

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 6

APRIL, 2026

NORTHWEST FISHING

EXPLORE THE PNW'S REEL LIFESTYLE

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TIME

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EDITOR'S CORNER:

Ah, Spring. The promise of a new season is here. Everywhere life is exploding. Winter wheat fields are turning greener by the day, and those days are getting steadily longer. The long hibernation of winter has drawn to a close, and the promise of familiar fisheries is here.

As always, we have a plethora of fishing options coming up. Ling cod, trout, springers, post-spawn walleye, and bass, the list has something for everyone.

Speaking of something for everyone, we are proud to launch our **NEW NW Fishing App!** The app has a ton of features and allows you to access current and past magazines and TV episodes. Cast the episodes to your big screen TV and watch your favorite episodes, or ones you may have missed. Post your catch pictures and get your name on our Leaderboard. There will be lots of features you'll find cool and useful.

I have my list of old and new destinations to check out this year, and my calendar is filling up fast. I hope you likewise have plenty of fun fishing adventures planned. See you on the water!

- Mike Carey, Northwest Fishing



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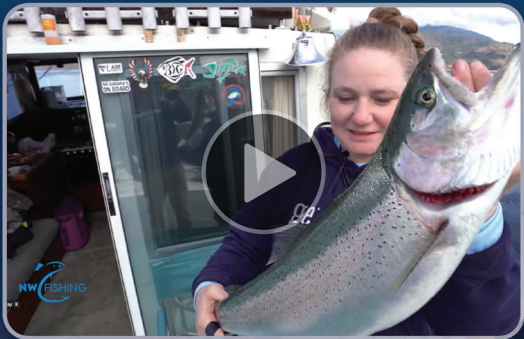
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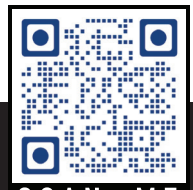
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TROUT FISHING WITH A **DRY FLY** IN THE CASCADES

BY GARY LEWIS

My first encounter with trout and a dry fly was like prayer. It was a Sunday afternoon. I was 12, the fish was as old as time, and the insect was a white miller moth that touched down on the water. I whispered a prayer. "Lord, if you want me to be a fly-fisherman, send a trout to eat that moth."

With the sun on its wings, the moth bounced over the water, touched down, lifted, touched again. A trout broke the stillness of the pool, nosed through the surface and ate the moth. Church was over.

In those days, to become a fly-fisherman meant becoming a different person.

Fly-fishermen wore tweed, and they wore funny hats. They smoked pipes. This was what I must become. It was big stuff for a 12-year-old. I wasn't even sure my mom would let me smoke a pipe.

On Monday, my grandpa drove me to the hardware store. I bought a 7-weight fly rod with the money saved from mowing lawns. I knew to start by fishing nymphs and wet flies, but as soon as I could, I would try to catch a trout on a dry fly.

In those days, I lived in southwest Washington and rode a ten-speed with a fly rod across the handle and crept through the alder to watch the trout and the bugs on the water.

WHERE & WHEN

Today, the Cascade mountains and the streams that come down off the glaciers and out of those snowmelt reservoirs can offer the same kind of dry fly fishing.

The estimation of a trophy trout is on a sliding scale. Since it does not take a lot of water to keep trout alive, trophy rainbows and cutthroat can be found in a lot of east-slope and west-slope creeks and rivers, and even a few north-slope trickles.

Highway 35 parallels and crosses the East Fork Hood River, which is home to beautiful cutthroats, vulnerable to any high-floating bushy dry fly.

Anyone good with a map can locate a dozen other small streams that can be accessed for spot-and-stalk dapping or casting in the same area.

In the Clackamas drainage, the Oak Grove Fork offers a bushwhacking opportunity where the light plays on the riffled water and mayflies dry their wings and form small clouds over the log jam pools.

Another stream winding down out of the national forest is the Breitenbush. Any trout from the Breitenbush is a trophy and may be too small to eat, but in time it will grow larger in memory. But don't be deceived, there are some big trout in the little river too.

Another steep little river is the North Fork Santiam, with both wild and hatchery trout. In the fast riffled water, the trout are watching the surface for the mayflies, stoneflies, and caddis caught in the current.

Miles and miles of the McKenzie River are driftboat floatable and wet wadeable. In these years after the big fire, the river's overstory (canopy) has opened, and there is no doubt the bug life has responded to the sunlight. Resident rainbows can grow big, coming out from under the cutbanks to feed.

Of the rivers and creeks tributary to the Willamette, the Middle Fork is a great option for the wading angler. In fact, there are a dozen streams. Pore over a map with a highlighter and note where the rivers cross under the roads. There will be a pullout and a trail down through the alders. An angler can base camp at Lowell, Westfir, or Oakridge and fish for days without going over the same water twice.

FLIES FOR SUMMER WADING

A well-stocked fly box should have foam body ants. It helps to tie or buy the fly with a high-viz wing to keep track of it in the riffles.

Attractor dry flies like the Stimulator and its variants are great for those rare moments when the fish are feeding on stoneflies. Mayflies and caddis can be tied with a little foam or hollow-bodied deer hair. Another good attractor is anything from the Chubby series. Sometimes, when fishing a chubby, it's a good idea to tie on a dry fly dropper. Cut off at least 20 inches of 5X. Put an ant on the light tippet tied off to the bend of the hook of the bigger fly. Then set the hook at a splash.

There are still a lot of places where rainbows and cutthroats flash to caddis from out of downed timber, the sun filtered through alders. The braided currents open windows to heaven in the clear water. Trout fishing is still like prayer.

To cast a dry fly and present it in a natural drift; to see trout come up out of the dark water to take it, that is the pinnacle of fly fishing.



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.

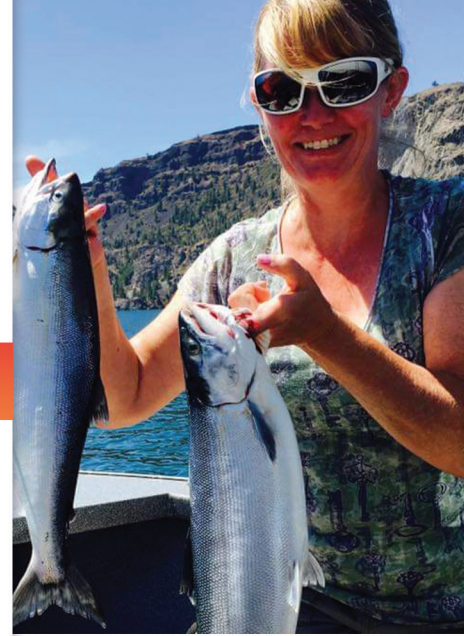


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Mike Carey

Battlin' Paddlefish

Lately, I've been remembering back to my mid-twenties (no small task), and an April trip my brother Kevin and I took on the Wisconsin River below the Sauk Dam. It was one of those beautiful spring days, sunny, blue skies, temperatures climbing into the 60s with just a whisper of breeze. We had loaded up my canoe and launched on the west side just below the dam. After a quick row through some fast water, we came to the calm side of the dam. With no water spilling over the dam, conditions were ideal for dropping a jig tipped with a minnow down to the bottom in search of walleye. The spawn bite was usually good, and we were looking forward to bringing home some tasty marble eyes. Little did we know the river had something else planned for us that day.

My brother Kevin was what I would call a "reluctant angler". He would go fishing with me, but only after much cajoling and promising not to get up at 5 am in the morning. The rest of my brothers were even less fishing inclined. I guess God gave me the lion's share of the piscatorial genes in our family, something for which I have been forever thankful. Although the rest of my brothers made up for it by getting extra IQ genes, which is why they would never get up at five in the morning to chase two-pound fish.

Lowering our anchor, we settled into the task at hand. We each had standard-issue 6 ½ foot rods of unknown action and backbone, and open-faced spinning reels loaded with 8-pound test monofilament. On the working end of the line, a ¼ ounce jig (green) and a

nose-hooked, squirming minnow who somehow knew things were about to go from bad to worse for him. Down 30 feet to the bottom, reel up two cranks, and we settled in for the first telltale tap-tap of a walleye to start our day.

Waiting for our first bite, Kevin, an avid Monty Python fan, started going through his repertoire of Humorous Sketches to pass the time. Noticing my rod starting to bounce, he inquired, "*What's all this then, ay?*" as my rod started a deep bow and the tip buried itself underwater. "*I'm not sure. I felt a bite, but it feels like it might be snagged on the bottom.*" In response to my observation, said snag began moving steadily away from our canoe.

Line started peeling off my reel at an alarming rate. "*Bring the anchor up, this isn't a walleye!*"



Looking at my reel, I saw an unsettling sight – the spool was rapidly running out of line. Saying a silent prayer, I tightened down on the drag, and to my amazement, the line did not come snapping back at me. Kevin, always the observant one, noted *“The canoe is being pulled by your fish”*.

“This is a big fish, I have no idea what I have.” We proceeded to be pulled along by some superior life force, passing other anglers. *“You must have a paddlefish,”* an old timer called out. Paddlefish... hmm. I told Kevin to Google paddlefish, which, being 1982, made him scratch his head. *“What’s a Google?”* he said. *“Never mind”*, my back-to-the-future self replied.


Like my monofilament line, time began to stretch. Kevin ran out of Monte Python material. Slowly, I regained line, pulling and reeling what felt like a big dead weight, except for the occasional short runs. I would like to say this was my finest hour as an angler, as I skillfully fought the fish to our free-floating canoe. But Kevin more accurately said I was the luckiest angler that the line hadn’t broken.

“Hang on, he’s almost to the boat”. With that, Kevin let out a low *“damn”* as the fish came up as docile as it could be to the side of the canoe. In that moment, I felt the first shudder of fear. The fish was easily a third or more the length of the 17-foot canoe. The jig was attached to the top of the long paddle nose...

GEEK ALERT - The long, paddle-shaped nose of a paddlefish is called a rostrum. This elongated, sensory-filled snout accounts for up to one-third of the fish's total body length and acts as an antenna to detect plankton via electroreceptors.


Neither Kevin nor I had caught anything bigger than a ten-pound carp up to this point in our angling lives. A 6–7-foot paddlefish would weigh 150 or more pounds, and holding on to him at the side of our less-than-stable canoe was a pucker-fest moment for both of us. Kevin reached back and unhooked our Moby Dick, and we watched the fish slowly sink into the depths of the Wisconsin River. Fast forward twenty-four years. Kevin has been gone for 12 years, but somewhere I have an old story I wrote with his notes in the margins, testifying that there is no exaggeration in the facts that I have shared with you.

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Here we are in 2026, and I'm out in Montana. Lo and behold, the State of Montana has a paddlefish recreational season! Not only that, but every year they hold a lottery for catch and keep tags at three locations where anglers can fish for paddlefish: the upper Missouri, the Missouri River under Fort Peck Dam, and the Yellowstone River. The health of the paddlefish population is strong and self-producing, with a thousand tags issued for catch and keep for the Upper Missouri section. Montana's Fish, Wildlife, and Parks has a well-regulated and managed fishery. It's incredibly popular, and paddlefish, I've read are very good to eat. Not to mention the eggs make caviar, a delicacy in many places.

Paddlefish are filter feeders that swim at their food with mouths wide open to catch zooplankton in their gill rakers.

Because of this, the only way to catch a paddlefish is to snag it. There are snagging seasons in many river systems throughout the United States. To an angling purist, I can easily see how this could be looked at as barbaric and unsportsman-like. Watching YouTube videos, it looks like a lot of work! Think of paddlefish as the fish of a thousand casts, only you're casting 6 ounces of lead weight and sweeping your rod with every cast. Be sure to bring your ibuprofen for the end of the day!

After much internal debate, I've decided to give it a try this year. I may run out of gas after ten casts, but with any luck I'll see anglers catch these prehistoric relics – they have a 300–400-million-year-old ancestry, predating dinosaurs. Wish me luck!



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WITH TRADITIONAL TACKLE

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I recently had the chance to fish for hatchery winter steelhead in a small tributary stream leading up to and past a state hatchery. This is not a secret spot, but I will not mention the name of this specific location. What I found was that the techniques and practices that I use on larger rivers were no good at this place, and I needed to refine my approach. This took me back at least 30 years to a time when I fished for trout in small mountain streams with spinners and bait rigs.

To start, let's discuss the differences between creeks, streams, and rivers. Rivers, streams, and creeks are all natural, flowing, ribbon-like bodies of water constrained by banks and a bed, with the primary differences being size, flow volume, and their role in the watershed

hierarchy. Rivers are generally the largest, acting as main channels, while creeks are smaller, often shallower, and frequently serve as tributaries to larger streams and rivers.

Some key differences include:

Size and Volume: Rivers are larger, deeper, and wide enough for some navigation, whereas creeks are small, narrow, and shallow (sometimes 5-15 feet wide). Streams fit in between, typically 15-30 feet wide.

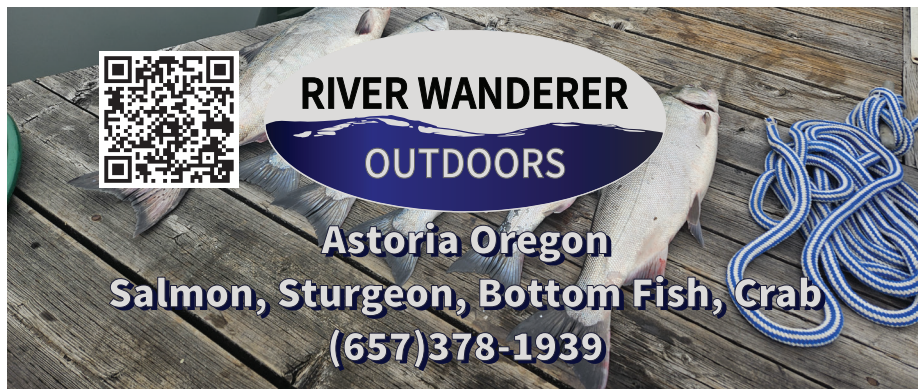
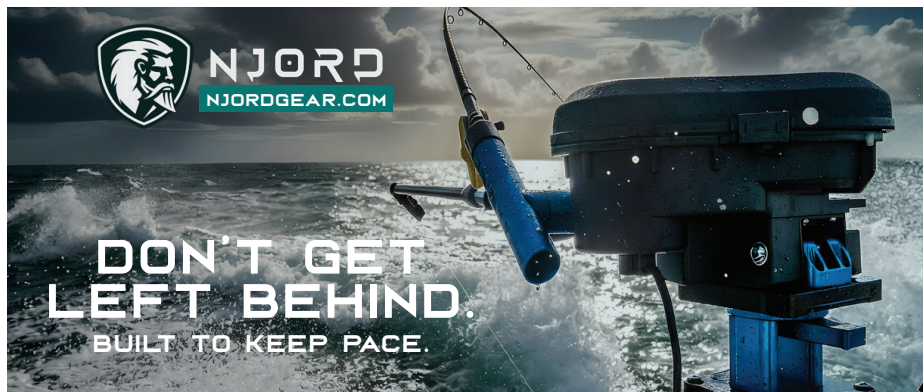
HIERARCHY/TRIBUTARIES: Creeks are usually small watercourses that feed into streams, which then feed into larger rivers.

PERMANENCE: Rivers are typically perennial (flow year-round), while smaller creeks might be intermittent or seasonal, sometimes drying up.

FLOW VELOCITY: Creeks are often faster, shallower, and may have more turbulent, steep paths, while rivers have higher volume and move slower in wider, flatter channels.

NAMING CONVENTIONS: Often, the distinction is based on local, regional, or historical terminology rather than strict, universal scientific definitions.

When we think of a stream, we often picture fast moving water that flows downhill on a typically steeper descent than a river. They are generally full of rocks and gravel, have steep banks and cutouts, and sometimes flow through gulleys or canyons. The water is generally shallow throughout, containing pockets of water behind large rocks, against cutout banks, and in the slower, flatter sections of the stream.



For those of us accustomed to drift fishing, bobber dogging, and floating jigs, worms, and bait - we are a bit out of our element in this environment. Everything must be downsized and simplified as we have very limited water to work with, and the stream topography is very grabby, resulting in lots of snags and lost gear.

For my winter steelhead trip, I came prepared with small stick weights, Dave's Tangle Free weights, and two shot slinkies to get my gear down. For the terminal end of my gear, I used a single #2 hook with an egg loop and a small

piece of yarn. Despite this downsized presentation, my weights were still getting caught in the rocks and I was forced to wade to retrieve my gear or just break it off and start fresh.

I noticed that other anglers who have been fishing this location for years were employing a different technique, one that I had not seen before. To avoid getting caught in the rocks, they slid a piece of 1/4" ID surgical tubing over their mainline and inserted a piece of solid core pencil lead in varying lengths, based on the depth of the water they were fishing and the flow rate.

They also employed a single hook with either a cheater/corky or a piece of yarn above the hook. To adjust the leader length, all you have to do is slide the tube up or down the mainline, moving your presentation closer or further from the lead. What I found is that this method of applying weight to the rig was not only simple, but practically eliminated the snags as the gear flowed over the rocks and other snaggy stuff in the stream. When they did get snagged, the lead would pull out, and the fishermen would get their gear back.

I know that we want to avoid depositing lead in our streams and rivers as much as possible - and I can attest that during the day that I fished, I only saw one angler lose his piece of lead. This is quite incidental and the method is very effective in reducing the amount of gear deposited into the stream.

In the deeper pools, more traditional methods may be used, but the weighting system can remain the same. Since the pieces of water are small, the gear must get down quickly to have a chance at a holding fish.



In the deeper water - beads, bait where allowed, small worms, and other presentations can work. Small spinners can also produce fish when there is enough water.

KEEP A COUPLE OF THINGS IN MIND: First, there is very limited space to cast, so you're really tossing, flipping, or lobbing your gear to the top of a drift. Casting will generally put you in the wood on the other side of the stream. Second, since the water is generally shallow and often very clear, you can sight fish, but keep in mind that if you can see them, the fish can probably see you. It is best to be very stealthy and when possible - try to get above the fish and let them settle down for a few minutes before you target them.

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Once they see you, they will be unlikely to strike your presentation until the threat is gone and they feel comfortable again.

One more thing to consider: If you are fishing the lower section of a stream, near the mouth, plan for several techniques. You can often walk the stretch of stream that you are considering fishing to see if there are any fish holding. If you don't see any and conditions suggest that the fish would move back downstream for cover, the mouth of the stream where it joins with the river can be a great place to find fish.

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Fish will always seek cover, whether it be shade, wood, behind rocks, or in deep pools. At times, they will seek cover in faster moving water that is broken or riffled on top, offering a layer of protection. When they cannot find these things, they will turn around and head back downstream. Generally, at the confluence, there will be some deeper water, and the fish may stage and hold there until they feel inclined to head upstream again. I love to fish these areas with beads and worms, either under a float or along the bottom.

Jigs and worms can be options as well, jigs being one of my favorite techniques to employ in lower, more clear water conditions. Bring out the bigger worms, even in brighter colors, when the water is high or has good color.

As anglers, I think that we all like to be challenged. Streams will challenge you and force you into a different approach. I found it very satisfying and a reminder of my childhood years chasing trout in streams. Give it a shot and have fun.



This time of year is a sad part of the season for me, and that's "Ice Off". As many of you know, ice fishing is my favorite winter activity. When the last sheets of Ice melt away, freeing up the shoreline makes it easily accessible. Panfishing quietly slips into one of its most overlooked and most rewarding phases. The ice is gone, the crowds are not back yet, and beneath the surface, Bluegills, Crappie, and Perch are in that familiar transition. For most anglers who've just spent months staring at a hole in the ice, they know it's not the end of the season. It's simply a shift in approach.

THE ICE-OFF MINDSET

Ice-off panfish are not yet in full swing in Spring mode. Water temperatures are still cold, often hovering around the upper 30s to

mid-40s, which means fish metabolism remains slow. They still won't chase far or waste a ton of energy chasing a meal. And typically, they won't behave as they do during the shallow water spawning frenzy that's weeks away. The KEY during this window is understanding that panfish are migrating and usually aren't stationary. During late ice, many fish hold in deeper basins adjacent to their spawning beds. When the ice leaves, they don't immediately flood the shallows. Instead, they stage along transition areas such as subtle breaks, inside bends, emerging weed edges, and dark bottom bays that warm slightly faster than the main lake. Basically, your job is not to find spawning fish, but to intercept the travelers.

ALWAYS START WHERE WINTER ENDED

One of my most consistent strategies every year is to begin near the last ice locations I was fishing at prior. If I had found suspended Crappies over a basin in late February-March, I would begin on that same basin edge in early April. They may have slid shallower, just a few feet, but often remain close until stable warming patterns push them further shallow. Bluegills behave similarly but tend to relate more tightly to structure. Especially remaining weed lines, timber, and those soft-bottom transitions. Perch are often the panfish Wildcard. They will roam, sometimes in "Wolf Packs", feeding aggressively when conditions line up. I'll focus on vast shallow flats, just adjacent to deeper breaks and drop-offs. Particularly

in areas with sand to mud transitions, as Perch love to gorge themselves on bloodworms. By pounding the bottom, creating a plume and disturbance, drawing in the Perch. Electronics, whether it's a basic Sonar or a Forward-Facing unit, can be invaluable now. Fish may suspend unpredictably from one day to the next. Seeing them before casting saves hours of fan casting and blind effort.

WARMER WATER WINS

In early open water, even a two-degree difference matters. Northwest-facing shorelines are protected from cold winds, shallow bays with darker bottoms, and areas that receive extended afternoon sunlight warm quickly first. These little micro warming zones attract zooplankton, which attracts baitfish, which attracts panfish. One other thing - don't overlook water clarity. Like wearing a darker shirt, stained water warms a little faster than crystal clear lakes. If I have several lakes to choose from, I'm typically hitting the stained body of water as they often out-produce clearer systems after Ice Off. So, remember, the Temperature is the compass. Let it guide you!

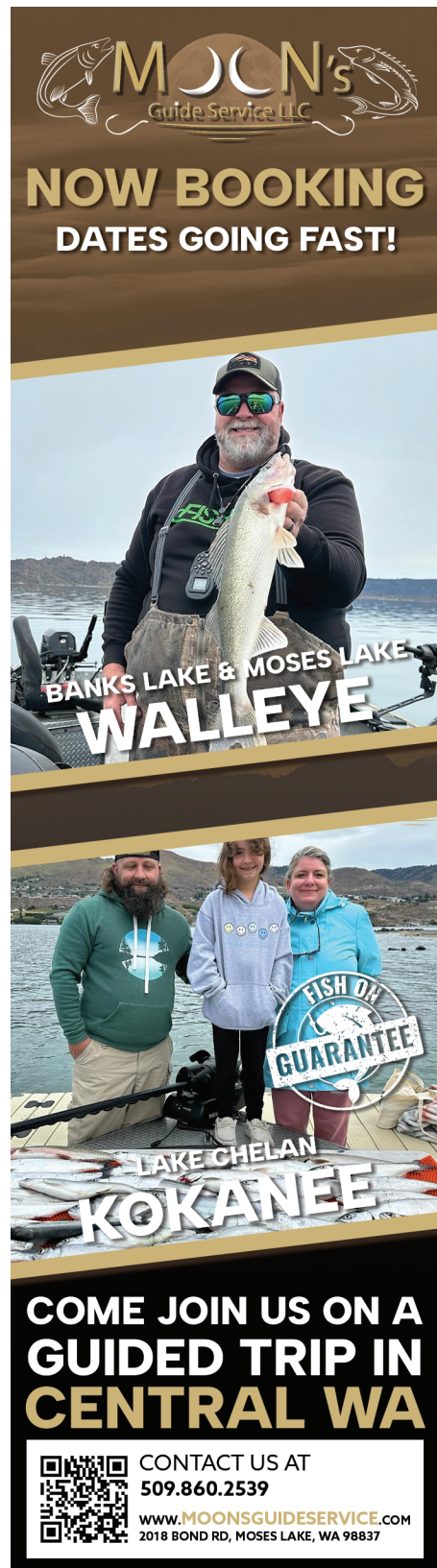
SLOW PRESENTATIONS ARE KEY

COLD WATER DEMANDS PATIENCE AND RESTRAINT.

Small Jigs - 1/64th to 1/32nd ounce tipped either with soft plastics, waxworm, maggots, chunk of crawler. Hair Jigs work great during this period because of their movement. I keep my retrieve deliberate and slow. I will cast and allow my bait to pendulum naturally, as I add in subtle twitches. Many strikes will occur during the fall. If you feel a slight tick, or notice slack in your line, set the hook. I won't just fan cast jigs but also slip bobbers and jigs. Bobbers are a lethal tool. Suspending a jig and offering above suspended fish allows you to hover in the strike zone longer. Remember, patience pays dividends. If the fish won't chase, bring the bait to them and leave it there.

THINK VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL

Sometimes, there are situations with early-season panfish, where they might be suspended off breaks and not reachable by standard casts. If you're able to position your boat over the top of them, jigging them vertically can unlock a different bite.



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I like to drift slowly with the wind, using 2lb-4lb test to maximize sensitivity and a natural presentation. Vertical jigging allows me to adjust to depths quickly until you dial in the exact depth the fish are holding. Meanwhile, from shore, keep fan casting as far out and cover water methodically. Early season fish group tightly, so you might go twenty casts without a bite, then suddenly connect on five in five casts. I'll say, when you find them, quickly get back on them because they don't travel alone.



ADAPT TO MOOD SWINGS

Spring weather is unstable. A warm three-day stretch can ignite a bite that feels like peak season, only for a cold front to shut it down overnight. After a cold snap, I often find fish have slid a little deeper and become less aggressive. I'll downsize my presentation even

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more, 4mm-5mm tungsten jig maybe. I'll lengthen my pause and fish slower than I think I should. Conversely, during stable warm trends, fish may push shallower than expected. Don't be afraid to check two to four feet of water on calm afternoons. I've seen some of the biggest Bluegills caught in skinny water before most anglers believe they should be there. Flexibility separates average outings from memorable ones.



LIGHT TACKLE, BIG REWARDS

Ice Off panfishing is not about power, but more about finesse and feel. I will always have an Ultra-Light rod with a soft tip to detect subtle bites. Paired up with a smaller 500 series reels with 2-6lb line and a smooth drag for unexpected surges from a Slab Crappie, or a Bull Bluegill. And there's always something deeply

satisfying during this period. The boat launches are quiet, and the air still carries a little chill. Blackbirds sing from the cattails while your breath fogs the morning. I really look forward to these special days every season.



TIMING THE *TRANSITION*

Being able to home in on these migrating fish is very rewarding and gives you a sense of self-accomplishment. As water temperatures approach the low 50s, panfish begin committing to shallow spawning areas, as the Males begin scouting beds. The bigger schools of fish will break up, and that predictable staging bite shifts into shallow shoreline action. But to me, that in-between window, that subtle, strategic, thoughtful phase right after Ice Off, may be the purest form of panfishing I find all year long.



It rewards observation and patience. And it rewards the anglers who understand seasonal movements and behaviors, instead of chasing yesterday's reports. When the ice melts, most anglers wait for the "Real Spring". The smarter move is to launch early, think like a migrating fish, and approach the lake with quite precision. Because under that freshly opened water, panfish are already on the move, and if you meet them halfway, the season starts long before most anglers realize it's begun!

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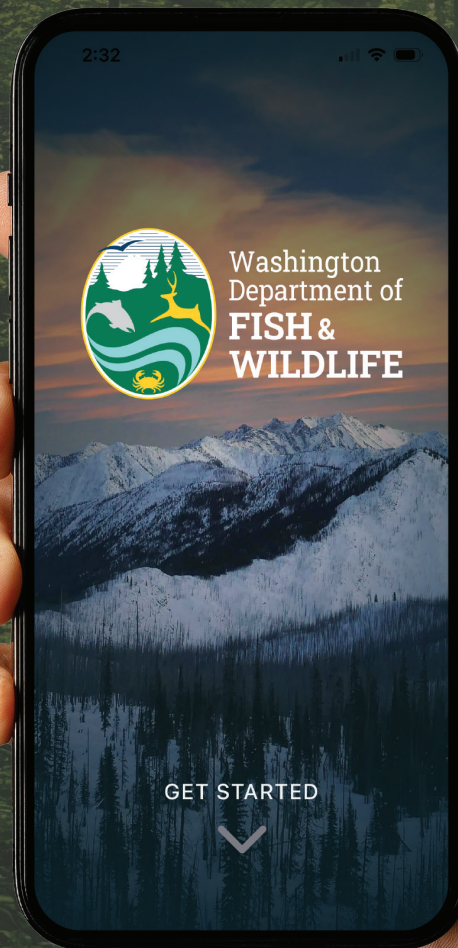
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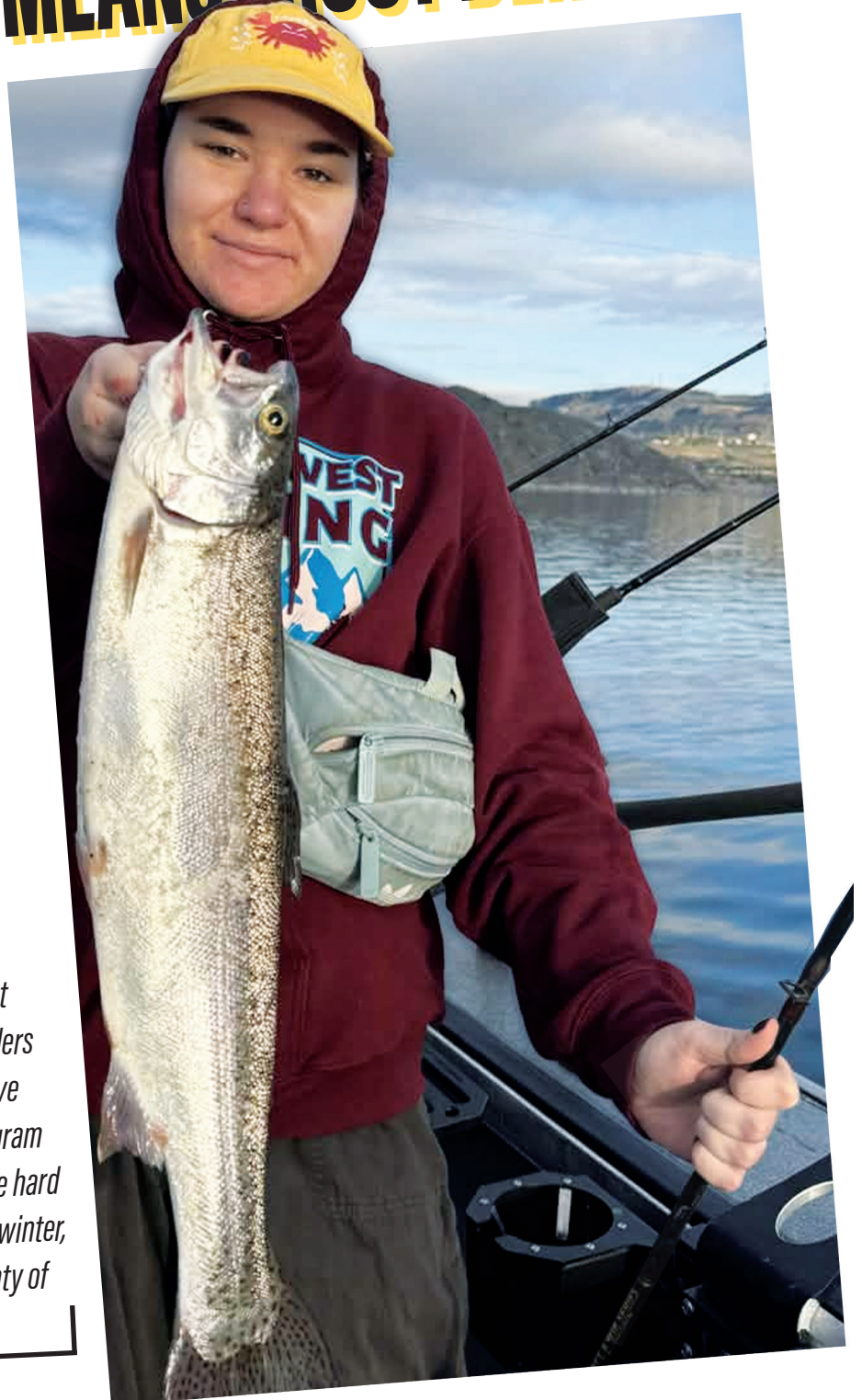
OPENING DAY MEANS TROUT DERBY TIME!

BY MARK YUASA

Warmer weather, coupled with longer days are a sure sign that spring has finally arrived, and the kickoff to the statewide lowland lakes trout fishing opener is just a stone's throw away.

To prepare for this special fishing occasion on April 26-25, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) hatchery staff have been busy stocking about 525 seasonal lowland lakes and ponds with nearly 15.5 million trout and kokanee.

"Opening day is one of our biggest and most important days for anglers to get out on the water," said Steve Caromile, WDFW Inland Fish Program manager. "Spring weather can be hard to predict, but we've had a mild winter, and hopefully that'll lead to plenty of success for weeks to come."





The 2026 stocking plan reveals more than 2.1 million catchable-size trout (averaging 11 to 13 inches) and another 157,000 “jumbo size” trout measuring 14 inches or longer will be swimming in lakes and ponds in time for anglers to catch on the opener.

Most of the jumbos are expected to be planted in March and April, while others will be stocked to boost fall fisheries.

Adding to the stocking list is another 1.6 million-plus trout categorized as “put, grow and take” – reared in hatcheries and 2.6 to 10 fish per pound in size – stocked in 2025. The fish that survived through the winter should now average 8 to 12 inches.

To further boost fishing prospects, an estimated 11.5 million fingerling and fry trout and kokanee planted one or two years ago should be in the catchable size range when the 2026 season gets underway. Most fry were stocked in Eastern Washington opening day lakes, which are managed to create decent fry survival.

To spice it up, the WDFW Trout Derby is April 25 through Oct. 31 with more than 100 stocked statewide lakes.

Around 70 statewide businesses are offering an estimated 915 prizes valued at \$44,000 and worth about \$48 per prize. The number of tags turned in during the 2025 season was 59%.

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The success of the trout derby would only be possible through WDFW's ongoing partnerships with business dealers/vendors throughout the state.

Prizes include: gift cards, fishing gear and tackle, annual magazine subscriptions, Seattle Mariners game tickets, hooded jackets, books, rounds of golf at multiple golf courses, local aquarium admission, car detailing bucket, and kayak rentals. Higher valued prizes include: a kayak, guided lake fishing trip for two, handheld GPS units, lifetime memberships for a streaming app to locate trout streams in Washington, stays at local resorts and campgrounds, a backpack, and a beverage refrigerator.

This season, each of the prize-winning trout can be identified by a green tag inserted near the dorsal fin.

Anglers can participate in the WDFW photo contest during the first week of the trout derby on Instagram by using the hashtag #watrouterby.

Join WDFW staff for the WDFW/Filson Trout Derby Kickoff Party hosted by Filson on April 18 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the

Filson Seattle Flagship store, 1741 1st Avenue South in Seattle's SoDo neighborhood. Get trout derby information, watch a fly-tying demo, learn from local fishing experts, and enjoy cuisine served by a local chef. For details, refer to <https://www.filson.com/pages/seattle-store>.

The derby is open to anyone with a valid 2026-2027 fishing license, and a temporary license may be used. There is no entry fee or registration required. Children under age 15 fish for free.

The WDFW Trout Derby website at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/contests/trout-derby> will be updated soon to see which statewide lakes contain tagged trout and learn more about how the derby works.

Why wait? Go now!

While most are gearing up for the later April opener, anglers can get a jump start right now by trekking to year-round westside lakes stocked with trout between March and May. Other lakes also receive bonus plants in the autumn/winter, and thousands of trout averaging 1- to 1.5-pounds apiece are going into some

Puget Sound region lakes for the “Black Friday” fishing event in late-November. For the statewide stocking schedule, go to the WDFW fishing and stocking reports webpage at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/reports>.

More than 24 Eastern Washington lakes opened on March 1 for fishing and were or are being stocked with catchable-size rainbow trout.

“As the days become longer, these early spring fisheries are a good way to start the season,” Caromile said.

In Grant County, Martha and Upper Caliche lakes were recently stocked with catchable-size rainbow trout. Each also received rainbow trout fingerlings in March 2025 and an additional plant of catchable-sized trout in October 2025. These fish are expected to average 13 to 14 inches by opening day, with some reaching 20 inches.

WDFW stocked Quincy and Burke lakes with more than 21,000 trout fingerlings in spring 2025 and received an additional 1,500 catchable-size rainbow trout in February.

Last year's fingerling plants are expected to be 10 to 12 inches, with some larger carryover fish in the 13- to 15-inch range.

Additional Grant County lakes open now for fishing are Cliff, Crystal, Cup, Lower Spring, and Upper Spring lakes. Lenice, Nunnally, Dry Falls, and Dusty lakes are also worth a try for trout. In Columbia County, try Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring, and Watson.

In Spokane County, head to Liberty Lake, which was stocked with catchable-size and jumbo rainbow trout.

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Amber and Medical lakes are open under selective gear rules and should fish well this spring.

In South Central Washington, many lakes in Benton, Franklin, Kittitas, and Yakima counties are open year-round and have been stocked with trout.

Weekly catchable trout stocking reports are posted on the fish stocking webpage at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/reports/stocking/trout-plants>.

FISHING GEAR TO USE

What anglers use for trout isn't overly complicated, and a trout rod should be

light and limber, in the four to 10-pound range, and lengthwise in the six- to seven-foot range. Many prefer a medium-sized spinning reel spooled with more than 100 yards of six- to eight-pound test fishing line.

From the main line, attach one or two number nine egg sinkers with a rubber bumper to a small barrel swivel. Leader length is vital; stay away from the store-bought pre-tied 12-inch leaders, which are way too short. Leaders should be three- to eight-pound test and 18 to 30 inches long.

For hooks, think small and use an egg or worm hook in a size eight or 10, or try a No. 14 or 16 treble hook.

Traditional baits to use are worms, maggots, salmon eggs, or scented marshmallows, but dough bait like the wide variety of Berkley Power Baits is now the preferred option.

Fly patterns like a black or black-olive colored Woolly Buggie in a size eight or 10 attached to a five- or six-foot leader and trolled weightless close to the surface is a fun way to catch trout.



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From a boat, troll a gang-flasher with a worm, maggot, or salmon egg laced with a tiny piece of scented dough bait or small spoon like a Dick Nite, Yakima Bait Triple Teazer, or Luhr Jensen Super Duper.

Bank anglers will usually cast out a bobber with their presentation sitting just below the surface in three to six feet of water. Others hang their presentation a few feet off the bottom, where the bigger fish tend to lurk. Once the stocked trout acclimate to their new surroundings, they'll eventually spread out and move to deeper areas of the lake.

Keep in mind that most recently stocked trout tend to school near the surface, and many will swim around where the hatchery trucked them in the lake, usually within a short distance of the shoreline, boat ramps, and docks.

Lastly, remember to purchase a 2026-2027 fishing license before you head out, which is required for anyone age 16 or older. WDFW now offers two mobile apps to support outdoor recreation, available for free download in the Google Play and Apple App Stores. MyWDFW is a comprehensive licensing tool providing access to active fishing license privileges and can be found at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/apps/mywdfw>. The Fish Washington® mobile app at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/app> is tailored for anglers, offering fishing regulations and a feature that lets anglers manage their active license privileges, purchase license products, and enter catches or harvests.

Licenses may be purchased online at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/login> or from hundreds of license dealers across the state at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/dealers>. The 2025–2026 fishing licenses expired on March 31.

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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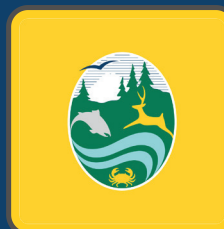
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Catching Bass

AFTER THE SPAWN

BY JOHN KRUSE



It is easy to fool yourself into believing you are a great bass angler when the bass are spawning in the springtime. Largemouth bass are defending nests full of eggs or fry and will readily strike a lure like a weightless worm or lizard cast near them. Catching a dozen or more bass is easy this time of year, both largemouth and smallmouth bass, but then comes the post-spawn, where those shallow water spawning beds become a ghost town. The fishing suddenly gets a lot tougher for some, and it's easy to say out loud, "Now what?"

as you futilely search for bass in places they are no longer found. One thing you can do is ask a successful post-spawn angler how to go about catching those bass. One such fisherman is Kyle Clark, an avid bass tournament angler and the owner of PNW Fishing Adventures - www.facebook.com/pnwfishingadventures/. I caught up with him at MarDon Resort the day he and his partner won a Washington Bass Federation tournament at Eastern Washington's Potholes Reservoir.

The two caught five largemouth bass weighing 20.8 pounds. When asked what he used to catch post-spawn bass in both Western and Eastern Washington, Clark replied with three of his favorites: Poppers, senkos, and jigs. All are solid offerings. Let's break down these choices and a few more for late spring to summertime bass.

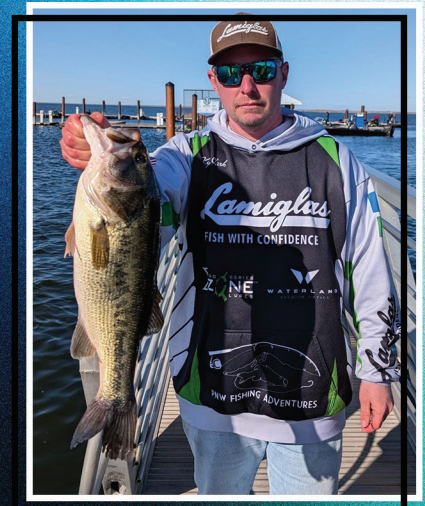
JIGS – Jigs are a staple for both largemouth and smallmouth bass all year. They come in many styles. There are swim jigs, football head jigs, flipping jigs, skipping jigs, Arkie jigs, and more.

All of them work, and with bass tending to hide in or around cover such as wood, reeds, willows, or rocks, weedless jigs shine. A 3/8-ounce jig is a standard for many types of fishing in both shallow and medium depths. Common color schemes include green pumpkin, black & blue, chartreuse & black, or orange & brown. Fishing jigs in cover like willow thickets, under docks, or in open areas amongst lily pads are all effective ways to use these lures.

SENKOS – The senko is a plastic worm, generally measuring between five and six inches.

Catching Bass

AFTER THE SPAWN



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The nose of the senko is subtly blunter than the tail. It is a deadly offering, fished weightless or with a very lightly weighted semi-weedless hook, when bass are spawning. However, it also works very well during the post-spawn phase. The two most common ways to fish a senko are Texas-rigged, where the bait is hooked through the nose and the body, making it weedless, or wacky-rigged. A wacky-rigged senko is hooked right in the middle of the worm, and the angler allows it to fall slowly in the water column.

POPPERS (AND OTHER TOPWATER LURES) – Early morning and evening hours are great times to fish a floating popper for bass, spring through early fall. Many think you can only fish with topwater baits when waters are calm, but truth be told, these lures are also effective during days when light breezes are blowing, creating rippled surface water. Kyle Clark prefers to fish a topwater popper slowly versus the steady to fast retrieve used with a Zara Spool style topwater plug you retrieve in a zig-zag, “walking the dog” style.

Other topwater lures that work well include weedless frogs (fished over grass, weeds, or lily pads), whopper-popper style topwater lures brought back with a moderate retrieve, and buzzbaits, retrieved rapidly, making a clatter as you reel it in. Topwater poppers (and several of these lures) shine when fished over submerged weeds and grass, especially off points or around sunrise, near shore.

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CRANKBAITS – Not on Clark’s list but certainly useful during the post-spawn period are crankbaits. There are two styles of crankbaits to fish this time of year: lipless cranks or diving crankbaits. Lipless crankbaits, retrieved parallel along weed lines, brush lines, or rock riprap, work great for bass that aggressively bite the lure in a reactive manner. The lure can be retrieved at a moderate to fast pace after sinking for a few seconds. If that does not draw strikes, try a stop-and-go retrieve, with short pauses between reeling.

Bass will often hit when the lure they are following literally stops and begins to drop in front of their nose. “Go To” lipless crankbaits include the Berkley WarPig or the original Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap. When it comes to colors, match the hatch or forage base the bass are feeding on. The one exception to this rule is when the water is stained or murky. That is when a chartreuse colored or dark colored lure shines because it stands out better, a fact applying not only to lipless crankbaits but all sorts of lures.

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Diving crankbaits are also easy to use, though most anglers fish them wrong. Lots of people will cast and retrieve them at a moderate pace, leaving them in the middle of the water column. However, depth matters, and diving crankbaits are best fished close to the bottom. So close in fact, that they are bumping the bottom and either bouncing off wood and rocks or churning up sand or gravel. Shallow three-to-five-foot crankbaits fished over flats or deeper diving crankbaits retrieved down slopes both catch plenty of largemouth and smallmouth bass.

Put it all together, and you have a number of simple, easy-to-fish lures that will get you into post-spawn bass from late spring and throughout the summer. Give one of these techniques a shot, and if it does not work, change to another. Let the bass tell you what they are in the mood to bite on any given day, and catch more bass after they are done spawning this spring.

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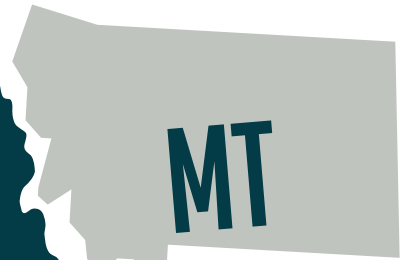
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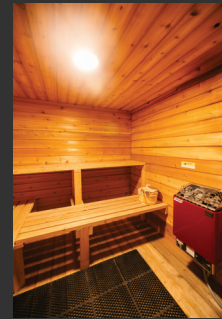
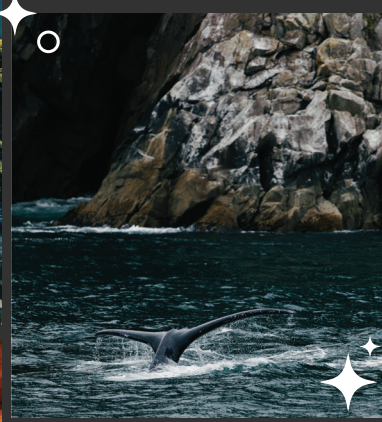
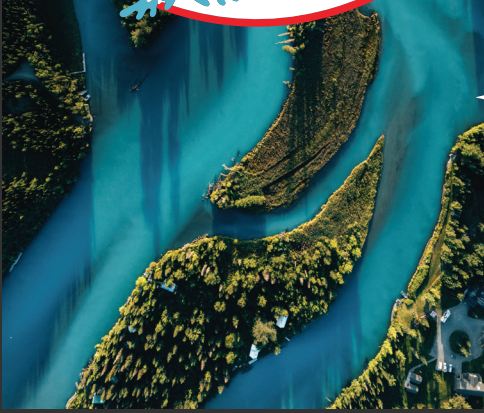
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