations that best match the water conditions.

SOME TIPS FOR TARGETING THE BIG FISH:

Focus on deep holding water — tails of runs, deep holes, and structure. Watch river conditions — post-storm clarity often improves

by late winter, improving bite windows.

Check seasonal regulations — wild steelhead protection varies by river and year; WDFW updates are important. Upsize your gear — Examples include swung spoons, large beads, worms of different colors to match the water clarity, plugs and spinners. Don't be afraid to go old school either. Throw your Oki drifters, spin n glo's and tackle of yesteryear. Yes, Herzog is correct, it all still works.

Many wild steelhead populations in Washington, especially coastal and

Puget Sound runs, are protected and often catch-and-release only with seasonal closures. Always consult current WDFW regs for the specific river you plan to fish. In addition, we are not allowed to remove wild fish from the water in Washington, even for a picture, so please practice safe handling and return the fish as quickly as you can. Think head in the water for that quick picture to commemorate your catch.

Good luck and happy fishing to you all.

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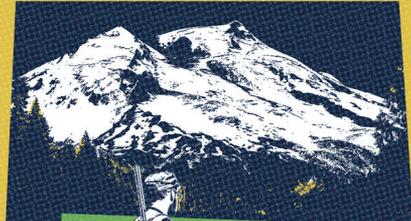
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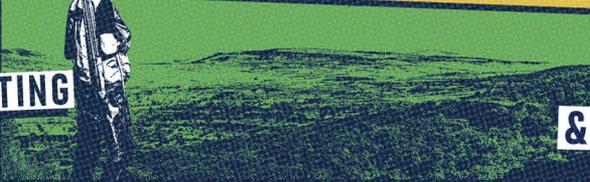
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WASHINGTON'S BOTTOMFISH BOUNTY

BY JOSH DEBRULER



Places like Florida, Texas, and Baja California are all celebrated for their tasty white fish like grouper, red snapper, and white seabass. While here in the Northwest, the fatty red or pink meat from a chinook or coho salmon is often what comes to mind when we think of seafood associated with our coastal and inland waters. The truth is, we also have all the necessary resources to make a mean fish taco. That is, the Pacific Northwest bottomfish.

Don't let the name "bottom fish" give you the wrong idea about where they might fall on the Hierarchy of seafood delicacies. The bottom fish mentioned in this article make for excellent table fare and can

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utilized for a simple fish fry, tacos, or can be combined with some of our abundant shellfish for a seafood stew like a Cioppino.

Our bottom fish range from large, dragon-like predatory fish like the Lingcod, to the massive halibut, which can get well over 200 lbs. In some cases, you can catch these fish from shore, but most often a boat of some sort will be necessary for success in these fisheries.

LINGCOD

Straights of Juan de Fuca

Marine areas 6, 5, and 4 along the Straits of Juan de Fuca all provide great opportunities for lingcod. In MA 5, you can launch a boat at Clallam Bay from the town of Sekiu at Mason's Resort boat launch.

From there, you can head west towards Kiyak Point, where ample amounts of rocky underwater structures and reefs hold healthy numbers of lingcod. Soft plastics work well here, but if you're aiming to land a giant, try hooking up a small greenling as bait and sending it down to the bottom.

Puget sound

Conservation efforts make the Puget Sound a much more restrictive area to target lingcod. The 2026 season runs from May 1st through June 15th and allows the retention of 1 fish per day. Size restrictions are in place as well, and you can only keep lingcod that are between 26 to 36 inches. Possession Bar, Tavola Shore, and Alkai Reef all hold lingcod.

CABEZON

The cabezón. Loosely translated to “large head”, is aptly named for this exact reason. Cabezons, when larger, have giant heads and are built like a tank. When hooked, they will take off with your line and head-shake like a large lingcod. They’re a blast to catch and can be found all over the Straits of Juan de Fuca and the Washington coast. My favorite spot to fish for these is near Hobuck Beach in Neah Bay. This spot can be accessed via shore if you are using a kayak, otherwise you will have to launch your boat from the Big Salmon resort in Neah Bay.

ROCKFISH

Westport

Rockfish are abundant all throughout the Straits of Juan De Fuca and the Washington coast. With that said, if you’re looking for easy access, Westport provides a unique opportunity to catch these fish off of their one-mile-long jetty at Westhaven State Park. If climbing the rocks isn’t your thing, you can also hop on board one of the many charter boats that take off from the Westport marina to target salmon and bottom fish.

HALIBUT

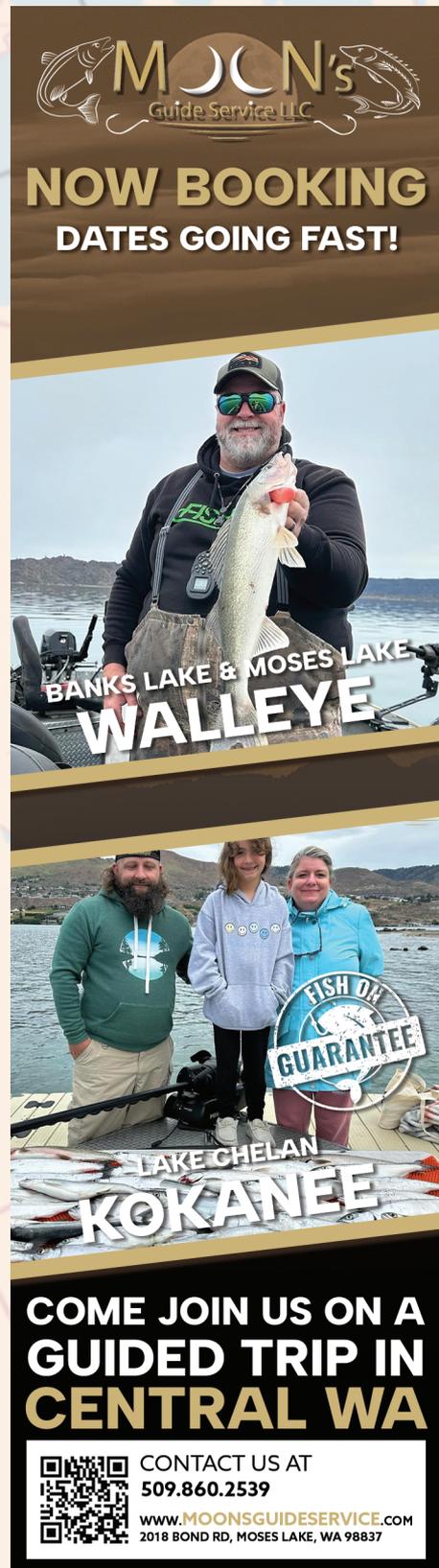
Pillar Point

Pillar Point is about 15 miles east of Sekiu and has a small boat launch that is favored more by kayakers than those with larger vessels. For those looking for a larger boat launch, this area can be accessed by launching out of Sekiu and motoring east. A long sloping underwater ridge provides prime habitat for halibut, and it’s not uncommon to see 80+ lb halibut pulled out of this area.

GREENLING

Neah Bay

The old Snow Creek resort on the northern part of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, just outside of Neah Bay, holds healthy populations of Kelp Greenling. Though these fish are often thrown back by anglers targeting lingcod or rockfish, they are incredibly tasty and can be found in the kelp beds only a few hundred yards offshore. This area is open year-round for kelp greenling so long as you stay east of the Bonilla-Tatoosh line.



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FLOUNDER

North Hood Canal

The flounder fishery is often overshadowed by some of the larger game fish species in the Puget Sound, yet these fish offer a fun year-round fishery that can be a great way for kids to get excited about fishing while at the same time making for excellent table fare. Flounder are found all throughout the Puget Sound and Hood Canal on sandy or muddy bottoms and are quite easy to catch using artificial sandworms, clams, or chunks of flounder meat.

Dabob Bay, just south of Quilcene, is the only part of the Hood Canal that is open to flounder fishing. The bay can be accessed via the Quilcene Bay boat launch to the north or Tritan Cove boat ramp to the south.

South Puget Sound

If fishing the Puget Sound, you can find flounder in large numbers in MA 9 at Jeff head or fishing from the shore at Point no Point in Hansville. Further south in the South Puget Sound, good flounder fishing can be had at Dash Point in King County, where a fishing pier and easy

kayak is launching from the beach. Going further down towards Olympia, you can find flounder from Dana Passage to Boston Harbor. Always check the Department of Health's website for current information on flounder consumption safety guidelines.

With many bottom fish seasons opening this spring, and the year-round opportunities that these fish provide us with, there's never a wrong time to get out there, get your cooler filled, and enjoy another one of our great fisheries here in the Northwest.

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- Electronic tagging for big game and turkey
- Catch and bird harvests recorded directly in the app
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EARLY OPENER TROUT

The March 1st opener provides anglers a chance to catch trout in several eastside lakes & beyond.

by Mark Yuasa

More than two dozen lakes across Eastern Washington are set to open March 1, although unpredictable winter-like conditions could limit trout fishing options and success.

“We’ve had a mild winter, and early March can be a great time for early lake fishing opportunities,” said Steve Caromile, a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) statewide inland fish program manager. *“As the days become longer, these early spring fisheries are a good way to start the year. Some eastside lakes may have some remaining thin ice, especially in the northeastern region of the state. WDFW doesn’t monitor ice conditions, so use extra caution before venturing out this year.”*

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Depending upon the severity of late winter weather, some lakes, especially those in the northeastern region, may still be iced over. WDFW doesn’t monitor ice conditions, so anglers should check ice conditions before heading out.

The initial best bets will likely be Martha and Upper Caliche lakes near George in Grant County. Each can be an excellent choice, and anglers should expect good fishing in 2026.

Martha and Upper Caliche lakes received 500 catchable 10- to 12-inch rainbow trout in the fall of 2025 and should be in the 13- to 14-inch range by opening day. WDFW planted another 325 catchable trout in time for the March 1 opener, and



Photo submitted to WDFW
by Douglas Jewett

3,900 fingerling trout (one- to three-inches long) were planted in April of 2025, and those that survived should contribute to spring-time catches.

It is not uncommon for Upper Caliche to still be frozen on March 1. However, there’s almost always plenty of open water on Martha Lake on the opener. The north section of Martha Lake is usually ice-free with plenty of shoreline space, and that’s likely where most of the trout will be concentrated.

In Grant County, Quincy and Burke lakes should both fish well this spring, and improved boat launch sites. Shore anglers should have plenty of room to fish with ample access to the lakes.

Both lakes received 1,500 catchable-sized trout in February, and each was stocked with more than 21,000 fingerling in April of 2025. Most fish will be in the 10- to 12-inch range, with some carryover trout in the 13-to 15-inch range. Try casting spinners and small spoons from the shoreline.

The Quincy Valley Chamber of Commerce Trout Derby is March 27-28 at Quincy and Burke lakes. Cost is \$40 per person over age 18 and free for youth ages 17 and under. For details, go to: <https://quincyvalleywa.chambermaster.com/events/details/trout-fishing-derby-2026-1300>.

Lake Lenore in Grant County is also open on March 1 with a one-fish daily limit and an 18-inch minimum size limit. This is one of only six lakes in Washington with Lahontan Cutthroat.

Other lakes and ponds in Grant County included in the March 1 opener are Cascade, Dry Falls, Lenice, Merry, North Potholes Reserve, Nunnally, Stratford/Brook, and Winchester Wasteway.

Also note that within the Quincy Lakes Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife

Area, there are many walk-in lakes that open March 1. These lakes can provide not only good fishing, but also solitude.

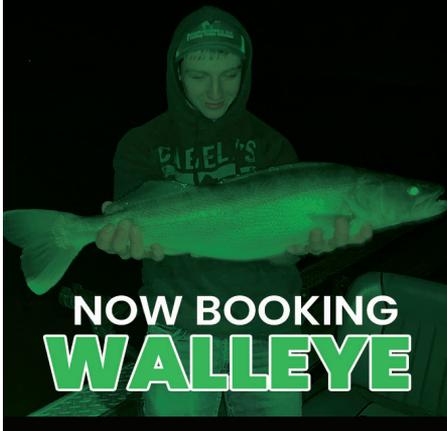
With their boat launches, parking, and shore access, Quincy and Burke lakes tend to attract the most attention when these Grant County, Washington, waters open March 1, but WDFW biologist Michael Schmuck notes that he stocks several nearby smaller and less well-known lakes that grow footlong-plus rainbows.

“There is a good chance for anglers to have them all to themselves, and many are down in small canyons that afford good protection from the spring winds,” said Schmuck.

Hike-in Dusty Lake is a selective gear lake that has excellent rainbow trout fishing as well as brown and tiger trout. Just southeast of Dusty is a collection of small lakes that hold rainbow trout. Cliff, Crystal, Cup, and Lower and Upper Spring lakes are small enough that they can all be fished in a morning. All these lakes receive spring fingerling rainbow trout and produce good catches of fish in the 12- to 14-inch range, with some up to 20 inches.



FISH INTIMIDATORS

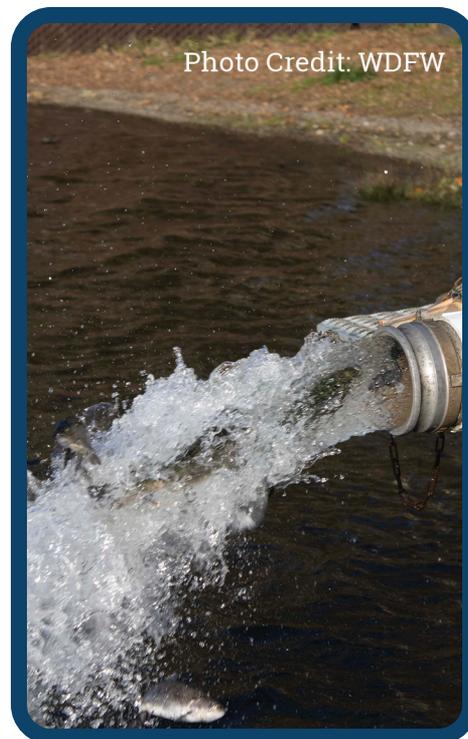


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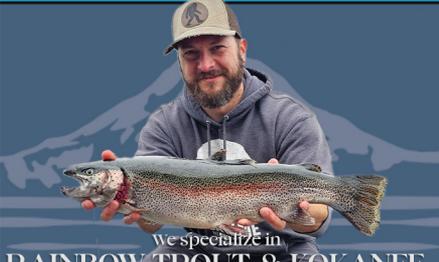
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see their website for more info.

The greater Spokane region has several March 1 openers, including Liberty Lake that can be good around the opener for brown and rainbow trout averaging 12 to 16 inches. Statewide rules apply at Liberty Lake.

There are other March 1 opener lakes managed under “selective gear rules”, but the action doesn’t generally pick up until the weather warms up. However, fishing can be pretty good, but not great, until warmer weather arrives.

Those lakes include Amber and Medical in Spokane County; and Coffeepot in Lincoln County. Amber and Coffeepot are managed with an 18-inch minimum size limit and a daily limit one-fish regulation. Medical has a 14-inch minimum size limit and a daily limit two-fish regulation.

Downs Lake, located in south Spokane County, typically opens for early-season fishing on March 1, but it is not accessible to the public this season. Access to the lake is limited to a privately owned resort that is currently closed. No fish were stocked in 2026, and stocking will not resume until public access is available.

LAKES BY COUNTY

GRANT COUNTY

(general fishing regulations with season open March 1 through Sept. 30)

BURKE, 1,500 catchable-size rainbow trout stocked in February, and 21,226 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in April of 2025;

UPPER CALICHE, 325 rainbow trout stocked in March, 500 catchable-size rainbow trout stocked in October of 2025, and 3,900 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in April of 2025;

CLIFF, 400 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in March of 2025;

CRYSTAL, 400 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in March of 2025; Cup, 200 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in March of 2025;

MARTHA, 500 catchable-size rainbow trout stocked in March, 750 catchable-size rainbow trout stocked in October of 2025, and 8,400 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in March of 2025;

QUINCY, 1,500 catchable-size rainbow trout stocked in February, and 21,177 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in April of 2025;

LOWER SPRING, 200 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in March of 2025;

UPPER SPRING, 200 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in March of 2025.

GRANT COUNTY

(selective fishing regulations with season open March 1 through Nov. 30)

DRY FALLS, 4,670 fingerling rainbow trout and 1,500 fingerling brook trout stocked in March of 2025;

DUSTY, 3,000 fingerling rainbow trout, 2,500 fingerling brook trout, and 2,200 tiger trout stocked in May of 2025;

LENICE, 2,250 catchable-size rainbow trout to be stocked in April of 2026, and 3,000 catchable-size rainbow trout stocked in October of 2025;

LENORE, 72,125 fingerling rainbow trout stocked in October of 2025;

NUNNALLY, 2,750 catchable-size rainbow trout to be stocked in April, and 3,000 catchable-size rainbow trout stocked in October of 2025.

SPOKANE COUNTY

LIBERTY, 4,000 catchable-size rainbow and 350 jumbo rainbow trout stocked in spring of 2026, 15,000 fry rainbow trout, 35,000 fry brook trout and 1,200 broodstock eastern brook trout stocked in fall of 2025;

AMBER, 7,500 fry rainbow trout and 1,000 fry cutthroat trout stocked in spring of 2025;

MEDICAL, 2,500 put-grow-take brook trout to be stocked in April 2026 (these trout are 2.6 to 10 fish per pound in size and should be in the catchable size by mid-summer), and 5,000 fry rainbow trout stocked in spring of 2025;

COFFEEPOT, 5,000 put-grow-take rainbow trout to be stocked in spring of 2026 (these trout are 2.6 to 10 fish per pound in size and should be in the catchable size by mid-summer).

WDFW is working to restore public access.

And finally, all seven human-made lakes off the Tucannon River in Columbia County –

Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring, and Watson — have open water and are stocked with rainbows weighing up to 1.5 pounds each. Pampa Pond in Whitman County is also open March 1 for rainbow trout fishing.

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION & RESOURCES

Many westside year-round lakes are also being stocked with trout in early spring. Visit the WDFW website at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/reports/stocking/trout-plants> for specific weekly fish stocking numbers.

Mark your calendar for the highly anticipated 2026 statewide general lowland lakes trout opener on April 25.

The WDFW Trout Derby will be held from April 25 through Oct. 31 at more than 100 stocked lakes and ponds across Washington. In 2025, more than 100 statewide businesses offered an estimated 1,091 prizes valued at around \$54,858 and worth about \$50.28 per prize, which

was up considerably from previous years, dating back to 2016. WDFW is currently preparing for the 2026 trout derby and will have updated information soon. The success of the trout derby would only be possible through WDFW's ongoing partnerships with business dealers/vendors throughout the state.

The derby, held for the past 10 years, has generated close to 55 to 60 percent of the tags turned in for prizes. To help boost catching a tagged trout, WDFW will have a list of all the lakes in real-time where prizes are left to be claimed.

Be sure to share your derby success on social media using the hashtag #watrounderby. The WDFW Trout Derby webpage <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/contests/trout-derby> should be updated soon with 2026 information.

You can find information on statewide lowland lake locations by going to the WDFW webpage at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/locations/lowland-lakes>. Basic trout fishing techniques on the WDFW YouTube webpage

MARK YUASA

Mark Yuasa is Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Communications Manager and longtime local fishing and outdoor writer.



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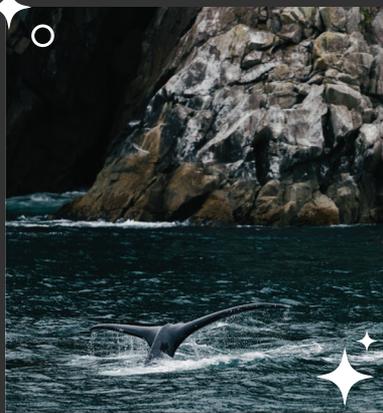
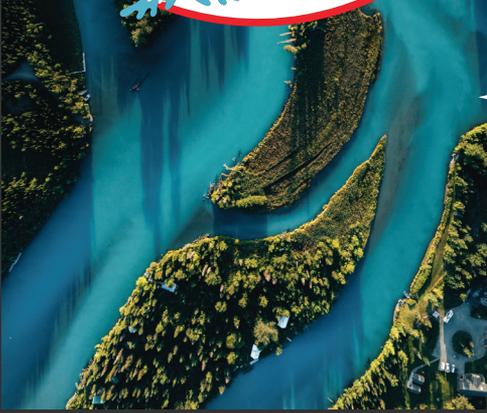
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BRINE TO BITE:

THE SMOKED SALMON BLUEPRINT

BY HANNAH PENNEBAKER



It's a question that every angler has at some point in their lives. You've had a great day out on the water, you've got a stringer of fish, and you're on the way home. "What do I do with all these fish?!" Smoking fish is an ancient technique that continues to be done today for a very good reason! The prospect of smoking salmon, trout, and kokanee at home can certainly be intimidating. But with the right tools and knowledge at your disposal, you can turn that fish stringer into a bag of delicious fish candy. Let's take a look at some techniques and tips for getting started as well as perfecting your smoked salmon.

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EQUIPMENT

One of the best things about smoking salmon is that it's fairly cheap to do it yourself. You can easily find used smokers online. As a bonus, you won't have to wait for your smoker to ship, and there won't be shipping and handling fees! I highly recommend exploring the used smoker market for deals. Oftentimes, sellers will throw in pellets, wood chips, covers, and other accessories.

Big Chief and Little Chief smokers are the old standby around the Pacific Northwest. They're cheap, simple, and turn out a great product. My first smoker was a Big Chief!



There is a learning curve to using them, however. They have no temperature control settings, and they are not insulated. You can attempt to alleviate these issues by purchasing an insulation blanket to wrap around the smoker in cold weather and cracking the door open as needed in hot weather. It's a good idea to use a Bluetooth thermometer to monitor your temperature.

You'll also need to empty the wood chip tray and fill it up with fresh chips every 30 minutes or so- I recommend setting a timer! One of the benefits of these smokers is that every part of them is replaceable.

You can purchase new racks, chip trays, and heating elements online. If you're okay with changing out your wood chips every 30 minutes and keeping a close eye on your temperatures, you can't go wrong with a Chief.

Although the Chief smokers are the old standby, if you're looking for something a

bit easier to use, invest in a smoker with digital controls. These require less babysitting, but this convenience does come at a higher price tag. Bradley, Masterbuilt, and Pit Boss are all reputable brands that make reliable and sturdy digital smokers. Some of these smokers automatically feed new chips/briquettes in addition to controlling the temperatures, making for a "set it and forget it" experience. They also tend to be insulated, so they can be used in cold weather and are more likely to hold a stable temperature.

Other smokers commonly used around the Pacific Northwest include charcoal grills and pellet grills. These grills are great because they're versatile. You can smoke a brisket, grill some burgers, and smoke up some salmon, all on the same unit. Electric smokers usually can't get up to the temperatures required for chicken, pork, or beef. Throw some wood chunks in your charcoal grill and let it smoke! Everyone loves that charcoal flavor. Pellet grills are very easy to use, and you can experiment with different types of pellets.

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METHODS

Now that you've got your smoker, let's delve into some techniques to help you get perfect smoked salmon on your first try. The first step is to brine your salmon. This involves putting your salmon in a mix of salt, sugar, and other additions in order to preserve your fish and add flavor. There are probably just as many smoked salmon recipes as there are salmon fishermen, but there are generally two ways to brine your salmon: dry brining and wet brining.

Dry brining is usually a mix of brown sugar, salt, and seasonings applied to your fish for 12-24 hours. After a few hours, the fish expels moisture, the brine liquefies, and you stir it all up. Wet brining is a mix of brown sugar, salt, water,

and other seasonings. Because it's diluted with water, you generally leave it in for longer, sometimes as long as 48 hours. Try out both styles of brine and figure out your preference. I have a dry brine and a wet brine recipe that I alternate between, depending on what I'm in the mood for, and how much time I have.

Once your fish is finished brining, it's time to form the pellicle. The pellicle is a shiny, tacky layer on your fish that smoke adheres to. You'll get a smokier, juicier product if you take the extra time to let your fish form the pellicle. Lay your fish out on racks and leave them in the fridge overnight, or 3-12 hours. It makes a big difference in the final product!

Your next steps will vary depending on what model of smoker you have, but a few general rules will always apply. Monitor your smoker temperatures, your smoke levels, and your fish temperatures. If you're wondering what type of wood to use, alder is always a good choice. Apple and cherry are other common options for fish. Take the wood chips/briquettes/chunks out after a few hours for a lighter smoke flavor.



During the last hour or so of smoking, I'll baste my fish. Maple syrup, honey, and jelly can help give your fish a bit of extra flavor and sweetness. Bag up your finished product and try not to let your family eat it all!

FOOD SAFETY

Especially if you're sharing your smoked salmon with friends and family, it's important to practice good food safety habits throughout the process. This starts from the moment you catch your fish. Bonk, thoroughly bleed, and immediately ice your salmon. Gut it as soon as you can and return it to the ice. Freeze or get your fish into the brine ASAP. Thoroughly brine your fish in the refrigerator before smoking it, turning it every 6 hours so that every piece of fish gets brined.

Brining the fish helps preserve it. Once the fish is done brining, form your pellicle by leaving the fish uncovered in the fridge. You want to keep your fish out of the temperature danger zone, 40 to 140 degrees, as much as possible. When you smoke the fish, make sure to temperature check it and ensure the thickest part reaches at least 145 degrees. Keep your finished product in the refrigerator and consume it within 1 or 2 weeks. Last but not least, thoroughly clean your smoker racks and drip trays after each and every smoke. Follow these food safety tips to keep you and your family safe from foodborne illnesses!

One of the most rewarding parts of smoking salmon is trying out new recipes, brines, woods, and techniques. There are many forums, groups, and websites with recipes for you to try. Keep experimenting and having fun!



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CATCHING SPRING CHINOOK

ARTICLE BY SCOTT T STARBUCK

From Northern California to Canada, and the Pacific to Idaho, few secrets are as carefully guarded as uncrowded areas for spring bank-caught salmon. Each time one of my fishing buds gives the slightest hint of a clue of a lean in that direction, my phone goes dead, his email is lost, or I have to remind him, "I don't text." I turned the ringer off on my phone nine years ago. Even my wife, Suz, and I had a big fight over it. We were raised fishing the same rivers like the Molalla and Clackamas, and ocean reefs, so I guess it was

only natural that sooner or later she demanded to know my springer spots. "Look," I said, "I bought you a diamond ring. Isn't that enough? I'm not giving you my secret fishing holes that took a lifetime to find. That kind of intimacy and trust takes years. If it's okay with you, I'd like to keep them between me and God." She said it wasn't okay.

"Let me get this straight," she said. "You trust me enough to marry me, but not enough to show me your secret fishing spots?"

"How it is," I said.

SPRING CHINOOK
PHOTO BY TOBY WYATT

She responded by deliberately knocking off one of my big spring chinooks with the net (she swears it was an accident. Yeah, right.). Of course, we broke up over it. It was a nice fish that by all rights should have been in the box.

Now we are back together, and using her mermaid magic, she has my secret spots. Or thinks she does. I didn't tell her I learned from a Joseph Campbell video how Navajo US Army scout and storyteller Jeff King left out an essential piece of the story until the initiate was ready.

Why, you may wonder, are you so extreme as to not even tell your wife? The answer is these fish are my favorite to eat. At \$18 to \$27 a pound during prime season, I can't afford to show up somewhere that previously had zero to three anglers and see 30 to 40. If that happened, I couldn't get my regular 16 fish a season from rivers to get me through the year. In plain terms, a 20-pound cleaned springer is worth about \$400. Add another, and that is an \$800 morning. All of which is saying, springer fishing is serious business.

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SCAN ME



Plutarch's Moralia notes that ancient Spartan mothers told their sons, "Return with your shield, or on it." At least one Oregon mother told her son going after springers, "Return with your fishing rod, or on it".

So what's the point of this article? is the obvious question. The point is, if you want to catch a coveted bank-caught springer away from the crowds, put your time in hacking blackberry vines, searching maps, and getting permission from landowners; or get a boat, or hire a guide.

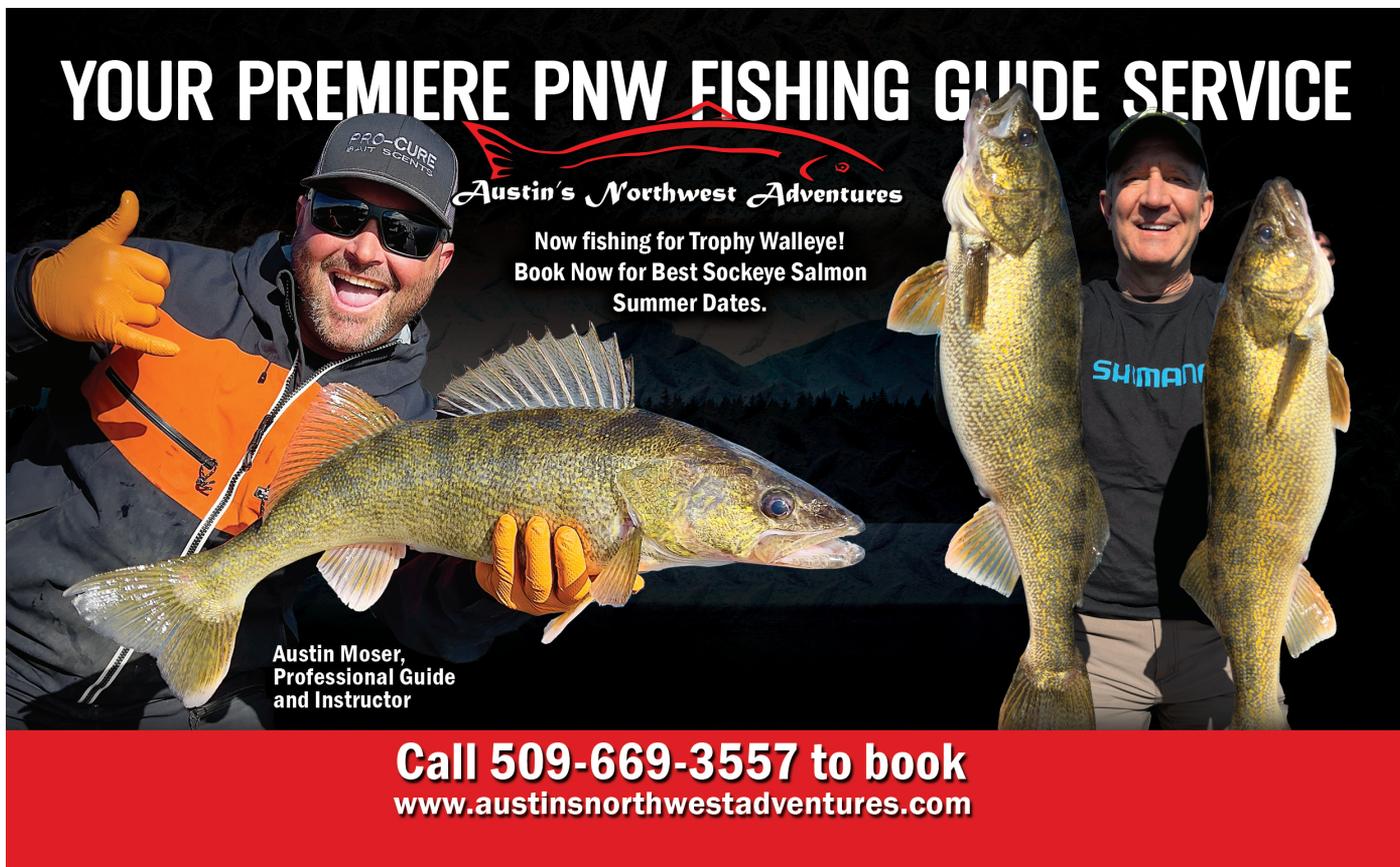
However, if you want to go it alone bank-fishing after hearing all this, here is my advice.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Go where people regularly catch springers, and watch everything they use and do, right down to the gnat's eyelash's mite's eyelash. I mean study gear, hook, bait, length and size, and kind of leader, exact placement and depth of lure, time of day, and if you are really serious, where they go to church and the color of their socks.

STUDY A WATERSHED

I found springers to be more picky than steelhead about where they pause in upriver migrations. In general, springers like it slow, dark, and deep, which makes sense if you consider these 10 to 30 pound brutes a short while ago had an entire Pacific ocean to forage. Chinook in our area travel as far as the Aleutian Islands past Dutch Harbor into the Bering Sea. That is how they get so big and delicious.



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SPRING CHINOOK
PHOTO BY SCOTT T STARBUCK

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GOOD BAIT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

After over 40 years of doing this, I see the same guys in the same spots at the same times of year on my springer travels from coastal rivers to Idaho. They are all expert anglers, but on some days one of them is slaying fish after fish while the rest of us look on in mouth-watering amazement. Why? It's the bait cure the fish want that day, and to show how serious these fish are, they ignore everyone else's bait, moving within inches of the same water.

I asked one successful angler his secret, and he said it took over 20 years for an old-timer to share it, and there was no way in hell he was telling me. I said I understood. If you read my last article, "How to Outfit a Fish Car," you know these fish "can smell parts per billion." GrrlScientist, formerly of The University of Washington in Seattle and science writer for The Guardian, permitted me to include a SciLogs article "Salmon, scent and going home again" January 17, 2011, in which she noted:

"In the November 1978 issue of Pacific Search, author C. Herb Williams described a Canadian study where a nearly homeopathic solution containing one part of human skin dissolved in 80 billion parts of water was dumped into a river. Astonishingly, the scent from this solution was sufficient to stop migrating salmon for as long as half an hour. Additional experiments by Canadian scientists show that salmon will either slow or stop their migrations when certain human smells are present in the water, and trout —



SPRING CHINOOK
PHOTO BY TOBY WYATT

another salmonid — show distinct flight responses when a fisherman washes his hands upstream. [par break] This offensive scent was identified as the amino acid, serine, which — because human skin contains serine — has led to some fishermen to refer to this as 'the serine problem'!"

This means when I catch a hen, I cure her eggs that night so I can fish them at daylight without being frozen. I keep my hands clean, and on sweaty days wear white latex gloves. One angler said I was Michael Jacksoning it, but I had a salmon, and he didn't. Many years of experimenting led to my current egg cure recipe. Reel blazing runs, \$800 fish mornings, and beet-red spring salmon steaks make it all worth it.

A Friends of William Stafford Scholar at the "Speak Truth to Power" Fellowship of Reconciliation Seabeck Conference, Scott T. Starbuck's two books of fishing poems are River Walker, which sold out in less than a year, and Lost Salmon forthcoming from

MoonPath Press. Starbuck's writing focuses on the clash between ancient sustaining forces like wild salmon rivers with modern industrial lives. His most recent book is Industrial Oz: Eco-poems. His blog Trees, Fish, and Dreams is at riverseek.blogspot.com

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Guiding out of Homer, Alaska, Rachel is a "Deck Boss" and soon-to-be Captain of Alaskan Adventure Guides & Outfitters.

BOAT NAME

SEA HUNTER

TARGET SPECIES

•HALIBUT•
•LINGCOD•
•SALMON•

SEASON

MAY THRU
SEPTEMBER

ABOUT RACHEL DAILEY

Rachel chases some of Alaska's most sought-after species, including halibut, lingcod, rockfish, and salmon from May through September. Alaska was the first place she ever fished. "Persistence was key," she says. "Within a month, muscle memory kicked in, and by the end of summer, customers were calling us a well-oiled machine." Working some of the strongest tides in the world, she's learned to adapt quickly as currents rip at three knots and conditions change in seconds. What she loves most? "Seeing the faces of people who have dreamed of this experience. I get to be part of that."



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Photo by Mandy Hergert



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