

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 9

JULY, 2026

NORTHWEST FISHING

THE PNW'S REEL LIFESTYLE

COVER STORY

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**SALMON
SEASON**



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EDITOR'S CORNER:

Those of us old enough can remember the Lake Washington Sockeye fishery and the massive numbers of boats and anglers on the water. It was a sight to see and an experience to never be forgotten. It tested angler's patience as all types of floating vessel could be seen trying to catch those chrome bright sockeye. With the closure of sockeye on the Columbia anglers will be turning to Baker Lake in hopefully anticipation of catching hard-fighting, tasty salmon.

It's hard to imagine just how congested this fishery is going to be. The sad reality is that more anglers are chasing less fish in fewer locations. That leads to congestion and combat fishing. It's a sad reality many of us must live with.

Baker lake is without a doubt one of the prettiest and most special fishing destinations in Washington State. If you decide to fish Baker this year, please take an extra dose of patience and goodwill for your fellow anglers who may not have the skills and ability you have, nor the experience of dealing with large numbers of boats all around them. God bless.

- Mike Carey, Northwest Fishing



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Photo by Jeff Betz



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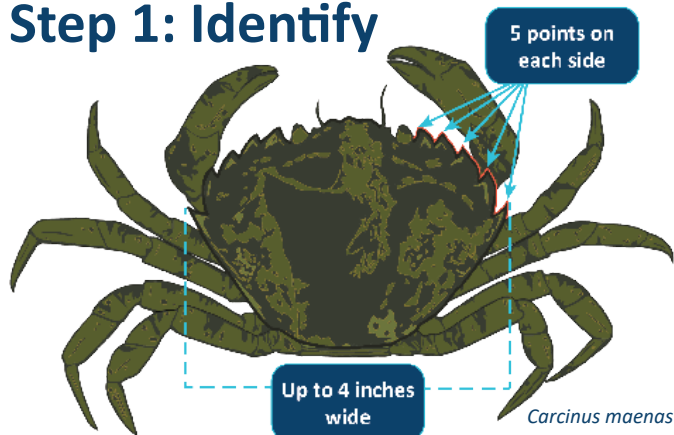
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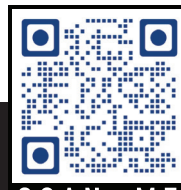
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**All of the articles do not necessarily represent the opinion of Northwest Fishing magazine.*



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Destination Oxbow Reservoir

for Smallmouth Bass

Gary Lewis



An angler can catch bass in the Snake River reservoirs year-round, but the fishing really starts to get good in July.

Cousin Neil turned the North River sled in a tight arc out of the narrow launch and pointed the bow downstream. We would fish both sides of the lake, looking for the seams and breaks in the current where bass tend to stack to ambush bait coming downriver. The kids' rods were rigged with jig heads and plastic Keitech baits. I started with crankbaits and the Realis spybait, which is one of my favorites, but I could not help but notice that the other guys were catching more fish.

Oxbow Reservoir is part of a complex of three reservoirs all built and maintained by the Idaho Power Company. At the top of Hells Canyon on the Snake River, bounded by Oregon on one side and Idaho on the other, Oxbow Reservoir is thirteen

miles long and only a couple of hundred yards wide at its widest point. The dam itself is 175 feet tall. Hells Canyon Reservoir is directly downstream and Brownlee Reservoir is directly above. To get to Oxbow out of Oregon, we head to Richland, turn at Halfway, then drop down Pine Creek to Copperfield. Oxbow Reservoir can be accessed either through Richland and Copperfield on the Oregon side or via Cambridge on a long and windy road leading north out of Boise and Fruitland.

Fishing any of these reservoirs, a person can expect to catch smallmouth bass, crappie, sturgeon, trout, and catfish. These waters are rich in nutrients and the fish grow fast. My cousin's kids are growing fast, too. Tabor and Steyr have been fishing since

before they could walk, and their dad, my cousin Neil, will drop everything to get them on the water in the summer. And there is nothing I like better than going fishing with my family.

A Food-Rich Fishery

Smallmouth bass prefer warmer, flowing water and can be found in great numbers around weed beds, grassy banks, along the seams of riffles, deep along rock walls, and in gravel flats. On clear summer days when the sun is high, the biggest fish will be found in deeper water. On overcast days or when the sun is low on the horizon, smallmouth can be caught on or closer to the surface. They are aggressive predators, feeding on smaller fish, insects, leeches, snails, and crayfish.



Crankbaits and minnow imitations work very well, especially along ledges or around submerged structures. We try to use patterns and colors that imitate local baitfish. Chub, perch, and rainbow pattern crankbaits work well for minnow imitations. Orange and olive crayfish patterns are good crankbait options, too. Another good tactic is to dead-drift a plastic swim bait, allowing it to tumble through the best bass-holding water.

A person can catch fish all day long on these Snake River reservoirs, but it makes sense to take a break midday and rest and refuel.

The Snakes

The Snake River was not named for the snakes along its banks. It was named for the Snakes, the Shoshone

speaking people that Lewis and Clark found and traded with. They were called the Snakes by their neighbors for the way they signed about who they were - the willow weavers.

But there are snakes, too. Rattlesnakes and bullsnakes - and it helps to know the difference. Although bull snakes don't act friendly, they are a much better neighbor than a rattler. You can tell them apart by looking at the heads. The bullsnake's head is narrower, while a rattlesnake's head is shaped like a wedge.



Timing

So when should you go? An angler can catch bass in the Snake River year-round, but the fishing peaks in summer. In a lot of years there can be heavy flows in the Snake which tend to keep the reservoir banks full in June. Most years by the second week of July, the rivers are in good bass fishing shape, and conditions are prime in August, September, and October.

Where to Stay & Play

Huntington, Richland, and Halfway, Oregon, are all within striking distance of Brownlee, Oxbow, and Hells Canyon reservoirs. One of my favorite places to stay is Pine Valley Lodge (pvlodge.com) in Halfway - an old stagecoach stop with all the Old West flavor intact. **JULY 2026 | 9**



Richland, Oregon, is a great little city of 156 people where a fisherman can get a burger or a cup of coffee. Best of all, it is just moments away from the Powder River arm of Brownlee Reservoir.

Huntington is an out-of-the-way stop where you can get a good meal, if the restaurant is open. Check the hours before you make the drive.

The traveling angler is going to want either an Idaho or an Oregon fishing license. Or both.

Back on the Water

In the evening, we launched the boat again. Shadows were lengthening in the narrow canyon, and the fish began to elevate in the water column.

This is tricky water. It may not look like it, but there are wicked currents. Make sure the children have life vests, and make sure the adults do, too. Especially the boat captain. Who falls out of boats more than any other person? It's the boat captain. And then the people who are not as good with running the boat have to try to rescue him.

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I switched over to the jig head and Keitech system and touched up my baits with smallmouth magic from Pro-Cure. That was the magic touch. A cast on the seam, well up-current, and then tighten up on the reel and feel the bait touch the bottom. If the line seemed to tighten up, it was a matter of cranking the reel fast.

The hooks were sharp and I caught fish fast for about a half hour. But while I was bringing fish to the boat quickly, I didn't catch the big ones. That honor was reserved for the rest of the Lewis clan, who each managed to boat three-pound smallies.

I had a four-pound smallmouth on for a minute. I know I did.



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BATTLE THE FISH NOT THE WEATHER

BY MATTHEW CAREY

Fishing in the Northwest has a way of reminding us that the outdoors rarely hands us the same day twice. One morning you're greeted with a warm sunrise that paints the water gold, and the next you're staring down a wall of wind that makes you question every life choice that led you to the boat ramp. Weather is part of the adventure, part of the challenge, and part of the story we tell later. It shapes how we fish, where we fish, and sometimes whether we fish at all. Over the years, I've learned that preparing for the elements - and adapting to them -

can make the difference between a memorable day and a miserable one. And sometimes, the best decision is simply calling it quits and trying again tomorrow.

For those sunny days: There's nothing quite like stepping out into the water under a clear sky. Sunlight dances across the surface, the mountains stand crisp and proud, and you feel like you've been handed a postcard-perfect day. But sunny conditions come with their own quirks. From a boat, bright sun often pushes fish deeper. You might find yourself adjusting

your gear, switching to heavier weights, or trolling at depths you didn't need the week before. On shore, the sun can make shallow water feel barren, pushing fish toward shade lines, drop-offs, or submerged structures. And if you're wading, sunny days can be a blessing - clear visibility helps you read the water, spot fish movement, and pick your path with confidence.

Preparation is simple but essential. Sunscreen, polarized sunglasses, a hat, and layers you can shed as the day warms. Hydration becomes as important as lure selection.



While it's nice to enjoy a frosty one, keep in mind H2O will help fight off fatigue and a headache later in the warm afternoon. Don't underestimate how quickly a calm sunny morning can turn into a scorcher by noon. I've had days where the fishing was great, but the sunburn was legendary.

Not that it ever rains around our parts, but for those who've experienced rainy days, it really can be magical. There's something about the sound of droplets hitting the water, the smell of wet pine, and the way fish seem to wake up under cloud cover. But rain changes the game.

From the boat, rain can make everything slick - decks, gear, even your footing. It's a day where bracing yourself becomes second nature. Fish often move shallower, feeding more aggressively under

the softened light. When fishing from the land out into a lake or river, rain can be a gift. The surface disturbance hides your presence, and fish feel more comfortable cruising close. It can be enjoyable, quite peaceful, but only if you're prepared. Cold rain on warm water creates fog, and fog can turn a familiar river into a maze. Preparation is all about staying dry. A good rain jacket, waterproof boots, and dry bags for gear. I've learned the hard way that soggy socks can ruin even the best bite. And while rain can improve fishing, it can also make conditions unpredictable. Rising water, muddy runoffs, and slippery banks demand attention.

Of course, we need to highlight ice fishing for those diehards who want to fish 365 days of the year. Fishing in the cold is a different beast entirely.



Ice fishing brings its own charm - quiet mornings, the crunch of snow under boots, and the anticipation of watching a rod tip bounce in a frozen world. But cold weather affects every style of fishing. On ice, preparation is everything. Safety first: checking thickness, watching for pressure ridges, and carrying ice picks. Cold affects gear too - line stiffens, reels freeze, and bait loses its appeal faster.

The cold weather often means slower fish metabolism. You might need to downsize your presentation or slow your retrieve. Cold weather demands patience.

Fish move slower, bites can be subtle, and comfort becomes a balancing act. But there's something special about those crisp winter days, the kind where your breath hangs in the air and the world feels still. And remember those cold ones during the sunny days? Well, a warm hot chocolate with a little extra kick might help you relax and enjoy the sights and

sounds of the winter cold.

I must save my favorite element for last - the wind. Wind is the great disruptor. It can turn a calm lake into a washing machine and a peaceful river into a challenge. But wind isn't always the enemy. On a boat, wind can push baitfish into certain areas, creating feeding zones. It can also make boat control a full-time job. You'll find yourself adjusting speed, angle, and even lure weight to compensate.

From shore, wind can be your friend or foe. Casting becomes a battle,



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but wind-driven current can bring fish closer. Wading in wind requires caution - waves can distort your footing, and gusts can make casting unpredictable. Preparation is about stability. Heavier lures, stronger lines, and layers that block wind chill are key. To be frank, the wind really annoys me. If there's ever a day to skip fishing, it might be when those windy days come blowing in. For those wanting to battle this element, I wish you good luck - you probably won't find me out there!

Fishing in varied weather teaches you to be flexible. You learn to change lures, adjust depth, switch techniques, and rethink your approach. You learn to read the sky as much as the water. And you learn that every condition offers opportunity - if you're willing to adapt. Some of my favorite memories come from days when the weather shifted dramatically. A sunny morning turning into a windy afternoon. A cold front rolling in unexpectedly. A rain shower that brought the bite alive.

Those moments force you to think, to adjust, and to appreciate the challenge. But here's the part we don't talk about enough: sometimes it's okay to call it quits. There are days where the wind is too strong, the cold too biting, the rain too relentless. Days where safety becomes a concern - slick rocks, unstable ice, or unpredictable waves. Days where the fish simply aren't cooperating and you're fighting the elements more than enjoying the experience. Walking away doesn't mean failure.

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It means respect - for the water, for the weather, and for yourself. Fishing is supposed to be enjoyable.

It's supposed to bring peace, challenge, camaraderie, and connection. If the elements take that away, there's no shame in packing up, heading home, and trying again tomorrow.

Whether you're fishing under a blazing sun, steady rain, biting cold, or stubborn wind, each condition shapes the experience. Each demands preparation, awareness, and adaptability. And each offers its own rewards.

Fishing in varied weather isn't just about catching fish - it's about embracing the unpredictability of the outdoors.

It's about learning, adjusting, laughing, and sometimes shaking your head at the sky. It's about the stories we tell later, the memories we build, and the appreciation we gain for the places we love. And at the end of the day, whether you've caught a monster, limited out for the day, or simply caught a moment of peace, you can be proud that you spent your time outside doing something you love.



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**BRENT KNIGHT**

Here we are, mid-summer. And for many of us sportsmen: waiting patiently for the fall salmon runs to begin. With very limited Chinook opportunities in Western Washington, most of us are looking forward to our coveted coho fishery. I know that I am organizing my gear, tying leaders, prepping bait and doing anything that I can to pass the time. I get in a day or two of kokanee or trout fishing here and there, but it is just not the same. Coho are hard fighting fish and arguably among the best tasting salmon, either on the BBQ or in the smoker. The 2026 forecasted return of coho salmon to the Puget Sound projects a strong, healthy return overall, ranking as one of the best seasons in recent memory for total

forecasted abundance. This means that we should be both optimistic and excited for what is to come.

Along with the returning salmon come numerous derbies, all up and down the west coast. Every September, there is a salmon derby unlike any other on the West Coast: The Everett Coho Derby, taking place in September when the Coho are stacking up in the Puget Sound on their way to their natal rivers and spawning grounds.

This great event celebrated its 32nd year in 2025 and has become the largest fishing derby on the West Coast, with around 2000 adults and 300 kids registering annually. That's a lot of sportsmen (and women) anglers on the water!

I have been fortunate to be a volunteer for the past five years. For me, it's easy. I just show up at the Edmonds Marina and meet and greet people as they bring their catch in for weighing. We laugh and talk to all the smiling kids, proud to weigh in their fish and compete for prizes. Outside of all the fun that we have over the two days of the derby, many others spend the year planning the event, and it is a lot of hard work.

The Everett Coho Derby is sponsored by the Everett Steelhead and Salmon Club/Everett Chapter of the Puget Sound Anglers and the Snohomish Sportsmen's Club. These two groups work together to plan the event. The money made in this derby goes to support the many fish



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A photograph of several people on a boat, likely fishing. One person is holding a large fish. The background shows a body of water and a distant shoreline.

enhancement projects of the clubs.

Coho can be caught in any of the open marine areas or the open rivers in Snohomish and Skagit Counties. First, second and third prizes fetch \$10K, \$5K and \$2.5K, respectively. Gary Hanson from Puyallup won the 2025 Everett Coho Derby with a 12.62 lb coho salmon. The annual derby concluded on September 21, 2025, with Betty Wood (Snohomish) taking second place with a 12.11 lb fish, and David Taylor (Tulalip) in third place with a 11.57 lb fish. The event saw a highly competitive weekend for the top spots.

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A little history about the derby: In 1993, the local recreational fishing industry was in a quandary. To protect many of the threatened runs of coho salmon, the State of Washington declared much of the saltwater off limits to salmon fishing, as well as closing most of the local rivers. The only area available was the Snohomish River system and a small "Bubble" right outside the mouth of the Snohomish River called the Tulalip Bubble. Interest in salmon fishing was waning and the sporting goods stores were worried about their livelihoods - the sale of fishing gear.

One of the local store managers, Fabian Loomas from Jerry's Surplus in Everett, approached Jim Brauch of the Everett Steelhead and Salmon Club and Mark Spada of the Snohomish Sportsmen's Club with a proposal. If a salmon derby was created, targeting the small area that was open, Fabian would try to solicit prizes from the various distributors. In addition, if not enough tickets were sold to cover the prize money, Fabian would guarantee the prize money would be paid. This was a no-lose scenario for the two clubs, and the decision was made quickly to create and organize the derby!

That first year, the derby was called the Snohomish River Coho Derby and it made about \$400-\$500 per club. Not a lot by today's standards, but in those days, most of the club's income came from small raffles and coffee rest stop donations. Four hundred dollars was significant for both clubs, and they were overjoyed at the additional revenue. Those guiding the effort muddled along for the next few years happy to have a derby and happy to make a little money from it.

A Humpy Derby was attempted one year, and two things were discovered: humpy (pink salmon) anglers don't buy derby tickets, and most humpies entered in the derby weighed about the same (10th through about 50th differed by less than 2 oz). In about the year 2000, Mac McReynolds - a representative from Olympic Boats, a local retail boat sales operation - approached the group to see if they could help sponsor the derby. McReynolds arranged for a boat, motor, and trailer to

be awarded as the grand prize, at no cost to the derby.

Ticket sales surged that year, furnishing money for the many enhancement projects carried on by both clubs. Up until a couple years ago, the boat, motor, and trailer package was a mainstay of the raffle portion of the derby and helped it to continue to grow to what it is today. Other past prizes have included trips to fish in Alaska and cash as alternatives for the raffle.

From these humble beginnings, the derby, now called the Everett Coho Derby, has become the largest derby on the West Coast of North America based upon the number of participants. Ticket sales have soared from 900 tickets sold in 2001 to 2527 sold in 2004, a year of inclement weather, along with over 300 free youth tickets. Over 2800 participants in total. The derby now averages 2000 adult paid tickets, and 270 free kids (12 and under) tickets each year.



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The prize money has also improved with cash for the five largest fish, from \$500 for 5th place up to \$10,000 for 1st place, along with many added cash prize categories. This derby has surely become a destination event on the West Coast.

The money made each year in the Everett Coho Derby goes towards the support of the many fish enhancement and propagation projects of the clubs - including stocking of the local lakes with trout, a salmon hatchery raising 60,000 coho smolt

each year for release in the Skykomish River (Eagle Creek Hatchery), carcass planting in the upper Pilchuck River and Snohomish System, many different youth activities including trout clinics/ fishing events, high school/ college scholarships, sending kids to Youth Conservation Camp, as well as many other activities too numerous to mention. The money goes to good causes and anglers have a chance to win prizes at the same time. What could be better?

These events take a ton of work to organize and coordinate, but the proceeds help more than most people realize. Also, many of the people who donate their time and energy to events like this are getting older, so there is a call for new blood. It is time for the next younger generation to get involved and start to take over so that we can keep these events going.

So, what does it take to get involved? There is nothing to it. Just volunteer and they will be grateful for your help.

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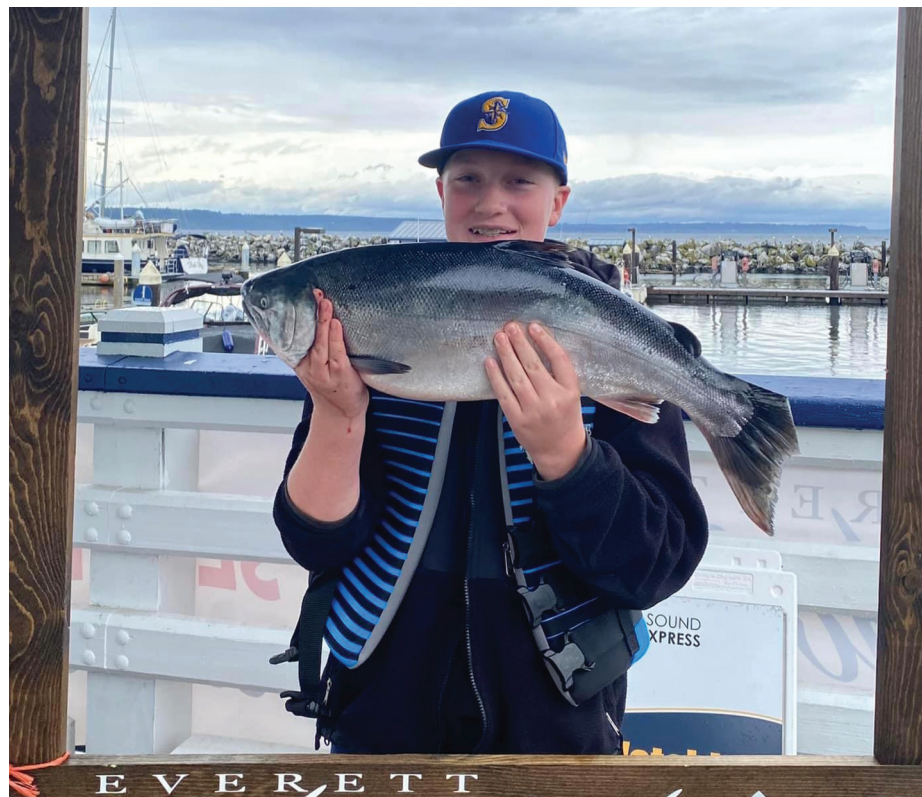
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If you are not the volunteering type, that is okay. Pay your entry fee and come try to win some prizes next year while filling your freezer with chrome bright coho salmon.

To learn more, you can visit **everettcohoderby.com**.

The 2026 derby will be held on Saturday and Sunday, September 26-27. Tickets will go on sale on July 1st. We hope to see you there.





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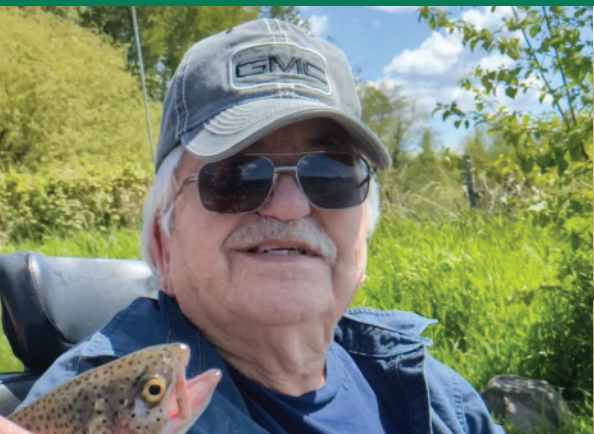
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Back in my Washington Alpine Lakes hiking days, my biggest concern was the potential of being stalked by a cougar. The odds were low, but the risk was high. The common wisdom was that you would never know what hit you until it was too late. Even so, I was in the habit of hiking with a Glock 45, which I figured was better than no protection. It was also protection against two-legged danger. Of course, hiking with a firearm in Washington led to some interesting encounters. One beautiful summer day I was hiking up to Snow Lake, and when I arrived, there was a group of four younger hikers. I was wearing my outdoor shirt which I had sewn the old WashingtonLakes logo on to. One of the hikers looked at me, looked at my gun, fishing gear, and logo, and asked me,

“Are you surveying the lake?” He obviously thought I was some type of official person. I replied, “No, just up here for some fishing.” The group had puzzled and worried looks on their faces as I went on my way. Guns were and are not a common sight on the hiking trails in Washington.

Fast forward twenty years and a move to Montana, where it is normal to be hiking with a holstered gun. And bear spray, and a knife. Because, in case you hadn’t heard, the last few years have seen a dramatic growth in black and grizzly bear populations in Montana, and the exodus of bears from the high mountain country to the plains of central Montana, where they once roamed freely (you can read about Merriweather Lewis’s famous encounter with a grizzly at the Great Falls of the Missouri).

Washington and Idaho are experiencing similar increases, not to mention growing wolf populations. The North Cascade Mountain range has grizzly again. Unfortunately, many casual hikers are sadly ignorant of the danger of wildlife encounters.

I don’t want to discourage anglers from exploring these beautiful, remote locations where it is possible to spend a day fishing and not see another angler, or person. The desire to fish in secluded places means accepting the risks and being prepared. Going alone increases that risk. At the very least, you need to hike with the “ten essentials”, which you can find by doing a simple internet search. In addition, I now always bring bear spray and my gun.

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that matters.

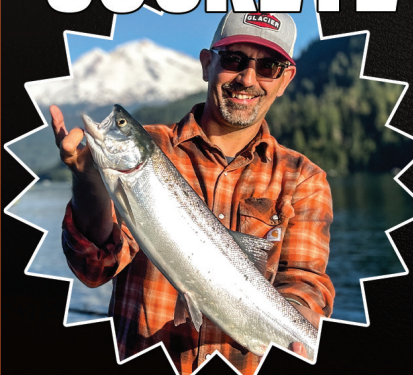


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I tell my wife the general area I'll be in, and if my plans change, I will text her the updated location I'm going to.

Time of year plays an important role in bear encounters, including the potential for lethal attacks. Bears coming out of hibernation are hungry, and female bears have their cubs with them which puts them in protection mode. Spring is an extremely dangerous time of the year to be out and about, and extra caution is required. It's not the best time for solo trips.

That said, I'm at the stage of life where I am semi-retired and spring fishing is just a given. This year I've been exploring segments of the Missouri River in my jet boat, and often it's just me and my dog, Duke. Obviously, being in a boat affords a higher level of safety, but there are times when we'll pull up on shore to stretch our legs. Looking for spots that are open rather than brush-filled is the first thing to do. Having a dog that comes to call and doesn't wander is darn important, too!

OK, you're saying, spring is dangerous with bears, I'll wait until summer comes.

Not so fast, buddy. With the warm temperatures come Indiana Jones' worst fear: snakes.

Washington, Idaho, Oregon, and Montana all have their fair share of snakes. The kind that rattle are particularly worrisome for me, not to mention my dog.

On a recent outing to "Widow's Coulee" on the Missouri, Duke and I were wrapping up a productive day of fishing for walleye and smallmouth bass. It was a day in the low eighties, and by 2 PM it was time to get Duke into some shade and call it a day. Securing my boat onto the trailer, I noticed some movement on my left. Coming out of the grass was a big old snake, easily 3-4 feet long. My first reaction was to break the Second Commandment, something I haven't done in some time (I need to get to confession for that...). My second reaction was to walk around the far side of the boat, get in the truck, and run the snake over. I went back to investigate and never found the snake, so he's probably waiting for the next angler to come along and scare the heck out of.



Oh my!

By the way, snakes can swim. Last year on a different stretch of the Mo, I was anchored up and watched as a snake swam by our boat and onto shore. I'm still not sure what to do in the case of a snake on the boat situation, and I hope to never have to figure it out!

Duke has received the rattlesnake vaccine, although I need to get him to a snake aversion training class as well.

Snakes, wolves, lions, bears – have I dissuaded you from backcountry adventures?

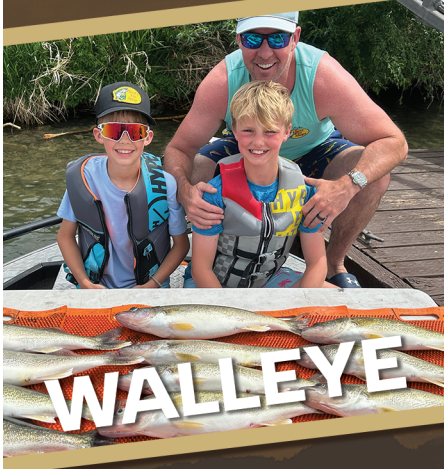
I hope not. Our wild areas offer a unique and special experience to anglers.

And sadly, more are disappearing every year. Personally, I've weighed up the risks and decided the experience is worth it. The quiet, peace, and solitude is something that feeds my soul, bringing me closer to my Creator.

I hope you'll do the math and decide to venture on the roads less travelled. May your fishing adventures bring you the peace we all yearn for.



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ESTUARY Sturgeon

BY JERAD SORBER

Known for hiding the shipwrecks of the graveyard of the Pacific, the sands near the mouth of the Columbia also hold a secret lair of North America's largest freshwater fish. White Sturgeon in the Columbia River Estuary regularly reach enormous sizes. These secretive giants provide a fight that compares with billfish, both in ferocity and acrobatics.

Just after Father's Day, I invited my friend Jamie to join my son and I for a scouting trip. I wanted to add some more spots to my list of options for my clients the next day. I was looking for deeper channels running next to broad shoals. Ideally, I would find a submerged cove.

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I anchored the boat up-current from a group of fish that I had spotted using my side-scan sonar and hung drift socks to keep the boat as steady as possible. Sturgeon are shy biters, and any movement of the bait before they commit can throw them off. I also use extra-long leaders, at least 3 feet, to give a little extra wiggle room. The current helps carry the bait scent towards the fish and draw them into our gear. The bite will often slow or completely stop during slack tide.

Like all fish, sturgeon follow their food.

Upriver, that means deep pools. In the estuary, the sand flats grow a carpet of small creatures including shrimp, worms, mussels, and clams. The sturgeon wait for the incoming tide and cruise up onto the flats for this buffet. Sometimes we'll spot them feeding in as little as a foot of water with their backs and the tops of their tails visible. When the tide moves out, they shift into the deeper channels and ditches.

I tied on a 3-foot Dacron leader in 120-pound test. In addition to strength, the Dacron provides abrasion resistance.

Sturgeon have sharp plates along their sides and spine. A hooked sturgeon will use an alligator style death roll to wrap the line around itself and cut the line. Despite their strong sense of smell, their eyes are poor. Where other species might ignore something with a thick visible line, the sturgeon don't seem to notice it.

I had pre-baited several leaders that morning with live sand shrimp. The local bait shops stock them but you generally need to order ahead of time to guarantee that you'll have them.



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For a quick swap after a missed swing, the tops of my leaders are tied into a surgeon's loop. I slide the loop into a McMahon-style snap hanging from a bead chain swivel. These snaps are strong, generally don't tangle with my leader, and are

fast to swap out once you get used to them. My main line is a 60 lb braid with a heavy swivel sandwiched between two beads ahead. Hanging from the sliding swivel is my lead. I usually use 6 oz pyramid-style weights to help hold the gear out in a wide spread in the current. In heavy current I'll run up to 10 oz but that's rare.

After I attached the leader, I looked around for a spot. I generally try to cover as many different areas of water as possible, and the spot I chose had a good mix of super shallow flats alongside a 15-foot-deep channel. My plan was to spread the gear out and see where the fish were concentrating at that moment. Whenever possible, I always like to hedge my bets.

Once in the estuary, the sturgeon prefer shrimp, even over traditional favorites like smelt and squid. I half-hitch two shrimp onto each leader, with the bottom one also being caught in the hook's bait loop. I know some folks that use bait threading needles, and I do prefer that method for durability when I have a needle available.

For the hooks, I use Gamakatsu Big River Bait Hooks in a 6/0 size. We are required to pinch the barbs and are only allowed to use one hook. The hard angle bend at the bottom of the hook does a better job staying in if the line goes slack. While I grumble about barbless hooks for salmon, with sturgeon I wouldn't want to have to get one out of their mouth anyways. Their tough skin would require a lot of work to extract one.

I swung the rod carefully, while thumbing the reel to prevent backlash. I typically use a casting type reel. I caught my first sturgeon on a spinning reel and it's not a bad choice, though. The casting reels just take up less space in the boat. Getting used to them also means I can change plans on the fly if the Spring Chinook bite is slow. The lead and bait landed in the shallows about 100 feet away. Based on the timing between when the lead hit the water and when I felt it hit the bottom, I'd say I was in about 2 feet.

I use the same mix of Lamiglas battle glass and Daiwa Beef Stick rods for bottom fish, and it also saves me from having to buy a whole additional setup. Sturgeon don't care how much you paid for the rod. They just need something strong.





To catch them, you just need a tip soft enough to detect a bite and a backbone strong enough to set the hook through their catcher's mitt of a mouth. The rod also needs to not snap when a 500 lb fish decides it wants to start peeling 200 feet of line off your reel!

A few of my rods, especially the softer Lamiglas rods, show signs of being repaired from when the tips came up against the boat while fighting a particularly devious fish. I have used my heavy salmon trolling rods, but the ones that have found use as sturgeon rods have become sources of spare parts after a few trips.

Usually when a sturgeon bites, the tip of the rod will twitch slightly. The hardest part of sturgeon fishing is lifting the rod out of the holder without tipping off the fish. I told Jamie, "When you feel it pull, set the hook as hard as possible." A few minutes later the rod tip twitched - first softly, then harder. Jamie grabbed the rod, pressed his thumb against the spool like I taught him, and pulled back. The rod stopped in mid swing and then pulled down hard. Fishing rods make a distinct angle when hooked with a big fish - the backbone of the rod usually goes straight up from the angler's hands. The mid-range forms a perfect 90 degree curve over about

12-14 inches while the softer top section will end up pointing directly at the fish. For those who live in more metropolitan areas, the feel in your hands is about the same as hooking into a city bus.

Bobby and I scrambled to pull in the other gear while Jamie held on for dear life. The reel's drag was probably close to combustion, and the fish had only been on for a few seconds. I looked up just in time to see a massive prehistoric beast jump fully into the air behind the boat. When you have to look up to see your fish, you know it's big. This sturgeon had decided to remind us that it comes from a time when



dinosaurs caused the earth to shake. Over eight feet and nearly 300 pounds of angry, armor-plated fish hit the water and began making a big run. Before we could throw the anchor buoy overboard, the line counter was already at 400 feet.

I used the motor to follow the fish and ease the load on Jamie. The tradeoff in this strategy is that the fish doesn't get tired as quickly. Once we had gotten back to less than 200 feet of line I restricted myself to just keeping the boat angled so that the fish wasn't underneath us or on the opposite side. I wanted to use the boat to help tire out the fish.

Jamie is an experienced fisherman. He's fought plenty of large salmon in his time and knows that when the fish is running, you keep the tip up a bit so that the rod does the work. He was perfect at waiting for the fish to start to turn before reeling so that he didn't tire himself out. Despite this, I could tell that the long fight was wearing him out.

Over the next 70 minutes, Jamie brought it to the boat three times - each time the fish would blow bubbles and roll onto its back. This is usually a sign that the fight is about over, but this one did this each time and was not done.



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Every time I tried to grab the base of its tail so that we could hold it still for pictures it would wake up and take another run.

After drifting for approximately 2 miles we made one last attempt to get the fish to the boat for a picture. This time, instead of taking off and away from the boat, it ran underneath. The mainline rubbed against the boat chine, found a nick, and the beast was gone.

We were exhausted. Jamie's arms were rubber, and we all agreed it was time to head home. Somewhere - maybe still in the shoals of the Columbia - that sturgeon is out there, growing even larger.



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GETTING READY FOR Salmon Season!

BY HANNAH PENNEBAKER

If you're anything like me, then you have dreams about bobber downs and chrome fish. The long wait is over, and the time is finally here! Whether this is your first or fiftieth salmon season, preparation is the key to success. Let's go over some tips on how to ensure your boat, trailer, and gear are in tip-top shape for this salmon season.

If you have a boat, you'll want to make sure it's running smoothly and has all the gear you need. Fill up your gas tank, check your batteries, test your downriggers, and fire up your motors. Take a look at your engine hours and take care of any recommended services. Repair shops are busy this time of year, so it's not a bad idea to watch some tutorials and figure out how to do some basic repairs and services

yourself. Our boat has both a 2-stroke main motor and a 4-stroke kicker, so my husband and I have had to become adept at both 2-stroke and 4-stroke motor maintenance!

Don't forget to ensure you have all the Coast Guard required safety equipment aboard your boat. This equipment is required for good reason, and the Coast Guard conducts inspections.

Let's not forget your boat trailer! Make sure to do a thorough visual inspection of the brakes, chains, couplers, straps, wheels, bearings, and tires for damage and wear. It's a good idea to re-grease your wheel bearings every year. Top up the air in your tires if needed. Hook up your trailer lights and verify that your signals are all working.

Required Coast Guard Equipment:

- ❑ Flares (3 daytime and 3 nighttime, or 3 daytime/nighttime combos)
- ❑ Life jackets for everyone on board
- ❑ Throwable flotation device (if boat is 16ft or longer)
- ❑ Navigation lights (if traveling between sunset and sunrise or during low-visibility periods)
- ❑ Horn/whistle/other sound signal
- ❑ Fire extinguisher
- ❑ Carbon monoxide warning sticker/placard

Not Coast Guard required, but good to have:

- ❑ Manual bilge pump
- ❑ Marine toolkit
- ❑ Marine radio
- ❑ Extra gas cans
- ❑ Spare motor parts (spark plugs, hose clamps, etc.)
- ❑ First aid kit



While you're at it, make sure your registration is up to date for both your boat and trailer.

Once you've verified that both your boat and trailer are in good, safe condition, it's time to look at your other gear. Look over your rods and fix any broken guides or tips. Open up your reels and grease any and all moving parts to prepare them for the fights ahead. I like to polish up any spoons or spinners that have corroded during the off season. This is also a good time to organize tackle boxes and stock up on any swivels, line, etc. Do it now before the season is in full swing and tackle store shelves are empty!

Here's a few other miscellaneous things to check before going out. Make sure you have an up-to-date fishing license and catch record card.

You can either use a paper card or use the MyWDFW app. Catch record cards are not added automatically in the app. You need to add them to your cart in the MyWDFW or Fish Washington app for \$0. If you're going to an area without cell phone service, the data in your card will be added locally and updated when you come back to an area with service. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the rules of the area where you'll be fishing. Don't forget to pinch your barbs and keep all fish in the water until you are 100% certain it's legal to retain. WDFW has great resources on how to identify each salmon species in both saltwater and freshwater. Please follow the rules and help protect the resource so that future generations can enjoy fresh, local salmon on the dinner table too!



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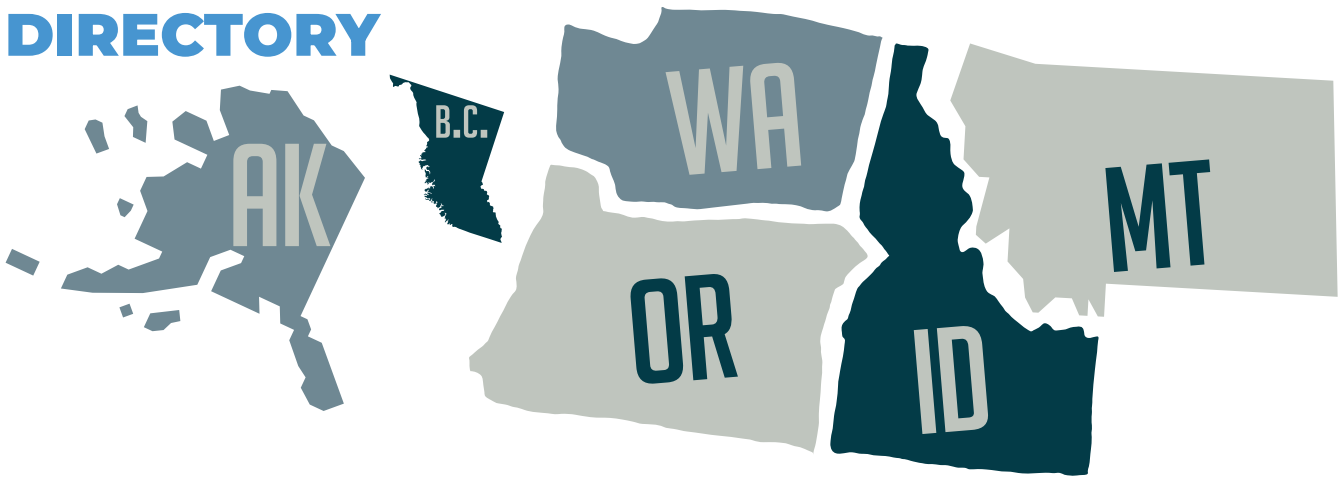
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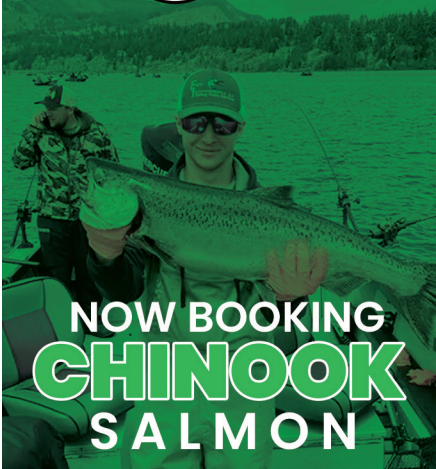
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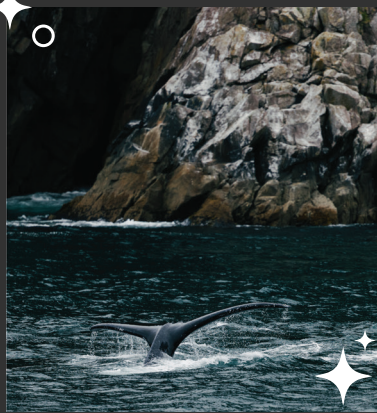
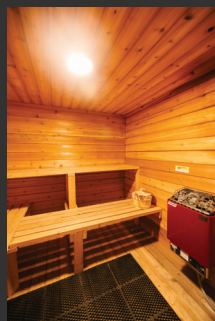
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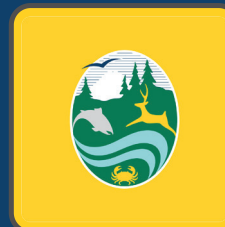
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