

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 3

NOV - DEC, 2025

NORTHWEST FISHING

EXPLORING

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TOSSING HARDWARE
FOR COHO



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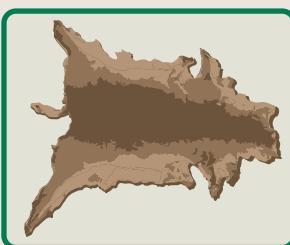
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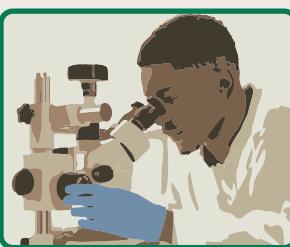
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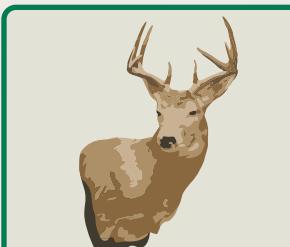
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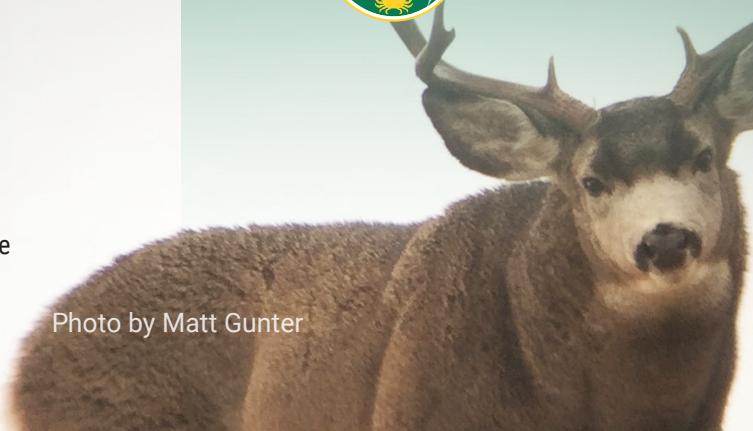


Photo by Matt Gunter

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EDITOR'S CORNER:

November and December offer Pacific NW anglers some of the best river fishing for big coho that can be found. Late-run fish can be found in numerous river systems, and they "cut nice" with deep red meat, good for both grilling and smoking. There's something about the crisp fall days, leaves having turned beautiful hues of red and yellow, and trails to the river covered with leaves. The smells of the forest alone are worth the drive. And the fishing? Well, coho can bite great one day and be lock-jawed the next, so bring your dose of patience. When you do hook into these late fall fish, the fight will be memorable! Hannah delivers a primer on hardware fishing for coho that will give you some good starting pointers.

One the other side of the coin, steelhead. Recent news of more hatcheries closing is a somber reminder not to take things for granted.

Enjoy your time on the water!

- Mike Carey, Northwest Fishing



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STEELHEAD ARE BITERS, DUDE



The solunar tables said the first day of spring would be poor for fishing, but there was a window in the morning when fish would bite best. The forecast called for one low-pressure cell after another, but between storms, there would be a bump in the pressure. I always think back to what a friend of mine told me on a day not unlike this one.

When the river is high, green and dropping, when the pressure rises, when the moon is waxing, when there are fish in the river. That's when I want to fish.

My grandpa used to point me to the barometer and tell me when the fishing was good and when it wasn't. It didn't make a lot of sense then, but I watch the barometer before every trip now. We picked the day months before, hoping to maximize our chances of tangling with big steelhead.

"Steelhead are biters, dude!" I remind myself when

the rainwater is dripping around the brim of my hat.

Dan Cardot and I made the drive the night before, ate too much fried food too late, and checked into one of those classic Highway 101 motel rooms with paper-thin walls, moldy carpets, and dirty blankets. We saved three bucks over the next more expensive motel. I would have paid \$50 more to stay a mile away if I'd had any inkling of what an active pair our motel room neighbors were.

That fresh ocean air can be invigorating.

After an hour of sleep and a Denny's breakfast, Brad Hanson met us in a pool of metal halogen light in the parking lot at Tillamook Sporting Goods. Only one river was in decent condition. The night was still in full Stygian blackness as we drove up the narrow road. I parked the Ford at the lower end of the first float and we drove five miles upstream, sipping at our coffees.

In the dark, we pushed Hanson's Clackacraft off the trailer, tugged on waders, and, as the first sliver of light broke over the tops of the cedars, Hanson sat down at the sticks. We floated into the current. With a couple of other drift boats in the river, we traded first water for a few runs, then turned a corner with one boat in front of us. They pulled anchor to stay ahead.

Here, the river made a right turn, broke across a gravel bar on river right, and frothed over a ledge with a pocket behind a moss-covered boulder. On the far side, the bank ran jagged into the current. A nice riffle of broken water tumbled through aquamarine, then the river browned out over a gravel tail.

At the business end, our baits were steelhead roe with a small yarnie, sweetened up with Pro-Cure Winter Chrome. Cardot pitched a cast upriver; his bait and float

GARY LEWIS

PRAY FOR A DAY WHEN THE RIVER IS HIGH, GREEN, AND ON THE DROP.

splashed down along the seam, and the float tipped up, caught in the current. Cardot's bobber zagged upstream, and he set the hook into a silver streak of fury. It cartwheeled and tailwalked from the top of the run all the way to the tailout and flashed in the sun. Bright as a new-minted nickel.

For a few tense minutes, we thought we'd have to follow it through the rapids. We didn't care about first water anymore. We wanted this water. When Cardot took the pressure off, the fish nosed back into the current and came back into the pool. Hanson dropped the anchor and jumped over the side to net the fish over the gravel bar. Cardot cradled it a moment and let it kick into the green water.

Five casts later, my float plunged, and we were fast into another, this one seven pounds, a rainbow-colored male.

Beneath us, the river was clearing, and the fish, fresh from the salt, kept eating our baits. Cardot's third fish ran the last 400 yards of our float, and Hanson netted it at the takeout. We drove back upstream to get Hanson's rig and then parked it at the next takeout down, breathing deep of that Tillamook dairy air.

When the rain started, we picked up a 12-pound wild hen, just four miles up from the salt. As wild as the morning of creation, as bright and fueled with the ocean's bounty as any fish I've ever caught.

This one I wanted to keep, but I couldn't and turned it back to make more wild steelhead.

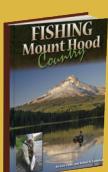
The rivers begin to swell with winter steelhead in late December, and each tide brings in new fish through January and February. Pick a day. Put it on the calendar. Tie leaders, sharpen hooks, and fill spools with fresh line. March is prime for winter runs, but there are still fresh fish on every tide well into April.

If there is rain in the forecast, if the water is high, if a low-pressure system is coming in over the beach, it doesn't matter much. Soak the baits. Thump the hardware. Swing those flies deep and slow. Steelhead are biters, dude.



GARY LEWIS BIO

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



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Tossing Hardware for Coho

Hannah Pennebaker

November is here, bringing chilly winds and icy rains. Although the year is almost over, the good news is that the coho run is not. Many rivers, coastal ones in particular, hold late-running fish from November well into December and January. But how do you get these fish in your cooler?

Bait has its time and place. For picky A run fish in clear, low water conditions, eggs are king. November is the perfect time to start using hardware for these big and aggressive B-run fish. Let's go over how to use spinners and spoons for these late B run coho.

Spinners

If I had to pick my favorite way to fish for coho, it would be throwing spinners. The takedown is aggressive, and there is no question when you have a fish on. Spinners are a great way to search for fish when you aren't sure where they are holding. Cast and retrieve in a spot several times, then walk down 10

steps

and repeat until you get a bite. Late-run fish are more aggressive and more likely to strike a well-presented spinner. It's a good idea to bring weighted and unweighted spinners. Make sure to use a bead chain or two attached to a snap swivel so you can change between the types of spinners easily. Unweighted spinners such as Wicked Lures can be fished with a variety of different inline weights according to the depth and speed of the run you're at, making them incredibly versatile. I carry inline weights between 1/4 oz and 1/2 oz. Wicked Lures come in a variety of different colors and sizes. I like the pink/green ones as well as the black/pink ones for most conditions.

Alternatively, weighted spinners such as Blue Foxes are a great option as well. Use small, dark size 3 spinners in clear conditions, and bright size 5 or 6 spinners in murky conditions. Fish will chase down spinners and aggressively chomp them, making for a fun fight.

Vibrax spinners have a lot of drag and tend to ride higher in the water column than torpedo spinners. Use the right spinner for the conditions!

Spoons

Much like spinners, spoons are an effective way to search the run for aggressive fish. Spoons can be fished a multitude of ways for coho. You can drift small spoons like Dick Nites or throw larger ones, like Little Cleos and Kastmasters. Smaller spoons wobble and dart when drifted like a cork and a yarn. Many northern Puget Sound anglers use this technique with great success. Use a 3-6ft leader and don't change out the hook- no matter how tempting it is! Bigger hooks would change the action of the spoon. The stock hook works just fine as long as you don't horse the fish in. Cast upstream and follow the drift with your rod tip, using just enough lead to tick the bottom every few seconds. It takes some patience and time to learn what a bite feels like.



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It can be subtle, so don't wait to set the hook until you feel headshakes.

For larger spoons, it's tempting to fish them like a spinner, but the technique is slightly different. Cast upstream and allow your spoon to sink. Point your rod at the spoon and mend your line as it drifts downstream. Feed out the line as necessary to keep the spoon slowly wobbling near the bottom. The action drives coho crazy! The takedown is much like a spinner bite- aggressive and unmistakable. 50/50 colors work well in most water conditions. It's a good idea to keep a variety of different spoon shapes and colors to see what the fish key in on. Every day is different, and every fish is different.

Setups

Rods and reels for hardware fishing tend to be based mostly on personal preference. While some anglers prefer to use a heavier, shorter rod, I like to use a light and long noodle rod. I find that these absorb the headshakes and jumps much better than a short, stiff rod. They also allow me to cast light spinners when the conditions call for it. Pair your rod with a size 3000 to 4000 reel.

I highly recommend using braided line with a monofilament top shot. This allows you to have the sensitivity of braid, but if you break off, you'll leave monofilament in the river instead of braid, which will break down much sooner. 8-17lb rated rods work great, but I've used 6-12lb rods as well. Use at least an 8ft rod. For my leader line, I use 10-15lb fluorocarbon. I find it has good abrasion resistance but also looks almost invisible in the water. Tighten your drag, but loosen it up after your hookset. Remember, these B run fish are big, hook-nosed brutes. You're in for a fun fight!

Now is the time of year to perfect your hardware technique for those large, aggressive B-run coho. Spinners and spoons can be used in both slow and fast water, making them a versatile technique. Not every river is open in November, so make sure to check both the regulations and emergency rules before heading out. Pinch those barbs or buy barbless hooks if required; it never hurts to double-check. The Fish Washington app is a great resource!



WINTER TRAILERING

BY RANDY CASTELLO

Being a sportsman, it is likely that you own at least one trailer. Whether it be one or more boat trailers, the utility trailer you use once a year to haul gear to high camp, or even motorcycle trailers, they all need a little TLC for winter duties.

The late Patrick McManus addressed life with trailers in his book "The Grasshopper Trap", a collection of short stories. A few quotes from his story "Trailer Trials" may find their way into this article.

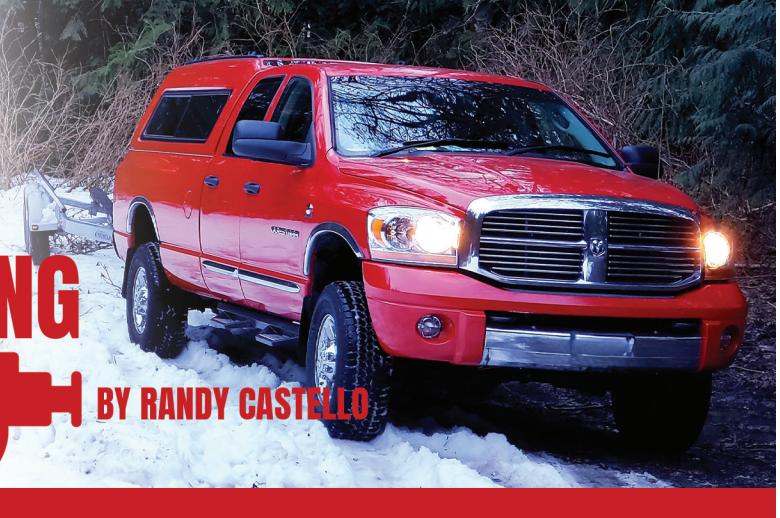
"Over the course of his life, any sportsman worthy of the name will own a dozen or so trailers of various kinds—utility trailers, tent trailers, boat trailers, house trailers, horse trailers, trail-bike trailers, and snowmobile trailers, to name but a few."

- Patrick F. McManus

With all these trailers cluttering up the driveway, it is probably a good idea to create a Winter Trailer Maintenance Checklist. Below are a few suggestions for maintenance checklist items, but be sure to customize the list for your specific needs:

WINTER TRAILER MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

- Check your tire pressure.
- Check the spare tire condition.
- Check your tires for wear and correct inflation.
- Check Bearing Buddies or the oil bath sight glass for condition
- Check brake pads, shoes, brake drums, and hydraulic lines.
- Check the brake fluid reservoir.
- Check the trailer lights.
- Check the trailer for overall condition
- Check trailer and payload for unauthorized passengers, cats, raccoons, and wasp nests.
- Ball mounts and Safety chains
- Hitch and ball mount
- Check payload tiedowns.



TIRES

Check tires for condition and proper inflation before each trip. Check tread depth for uneven wear, damage, cracking, and bulges. Include the spare in your tire check. Make sure the spare tire lock is functional. The spare tire for my drift boat trailer is mounted under the trailer tongue. The lock gets seriously fouled with mud, road grime, and ice.

BEARING BUDDIES & OIL BATH BEARINGS

Failed wheel bearings are often a preventable source of trailer troubles. Bearings can get rusty if they are contaminated by water. Most boat trailers are equipped with Bearing Buddy Bearing Protectors or oil bath hubs. Bearing Buddys use a spring-loaded piston to hold grease in the wheel bearings to displace

any water. With oil bath bearings, the bearings run in a sealed cavity filled with oil. Typically, there will be a sight window that allows you to assess the level and condition of the oil.

Servicing Bearing Buddys is easy. An occasional pump of waterproof grease is really all that is required between bearing repacks. Depending on usage, they should be repacked and inspected every 1 to 3 years. Oil bath bearings should be checked for leakage, oil level, white frothy contamination, or very dark oil regularly. There isn't really a recommended teardown interval. If you see any signs of contamination or water in the oil, it's time to service them.

BRAKES

If you launch your boat in salt water, it's important to rinse the trailer brakes as soon as possible after you retrieve the boat. Trailer brakes may be disc-type (with brake pads) or drum-type (with shoes). Just like the brake pads or shoes on your tow vehicle, trailer brakes will wear with use. Inspect or have the pads or shoes inspected every few seasons. You can combine brake service with wheel bearing service. This can be handled via DIY, a general

auto repair service, or even some tire stores can handle this job. Be sure to also check the brake lines for signs of rust and cracking.

Brake Fluid

Check the brake fluid reservoir in the master cylinder (on the trailer tongue) a couple of times a season, following instructions in the trailer owner's manual. The fluid level will go down as the pads wear. If the level is suddenly very low, you could have a leak in the brake system, which should be repaired immediately.

Trailer Lights

"One eighth of a sportsman's life is spent trying to hook up trailer lights."

- Patrick F. McManus

And if the wife tries to help, *"The divorce rate among trailer owners is nine times that of the general population."*

- Patrick F. McManus

Be sure to check your trailer lights every time you hook up the trailer. It is a good idea to protect the trailer light connector pigtail on your trailer when not towing to prevent corrosion from forming. Many will have a plastic cap that fits over the connector, or even a small plastic bag with a twist tie will get the job done.

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A little dielectric grease will also help prevent corrosion. Bad grounds are often the cause of trailer light failure. The ground wire should be white and secured to the trailer. Locate the connection point and evaluate for corrosion or broken wires. Make sure there is a good, clean ground path with the trailer frame.

Most new trailers have LED lights. Aside from ground issues, LEDs are reliable and more or less trouble-free. Older trailers with incandescent bulbs, on the other hand... Even with proper care and feeding will frequently burn out, sometimes between the boat ramp and home! Keep a stash of the correct bulbs and a small tube of dielectric grease handy.

"Shortly after man invented the wheel, he invented the trailer. Ever since then, he has been trying to figure out how to hook up the lights."

Patrick F. McManus**TIE-DOWNS**

Check the condition of your tiedowns. It may be a good idea to store them somewhere out of the elements, but then you have to remember to install them before you hit the road. Even if your boat is heavy, use some form of tie-down straps. Years ago, I was pulling my offshore sportfishing boat down the 22 Freeway in Southern California. A car bounced off the K-barrier and spun right in front of me. I had to slam on the brakes hard to keep from hitting it. I managed to stop in time without jackknifing. With the traffic stopped, I got out of the truck to check on the boat. Where I had thought that it was heavy enough to stay put, one of the tie-down straps had broken. Fortunately, the safety chain prevented the boat from going airborne and landing on my truck.

BALL MOUNTS, TRAILER HITCH RECEIVERS, & SAFETY CHAINS

Check the ball mount and receiver for any obvious signs of damage. Be sure the ball is the correct size for the trailer hitch and is secured to the ball mount. Check the pin holding the ball mount in the receiver. Look at its condition and verify that any locking feature is functional. Regarding safety chains, all trailers should have 2 different safety chain setups. One secures the boat to the trailer, and the other secures the trailer to the tow vehicle. Make sure that both are connected properly and in good condition.

"Trailer hitches can be a problem, although they are nothing compared with trailer lights. The hitch simply clamps down over a steel ball on the car. The steel balls come in three sizes—too large, too small, and just right." - Patrick F. McManus

"Safety chains, by the way, are required on all trailers. Their purpose, should the hitch come loose, is to rip the rear end off the towing vehicle, thus further punishing you for using the wrong ball."

- Patrick F. McManus

WINTER DRIVING

Double-check your trailer and tires, being sure to check the tire pressure. Consider running mud and snow tires on your trailer. They can help prevent the trailer from sliding around.

Properly fitted chains are your friend in icy conditions. If you tow a trailer during inclement weather, never use the cruise control. Drive with a plan, no sudden stops or hard turns. If you miss an exit or turn, continue to the next safe place to turn around. It is a good idea to keep a bag of kitty litter or sand and a shovel in the back of your tow vehicle. The added weight will improve your traction and can be used under the tires for extra grip if needed. Know when to say no, we need to pull over, or even we're going to leave it in the driveway.

STORAGE

If you're storing your rig for winter, try to find a covered location like a garage or barn to protect it from the elements. Otherwise, invest in a breathable or ventilated tarp. Pull all drain plugs and ensure there is no water in the washdown pump or livewell system. To keep water from pooling, try to store your boat a little bow high if possible. If your boat is an outboard, tilt the motor down to the running position to prevent freeze damage to the internal components or lower unit.



It is also a good idea to jack up the axles and block them to prevent damage to the tires or bearings during long-term storage. Tire covers can help prevent tire UV damage.

CONCLUSION

As your winter work week ends and you feel the need to get up 3 hours before your alarm would normally go off, then hook up the boat or hunting trailer to hit the road. Be sure to take a few minutes to ensure your rig is winter roadworthy. In closing, a few more quotes from our friend Patrick McManus.

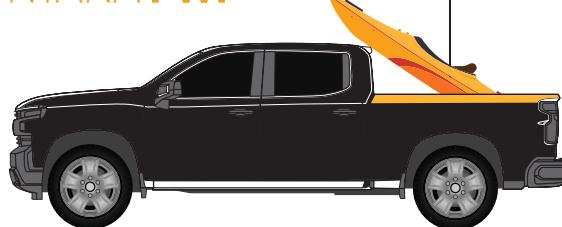
"Rancid was poor. He didn't seem to know that he was poor, however, and I never had the heart to tell him, because he was the happiest person I'd ever met. If he had known he was poor, of course, then he would have been sad and miserable all the time. As it was, Rancid was able to live out his whole life in blissful ignorance of the fact that he was poor."

*- Patrick F. McManus
(They Shoot Canoes,
Don't They?)*

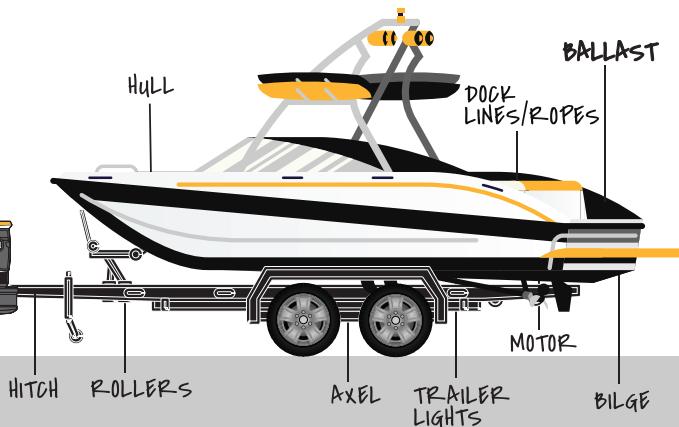
"My grandmother had actually known some real mountain men back in the old days, but she had never taken a liking to them. She said they drank and swore and spit tobacco and never took baths, and fought and bragged and lied all the time. I don't recall, however, that she ever mentioned what was bad about them."

- Patrick McManus,

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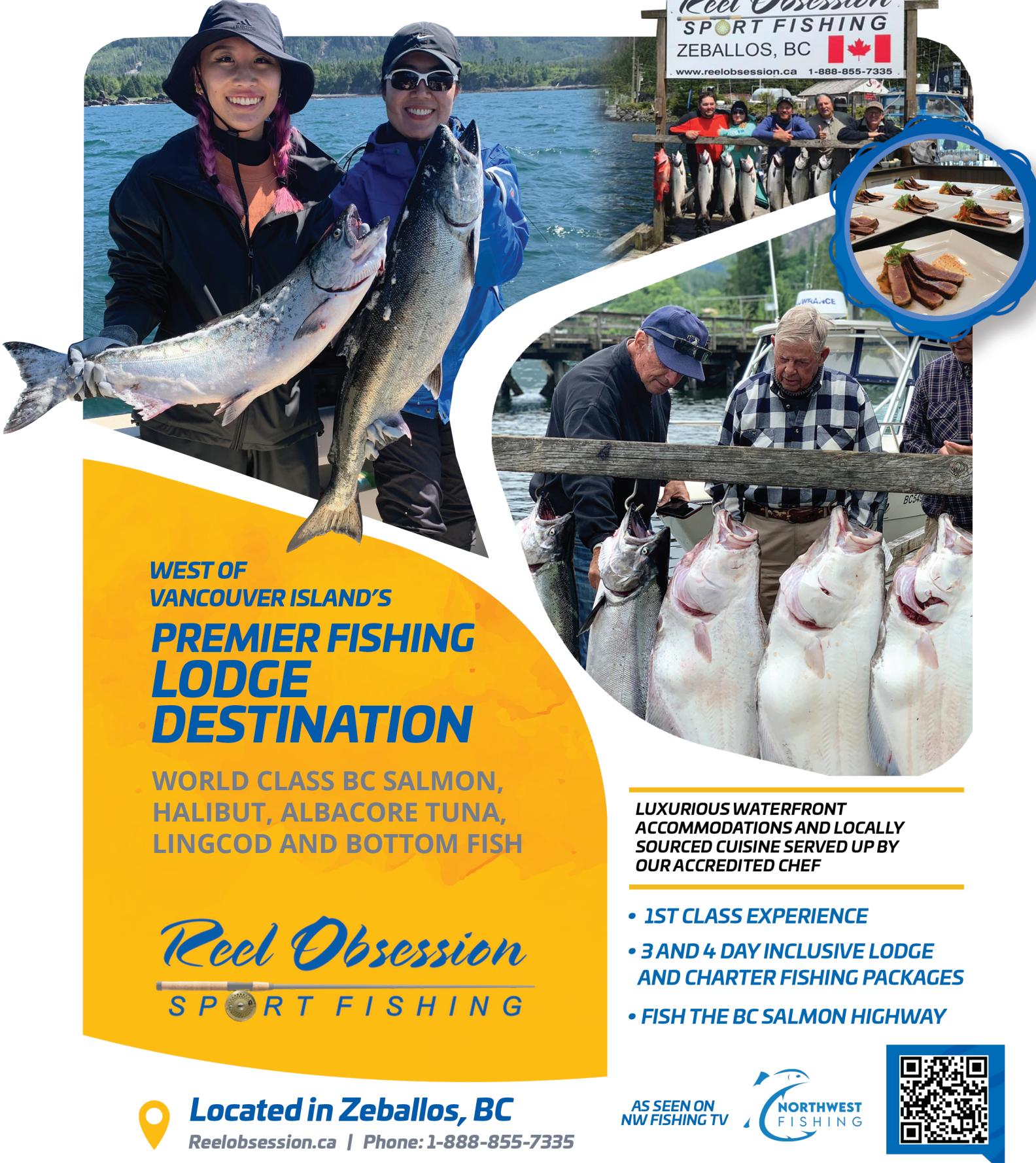


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BY MATT CAREY

Get outside. It's as simple as that. If you come across Joe Pesci defending a pair of kids in a court of law, he might refer to them as "the two yutes". Those same youth might phrase it as "touching grass". I stretched for that one, admittedly, but you can guess which 90's classic movie I watched recently and had a good chuckle about. The grass part is what I especially want to highlight, particularly given the changing seasons and time for many of us to shift our focus away from fishing to other activities. Don't get me wrong, fishing in the fall and winter months can be tremendously fun and also yield quite a bite if you know what to target, where

to target it, and when to do so. Some might make an argument that it's the best time to go fishing, given the abundance of baitfish swimming around and the reduced number of anglers as the temperature drops. That aside, I'd like you instead to think about the wind on your face, the sound of birds calling one another from a distance, and the rustle of the trees and grass as animals follow their trails. Here in Montana, Fish, Wildlife & Parks' slogan, among others, is that "The outside is in us all". Whether that be on the water fishing for dinner, hiking a trail, or hunting, we shouldn't shy away from enjoying the outdoors even when the temperature begins to dip.

HIKING

To those fortunate enough to live near a mountain, or at least a small hill, hiking has to be one of the "go-to" activities as the calendar flips to fall and winter. Early in the fall, the air is crisp, and a light coat or even a t-shirt can be more than enough to keep you comfortable while exerting yourself up thousands of feet of elevation. Like many aspects of the outdoors, the payoff is often found in the culmination of the hike. Reaching the summit. Getting to the top. Climbing the mountain. Being able to take a few minutes to soak up the sights from a mountain peak is something that everyone should experience with some level of regularity.



If not an everyday or week type of trip, certainly one that should be done annually. And what better time to do it than when the colors start to change, a light snowpack covers the foreground, and a beautiful mixture of early descending sunsets shines just perfectly on the horizon with the moisture in the air. As many of you know, I am fortunate enough to live in Montana with what are certainly thousands of trails scattered throughout the state. In just my hometown, I can take an afternoon hike up nearly 5,500 feet and over 36 trails.

It's a palace I've been to many times - with my dog, with my kid, with my brother. Sometimes with a goal of reaching the top and other times just to see how far I might get and who all I might say hello to as I spend some time with the rocky gravel beneath my feet. If you have not explored a good mountain recently, take this as your sign to do so.

HUNTING

I'm sure many of you circle particular days on your calendar. Birthdays, holidays, celebratory events, or sad anniversaries get a little easier as time goes on. One day regularly circled on my calendar, in fact, even added as an event on my work calendar, is opening day for bird hunting. Like clockwork, that second Saturday in October comes around, and pheasant season is open to any hunter with a 12-gauge and a good hunting dog.

Similar to the hiking experience, those who partake are going to be putting some mileage on their bodies, most likely. The combined benefit of a good cardiovascular workout as you trek through varying terrain cannot be overstated. Many times during those early-season hunts when I'm not quite in shape, I'll noticeably feel the strain in my quads and hamstrings after having kicked around cattails taller than I am for 3



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hours in pursuit of a rooster. Maybe hunting small game isn't your thing. That's fine, too. For those who enjoy filling a freezer, the start of hunting season can mean adding some precious wild game to your diet for the coming months. Nothing quite tastes as exquisite as a good elk steak... except for maybe some elk burger. And, of course, deer are an abundant resource to be harvested along with herds and herds of pronghorns running along the freshly cut farmland.

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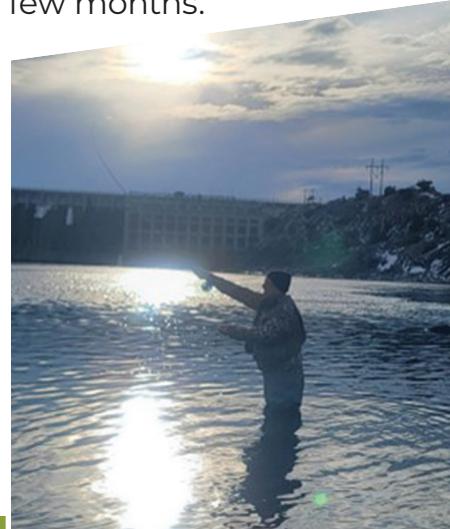
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fresh venison jerky or a few pounds of frozen elk is a quick way to do it. Like the experience of hiking the mountains, hunting provides a level of solitude that cannot be matched or described unless you're fortunate enough to experience it yourself.

THE TRIPLE THREAT

The solitude and reflection, I think, are what make all three of these fall and winter activities as special as they are. Whether hiking, hunting, or, of course, fishing, we get to experience something in the moment that many others yearn for.

Connection with the outdoors. Time away from the hustle and bustle of "real" life. The chance to think about how we fit into the bigger picture of life and the world. If you're lucky enough, you'll get to do all three in these next few months.





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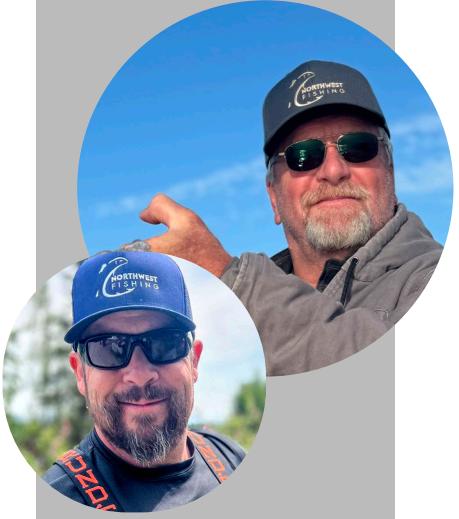
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Spoon Theory

Gary Lewis



Tips and tricks for trolling for hatchery rainbow trout in cooling water.

If there is one best time of year for trout fishing, it's fall when the insect life is fading away and trout that have been fattening all summer are starting to feel the pinch of empty bellies.

Trout that are going to make it through the winter have to switch from eating insects to eating minnows. This is the time of the year to put baitfish imitations to use. Trout are full of energy and will go a long way to hit a shiny bit of metal.

On those days when we launch the boat in the early morning. When the water is glass, we know the fish are elevated. It can be fun to put a small spoon in play.

PLANNING THE TRIP

Before you back up to the boat trailer, take a look at a map and click up myodfw.com to get an idea of some Oregon waters that will definitely get fresh stocks of fish in the early fall.

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This is the time of year when hatchery trout stocking ramps up again. Water levels are beginning to fall, and ambient temperatures are good for trout

Most fish & wildlife agencies post their stocking schedules on public websites. Weather changes, the price of fuel, and emergencies can change the timing of fish releases, but it's a good idea to comb the stocking schedules.

Top bets in the Willamette region (an easy drive for anglers from Portland, Salem, or Eugene) include North Fork Reservoir (on the Clackamas River), Foster Reservoir, Trillium Lake, Dexter Reservoir, Hills Creek Reservoir, and Dorena Reservoir.

Most lakes get the "legals", which average 8 to 12 inches, but a person can put more poundage in a

trout limit by targeting the "trophy size" trout that are older, better fed, and better fighters. If a lake gets 5,000 legals in the season, it might also get 250 trophies and a few brood stock trout that can tip the scales at five pounds or more. Premier fisheries that get a lot of angling attention, like any larger reservoir with campgrounds and mountain views within a two-hour drive of a metropolitan area, are likely to get a couple of stockings of brood fish or trophies every season.

It's all there in the stocking schedule. Except it's not.

BEHIND THE SCENES

A lot of what happens behind the scenes does not show up in the hatchery schedule. Sometimes there is an abundance of brood stock or surplus steelhead in the system that need to go somewhere. Another thing to watch for is

when a lake is drained for maintenance or to kill trash fish. When the lake fills up again, the fisheries department scrambles to fill it with trout.

Then there are the lakes that are never on the stocking schedule, but they magically have hatchery trout every season, and plenty of them. What's up with that?

Some reservoirs are not on the published stocking schedule because they are managed by agencies or municipalities, or utility companies with their own hatcheries. These can be some of the best destinations. Think about it. A power company built the dam, and part of the negotiation with the tribe or the community that permitted the dam was to provide a fishery. So every year, they are contractually obligated to populate the lake with some 30,000 trout. They're going to do it, but chances are they aren't taking the time to put it on a list somewhere.



Gary Lewis Bio

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

That's a lot of silvery slabs vying for a chance at a slow-trolled trout spoon.

SPOONAGE

There are a lot of spoons on the market, and they all have their place, but when we are talking about catching a limit of hatchery "legals" and "trophies", the best choice is one and a half to two inches long, like the Mepps Syclops, Triple Teaser, Thomas, Jerry Leo, Z-Ray, and Acme Little Cleo.

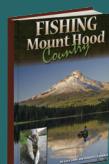
In most cases, a spoon should be trolled slowly so that it wobbles side to side. The slower the better. I like the speed at less than 1 mile per hour, up to 1.5 miles per hour, and if I can, I try to keep it at zero-point-nine. This can be accomplished some days on a wind drift, but a bow-mount trolling motor is pretty consistent.

There are exceptions. In some lakes, the fish are used to chasing baitfish. This is the case on Upper Klamath and Agency Lakes, where sometimes you can't reel fast enough.

The spoon itself could be an Acme Kastmaster, Little Cleo, or Thomas Buoyant, maybe in the 1/6-ounce class. Every lake fishes a little differently, so it helps to have local knowledge. Frog patterns can be important, as are brown trout, chub, rainbow, and perch colors, depending on the local bait.

Sometimes we put a flasher in front of the spoon with a 15-inch leader. Another trick we like is to add a touch of Pro-Cure's trophy trout scent to the spoon. And it never hurts to tip the hook with a bit of worm, corn, or a salmon egg.

Trout that are going to carry over through the cold months have to start eating baitfish. Put baitfish imitations like trolling spoons to work. Trout are supercharged in the cold water and will chase up and down in the water column to hit a shiny bit of metal.



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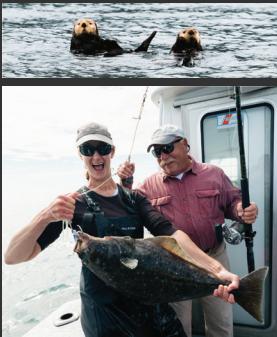
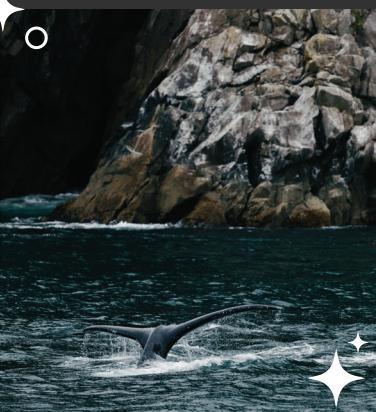
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BLACK FRIDAY TROUT

BY MARK YUASA

Sure, the weather outside is frightful at this time of the year, but that won't stop thousands of anglers from skipping out on the shopping malls and opting to go trout fishing instead!

"The holidays are great to spend quality time outdoors with family and friends, avoid the mall shopping madness and maybe even catch a fish,"

said Steve Caromile, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

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Inland Fish Program manager. The fishing wish list just grew twofold as WDFW hatchery crews have been busy leading up to Black Friday by shuttling 64,350 jumbo-sized rainbow trout, averaging 1 to 2 pounds apiece, into 25 lakes around the Puget Sound region and southwest Washington, as well as several Eastern Washington lakes and ponds.

BLACK FRIDAY TROUT PLANTS INCLUDE:

Chelan County: Roses, 20,000

Clark County: Battleground, 2,000; and Klineline, 2,000.

Cowlitz County: Kress, 2,000.

Island County: x-Cranberry, 4,000.

King County: x-Alice, 1,000; x-Beaver, 2,500; and x-Green, 5,000.

Klickitat County: Rowland, 2,000.

Lewis County: Fort Borst Park Pond, 2,000; and South Lewis County Park Pond, 2,000.

Pacific County: Cases Pond, 300.

Pierce County: American, 2,000; and Tanwax, 1,350.

Snohomish County: x-Ballinger, 3,000; x-Blackmans, 1,500; x-Gissburg Ponds, 1,500; x-Silver, 3,000; and x-Tye, 2,000.

Thurston County: Black, 3,000; Long, 1,000; and Offutt, 1,000.

Yakima County: I-82 Pond #4, 2,000.

The Black Friday program, created more than a decade ago by WDFW, came up with a creative way to stock thousands of rainbow trout for a late-season fishery in year-round lakes. The post-Thanksgiving holiday fishing option has been a hit for anglers looking to wet a line at a time when the choices are sparse.

In October, a good number of other year-round lakes around Washington were also planted with trout for anglers who want to head before Thanksgiving. You can find trout stocking information that is usually updated weekly by going

to the WDFW webpage at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/reports/stocking>.

(x-Around 50% of the planned trout stocking occurred in October in the noted lakes, and the remainder will be stocked in time for Black Friday) There are four Eastern Washington lakes opening on Black Friday that were stocked with trout fry this past spring that should be averaging 8 to 10 inches, plus some other larger fish were stocked of late.

Eastern Washington lakes trout plants include:
Stevens County: Hatch Lake, 15,000 fry stocked

in May, and 600 trout averaging 1 pound apiece stocked in October; and Williams Lake, 12,000 fry stocked in May, and 1,500 trout averaging a quarter pound apiece stocked in mid-April.

Adams/Lincoln County:

Fourth of July Lake, 60,000 fry stocked in May, and 18,000 trout averaging a quarter pound apiece stocked in mid-April.

Spokane County: Hog Canyon Lake, 20,000 fry stocked in May, 10,000 trout averaging a quarter pound apiece stocked in mid-April, and 1,600 trout averaging 1 pound apiece stocked in October.

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BEFORE YOU GO

When fishing for trout, don't overthink the necessary fishing gear. A basic trout rod and reel averages \$50 to \$90, and a higher-end set is about \$100 to \$200. The rod should be light and limber in the 6 to 7 foot range with a 4- to 10-pound line weight range. A medium-sized spinning reel with a capacity to hold more than 100 yards of 6- to 8-pound test fishing line will do the job right.

From the mainline, attach one or two number 8 or 9 egg sinkers with a rubber bumper just above a

small barrel swivel. Avoid the cheap store-bought pre-tied 12-inch leaders that are way too short in length. Either tie your own leaders or spend a few extra dollars on pre-tied versions in 3- to 8-pound test that measure 18 to 30 inches long. A smaller size 12 or 14 egg hook is the best choice when using a moldable dough bait or nugget, salmon eggs, worm pieces, or maggots. For live bait such as a whole worm, nightcrawler, or marshmallow, the optimal hook size is a size 8 or 10 worm hook. If you use an artificial fly, the stick with

a size #14 hook or smaller. A hook that is too big or exposed may scare away the fish, and one that is too small may result in fewer hook-ups. Lastly, make sure your hooks are sharp and sticky. Most anglers casting from the banks or in a boat will stick with the popular moldable dough baits, which come in a variety of colors, and some are shaped like a salmon egg, marshmallow, maggot, or worm. The old school baits include salmon eggs, worms/nightcrawlers, maggots, and marshmallows.

From a boat troll a gang-

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flasher with a hook tipped with a piece of worm, maggot, or salmon egg, along with a tiny piece of scented dough bait or a liquid scent. A small spoon or spinner also gets its fair share of bites.

From the shoreline, cast out a small-sized bobber with your bait sitting just below the surface in 3 to 8 feet of water. Others like to go deeper, where it hangs just a few feet off the bottom, where the larger-size carryover trout lurk.

Recently planted trout tend to hang around near or just under the surface of the

water at depths of 3 to 10 feet. Once the stocked trout acclimate, they'll eventually spread out and move into deeper areas of the lake. Anglers often look for schools of trout right where the hatchery truck placed them, usually near the shore, boat ramp, or dock areas. Trout like to rise to the top of the water column to gobble up insects on the water's surface. This is where artificial flies come into play, like a Woolly Bugger in black, dark green, or black-olive in a size 8 or 10 with a 5- or 6-foot leader.



**PHOTO CREDIT:
WDFW**

An advertisement for Livin Life Adventures. It features four circular images of people fishing: a woman holding a Winter Cutthroat trout, a woman holding a Perch, a man holding a Cowlitz Steelhead, and another woman holding a Winter Cutthroat trout. The text "GIVE THE GIFT OF FISHING" is at the top, and "Now Booking" is in large script. The contact information is: CONTACT ME BRIANNA BRUCE 1.206.714.2112 LIVINLIFEADVENTURES.COM. There is a QR code in the bottom right corner.

An advertisement for "Classic Creations" featuring gold jewelry with engraved wildlife scenes. It includes four gold rings and two gold pendants. The rings feature scenes of a bear, a fish, and a mountain. The pendants are teardrop-shaped and feature a bear and a fish. The text "Classic Creations" is in large script, "WILDLIFE SCULPTURES IN GOLD" and "BY FRANK MCCUBBINS" are below it. The contact information is: (360)765-3110 and WildlifInGold.com. There is a QR code in the bottom left corner.



BLACK FRIDAY TROUT PROGRAM

They can be cast from shore or trolled weightless close to the surface behind a boat or floating device.

A fishing license – fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/login – is required for anyone age 16 or older. A Discover Pass – wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/parking – is required to park a vehicle at many state lands, including the state park system, WDFW lands, and the Department of Natural Resources lands. The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission Boating

Program – parks.wa.gov/find-activity/activity-search/boating – would also like to remind anglers to take a boater safety education course, if you haven't already, to be prepared for spring and summer. In Washington, boaters who operate a vessel with a 15-horsepower engine or greater must carry a Boater Education Card to prove they passed an accredited boating safety education course.

MARK YUASA

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



**PHOTO CREDIT:
MARK YUASA**

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Photo by Mandy Hergert

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COVER STORY

WINTER STEELHEAD PROSPECTS IN WASHINGTON

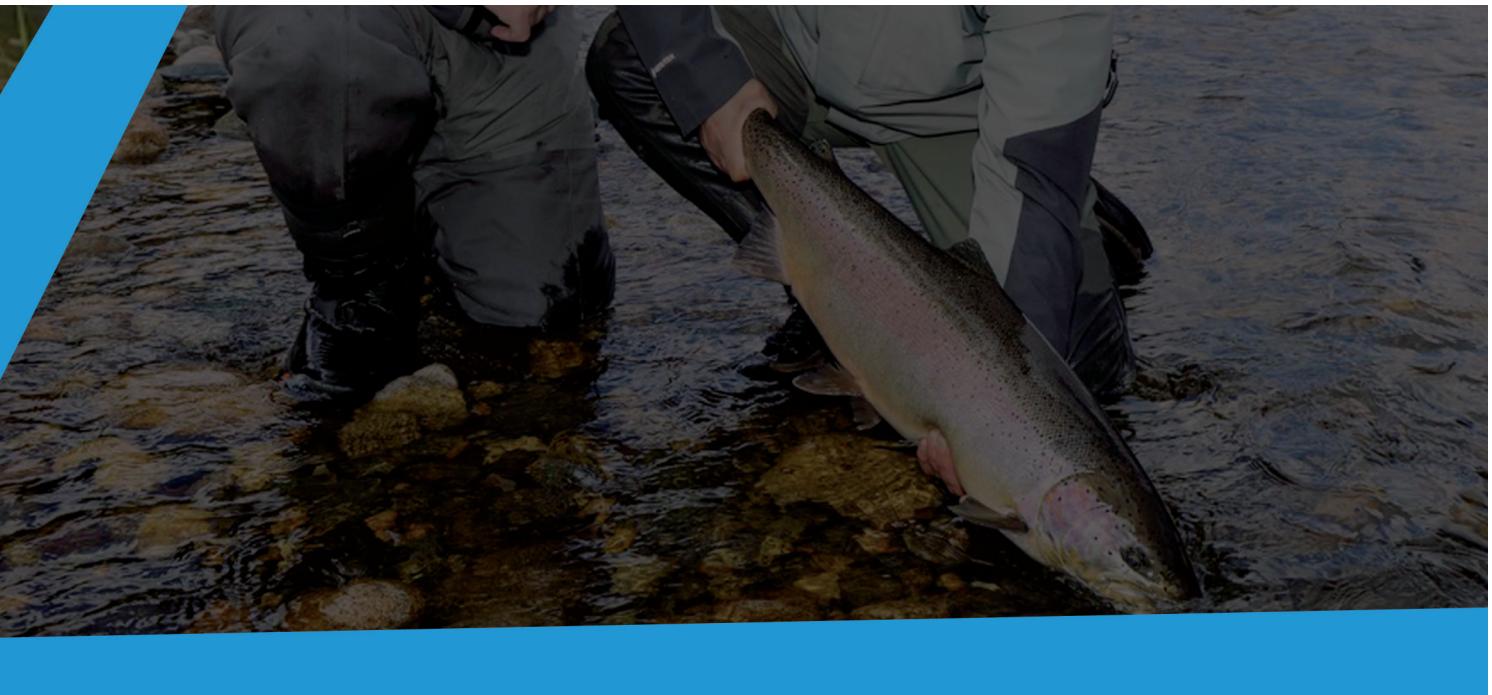
BY BRENT KNIGHT

Winter Steelhead fishing in Washington has long been a passion for serious anglers. After all, fishing in inclement weather for a species that is hard to catch is not for the lighthearted. It takes serious motivation to pursue these fish, and for those who understand, it often becomes an obsession. With the winter steelhead season almost upon us, historically, Thanksgiving usually marks the beginning of the winter run on the Washington Coast, with opportunities inland that last deep into the spring. My rule of thumb is to start on the coast during the late fall, early winter, and move

inland to the Puget Sound and SW Washington rivers in March and April.

I have many friends today who grew up steelhead fishing. Many of them are older than me and remember the days when there were lots of fish and the fish were big. Danny Cook from Wooldridge Boats told me a story of hooking a wild steelhead just below the Sultan launch on the Skykomish that tipped the scales at over 30 pounds. This was during a time when you could kill wild fish. Danny is a legend among steelheaders and has caught no less than five steelhead over 30 pounds,

but the likelihood of repeating that today is not very good. I will never forget my first steelhead trip. It was the late 1970s, and my dad decided that we were going to try fishing the Skagit River for steelhead. You see, he had a coworker who was obsessed and was willing to give my dad some tips. As a result, we planned a trip and set a date. The gear that we used was very primitive. We cut out the plastic lid of a coffee can to act as a spreader, to which we punched three holes and attached paper clips. I still have one of these today. To one paper clip, we connected the mainline.



To another, we connected a short dropper to a pyramid weight. To the final paperclip, we attached a leader with a large spin-n-glo and a gob of eggs that my dad's coworker gave to him.

We set out early on a Saturday morning with the intent to plunk a piece of private property on the Skagit. We set up camp chairs, cast out our gear, and sat down to wait for a passing fish to take our setup. It seemed like forever, but then again, I was about eight years old. When a bite finally came, it was my rod that went off. My dad yelled, and I jumped out of my camp

chair to grab my rod. Once I had control of the rod, the line started to peel off the reel, and the fish was pulling me down the riverbank. Eventually, the fish found some wood and got me tangled. That was the end of my first steelhead encounter, but I will never forget it. What stood out most was the power of that fish. Unfortunately, that was the first and last time that we targeted steelhead until I became an adult, and it was the only time that I steelhead fished with my dad. So, what has changed, and why is steelhead fishing today a shell of what it once was?

The answer is simple: almost everything has changed. We don't need to get too deep into the issues steelhead face, but let's just say that the deck is stacked against them. To me, the greatest challenge has been fish politics. We once had robust hatchery programs that helped to sustain the populations, but most of those are now gone due to wild fish advocacy. There are still some hatchery programs, such as the Cowlitz, that offer prolific opportunities to catch and keep steelhead, both winter and summer runs.



Also, the hatchery programs on the Quinault and Queets Rivers on the Olympic Peninsula offer some of the best steelhead fishing opportunities that exist today. Outside of the limited systems that have active hatchery programs, it has become a guessing game from one year to the next as to whether we will have opportunities for catch and release of wild steelhead. There may be opportunities on Washington's coastal rivers, to the inland rivers of the Puget Sound and SW Washington, and even the interior rivers that feed the mighty Columbia.

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The good news right now is that it seems that steelhead are faring a bit better in some areas with better returns. It is a far cry from the numbers that we saw return during the period from the early 1970s to the early 2000s, but things are looking up a bit. Politics are still playing a key role in creating obstacles for steelhead, and that will not likely change, but current ocean conditions have been favorable, and the resulting returns have been up in some areas over the past few years. When we evaluate our salmon and steelhead returns, we measure the returning fish according to a forecast and

a 10-year average. For the most part, sockeye, pink, and coho salmon runs have been improving. Chum salmon runs are improving in some areas, but are still threatened. Chinook returns continue to struggle for more reasons than I wish to share, but for some reason, this species faces the most pressure of the five species of salmon. Steelhead, both winter runs and even more so for summer runs, are in a similar situation as chinook, with continuous decline. In my opinion, mirroring the broodstock programs employed on the Oregon Coast could help our steelhead populations since so many hatchery

programs have been sued into submission and shut down. This alone could make a huge impact on the process of restoring our returns. Another option, an option that anglers don't want to hear, is that we shut down river systems that are facing critical issues.

This is not popular, but look at the Sauk River as an example. It was shut down for many years to recreational fishing, and the population recovered on its own to the point that we now see a somewhat consistent opportunity for catch and release. As far as 2026, that remains to be determined.

Either way, for those of us who love to chase steelhead, whether it be winter or summer runs, we will find opportunities, and we will travel wherever we need to go. For those new to the sport or considering becoming a steelheader, here are some tips and some information that I would like to share. To start, keep in mind that steelhead are more elusive than our migrating salmon runs and less predictable, making them more difficult to catch. Changes in river conditions during the wet, winter months are constant, forcing us to drop what we are doing and go when the conditions are best. We also need to change up our techniques based on river conditions. Scheduling a trip in advance can often result in disappointment when the river blows out or it gets cold, and the river drops to very low and clear conditions. This is steelhead fishing, so you must get used to it.

Most of my Steelhead fishing has been done in the rivers in from Everett north, the Chehalis Basin, the Cowlitz, and the Washington Coast, specifically the Forks area and the



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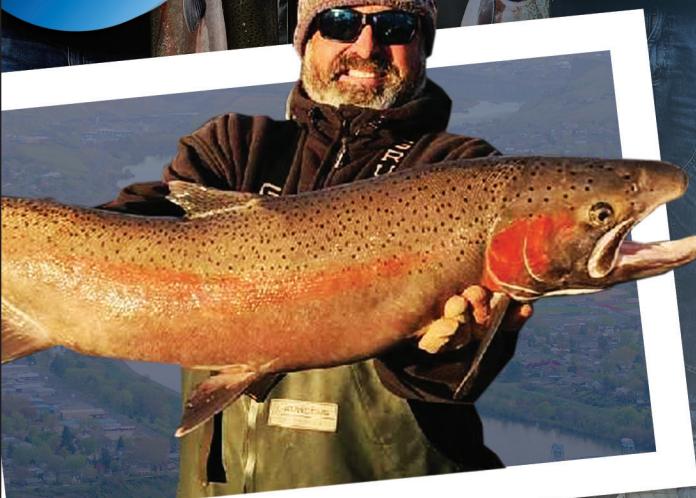
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Quinault and Queets Rivers, within the reservation as well as Olympic National Park. There are still many options available all the way to the east in Idaho on the Snake and Clearwater rivers, so I recommend that you start with a river that interests you and is open for either retention of hatchery steelhead or catch and release of wild fish. Check the regulations for opportunities and, most importantly, some good guides who know the river well. I encourage you to spend the money to fish with a guide to learn what

works and understand how to target fish in different conditions. Time is money, and the learning curve to catching these fish can be steep, so reduce the curve and spend a few days with a guide so that you can learn and then go practice what you learn on your own. Know that every guide has a different opinion and approach, so I recommend that you try a few to gain a broader perspective. If you are new to steelhead fishing, I recommend that you NOT go out and buy all your gear before you learn the basics.

You can spend a lot of money only to find out that you didn't need a lot of what you bought. Mirror what your guide uses, as their methods are tried and true. Watch YouTube and pay attention to fishing shows such as Northwest Fishing. You will learn a ton that will help reduce the learning curve and get you into opportunities. To start out, I do recommend that you purchase a nice pair of waders and wading boots and a jacket that is waterproof. Getting cold and wet will ruin your day in a hurry.



There are many popular techniques for catching Steelhead, such as casting or trolling plugs from the bank or shore, throwing spoons and spinners, float fishing beads, bait, jigs, and other offerings, drift fishing or bobber dogging beads, yarnies, bait, and other offerings, and much more. So many different options to choose from, and they all work. Again, keep it simple and choose 2-3 methods that you are taught, such as bobber dogging beads, float fishing jigs, and casting spinners and spoons. Many guides only use a few methods and do very well.

Now, you have learned the basics from one or more guides, you have learned how to fish a specific river system, you have purchased a handful of the gear that you need, and the time has come to go out and give it a shot. Believe me, you don't have

to go buy a drift boat to fish. There are plenty of opportunities to wade and bank fish. Also, I encourage you to continue to fish with guides if you want to boat fish or make a friend who has one. Believe it or not, many fishermen who own boats are looking for fishing buddies, so join a Facebook group to make some friends.

Also, I will emphasize again that time is money. Some of us have more time and others more money, but either way, our days on the water are limited, so it is my opinion that we should make the most of them. Pay \$200-300 to fish with a guide and let them do the work. Also, they spend every day on the water, so they know where the fish will be and how to catch them. You can easily make 10-20 trips without a bite on your own if you don't know what you are doing. With a guide, that learning curve

might be eliminated, and you may catch a fish on your first trip. I can promise you this: you will never forget a steelhead that you catch.

The encounters are memorable and, to me, unlike any other species encounter.

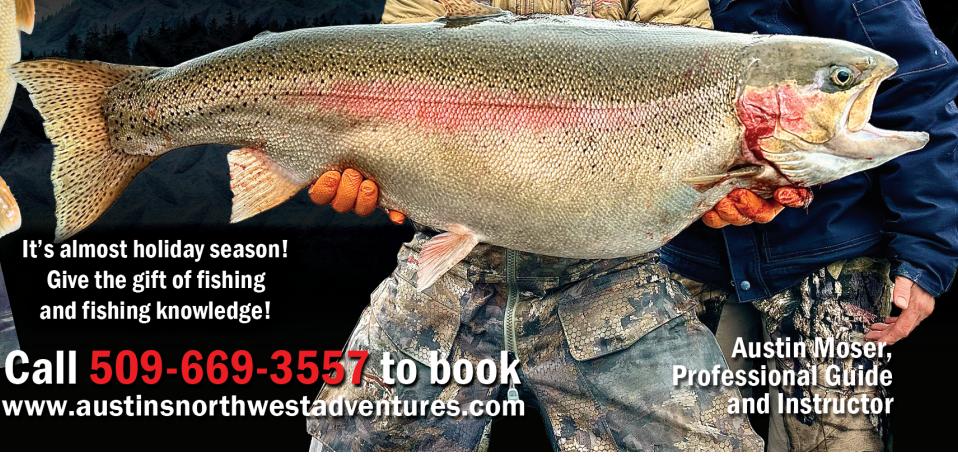
Steelhead fishing is an amazing pastime, and until you have spent some time doing it, you really don't realize how special it is. I can say that they are very special fish, and you will never forget your first or for that matter, any Steelhead that you catch.

You can contact me on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/brent.knight.148> if you need additional tips or want to be connected to a guide near you. I am always happy to help and more than anything, I want you to learn and to have fun.

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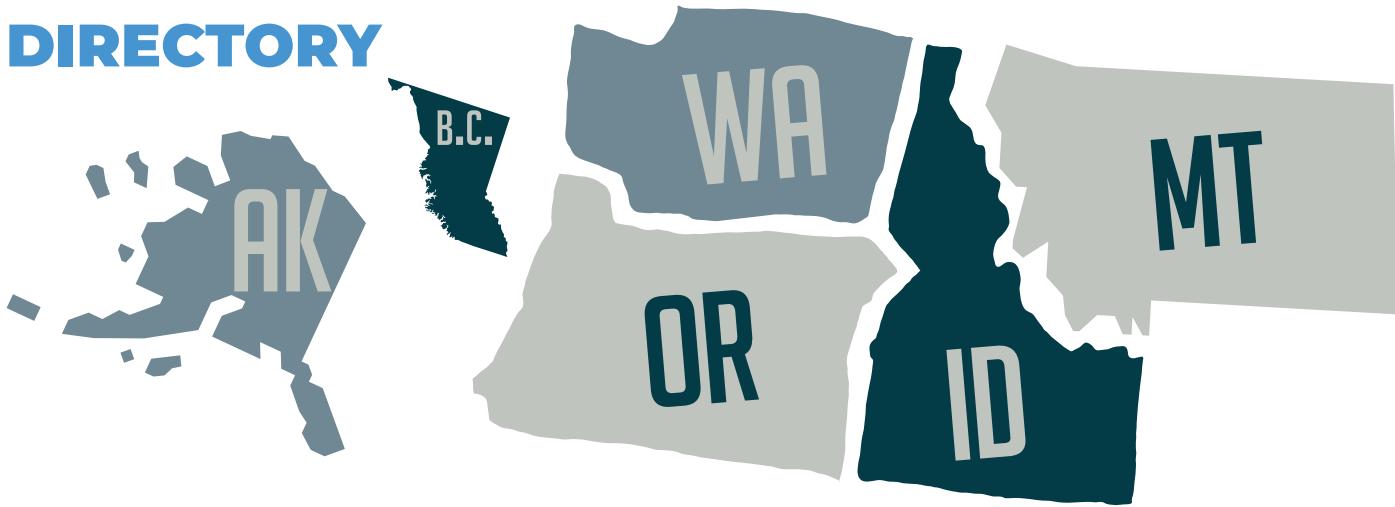
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