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EDITOR'S CORNER:

Is it winter yet? Here in Great Falls, we've been living with warm Chinook Winds the past three weeks, with temperatures in the 50s and no snow in sight. It's been great for upland bird hunting, not so much for ice fishing around here. That said, I've seen the ice fishing posts start to spread on social media and I know the warmth won't last. The lakes will freeze over and offer safe hard water fishing throughout the Pacific Northwest soon. In this issue we touch on a surprising assortment of winter fishing opportunities. Eric and John offer up some prime winter ice fishing lake suggestions for you to research. Randy looks at Puget Sound Blackmouth prospects, and Gary explores trout fishing in open streams. With that and more great articles, whether it's hard water, saltwater, or river/lakes there's something out there to satisfy your fishing itch!





Mike Carey - mikec@nwfishing.net @Michael Carey Northwest Fishing

ARTICLE GENRES

ARTICLE GENRE

SAFETY

FOOD

LOCATIONS

GUEST WRITER MISC

CONTENTS



GEAR

FISHING

08 Winter Trout

Hannah Pennebaker



5 Frozen Treasures
Eric Magnuson

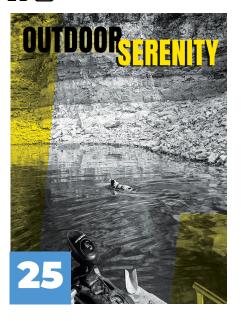
Soothing My Soul on the Sol Megan Bennett

Squid Jigging the
Piers of the Puget
Sound

Josh DeBruler

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f o anorthwestfishingtv



25 Outdoor Serenity

Matt Carey

Bag'n Blackmouth Randy Castello

Winter Trout

Gary Lewis

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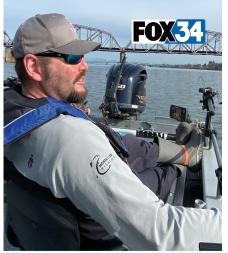




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Lenore Lodge is situated in Lenore Idaho approx. 35 minutes outside of Lewiston, overlooking the Clearwater River. Located just a stone's throw away from the boat launch, this destination is a prime location for fishermen seeking renowned steelhead and salmon fishing on the Clearwater River. For those of you who enjoy Bass, Trout, and Kokanee fishing, Lenore Lodge is approximately 16 miles to the famous Dwarshak Dam where giant smallmouth bass are known to inhabit.

Not a fisherman, that's ok! With outstanding views of the Clearwater, this spot is picturesque for your family reunion, destination wedding retreat. 2 Kitchens, a BBQ Porch, plenty of parking, and a large outdoor space make this place an ideal gathering spot. There are also RV's available that sleep 6, fully equipped starting at \$140 a night. Pulling an RV? Lenore Lodge has space for you too with full-service RV pads starting at \$50 a night.

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Now that the holiday craziness is over with, you might find yourself with the fishing itch. Maybe you got a new fishing rod for Christmas that you're dying to try out! Winter steelhead are a worthy pursuit, but kids might not have the patience to withstand casting all day. Winter perch are the perfect solution! Though they are small, they taste great when fried up and most lakes have an abundant population of them. They are eager biters, especially in the winter months, and you don't need much tackle other than a light action rod and some worms. Let's dive into it and talk about how to have a successful day at the lake fishing for perch. Though shore fishermen can certainly be successful when fishing for winter perch, boaters have an

8 | NWFISHING.net

advantage. The trickiest part of perch fishing in the winter is locating the fish. They move throughout the lake in large schools searching for food. These fish often hide in deep water, below the thermocline, where the water is warmer. Boaters can search the lake until they locate the schools of

fish.

Fish finders can show you where the schools are, so you can drop your bait right in the middle of them. Check near drop-offs and underwater shelves first. Perch will tightly school up, so if you catch one, you're bound to catch more. Drop anchor or activate your spot lock and get a bucket ready! As with most fish in the winter, they don't like chasing down the meals. Keep your bait right in the middle of their school. If you aren't getting bites,

move on. Perch schools will look like little clouds on your fish finder. Pay close attention and follow the fish.

If you're shorebound, remember to use bottom rigs so you can fish the bottom of the water column. This is a great situation to use your two-pole endorsement if you have one. The more rods in the water, the better your chances of finding the fish.

Try to find a lake with a pier so that you can more easily reach the deep water. Reservoirs are harder for shore fishermen to effectively fish in the winter, since they're usually drawn down past the piers.

Another great thing about winter perch is that they're willing to hit a variety of lures and baits. I often start with worms or crappie jigs. Lower your offering to the

fish and jig lightly until you feel the bite.

Winter perch can be soft biters, so pay close attention and be ready to set the hook. Once you've caught one perch, you can cut it into small strips of meat and catch more. Perch cutbait is one of the best ways to catch more perch! One word of advice, use small hooks. I use size 8 or 10 hooks most of the time. I also use an ultralight crappie rod and reel for maximum sensitivity. Be careful when dropping the fish into the bucket or holding them for pictures, they have several spines in their fins that can prick you.

Though most lakes have yellow perch to some degree, you might be wondering where to start. I've had success at Lake Washington, Lake Sammamish, and Clear Lake. Lake Washington is my go-to for winter perch.

If you launch on the southern end, try anchoring near the bridge. These are just suggestions- check your regulations and try a lake near you that's open yearround. Remember that perch tend to hug the bottom during the winter and study a map to find those deep pockets on





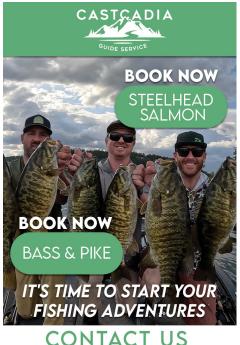


your lake of choice.

Because of the cold weather. it's a good idea to be prepared before hitting the water. If it's been a while since you've run your boat. do an inspection, test your motors, and ensure your first aid kits and life jackets are aboard. Bundle up and bundle up your kids too. Hand warmers are essential! I picked up some electric hand warmers online and they work great. The trickiest part is making sure they're charged before heading out!

Like electronic hand warmers, heated jackets can also be a game changer. Winter perch fishing is a sedentary activity, so you'll want every advantage you can get to stay warm. I also highly recommend putting on base layers, especially underneath your pants. Costco and Sportco both offer affordable base layer packs for men and women. Winter fishing doesn't have to be cold and miserable. Making sure you're adequately prepared will go a long way toward having a fun day on the lake.

Have fun on your winter perch quest! Most lakes around here have no bag limit or size limit, but make sure to be responsible and only harvest what you're going to eat. Perch are one of the best fried fish out there, and they're easy to prepare for the frying pan. You can either fillet them quickly or cook them whole. Electric filet knives can make short work of a bucket of perch. My friend and fellow writer Randy Castello likes to batter his perch filets and freeze them so that his family can enjoy fried perch anytime. Put life jackets on the little ones, gas up the boat, and hit the lake!



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BAGN BY RANDY CASTELLO BLACKNOUTH

With the exception of a few laggard B-run coho in the rivers, our PNW salmon focus should be shifting to the 2023-2024 Puget Sound winter blackmouth fishery. Typically, winter blackmouth is one of my favorite local fishing opportunities. Going back to my mid-teens winter blackmouth fishing has always been one of my very favorite ways to grow snotsicles.

Because recent conservation measures have severely reduced our opportunity to drag downrigger balls in the gravel, many of us will be considering putting the salmon gear away and winterizing the boat. You may want to hold off a bit, break out a wool hat, hoodie, and your cold weather friend Mr Heater. it's almost blackmouth

season. But, what's a blackmouth?

Blackmouth are chinook salmon that have decided not to migrate to the usual feeding grounds in the Gulf of Alaska. Instead, they tend to remain in Puget Sound and the Straights to feed on local schools of herring, candlefish, other forage fish, and squid.

Back in the 1960s, WDFW decided to duplicate the natural tendency of a small percentage of chinook to remain in Puget Sound and create a year-round sports fishery. The WDFW established a team led by Frank Shaw and got to work. It was determined that if you held the usual hatchery release at 3 months for an additional vear, or 15-18 months total, the chinook would forage locally.

The original releases were made in Capital Lake in Olympia. The program moved to net pens by Squaxin Island but the WDFW determined that the salt-reared fish tended to migrate. The program was shifted to several local hatcheries. They are for the most part clipped, but there are certain releases where the co-manager agreements do not allow the fish to be clipped.

Over the years we have seen a reduction in opportunity; a few years back we lost the winter blackmouth fishery in Marine Area 7, 8-1, 8-2, and MA 9. They were closed to preserve or extend some of the summer chinook fisheries while still supporting federal and co-manager escapement goals.

JAN - FEB 2024 | 11

MA5 will be open 4/1/2024-4/30/2024 with a 22" minimum and a 2 fish limit, (1 chinook may be retained). MA 5 Management Criteria Sublegal Encounters; the encounters guideline is 3.707 fish. MA 10 will be open 3/1/2024-4/15/2024 with a 22" minimum and a 2 fish limit, (1 chinook may be retained). MA III Management Criteria Total Encounters; the encounters guideline is 4,953 fish. Unmarked **Encounters**; the encounters guideline is 953 fish. Sublegal Encounters; the encounters guideline is 4,181 MA II will be open 3/1/2024-4/15/2024 with a 22" minimum and a 2 fish limit. (1 chinook may be retained). MA 11 Management Criteria Total Encounters, the encounters guideline is 1,191 fish. Unmarked Encounters; the encounters guideline is 259 fish. Sublegal **Encounters**; the encounters guideline is 816 fish. MA 13 will be open 10/1/2021-5/14/2021 with a 2 fish limit and a 22" minimum size. Management Criteria do not currently apply.

Reduced opportunity, well maybe, but there are still a few areas that will host a blackmouth fishery this winter.

That said; chip the ice out of your bilge, gas up the

12 | NWFISHING.net

boat, and read on.

But first, no boat? While most of our winter blackmouth fishing will be from a boat, there is also an opportunity for a limited shore-based fishery. More on that later, if you do have a boat here is a breakdown of the 2023/2024 Puget Sound winter blackmouth fishery.

MA 6, 7, 8-1, 8-2, 9 and both North/South MA 12 will be closed for the 2023/2024 winter blackmouth fishery.

The information to the left was extracted from the 2023 North of Falcon data and may be subject to additional closures. Consult the WDFW App. or website for the current regulations and emergency closures.

With the limited blackmouth opportunity for the 2023/2024 winter season, the open areas will likely be busy. Instead of detailing each area, I'll try to break down the different Marine Areas into a few general options for starting your adventure.

Before that though; think of points, banks, and flats. Look for areas where the currents will collect bait. Keep a constant eye on your fishfinder and look for schools of bait. Although forage fish populations

change from year to year, candle fish and herring are the primary forage fish for Puget Sound blackmouth. That said, because of a general crash in the Puget Sound herring populations, candlefish are currently the major blackmouth food source.

Candlefish show as a cloud of bait right on the bottom. Find candlefish and you significantly improve your odds, find arches and candlefish on the deck and it will be hammer time! Candlefish spawn in the gravel and are rarely found above that. I have caught many blackmouth where their gill plates and bellies were all scraped up. I have even cleaned fish and found gravel in their stomachs. So, where does one target gravel filled salmon?

MARINE AREA 5 or basically the Sekiu/Pillar Point area has a few notable blackmouth areas to target. The Caves, Clallam Bay, and then Slip Point to Pillar Point can all be awesome blackmouth fisheries. All can be very exposed to winter weather so know your limitations. Help is a longways off if you get in trouble so always err on the cautious side.

MARINE AREA 10 is the Seattle/ Bremerton area and includes a number of well known, semi-protected blackmouth fisheries. Kingston, Jeff Head, West Point, Elliot Bay, Alki Point, Point Monroe, Skiff Point, Manchester, and different banks or points around Blake Island consistently produce blackmouth. Look at the weather, choose a launch and learn a given area to feed your winter addiction.

MARINE AREA 11 or the Tacoma area is one of the best small-boat blackmouth fisheries on Puget Sound. The Slag Pile, Owens Beach, and Clav Banks are all easily accessible and just minutes from the Point Defiance launch. With the proper boat for the conditions, Dalco Point, the Beach just north of Gig Harbor, Point Robinson, Browns Point and Dash Point all offer solid blackmouth fishing as well.

MARINF ARFA 13 is an interesting fishery. It is the area south of The Tacoma Narrows Bridge. The whole area is fairly protected from winter weather but the better fishing areas are a bit of a run from any of the all-tide metropolitan ramps. With that said. MA 13 is kind of a local's fishery, with smaller boats launching into open water from a handful of unimproved county ramps. A few areas stand out: including Point Fosdick. various areas around Fox Island, Lyle Point, Oro Bay, and Johnson Point all hold fishable numbers of blackmouth. Depending on the tide there are many less known points that disrupt the tidal flow and hold bait. Be that guy, maybe more so than any other area in Puget Sound, MA 13 has many 1 fish spots. Review both your charts and tidal information and know where to fish during the

different tidal phases.

Blackmouth fishing is a planning and patience game. Choose a ramp. select a handful of areas you want to fish, and understand how the tide will impact them. Independent from the tide often the best fishing will be at first light. From there follow your plan, if you make a pass on your initial stop and there are no signs of life move on to plan B and C as required. Depending on the tidal conditions don't be afraid to revisit plan B! I know that I mentioned patience but if you're not seeing bait on the meter move on. Typically boat limits will be hard to come by, but put a couple of nice blackmouth on ice and you've had a good day.

My general blackmouth drill includes trolling with the downriggers or motor mooching cut plug herring. If dogfish are in the area, skip the cut plug plan and stick to trolling. Run 11" flashers ahead of spoons, trolling flies, or hoochies. Spice up the trolling flies and hoochies with salted herring strips.

Target schools of bait along the bottom in 90-140' of



water while keeping your gear within 5' of the bottom. I troll 2.5-about 3.5 mph for blackmouth and all my blackmouth leaders are tied on 42" of 30# fluorocarbon.

Earlier I mentioned a shore-based opportunity to catch blackmouth. No really, I'm not nuts. Well, OK maybe I am a little nuts but there are many piers and boardwalks that are open to salmon fishing year-round. Study the WDFW Sport Fishing Rules and check the Emergency Rules as they supersede the general sport fishing rules. When I was a kid. well before cell phones and computers I used to frequently fish the piers

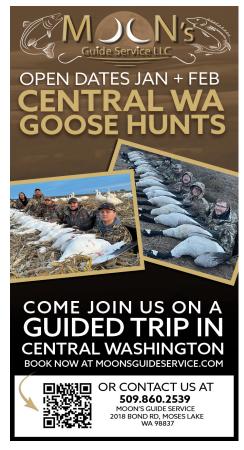
and caught a lot of blackmouth. I didn't chase reports to fish a hot bite. I had to put in the time while experimenting my way through the gear and presentation until I caught fish.

I usually carried two rods, a dozen small herring (fresh or frozen, back then fresh herring was the norm), and a small handful of gear. My go-to rig was a level wind steelhead rod rigged with a large sliding float and a hand-tied mooching

leader. I would nose hook the herring, leaving the trailing hook free, and gently cast it off the down current corner of the pier. I would free spool, letting the rig drift until I was down the last few wraps of line on the spool and then put it in gear. Recovering a crank or two every few minutes, it would take forever to reset. The process was deadly and accounted for many salmon dinners.

I also fished hardware. A double hooked Colorado spinner with a herring strip will catch anything in the sound. I'd rig them on a 24-30" leader behind a piece of pencil lead. Easypeazy; just cast, let sink and slowly wind it back in. Where most fish would hammer it, salmon seemed to cause the retrieve to hesitate then go in for the kill. The other method was to use flutter spoons. This was pre-buzzbomb/rotators and involved casting heavy spoons or Swedish Pimple type lures and letting them sink for a bit. The process was similar to twitching jigs, slowly lifting your rod tip, and then picking up a crank of two while you auickly tower the rod. Between the 3 methods, most of my pier fishing excursions were a success.

This should get you started in your quest to extend vour local salmon fishing opportunities while you freeze your keister off. The when, where, and how are baselined but I suggest choosing an area and learning it. As a boater or pier-ite, become the local expert! Please remember that our winter weather can be unpredictable. Make sure your boat is seaworthy, full of fuel, fuel conditioner and you are dressed for the weather. A little upfront planning will help to ensure that you and your crew have a safe and productive blackmouth adventure.





Washington State, known for its stunning landscapes and diverse outdoor activities, offers a unique and thrilling experience for anglers during the winter months, Ice Fishing. As the temperatures drop and the lakes freeze over, enthusiasts from all over gather their gear and head to some of the state's most picturesque frozen waters. In this article, we'll dive into the icy wonderland of 5 lakes that stand out as prime destinations for ice fishing in Washington: Curlew Lake, Bead Lake, Sacheen Lake, Banks Lake, and

Eloika Lake.

Curlew Lake

A Frozen Oasis In The Northeast
Curlew Lake, nestled more in
the Northcentral portion of the
state, transforms into a winter
wonderland, drawing anglers
seeking a tranquil ice fishing
experience. The lake spans over
900 acres and is surrounded
by snow-covered mountains
and hills, creating a beautiful
backdrop to your frozen
adventure.

The lake is home to a variety of fish, with Rainbow Trout and Yellow Perch being the most sought-after during the winter months. Anglers often set up shanties or their ice fishing

JAN - FEB 2024 | 15



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spots right outside the state park patiently waiting for the telltale signs of the fish below, which doesn't take long. The vast mud flat just outside the park holds amazing numbers and is easy to get into. The camaraderie among anglers and the stunning scenery make Curlew Lake a must-visit destination for any Ice Fishing aficionado.

Bead Lake

A Hidden Gem in the North Mountains

Nestled in the North of Spokane Mountains, Bead Lake is a hidden gem that offers a secluded and serene ice fishing experience. The lake, surrounded by dense forests and snow-covered peaks, provides a pristine setting for anglers looking to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

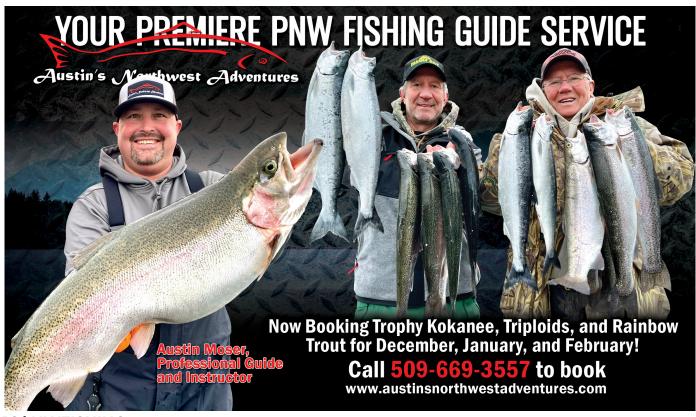
Bead Lake is known for its healthy population of Kokanee, and the popular large lake trout that roams the depths. As large marks appear on your sonar, don't be surprised if it's not a laker, but a monster of a burbot making this lake an enticing destination for those seeking a variety of catches. As you set up your gear on the frozen expanse

of Bead Lake, the quietude and natural beauty will transport you to a world of tranquility, making each catch a memorable moment.

Sacheen Lake

Serenity and Splendor In Pend Oreille County

Located in Pend Oreille County, Sacheen Lake offers a charming blend of serenity and splendor during the winter months. Surrounded by evergreen forests and snow-covered hills, the lake becomes a haven for ice-fishing enthusiasts seeking a peaceful escape.



Sacheen Lake is known for its panfish, including perch and crappie, which are abundant and fun to chase. Also, fun to target nice trout under the ice as well, with good chances of catching! Rainbow, Brook, and Tiger Trout provide excellent opportunities for ice anglers to enjoy a variety of catches. As you drill your fishing holes and set up your equipment, take a moment to absorb the quiet tranquility of Sacheen Lake, where the only sounds are the soft crunch of snow beneath your boots and the occasional call of a winter bird.

Banks Lake

A Vast Frozen Playground in Central Washington
For those looking for a more expensive ice fishing experience, Banks Lake in Central Washington is a prime destination.
This reservoir spans close to 27,000 acres and is known for its diverse fish population, including Walleye, Rainbow Trout, Burbot, and Whitefish which are the most popular to go after.

Ice fishing on Banks Lake is a social affair at times, with clusters of anglers setting up their shanties in popular spots and many staying overnight. The vast frozen expanse provides ample opportunities for exploration, and to get away from the crowds if needed. As the sun sets over the snow-covered horizon, the frozen lake transforms into a canvas of colors. Banks Lake is not only a haven for anglers, but also a visual spectacle that captivates the senses.

Elokia Lake

An Ice Anglers Original
Nestled in the heart of
Northeastern Washington
State, Elokia Lake
transforms into a winter
wonderland for avid ice
fishing enthusiasts. As
temperatures drop, the
lake's icy surface becomes
a haven for those seeking
the thrill of angling beneath
a blanket of snow.

Eloika Lakes expands over 600 acres, providing ample space for ice fishermen to explore its frozen expanses. One of the primary draws for anglers is the diverse range of fish species that inhabit this lake. Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout, Largemouth Bass, Perch, Crappie, and Sunfish. Seems that Crappie are what attracts most ice anglers.

The savvy ice anglers will target the Brown and



JAN - FEB 2024 | 17

Rainbow Trout early season just a couple of feet below the ice and near creek outlets. Eloika's cold waters create an ideal environment for these fish. Anglers can also test their skills against the Large-mouth bass, known for their elusive behavior even in freezing temperatures, and they are big in this lake, especially on an ice rod.

Yellow Perch and Crappie add a variety to the fishing experience at Eloika.

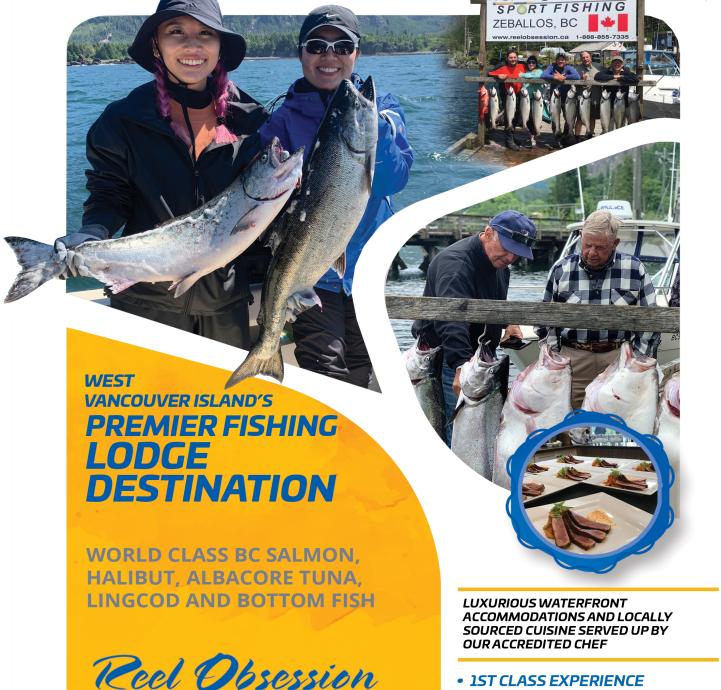
These panfish offer more of a relaxing angling experience, making the



lake suitable for seasoned veterans and beginners alike. Perch are abundant and make sure to check the regulations for the Crappie size and limit.

As ice fishing shelters and anglers dot the frozen landscape, camaraderie flourishes among anglers who gather to share stories and tips. Eloika Lakes icy embrace beckons, offering a unique and thrilling experience for those willing to brave the cold pursuit and snag the perfect catch!





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SP@RT FISHING







Of the many rivers in the beautiful state of Washington, the Sol Duc is one that can manage to keep just about everyone happy. Whether you fly fish, spin or bait cast, there is, or at least was, a fish with your name on it!

Fish species on the Sol Duc include Fall and Summer Chinook, Winter and Summer Steelhead, Coho, Sockeye and both resident and sea-run cutthroat trout. The Sol Duc River runs 78 miles from the Olympic Mountains and cuts Southwestward through the most spectacular scenery in Washington State. With a variety of access points, you'll be greeted by precipitous gulches and mossy rocks in vivid green tones set a fire by the angle of the sun.

Picture perfect moments around every corner. The river is a pleasure whether you're catching or not. Just to be there, to catch a glimpse of an ancient creature born of the gravelly riverbeds. Traveling their way through genetic imprinting, magnetic fields, the temperatures, and conditions of the earth, making a 70-mile journey into the unknown.

What is it that ensures a fish can find its way back to the place it was born? When I can't even find my way home without an app. An interesting factoid, scientists have discovered fish have ear stones called otoliths. These "otoliths" incorporate chemical elements from the water as the fish grow and move. Picture a growth band of a tree, with each ring recording a chemical map of where the fish has been. how long they stayed there and how fast they grew. Scientific advances like this are pivotal in managing fish populations.

I have a deep concern and respect for the natural world, a curiosity for things we can and cannot explain. A desire to be a part of it all, to get my hands dirty and my mind clean.

So, while we still can, I will travel my own way, finding places that provide an opportunity to get my line wet.

My most noteworthy experience would be a fantastic stay at the "Cabin on the Middle Run" in Forks.

Easily accessible and found off 101, this well-appointed, clean and cozy cedar cabin boasts everything you need and more. For me it was the stocked kitchen and comfortable beds, topped off with a long hot shower. Though, I must admit we spent most of our time in the backyard. Our hosts and neighbors were so very friendly and helpful. Which isn't always the case when you're fishing in someone's backvard. We were rooted on and engaged in friendly conversations with guides floating by and neighbors on their decks.

20 | NWFISHING.net



When I lost a huge dazzling Coho the echoes of disappointment hummed through the valley.

The comradery of fishing is something you'll never understand, until you feel it. Like a Folie à deux, are we driven by madness or passion and is there really a difference? Whatever it is, that makes us feel hyped up by each other's experiences, it is infectious and exhilarating. I desperately hope the rivers will return to a place where we can enjoy catching at least one fish. Not just for the fun, but also for the food. Nothing beats a filet from the river. I have become so spoiled by the flavor of a fresh catch. commercially sourced just doesn't make the cut.

Make sure you check all regulations before heading out these days. Low returns have caused a system-wide closure in the Quillayute river system. This system includes the Sol Duc, Bogachiel, Calawah, Dickey, Sitkum Rivers and Thunder Creek.

As heartbreaking as these closures are, they are necessary to ensure that our rivers can support humans and the local ecosystem.

I admit, a mix of resentment but also understanding that the system works to protect, preserve, and perpetuate fish and wildlife.

As a fisherwoman, my recreational opportunities are last in line and that is ok. Will this closure stop me from enjoying the beautiful Olympic rainforest and its awe-inspiring rivers? Never! I will plant my feet in the forest, hike to the waterfalls and sit my soul quietly by the river.

Waiting my turn.







A commonly overlooked opportunity that starts up in Neah Bay during late August and ends down in the south Puget Sound towards the end of winter, is the squid fishery, specifically the Pacific coast squid, also known as the California market squid.

day length always seem to provide new opportunities for the men and women who choose to reap the spoils of the outdoors. If the

desire is there, the fun and

the food is at our doorsteps.

The Pacific coast squid are relatively small, averaging about 8 inches. They have short lifespans and spend most of their time in the Eastern Pacific Ocean—between Baja California and Southeastern Alaska. They move into the straights of Juan De Fuca during late

summer and their numbers tend to peak in the Puget Sound around December and January. The fishery is often fickle, with some years falling short of anglers' expectations, while other years the fishery can prove to be quite robust. On these years when the squid are plentiful, the hardest working anglers can find themselves heading home with their limits, which, as of January of 2023, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has set at 10 lbs or a five-gallon bucket filled to the halfway point. Now that is a lot of calamari!

Jigging from a boat or a pier is the most common way to procure these saltwater delicacies, and during the winter you will often find the docks from Everett down to the south Puget Sound alive with folks chasing the Pacific squid. Squidding is a minimalistic endeavor. A fishing rod, a spinning reel, and a squid jig are essentially all that is needed.

Squid jigs find their origins in Japan. They are usually torpedo or bullet-shaped jigs with several spines at the bottom that point upright. These spines don't serve the same purpose as a typical fishing hook. Instead of puncturing or penetrating the squid, they create a bit of a platform for the squid to become

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entangled in as they latch onto the colorful plastic body portion of the jig.

Many squid jigging enthusiasts swear that nighttime is the best time to catch squid. By in large this holds true, but it's also important to put some focus on the tides and water clarity. A high tide with decent water clarity can produce squid even during the daytime.

At night, squid are attracted to the lights illuminating off of the piers. The general belief around this is that light attracts phytoplankton, the phytoplankton then attracts zooplankton, and zooplankton attract the fish and other critters that squid like to feed on. Piers already come equipped with their own lights and these typically do a decent job of providing the needed illumination to bring in the squid. With that being said, the chances of bringing in larger amounts of sauid become increased when a more powerful and concentrated light is introduced. Folks will often bring battery or generatorpowered lights to shine into the water.



Check with local rules to find out if generators are allowed.

While on the topic of rules, it's important to note that there is a fair amount of pier fishing etiquette to consider while navigating the pier. It's best to speak with folks who are using lights and ask them if it's ok to post up next to them. There's a good chance they might be saving these spots for friends or family and It's not uncommon for conflict to occur on the pier if people aren't using common courtesy while acquiring their jigging spots.

Just as the gear is minimalistic, the technique is simple as well.

Folks will work their jigs in a variety of ways, but sticking to the basics is what generally will get you on the squid. When casting, you should allow your jig to drop to a depth where squid are holding, lift the tip of your rod and slowly retrieve as you lower the rod tip back down,

then repeat the process. Once you have a squid on your jig, keep tension on the line and the squid should remain there as you retrieve.

The method is similar while jigging directly beneath you, though you won't be doing any reeling in of the line until a squid has attached itself. Some people like to do a few quick and hard lifts of the rod and then let it sit near the bottom for a few moments. Though you might not feel the squid strike your jig, the difference of weight at the end of your line once you lift again, will be your indicator that you have a sauid on.

So, if you're anything like me, and consider the sound of a bubbling deep fryer to be just as much of a winter staple as holiday tunes or roasted turkeys, then put on your winter jacket and head to a local pier for your shot at getting that bucket up to its halfway point with these great tasting cephalopods. And remember, there's no such thing as bad weather, there's only such a thing as bad gear!

OUTDOOR

"IT'S EASY TO FIND OURSELVES APPRECIATING
WHAT THE OUTDOORS CAN DO FOR US"

Let's take a step back away from fishing for a moment, please. That may be sacrilegious, coming from a magazine that is on its face wholly dedicated to fishing. I mean it's called Reel Life for Pete's sake, the pun couldn't be any more fishing related. Consider the experiences that we add to our core memories from our passion for life outside the concrete jungle. The sights and sounds of places we've just experienced for the first time. Those times with friends and family. The sometimestrivial outings that we build into our routines because we are outdoorsmen and outdoorswomen at our core. Being present at those times is crucial to our ability to take a deep breath and hit the reset button.

One of the most scenic drives I have ever experienced came from a trip along the Beartooth Highway in the heart of the Custer National Forest. It is one of those winding, nauseating, fear of height

inducing drives that really make you appreciate the work of engineers. The drive up the mountain is narrow. A two-lane highway with an unforgiving drop on one side of the road and an immovable rock face on the other. It makes me wonder how folks drive campers, boats, or trailers up such a road. There are points along the drive where, if you're on the outside lane, by peering out of the window, you'll realize the full effect of the over 9,000-foot drop off the road, add another nearly 2,000 feet if you decide to get to the very top. It's a road so treacherous, it is closed during the wintertime, and rightfully so. In addition to

these crystalclear memories of peril, are the wondrous views that come from the observation point.



The attraction looks around 360 degrees and has all the amenities you'd expect: a bathroom, parking, informational signs, and posters. But, more importantly, there are the sights. Mountains, that from below looked ominous, are now eye level and expansive. On a clear day, like the one we thankfully had when we made the journey, that allows you to see for miles. The funny thing about being at the point is my lack of memory about the people or whatever else was going on.

I know there were other cars in the parking lot and people walking around the trails, but I really can't remember any of them. The calmness of the moment and realization of these breathtaking views is something I'll keep with me. Even in these moments where modernization blends, crosses over, and cheapens the outdoor experience, it's still easy to find ourselves appreciating what the outdoors can do for us.

Ok, let's bring it back to fishing, just slightly. The Bighorn Canyon sits in the heart of the Crow Reservation in Montana's

26 | NWFISHING.net

eastern third of the state. The area is simply aoraeous. It doesn't hurt that the area produces some of the highest quality trout you can find, as is the case in many of the Blue-Ribbon Montana waterways. For the hiking or ATV enthusiasts, you'll want to stop at Pryor Mountain, as the Bighorn Canvon offers a few trails along the way, but the area primarily runs along the Bighorn River. A few fishing trips with a close friend of mine will always draw me back to the area and the peacefulness I experienced. with one memory, particularly in mind. Did I mention the canyon is incredible? It really cannot be understated the jagged edges of the cliffs and the deep red colors slowly fading to a subtle yet muted granite. The water is a pristine blue. Seemingly untouched and calm as glass. We nearly had the canyon to ourselves except for a few families enjoying the day on the water and some kids fishing from the dock. My buddy in fact complimented the kids on their small bucket of fish they had accumulated and in turn, they gave him the lure they'd been using. It was a fun little exchange

and was nice to see that kids can still be thoughtful. And of course, we used the lure and caught some of our own! We put my boat in the water and didn't travel too far from the dock, maybe a few hundred yards into a nice rocky hole that was loaded with bass.

We trolled around slowly to different bays within the river for a few hours and continued to pull out solid sized fish. The kind of fish that makes you appreciate being outdoors with a consistent bite and decent weight behind them. All the while, talking about work, family, plans, and







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Those other 9 months of

the year he's relegated to

leashed walks around the

all the other things you'd expect to visit about. It was a fishing trip I'll remember fondly because of the time with a valued friend and the opportunity for breathtaking views. It was also memorable due to a trailer tire popping and me driving on the axle for who knows how many miles, but that's a story for a different time.

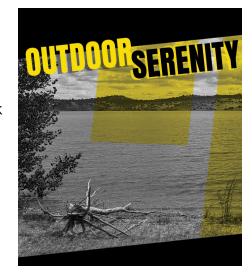
Let's not mistake the vivid memories from our time appreciating the tranquility of the outdoors as more meaningful than the opportunities outside we capitalize on through the routine of our lives.

For me, those instances take shape in the form of an activity as easy as walking my dog. He's a hunting dog by trade and at 7 years old is still full of energy and prey drive. Tracking anything and everything is still a large part of his world, even if the hunting season is a few short months.

hardware store or some off-leash trails and parks around town. Taking the dog out for a walk is not unique or special. Perhaps you reading this have a dog yourself. You probably do the same routine part of your day as I do mine. Get up, go to work, come home, spend time with your family, and take the dog on an evening walk. Rinse, repeat. I would challenge you to be present in those moments outside if you aren't already. I'm guilty of putting on a podcast during a walk or listening to music like anybody else. But I've tried to make a habit of putting these things aside if I've got the opportunity. A leashed walk down the street?

Fine, music's not a big deal provided you're on the sidewalk. The hardware store? Well, we're here buying stuff so it's not much of an outing for the

dog, but it is a chance for socialization and to break up his day. What about a hike on a trail or a stroll on some public land? Those are the outings I try to be cognizant of. Quiet. A passing hello to another person briefly, and then back to isolation. Although built into the day-to-day of everyday life, something as simple as a walk with the dog can bring a calmness and recognition for everything we experience beyond our home's front door or the office. Why drown out the peaceful silence when in that moment?





These are some of the best days on the water, in December and January, when a lot of other sportsmen are watching football. Fly-rodders watch the weather and hope for a hatch of midges and look forward to the little black stoneflies, but there are better ways to tempt bigger trout in December and January. Plastic worms and minnows can tease big trout out from beneath the undercut banks and beads. tailored to size and color can turn on the bite.

TWITCHING PLASTIC

Plastic worms tend to produce as many fish as natural baits. And you don't have to dig through the compost pile to find them. Adapted from steelhead drift fishing the best rig is a six-pound main line tied to a barrel swivel. A sliding sinker on the main line is a good way to get the bait down but another option is to leave a tag on the main line knot and crimp on

removable split shot. The leader should be 20 inches long terminated at a No. 10-8 single egg hook.

Rig to drift the edge of a seam with just enough weight to tickle the tops of the rocks. Jeff Warner, founder of X Factor Tackle, relies on three main colors in cold winter water - hot red, fluorescent pink, and natural worm.

Warner's go-to for brown trout on his home water is a 1/16-ounce jig head on a No. 4 hook and an X-Factor Teaser minnow. He fishes without a float.

"In my experience, it is better to allow the bait to do its work as an injured bait fish. I don't want a natural drift, I want violent rips and jerks. It's why I like the lightweight jig. I don't need it to be down on the bottom. It lets the bait look more erratic than it does with a heavy jig head."

Warner's favorite on a bright sunny day is motor

oil with red flake. Warner recommends a plastic minnow in the tail-outs and along the seams and ripping it back.

"I like to cast it upriver and then work the clock so to speak. Even cast it straight downriver and twitch it. If I don't catch a fish by that time there ain't one in there."

The bite can be hard to detect. Keep the index finger on the line to stay in touch with the rocks and set the hook at the least tug that signals a grab.

FLY ROD EGGS/BEADS

When fishing egg imitations and hard beads, the big challenge is to get them at the level the fish are holding and allow a dead-drift presentation.

Try to position the bead about two inches above the hook. This can be accomplished in several different ways. One easy way to do it is to nail knot

a piece of clear mono on the leader and position it two inches above the hook acting as a stop.

Set the indicator (a good one is the easy-to-cast plastic Thingamabobber) and put split shot on above the tippet knot (or swivel) and set the float about the depth of the water.

When the trout bites the bead the angler reacts with a short upward lift which tends to pull the bead through and pin the hook in the outside corner of the mouth.

With whitefish spawning in western rivers in late

January and February we have bait to match. Trout that kev on whitefish spawn get used to gobbling the yellow eggs and its why some fly-fishermen tie on yellow wet flies in February without knowing the reason why the trout are biting. Summer steelhead may also spawn in January and February, in which case, the trout are eating orange eggs. In any case, small orange beads or tiny yellow eggs can turn a rainbow's head this month.

SOFT PLASTIC BEADS

One of the greatest moments in drift fishing is to watch a trout peel away from its holding lie and follow a soft orange egg downstream then crush it. A squishable, scented egg imitation tumbled along the gravel with a drift fishing rig or a bottomwalking drop shot setup is a good bet in December.

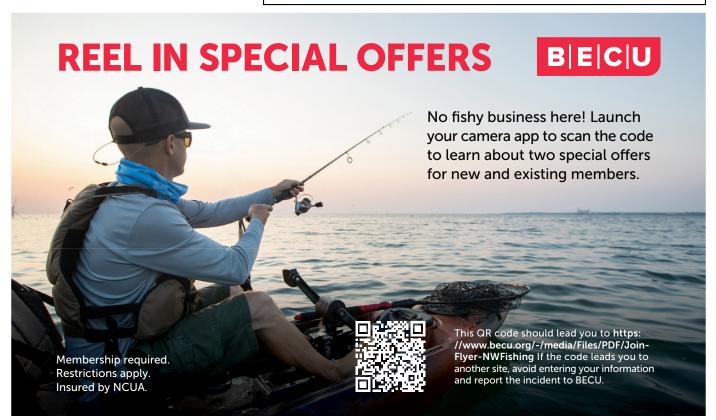
My favorite hook for this work is a Daiichi salmon egg bleeding bait hook sized No. 12 up to No. 8. Again, the soft bead is best positioned two inches above the hook, which can be accomplished by using a nail knot, a blood knot, a sequin or similar bead stopper.



One of the mistakes we make is using an indicator in shallow, clear water. If the fish and the bottom is visible, dispense with the indicator and just watch for the take.

A mistake we often make is allowing the weight to control the movement of the egg. This is why a sliding sinker is sometimes the best choice. And why a drop shot weight might be the best choice with a tag end of a surgeon's knot used to splice on a bit of 4-pound fluoro. That bait should present as freely as possible in multiple braided currents. The egg wants to be free!







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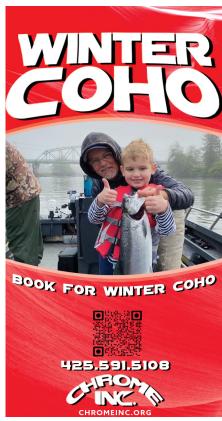
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