

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 2

OCTOBER, 2025

NORTHWEST FISHING

EXPLORING THE PNW'S REEL LIFE

PUGET SOUND SQUID

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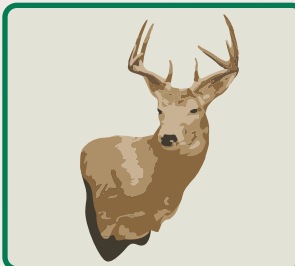
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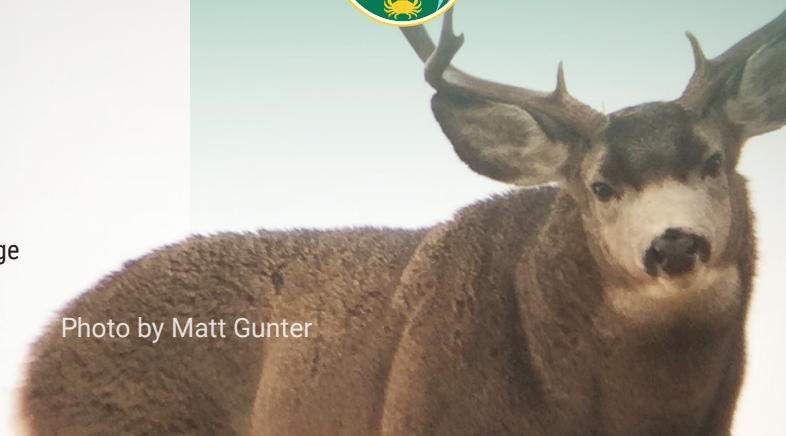


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Photo by Matt Gunter



EDITOR'S CORNER:

Ah, October! Every sunrise a little later, every sunset a little sooner. Cooler days mean my morning jacket (did you get that musical reference?) is seeing more use. October and the rivers are filled with returning salmon. Anglers have the tough choice of continuing to fish saltwater and one last big hooknose coho, or begin serious river fishing. Fall trout, walleye, and pike action can be excellent as the fish sense winter coming and fatten up.

It's also a time for many of us to begin to think about storing our boats, meaning winterizing. It's a good time to clean the boat and organize your gear so next spring everything is where you thought it was. Fix those broken items now so you're ready to go next year.

As for me, October means bird hunting here in Great Falls. My dog, Duke, has been flushing a few pheasants on our walks. I'm sure he's ready and I'm ready for some relaxing walk-about. By the way, fall is the best time to do some Alpine Lakes hiking and get out to fish those high elevation jems.

See you out there!

- Mike Carey, Northwest Fishing



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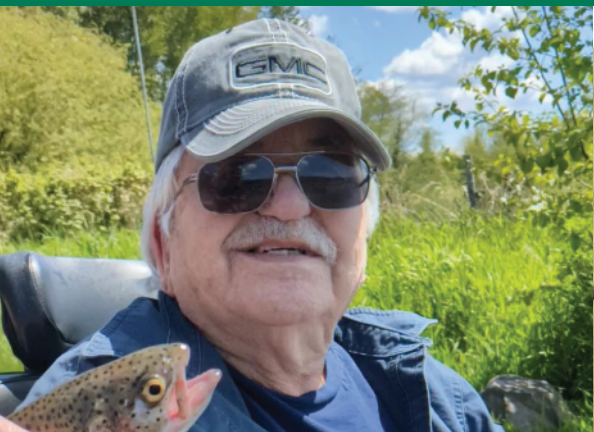
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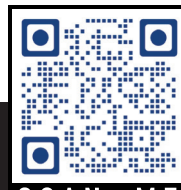
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PANFISHING STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

ERIC
MAGNUSON

TO USE FOR
YEAR-ROUND SUCCESS

For many anglers, panfish are the first fish we've caught, and for good reason. Bluegill, Crappie, Perch, and other panfish are plentiful, cooperative, and can be enjoyed as a delicious meal. Yet, despite their reputation as "Beginner Fish", experienced anglers know that panfishing can be as technical and rewarding as any pursuit in freshwater fishing. With the right strategies and tactics, you can consistently put more fish in the boat or on the ice, no matter the season.

In this article, I will break down the keys to successful panfishing, from understanding their behavior to fine-tuning your presentation.

KNOW YOUR BODY OF WATER AND SPECIES YOU'RE FISHING.

"Panfish" is a catch-all term for several species, most notably bluegill, pumpkinseed, yellow perch, and both black and white crappie. While they all share similarities, each has its own quirks, which can help you understand how to approach each one on the water.

BLUEGILL & SUNFISH:

Aggressive feeders that relate closely to weed edges and shallow flats, especially in the warm months.

CRAPPIE: More structure-oriented, often suspended over deeper basins, or schooling up around brush piles. I also target large Marina docks and boats.

PERCH: Typically roam a little more, especially in winter, but will still relate to breaks, deeper weedlines, and especially sandy muddy flats where they gorge themselves on bloodworms.

Knowing the tendencies and behaviors of your target species will help you decide where to fish and what tactics to use.

SEASONAL PATTERNS

Understanding how panfish move through the seasons is the foundation of consistent success.

SPRING: As water warms into the 50s, panfish start to move shallow to begin their spawn. Bluegill and Sunfish fan out nests in shallow bays, creating mine fields of circle beds, while Crappie

will hold on to brush piles and structure a little longer before moving shallow.

SUMMER: After spawning, Bluegill will typically remain in the shallows around their spawning grounds, if there's good cover. While the Crappie tend to move a little deeper, and when I say deeper, I'm referring to 15'-17'. This is prime time for early morning and late evening action near the weed edges.

FALL: Cooling water pushes baitfish and panfish towards deeper structure. When crappie form large schools over deep basins, fan casting and bobbers come in handy. Perch will be found chasing baitfish on steep breaks and roaming the flats.

WINTER: Panfish will typically group tightly in the winter, and you can get into large schools when found. I will target the last remaining deep weed edges for Bluegill and Pumpkinseed, and hit them on the deep, muddy flats for the hungry Perch. The most difficult, and rewarding, is fishing the suspended Crappie, finding the 2'-3' just below the ice, cruising deep basins.

LOCATING PANFISH

The most successful

anglers spend more time finding fish than fishing empty water. Key tools and techniques to locate panfish include:

ELECTRONICS: Sonar or Forward-Facing Sonar can reveal schools and depth preferences in seconds. In open water, Crappie are typically suspended while the Perch and Bluegill hug cover or bottom. Electronics will show you these behaviors of these fish in real-time.

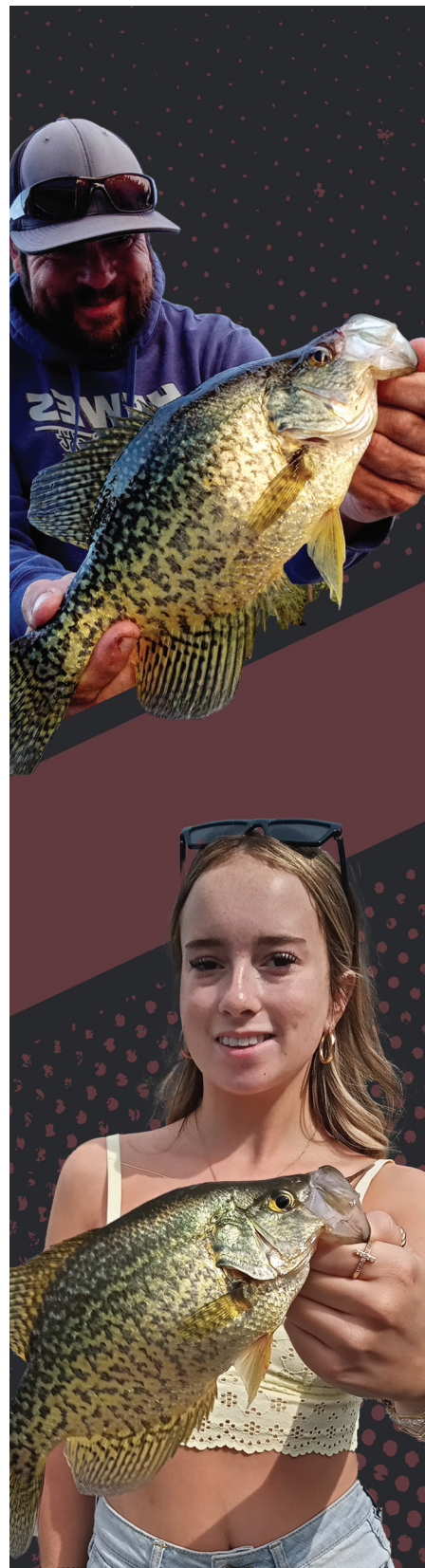
VISUAL CUES: In shallow or clean water, polarized glasses can help spot so much. Beds, weed edges, stumps, brush piles, deep ledges, and fish.

STRUCTURE: Focus on those weed edges, fallen timber, brush piles, docks, and submerged humps.

MOBILITY: Don't linger in that "Empty" water; if the fish aren't there, you have to move. Use those Electronics as you move spots, marking schools of fish or looking for that structure we've talked about. From the boat to the ice, this is what it takes to find 'em!

TACKLE AND GEAR SELECTION

Panfish gear doesn't have to be complicated, but it should match the presentation.





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RODS: Light or ultra-light spinning rods (5'-7' feet) offer the sensitivity to detect soft bites. For ice fishing, I like the same action in a (24"-32" Inch) rod.

REELS: Small 100-200 series reels with a good, smooth drag and bearing system are ideal.

LINE: I typically will run 2lb-6lb monofilament or fluorocarbon for most situations. Braid with a flouro leader works well when fishing deeper water, like 30'-50' feet at Curlew for those Jumbo Perch.

HOOKS AND JIGS: Size 8-12 hooks for bait such as worms, maggots, or mealworms. These baits are Bluegill's favorites, while Crappie will indulge under a Slip bobber.

SLIP BOBBER: A slip bobber will allow you to precisely control the depths of your bait, adjusting until you're right above the fish. Critical for suspended Crappie.

Live, real baits work in all seasons but can make the difference for finicky fish.

ARTIFICIAL LURES & PRESENTATIONS

Artificial baits often outfish live baits when fish are aggressive, or when you need to cover water quickly.

SMALL PLASTICS: Tube jigs, curly tails, and micro swim baits mimic small prey and can be fished fast or slow.

SPOONS: Flashy and effective, especially for Perch and Crappie under the ice. Use subtle jigging motions to trigger bites.

PANFISH ON A FLY: Don't be timid about pulling out the Fly gear on these shallow bedding fish, or a beaded head fly under a bobber, or under the ice. Possibilities are endless!

Experiment with different sizes, profiles, and colors. Staying more in the natural

hues (White, Brown, Olive) or bright colors such as (Pink, and Chartreuse) excel in catching limits. Oh, and remember... "It doesn't matter what color it is as long as it's Gold"!

PRESENTATION TIPS

The way you present your baits is often more important than what's on the hook.

MATCH THE MOOD: Aggressive fish respond to faster retrieves or sharper jigging. Neutral or negative fish may want a slower retrieve or movement about the water column.

DEPTH CONTROL: In suspended situations, keep your bait just above the fish, as most panfish feed upward. This is where the Electronics come into play, while you can see the fish and your bait.

PAUSE AND HOLD: Especially in cold water, when fish are not as active. Pausing your bait can trigger strikes from hesitant fish. Often, we ice anglers will always have a "Dead Stick" fishing not too far from us.

ADJUSTMENTS FOR ICE FISHING

Winter panfishing demands extra precision and extra clothing.

DRILL IN GRIDS: I like to drill a grid pattern of holes over



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a flat or structure. Typically, I drill 15-30 holes before I start dropping lines.

DOWNSIZE: Smaller baits and light lines are necessary. Tungsten baits are my go-to, as I can fish them fast and get down to depths quickly. Minimize the gear you bring to lighten the load in your sled you're dragging behind you.

STAY MOBILE: Panfish roam, and staying on top of them is key to steady action. Electronics are especially valuable here, letting you watch fish react to your bait in real time.

CONSERVATION & ETHICS

While panfish are abundant, local populations can be impacted by heavy harvest, especially large breeding fish.

PRACTICE SELECTIVE

HARVEST: Keep enough for a meal, but release the larger ones when you can, to maintain healthy genetics

KNOW THE REGULATIONS: Size and bag limits vary State to State, and sometimes by body of water.

HANDLE WITH CARE: Use a wet hand when unhooking and handling fish in the cold temps. I try to minimize the time I lay a fish on the ice, as fish don't have eyelids, so you

can damage the eyes, not just the skin. Minimizing air exposure will help the survival of the fish you plan on releasing.

One of the best things about panfishing is its accessibility. Whether it's from the dock, boat, or ice, you can enjoy success. It's the Gateway to introduce kids and beginners into fishing, fast action, frequent bites, and plenty of smiles. But for a handful of us seasoned anglers, panfish offers a challenge. Finding the biggest Crappie in the lake or coaxing a wary Bluegill from its bed takes skill, patience, and attention to detail. My final thought is this. If you approach panfishing with the same strategic mindset you would for Bass, Walleye, or Trout, you'll quickly discover that these "small fish" can be very rewarding. Whether you're filling a bucket for a fish fry or targeting Trophy Class Slabs, the combination of smart location choices, precise presentations, and seasonal awareness will keep your rod bent all year long!

And don't forget to "Reel in Those Memories"!



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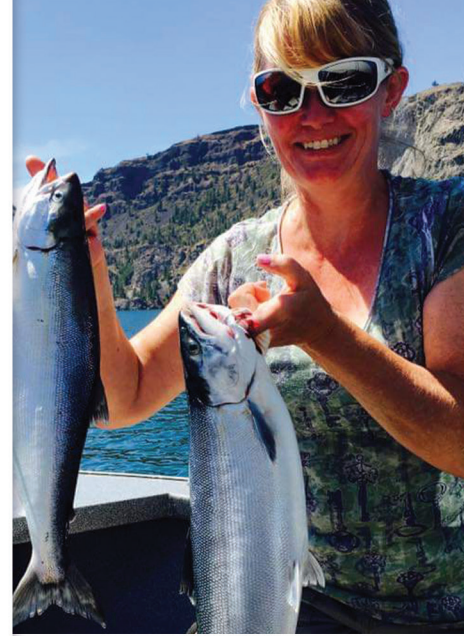


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GEARING UP FOR RAZOR CLAM SEASON

JOSH DEBRULER



If you visit the Washington coast in October during low tide, you'll likely see the beach lined with hundreds of people of all ages. Beyond the rolling sand dunes and swaying grasses, where the receding waterline reveals miles of open flat beach, they walk with heads down and eyes fixed on the sand. The experienced ones are likely tapping at the ground with some sort of apparatus, almost as if they were knocking to see if anyone was home beneath the surface. It turns out, that's quite literally what they are doing. This is the time of the year when the long-awaited razor clam season opens back up after its annual summer hiatus.

Each year, an estimated 400,000 recreational diggers go out in search of these clams on Washington State beaches. Razor clams

have been an important part of Pacific Northwest history, dating back to the first commercial canneries along the coast of Grays Harbor in the early 1900s. They are ingrained in the cultural identity of indigenous Coast Salish people like the Quinault and Cowlitz tribes, who have been harvesting these bivalves for millennia.

Each month, on their website, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife will post tentatively scheduled dig dates for the Washington coast. Digs are generally in the mornings or evenings and always during low tides that are anywhere from a +3 ft to -3 ft level. The best time to start digging is 2 hours before the listed low tide. This is both the legal start time for digging and, as I've found, when the most success happens.

LOCATING CLAM SHOWS

The "clam show" is a colloquial term for the hole in the sand left behind as a razor clam retracts its neck back into its shell, and it is what allows you to locate the razor clam. When walking the beach, look for the clam shows that are roughly the size of a nickel or a quarter. If you're not seeing any existing holes, you can tap the sand as you walk with your clam gun or shovel, and this often causes clams beneath the surface to retract their necks, thus creating a hole.

EQUIPMENT

Razor clam digging doesn't require a lot. In a pinch, you could potentially dig your limit with only a chunk of driftwood and your hands. Heck, you could even do this while wearing sweats and tennis shoes if you wanted.

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However, if you're not a glutton for punishment, then there are a few essential items you should bring with you to the beach. First item you'll need is a digging tool. The two primary tools most often used for digging razor clams are the clam shovel and the clam gun.

THE SHOVEL

A clam shovel is essentially a trench shovel that has a bit of a curve to the head. Once you locate your clam show, dig the shovel into the sand about 6 inches back towards the ocean side of the hole. This part is important, because if you were to dig directly above the clam, you would likely bury your shovel into the clam itself and damage the shell. This leads to a dead clam that quickly becomes inedible. Digging on the ocean side of the hole also allows you to grab the razor clam from its hinge-side as opposed to its sharp-edged

side (hence the name razor clam). You don't want to do all of your digging with the shovel. Instead, take 2-3 scoops of sand away to form a hole, then finish by digging with your hands until you can feel the clam. From there, you'll want to grab hold of the clam's shell and rock it back and forth till you feel it break free. If the clam won't break loose, start pulling more sand away from the sides of the clam and then try again at extracting it. If this all sounds incredibly difficult, well, that's because it sort of is. Using a clam shovel is not the easiest way to harvest these critters, but many traditionalists (myself included) enjoy the challenge and the increased sense of pursuit that comes with a shovel.

THE CLAM GUN

The clam gun came about once people decided that digging with their hands and a shovel into the cold

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sand at 5 o'clock in the morning didn't exactly match up with their version of "a good time". Understandable. The clam gun is super effective, very approachable for people just getting into razor clam digging, and it's generally much easier to use than a shovel.

A clam shovel consists of a long, roughly 6-inch diameter cylinder tube that has a double-handed handle on top. These are typically constructed out of aluminum or PVC. At the handle, you will find a suction hole that you can plug or unplug with your thumb. When left unplugged, it allows air to escape during the downward (or digging) process. When plugged, it creates suction during the upward pull that removes both the sand and the clam buried inside.

Simply locate your clam show, put the cylinder on top so that it's centered

over the hole, tilt it slightly towards the ocean, and then rock it left and right as you put downward motion on the gun. The rocking motion will allow the gun to sink into the sand quickly. Once you have the cylinder about 1/2 to 3/4 of the way buried into the sand, bend your knees and straighten your back so that you're spine is in a vertical position, straighten your arms, plug the suction hole with your thumb, then lift with your legs. Without using this proper lifting technique, you will struggle to get the clam gun removed from the sand, and you can very well injure your back in the process.

CLOTHING

Assuming you're choosing not to be the sweats and tennis shoes person, let's talk about the gear you should bring with you to the beach.

Hip boots or waiters will do an excellent job at keeping you dry and protected from

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the occasional wave that will inevitably make its way to where you're digging. If you're careful about retreating whenever a wave comes in, then rain boots can also suffice. Warm clothing and a rain jacket are generally a requirement, if it's not an unseasonably warm fall day.

STORAGE

You will need somewhere to store your razor clams for when you are digging and for when you're on your way home. A 5-gallon bucket works for holding clams while you're digging; however, if you don't have a partner holding the bucket

while you dig, you then run the risk of an incoming wave knocking over your bucket and turning your catch into seagull food. A better option would be a netted clam bag that you can hook to your hip with a carabiner. This option is pretty fail-proof and is what I always use when out on the beach. You'll likely find a lot of different suggestions on how to bring the clams home. The simplest and most recommended way is to put them in a dry cooler with a few ice packs. You can soak a towel in ocean water and cover the razor clams with the towel.

Do not submerge the clams in water of any sort during transport!

Now that you've got your clams home. It's time to clean them and enjoy! For more info on the cleaning and preparation process, visit the WDFW website do get a step-by-step rundown. Razor clam digging can be a great way to get family and friends together for a rewarding adventure in the outdoors. It's something kids can enjoy, and has some real potential at bringing food that you've harvested with your own hands from the ocean to the table.



The advertisement features a red banner at the top with the logo for "THE ELEPHANT BOYS FISHING - CAMPING" on the left, which includes a silhouette of a person fishing and an elephant. To the right of the logo, the text "STEELHEAD SEASON IS HERE!" is written in a large, white, stylized font. Below the banner, there are four images of fishing gear: "JIGS" (various colored jigs in plastic packaging), "BAIT" (two jars of "NORTHWEST BEST BAIT Tight Lines!"), "MAG LIPS" (a package of magnetic lips), and "SPINFISH" (a package of spinfish). At the bottom, a red bar contains the text "ONE LOCATION - TWO STORES" in white, followed by "Authorized Minn Kota/Cannon Service Center." and the "MINN KOTA" logo. Below this bar, the address "14811 E. SPRAGUE AVE, SPOKANE VALLEY, WA 99216" and phone numbers "509 443 3686 FISHING & CAMPING" and "509 926 6894 BOATING" are listed.

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INTERVIEW WITH A WELL-SCHOOLED KOKANEE

CONCLUDES

GARY
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*This may or may not have taken place on one of my favorite kokanee lakes...
but the advice is good whether it really happened or was just in my head...*

DUDE: You know I have read so many times on various fishing forums about how some guy had a great time fishing for kokanee. He is bragging about how many he caught and retained, and how many he caught and released "in good shape to live for another day." Thoughts?

KOKANEE: Maybe I'm mellowing a bit in my old age. I am always grateful for good intentions. But I also believe that there are times when good intentions produce not so good results.

DUDE: Let me guess -- it is more complicated than I would have thought, and probably more complicated the well-intentioned kokanee fisherman realized.

KOKANEE: Indeed. Let's start first with the fact of just how old are the kokanee

that bite. Most kokanee will respond to a well-balanced color and scented lure starting in their third year. Spawning will take place later in either their third or fourth year depending on location. Biting has everything to do with spawning. For the kokes that will be spawning later in the season, their scales are on course to transition from soft and flaky to absorbed and hardened.

DUDE: Come to think of it, the scales are very soft and flake off easily in the early spring bite. They get on everything. But late in the season, the scales do not flake off at all.

KOKANEE: It is a natural process of maturing. By pre-spawn, the kokes are well along in resorbing their own scales. They need hardened scales to withstand the rigors of the

spawn. Do you know why fish have scales?

DUDE: Scales are the protective outer layer of the fish's skin. I can understand why hardened scales are protective, but what about soft scales?

KOKANEE: The outer part of these soft scales has a consistency similar to mucous, making the fish extra slippery in the battle not to become prey. The slime can come off without a problem. But the scales themselves have a very important function -- they act as a barrier to ward off infection. If some of the scales are removed from the fish, infection easily moves in. Remember, theirs is a water environment. Infection is easy to come by. Fish will not be able to get a prescription for an antibiotic, and the fish has no biological mechanisms

to replace the lost scales. The result is usually a slow and painful death.

DUDE: So how does the well-meaning fisherman cause the harm?

KOKANEE: The harm is more likely early in the season when the scales are very soft. The scales come off with the use of any net, as well as any touching with the human hand. Well intentioned fisherman wanting to remove the hooks so the "fish can live another day" are shredding those protective scales. And although the fish when released happily swims off, the fatal damage is already inflicted. That fish gives the impression that all is well. All is not well.

DUDE: So how long does it take?

KOKANEE: You mean before the infection becomes fatal? Depends. Hours. Days. But it will happen. Of course other species benefit. Ospreys for example love those well-intentioned fisherman. So do mackinaw -- lake trout. Fish in weakened condition become a tasty addition to the food chain.

DUDE: So if a fisherman wanted to simply just release the kokanee without touching it from

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any means, just how is that accomplished?

KOKANEE: Let me refine your question a bit. Remember we are talking about the time in their life cycle before the scales are fully hardened. Let's say a fisherman has a two rod stamp - which many states now have. Two rods - but single limit. Let's further say that the fisherman is one fish shy of a limit. Both rods are out. Bam. A double. Only one can be taken. There are only two choices. First, land the one and then "release the other to live another day" using the net and manually removing the hooks - and thus killing

the released fish. The other choice is to land the one fish, but as to the other fish, just let it have some slack. Unless it has a hook through the bone in the snout, it will self-release. Neat - no net, no human hands, no loss of scales. Actually does live another day.

DUDE: What if it does have a hook through the snout?

KOKANEE: Easy. If you have brought the fish to the side of the boat and just let it swim there, the fish will be pretty tired. Control the distance to the side of the boat with your rod. This works best with the boat

moving forward. Without netting the fish or touching it, simply cut the line as close as you can to the hook and let the fish swim off. In most cases, the fish will be fine.

DUDE: You said "in most cases."

KOKANEE: Yes that is what I said. And kokes are generally resilient to injuries as long as the injury does not entail scale removal. I have seen some of my friends with broken and partially split lower jaws reach full fat maturity. There are some other injuries I have seen that even I have been amazed that the fish survived.

DUDE: So as you have explained it, any contact with the soft early season scales is likely fatal. But as the season progresses, the soft scales become harder, and don't flake off. When the pre-spawn kokes have reached this maturity, and I want or need to release it, then I can use the net and actually touch the fish to remove the hooks.

KOKANEE: Correct. Just be aware that this is a gradual process over the course of the fishing season.

A smart and caring fisherman will make these timing observations and react appropriately.

DUDE: I have caught kokanee in the later part of the season, and the scales are flaky and come off easily. What gives?

KOKANEE: Think it through. I told you that the process of scale hardening and absorption is a characteristic of the pre-spawn kokanee. If you catch a late season kokanee with flaky scales, then it is not pre-spawn. As it turns out, there are quite a few precocious young kokanee that are ready to chase lures as they get towards the end of their second year. They will spawn the following year.

DUDE: I told you that I read as much as I can -- with a critical eye on content -- and I have run across a couple of other kokanee concepts that I would like to ask you about.

KOKANEE: I'll do the best I can.

DUDE: I have heard rumors that there are kokes that are bred to become "late season spawners." I have friends in Idaho, who tell me they can fish for kokes on Thanksgiving, and the scales are hardened, but

the fish have not yet turned color and the males are just barely beginning to show signs of a kype. Seems like most of us see color and kypes sometime in late July, and definitely by late August and for sure by Labor Day.

KOKANEE: The rumors are true. We kokes are fairly adaptable to our environments wherever situated. Some kokes developed genetic characteristics that better guarantee survival. Let us suppose a particular kokanee world is a draw down reservoir - so the alfalfa farmers can get their late summer water. In that situation it makes good sense to spawn earlier in the streams and feeder creeks as they will not be water to spawn in in the main body of water. But some kokes have an easier situation.

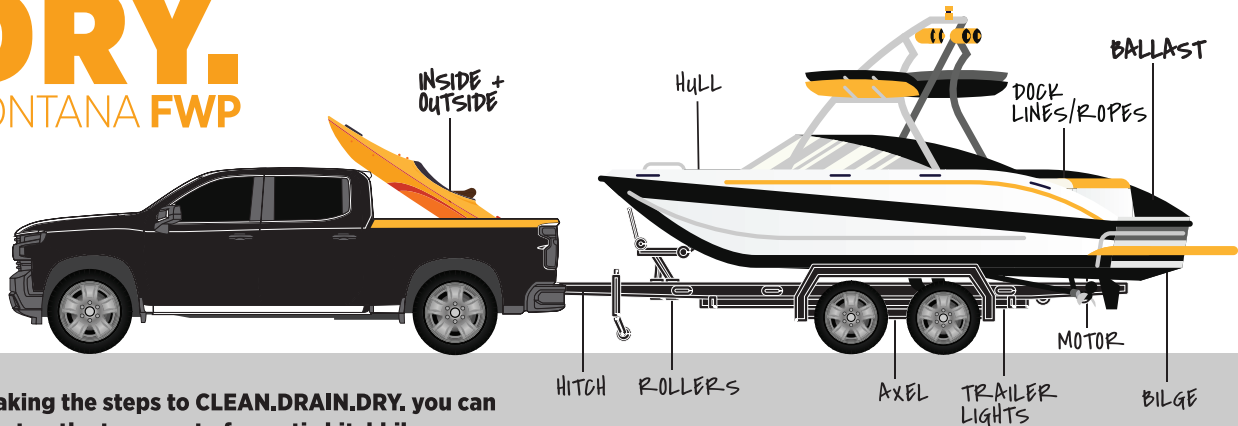


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For these kokes size matters genetically. A longer growing season means consistently larger kokes if the food supply is adequate to support them.

DUDE: No harm in larger kokes.

KOKANEE: When the early spawn/late spawn characteristics become predictable, then such a population of kokes can be introduced into a water system that would be compatible with that characteristic. Manipulation of the species.

DUDE: You are not going to wax philosophical on me now are you?

KOKANEE: No. Just sayin'

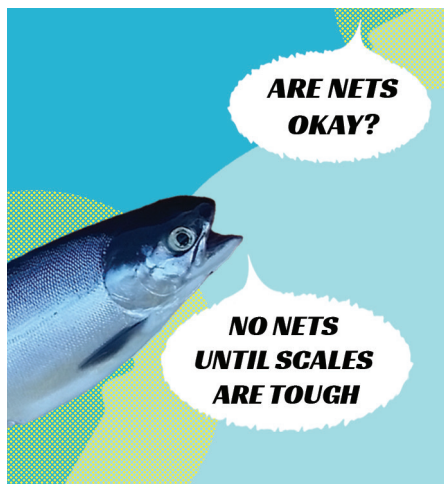
DUDE: I got an invitation for next year to go and fish Wickiup Lake in La Pine, central Oregon.

KOKANEE: Believe me -- I know about La Pine and Wickiup.

DUDE: I hear the kokes there are huge -- sixteen to twenty two inches or more, and the daily limit is twenty five. I was passing through there last September and decided to go check the reservoir out. I could not believe what I saw. The only water I saw was in the river channel. There were vast wide areas of shallow dry lake bed gently sloping to

the river, which was not very wide.

KOKANEE: And you probably want to know where the fish go when the reservoir dries up. Well let me tell you. The reservoir is to capacity just about every year in spring. But during the season, the water is gradually drained out down the Deschutes River. When the dam was constructed, it was not constructed for kokanee. It was built to provide irrigation water for downstream farmers and alfalfa growers. The kokanee in Wickiup are early spawners. They have to be.



And it may come as a surprise to you but the kokanee fishery at Wickiup is entirely natural.

DUDE: Not supplemented?

KOKANEE: Not at all. This is a great example of the adaptation I was speaking about earlier. The kokes have to be ready to spawn before the water supply challenges and limits their ability to graze. Fortunately, just enough water is available to make redds that will be properly oxygenated even with the draw down.

DUDE: But the size and the great number?

KOKANEE: With so much of the reservoir being shallow when full, the draw down encourages a great variety of insect hatches. One species in particular thrives there. These are a type of fly. In larval form they are called chironomids.

They are produced in such abundance as to be mind-boggling. Wickiup kokanee have discovered that these chironomids are a better source of protein than the zooplankton water fleas known as daphnia. These chironomids don't run and hide when the sun comes up, and the kokes can feed on them round the clock. And they do. An abundant protein source makes for very large kokes, much the same as the Mysis shrimp did for the third year kokes at Wallowa Lake. Only the chironomids don't destroy the next generation of kokes.

DUDE: And let me guess, the second year kokes at Wickiup can eat chironomids because the fly larvae are small enough, unlike the Mysis.

KOKANEE: Exactly. So the second year kokes gorge and become very large second year olds. As such, they have more strength to make it through the severe winter conditions at Wickiup. So when spring comes, now as three year olds, they are still in great shape, large and cranky - just the way they should be. In the meantime the three year olds have spawned. The drawdown of the reservoir provides a good

measure of protection as virtually all motorized boating ceases. If left alone, the redds will produce huge numbers of kokanee fry ready to start the cycle.

DUDE: You have taught me so much and I don't know how to meaningfully repay you.

KOKANEE: Well, there is a way you can do that.

DUDE: Anything.

KOKANEE: You know all those mornings when you get on the lake just before first light, and then some light starts chasing the darkness away? How quiet and still things seem to be. Your mind is filled with anticipation of the great fishing day ahead. And you take a slow deep breath - just trying to take it all in. Don't ever lose that feeling, and don't keep it to yourself. Pass on such ethics to your children, and family and friends. Help out and encourage those just starting out in the sport.

DUDE: Yes, I can do that.

KOKANEE: I'll be on my way now. Gotta fulfill my real purpose. It's been great chatting with you and I'm really glad you responded in the way you did. As for me, the ladies are calling.

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FALL COHO FISHING IN RIVERS



BY BRENT KNIGHT

If you ask me my favorite fishery of the year, I will always tell you that winter steelhead fishing is king! There is a romance to steelhead fishing in the winter that is unlike anything else, and I can't get enough of it. A very close second is fishing for Coho salmon in our many rivers around the Puget Sound and along the Washington Coast.

Coho salmon begin entering our river systems in the early fall, generally from mid-late August, depending on rain. The migrations vary by river, but in some cases continue through January. The peak time to target these fish is from late September into late November.

Since 2025 is a pink return year, I expect that the Coho will likely push in just a bit later to avoid the massive influx of pinks. We have over 7,000,000

pinks forecasted to return to the Puget Sound this year. You can always find both species in a system at the same time, but I don't believe that they like to compete for water, and hence, the Coho tend to avoid the pinks as best they can. For this reason, I have found that early run Coho are often found in less common water when the pinks are in. Think center of the river in the current and on the soft edges.

The best thing about fishing for Coho is that they tend to be very predictable. You are going to find them holding up in softer water, staging for their final push to their spawning grounds. As one group moves out of a hole and upstream, another will travel up and fill in. This will continue as fresh fish enter the river system and continue to migrate upstream. For this reason, I have found that Coho are much more predictable and easier to

target than species such as spring Chinook or winter Steelhead. The advantage of Coho fishing is that we often experience greater numbers of encounters, get to fight many fish, and often restock our freezers for the winter.

It is important to note that during the fall, you may find Chinook, summer Steelhead, Pinks, Coho, and even Chums in the same system. Depending on the river, you may be able to keep multiple species and, in some cases, even unmarked fish. Make sure that you read the regulations closely and comply with all rules related to gear restrictions and retention.

Coho can be finicky and may not bite at times, but by nature, they are very aggressive and territorial. It might take a bit to get one to bite, but once you do, it is usually game on for a while.

The nice thing with Coho is that you can employ many techniques to target and catch them. It is fun to anchor in a slot and pull plugs. There is nothing quite like the takedown on a plug to get your heart pumping. This is a great technique for those who are looking for a relaxing day on the water. Note that fishing plugs generally means that you are fishing the traveling lanes, not the soft pockets of holding water.

Some prefer to use bait. For years, cured eggs drift-fished was the go-to technique. There are so many options today

that you don't see bait used as much. Some are even switching from bait to beads as they work very well and can be drift fished, bobber dogged, and even used under a float. Speaking of floats, fishing jigs like we do for Steelhead is another fun and proven method to target Coho in slow-moving water. Again, a jig takedown under a float makes for an epic fight.

Currently, I see more anglers targeting Coho in holding water by casting presentations at them. My favorite technique is to throw spinners, but depending on the river system, Wiggle Warts,

Dick Nite's behind an inline weight, or with a dropper, spoons, Wicked Lures, homemade hoochie spinners, and jigs all work very well. The technique that is really catching on is twitching jigs.

A twitching jig is a bit heavier than a normal jig, weighing anywhere from 3/8 to 1 oz. They come in a variety of colors and are deadly for Coho. To twitch, you simply cast your jig towards your target and let it sink towards the bottom. Twitch up on the rod from about 30 degrees to 75 degrees and reel 1/4 to 1 turn as you drop the rod tip.

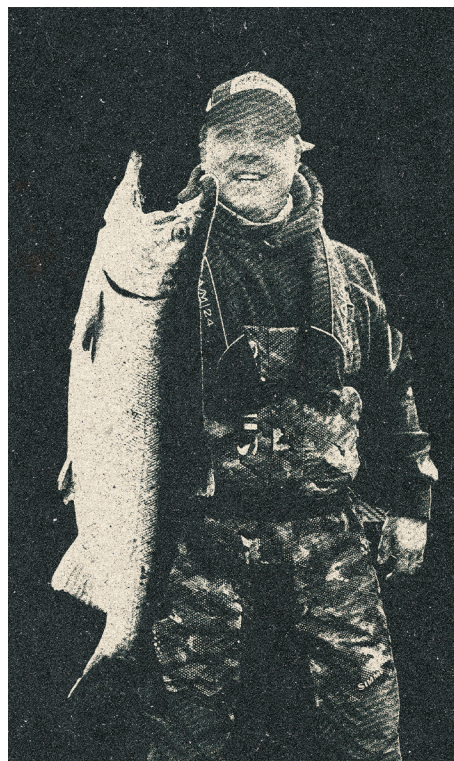


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The speed of your retrieve will dictate your depth in the water column. Note that twitching will work in water as shallow as 2 feet and is deadly effective in deep pools. The takedown when twitching is unmistakable and often very violent. The only drawback to twitching is that it does tend to tire you out, so plan to mix it up throughout the day.

For newbies, I highly recommend that you book with a guide for your first few trips. Learn the tricks from them on where to find fish and which technique to use

to target them based on the water you are fishing. Try the river systems in the North Sound, such as the Snohomish, Skagit, or Nooksack systems. Try the SW Washington rivers, such as the Cowlitz or Lewis.

Target the rivers feeding into Grays Harbor and the Chehalis system. Some of the largest Coho can be found in this region. For a real adventure, try the rivers on the coast from the Humptulips all the way up to the Quileute system near Forks. I know that the lower Quinault can be a ton of fun when fished with a tribal guide.

I have always said that the fishing in an odd year for pinks is a great way to get the kids interested, since they will catch a lot of fish. Coho are not much different in that they tend to be plentiful and are often not hard to catch. The advantage of catching coho is that they make great table fare once they enter the river. Some might even say that they taste better after they have been in fresh water for a bit.

Give it a try and get out this year! Learn a new river system. Try a "new to you" technique. Most of all, have fun!

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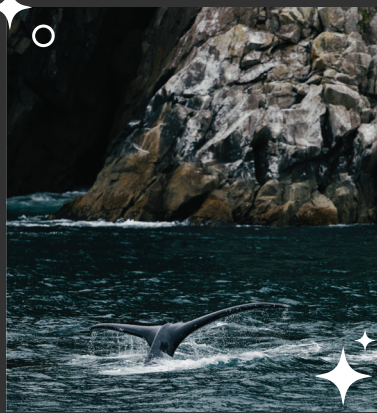


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PUGET SOUND SQUID

BY ANTHONY MARRESE

SQUID FISHING IN THE PUGET SOUND IS BECOMING AN INCREASINGLY POPULAR RESOURCE FOR ANGLERS OF ALL AGES AND SKILL LEVELS.

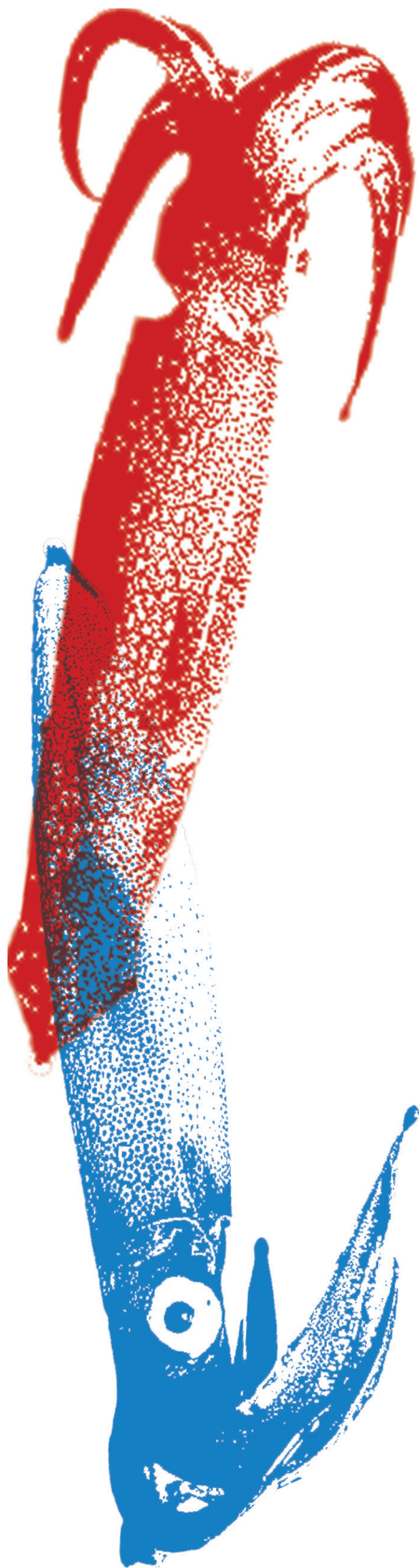
Squid are a relaxing, low-pressure fishery and can be targeted successfully on nearly any budget. And you don't even need a boat; in fact, some of the most successful squid fishermen only fish from shore. This piece will give you some understanding of where, when, and how to fish squid in the Puget Sound.

We will start with the rules and regulations for squid. You will need a shellfish license. I always recommend that everyone just get the Fish WA license,

because with that, you are covered for everything, but squid can be covered simply under shellfish. The season and bag limits for squid are very simple.

Squid is open year-round, and the bag limit is 10 pounds per person. This is a lot of squid. I rarely stay and fish out a whole limit, but I always make sure to have a scale handy to make sure I don't overfish! The only other relevant rule is that you can fish with a maximum of 4 squid jigs on your line at a time. I typically use two. If you

are within these rules, you should be all good to get out there! Next, let's talk about where. Squid can be found in nearly all waters of the Puget Sound, from the Strait of Juan de Fuca, all the way to Tacoma. Depending on the time of year, they will be more prevalent than others. The general rule is that squid start showing up in the Port Angeles area around September and migrate down to Tacoma through January and February. This is not a hard and fast rule, but they generally follow that pattern.



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There are people who catch squid every single day from the Les Davis pier in Tacoma. I, however, do not have that expertise. Some hot spots to check out are the Port Angeles City Pier, the Edmonds Pier, Pier 70 area in Seattle, Seacrest Marina Pier, and Les David Pier in Tacoma. There are several Facebook groups dedicated to squid fishing, and you can usually find out where the squid are from the number of success posts.

When to fish for squid is fairly widespread. There are some people that find success all year long from the same pier. But in general, squid fishing is best, and the squid themselves are largest, in the winter months. I usually start fishing for squid in about November and will fish regularly through February. Earlier in the season, I will usually fish closer to Edmonds, and then the deeper we go into

winter, I will move further south and usually end my season closer to Tacoma. If I intend to fish from the pier, I will almost always fish at night. Sometimes I will arrive at 1 or 2 in the morning and fish until sunrise. If I am fishing from a boat, I will often fish in the morning or evening, but almost never at night.

Lastly, how do we fish for squid? Squid can be caught from shore or from a boat, so we will break down how, based on this distinction. Fishing from shore is the most popular and simplest method. You will need your own bucket and a long, sensitive rod (I would say no less than 9'). 9-foot, 5-weight fly rods are growing in popularity due to their sensitivity, and you can rest your arms on the pier and not have a long butt section getting in the way of your jigging action.

Generally, people will set up their

rods with braided line about 20–30-pound test, with a corky on the mainline to act as an indicator so you can tell where your line is in relation to others. You will also want to have your squid jigs tied on with monofilament that is about 12-15-pound test. I really like to use one weighted Fisherman's Gold squid jig in green or pink with another unweighted Fisherman's Gold jig above that. The current and tide will impact whether I am going to use half, three-quarter, or one-ounce jigs. The optional part of your kit is a light. There will generally be people on the

dock who have lights. If you don't have a light, you can try to get close to them, but be respectful of their space and bring your own if you want to fish right under a light for your whole session. When you are all rigged up, you will want to cast out and let your jig sink. I usually let mine go to the bottom to start, and I will slowly work the jig back towards me and up the water column using slow jigs with pauses at the top.

To detect a strike, you can usually feel either an increase or a decrease in the weight on your line. A big hookset isn't required,

but a fast set and an increase in your retrieve are enough to keep them pinned on the jig. Strike detection will take some time. If you see someone on the dock really crushing them, be nice and try to learn what they are doing, and maybe ask some questions. My experience has been that if you treat people with respect, they will treat you with respect and usually give you some pointers on how to do better. If you are going to fish from a boat, the kit is mostly the same, but I usually use a 9' or 9'6" spinning rod instead of a fly rod.

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Because you are not limited to how far you can cast from the pier, I will typically drive around slowly and look for a haze near the bottom on my fish finder in roughly 80-120 feet of water. I will then drop my anchor and fish on top of the squid. Because it is light out, they are almost always on the bottom. I will use the same jigging technique, but in a more vertical motion. So, now you have the what, when, and how of catching squid in the Puget Sound. Give it a try this winter, and instead of waiting for calamari at a restaurant, you'll be able to serve it up right in your own home.

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A DOCK FULL OF FUN

BY JOHN KRUSE

I grew up fishing off docks at Lake Sammamish in Western Washington for everything from bass to bluegills to perch to trout, pumpkinseed sunfish, and more. Little did I know that much later in life, I would be fishing off a dock again for multiple species of fish, but this time, for a potential monetary payout!

MarDon Resort is a multi-generational family-owned resort located on the south shore of Potholes Reservoir in Eastern Washington. For years, they have been putting on an annual dock tournament the second weekend of September. This is a popular event, with anywhere from 125 to 160 participants, many of them coming back every year.

The tournament is very affordable (\$60 per entrant in 2025), and there is an 80-percent payout to the winning anglers. It is a vastly different tournament than most. Instead of catching a limit of five or

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six fish and weighing in the bass or walleye, you are fishing for the two biggest fish of eleven distinct species of fish.

The species you can catch off the dock are numerous. There are categories for largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleye, rainbow trout, perch, crappie, bluegill, pumpkinseed, carp, channel catfish, and yellow bullhead. This year, the first-place fish in each category netted the winner \$375, and the second-place fish was worth \$125.

The groups participating in this event are very diverse. There are families and extended families, couples, fishing buddies, senior citizens, women, and children all fishing off the dock day and night, and all trying to get a big fish. The tournament kicks off with a potluck on Friday at 5 PM. MarDon Resort provides fried chicken tenders, water, and cookies while

participants bring side dishes and more for a nice dinner. At 6 PM, anglers hit the docks and you fish as much or as little as you want from Friday night until 10 AM on Sunday. There is a weigh-in station at the marina staffed 24 hours a day, this year by Russ and Kim Anderson, who took turns sleeping during the night. Some of the winning fish were caught right off the bat! Georgia Goss was using a crappie jig when she hooked into a monster walleye at sunset on Friday. The 5.56-pound fish netted her first place by a long shot. The only other walleye caught was by her niece, Madison Shopbaugh, and that was only six inches long but still worth \$125. It was nice to see kids reel in winning fish! On Saturday morning, 12-year-old Levi Garza caught a gigantic channel catfish that weighed 25.4 pounds, easily beating out a 16-pound catfish that took second place.



Registration for next year's dock tournament opens in the Summer of 2026. You will want to register early because this event sells out. As for where to stay? That's easy...

MarDon Resort. You can pitch a tent, hook up an RV, or stay in a cabin or cottage there. Food, coffee, bait, and tackle are available at the resort's store, and if you want to eat out or have a drink between periods of fishing, look no further than The Beach House at the resort.

Find out more at:
mardonresort.com

And then there was Jaxon Pech.

I met him last year when he reeled in two huge carp, earning him a \$500+ paycheck. Jaxon, who is 13 years old, takes this tournament seriously. He lives in nearby Moses Lake, and he told me he fished twenty-nine times off the dock this summer, preparing for the tournament. Jaxon was fishing a sizeable pile of bait off the bottom, hoping to catch carp again. However, when his rod bent with a fish, he found out after a frantic 10-minute fight that he had caught not a carp, but instead, a 4.8-pound rainbow trout. Since Jaxon caught the only trout of the tournament, he got \$500 for that fish!

Over the course of the event, the lead would change multiple times for different kinds of fish. For example, I was briefly in second place with a ½-pound bluegill on Saturday morning but was bumped within an hour by a bigger fish.

At the end, both of the winning bluegill weighed in at over a pound. The final second-place winner was caught on Sunday morning.

At 10 AM, the event ends, and the whiteboard with the final results is brought up to a grassy area above the boat ramp and docks. Co-owners Levi and Annie Meseberg prepare checks for the winners as well as raffle prizes. Raffle tickets are sold for a dollar each, and at 11 AM, all sorts of raffle prizes are given away. The event wraps up with awards and checks being given out to the winners.

Talking to anglers during the event, I learned that everyone hoped to come back again next year. The mood on the docks is light, anglers are willing to share space, and everybody catches a whole bunch of fish over the weekend. Put it all together, and this unique dock tournament is chock full of fun!

Razor clam digs are here!

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Photo by Mandy Hergert



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BY MARK YUASA

FISHING



RAZOR CLAM FORECAST FALL TROUT OUTLOOK

Coastal razor clam enthusiasts should be able to find a treasure trove of bivalves this fall and winter.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) shellfish managers announced 47 days of tentative razor clam digs from Oct. 6 through Jan 6 for Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, and Mocrocks beaches.

"THIS RECREATIONAL RAZOR CLAM SEASON WILL SEE SIMILAR DIGGING OPPORTUNITIES TO THE PAST TWO YEARS, WITH A FULL DIGGING SCHEDULE AGAIN FOR THIS FALL," said Bryce Blumenthal, a WDFW coastal shellfish biologist.

"THE TIDES THIS YEAR WILL ALLOW FOR CLAM GATHERING OPPORTUNITY IN THE LEAD UP TO THE THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS, ALONG WITH HARVESTABLE DAYLIGHT DIGS FOR THE LATE AFTERNOONS OF NEW YEAR'S EVE AND NEW YEAR'S DAY."

Summer assessment surveys conducted by WDFW and tribal co-managers showed a relatively stable population of razor clams on all four beaches. Kalaloch Beach along the northern Olympic Peninsula coast won't be open due to continuing issues with depressed populations of harvestable clams.

Here are the razor clam tentative series of dates:

OCT. 6, 7, 10, & 11

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

AND OCT. 8, 9, & 12

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

OCT. 22, 23, & 26

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

OCT. 20, 21, 24 & 25

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

NOV. 3, 4, 7, & 8

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

NOV. 5, 6, & 9

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

NOV. 19, 20, & 23

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

NOV. 18, 21, & 22

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

DEC. 3, 4, 7, & 8

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

DEC. 2, 5, & 6

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

DEC. 19, 20, & 23

at Long Beach, Twin Harbor, and Mocrocks.

DEC. 18, 21, & 22

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

JAN. 2, 3, & 6

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

DEC. 31, AND JAN. 1, 4, & 5

at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

All beach openings are dependent on final approval of marine toxin testing, which usually occurs about a week or less prior to the start of each digging series. The Washington Department of Health requires two test samples taken seven to 10 days apart, and domoic acid levels must fall under the guideline level before a beach opens for digging. Domoic acid, a natural toxin produced by certain types of marine algae, can be harmful or fatal if consumed in sufficient quantities.

Most successful digging occurs between one and two hours before the listed time of low tide. No digging is allowed before noon during digs when low tide occurs in the afternoon or evening.

During the 2024-25 season, a total of 109 digging days at the four beaches were offered from Oct. 3 through May 15. During that time, 312,716 digger trips were made with a total harvest of 3,957,859 razor clams harvested. At Long Beach, 96,152 digger trips saw 1,253,207 razor clams harvested for an average of 12.7 clams per person; at Twin Harbors, it was



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98,096 with 1,369,969 for 12.7; at Copalis, it was 66,628 with 804,903 for 11.9; and at Mocrocks, it was 51,840 with 629,781 for 12.0.

On all open beaches – Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks, and Copalis – the daily limit is 15 clams per person. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container, and all diggers must keep the first 15 clams they dig, regardless of size or condition.

"IT'S IMPORTANT THAT DIGGERS KEEP THE CLAMS THEY DIG TO PREVENT WASTAGE (INCLUDES DISCARDING SMALL CLAMS, CLAMS WITH BROKEN SHELLS, OR REBURYING UNWANTED CLAMS),"

Blumenthal said. **"IT'S NOT UNUSUAL TO ENCOUNTER SOME SMALL CLAMS, ESPECIALLY THIS EARLY IN THE SEASON."**

All diggers age 16 or older must have an applicable fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licenses can be purchased from WDFW's licensing website and from hundreds of license vendors around the state. WDFW recommends buying your license before visiting coastal beach communities.

WDFW reminds beachgoers to avoid disturbing nesting snowy plovers – a small sand-colored shorebird – by staying out of the dunes

and posted areas along the sandy beach coastline. Snowy plover nests are nearly invisible, and it is vital to give birds the space to live and thrive during the nesting period, especially along the southern end of Twin Harbors, known as Midway Beach, and north of Second Avenue in Ocean City to the north end of Copalis Beach and the north end of Long Beach. Avoid leaving leftover food or trash on the beach and picnic areas, keep pets on a leash, stay out of dunes, and avoid areas marked with posted signs.

When driving on the beach, please respect the 25-mph speed limit and enter only at designated access points. Stay on the hard-packed sand near the high tide line to avoid crushing clam beds, buried female Dungeness crab, and snowy plover nests.

The 2025-26 Razor Clam Management Plan will be available soon on the WDFW's website. WDFW welcomes public input on proposed razor clam schedules and considers this feedback when finalizing each season's digs. Public comments may be emailed to razorclams@dfw.wa.gov.

For more information, refer to the WDFW's razor clam webpage at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfishing-regulations/razor-clams>.

LOOK FOR DECENT OCTOBER TROUT FISHING

It's beginning to feel a lot like autumn as temperatures drop, the sun fades away much sooner, leaves are falling, and trout have become active in many statewide lakes.

While the bulk of trout plants occurred back in spring, many of those fish are still waiting to be caught, and some have grown larger in size, plus WDFW hatcheries continue

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to add more fish into lakes. The seasonal lakes remain open for trout fishing through Oct. 31, while others are open for year-round.

Some fair to good seasonal westside lakes include Pine, Wilderness, Langlois, Toad, Margaret, Whatcom, Steel, Summit, Bosworth, Ki, Storm, McMurray, Sixteen, Erie, Silver (Whatcom County), and Padden.

The top lakes east of the Cascades are Jameson in Douglas; Ellen in Ferry; Starvation in Stevens; Wapato in Chelan;

Pearrygin; and Conconully Lake and Reservoir in Okanogan. You can track trout plants on the WDFW website at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/reports/stocking/trout-plants>.

To sweeten the deal, WDFW's Trout Derby continues to offer anglers a chance to catch a tagged fish and win a prize through Oct. 31.

The derby – which began in late-April – features more than 100 lakes planted with fish that have an orange tag attached near their dorsal fin.

If you catch one, be sure to keep the tag to claim your prize. For derby details, go to <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/contests/trout-derby>.

Heading into November, WDFW hatchery staff will be busy leading up to Black Friday by stocking thousands of jumbo rainbow trout, weighing up to three pounds apiece and measuring longer than 14 inches, in lakes covering an area from the Puget Sound region to southwest Washington, as well as a few eastern Washington lakes and ponds.

The Black Friday program, created more than a decade ago by WDFW, looked at ways to raise thousands of rainbow trout for a late-season fishery in select year-round lakes. This post-Thanksgiving fishery has been a hit among anglers looking for options


to go fishing at a time when choices are skinny. Before heading out the door, be sure to check for lakes that are open or closed, and regulations at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/>.

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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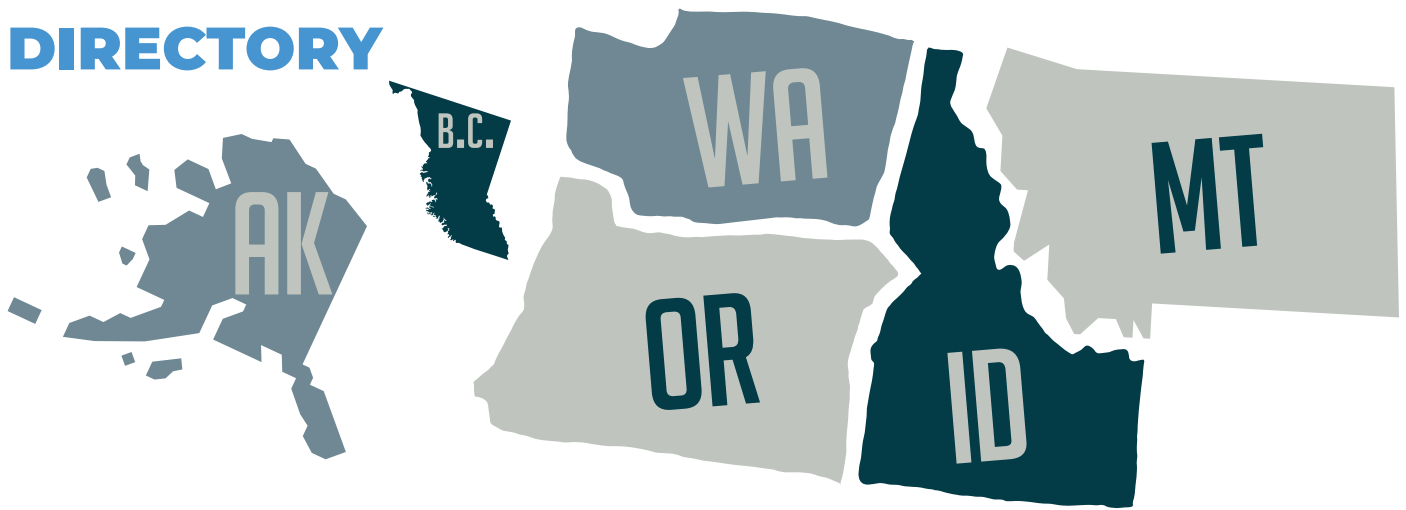
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