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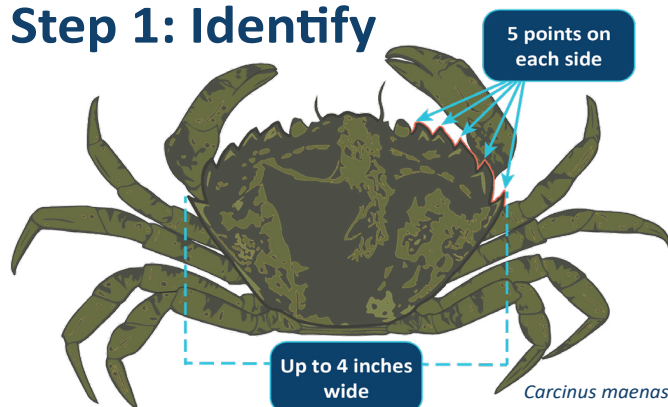


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EDITOR'S CORNER:

This month's issue features three beautiful destinations for anglers to check out. John Kruse takes us to Montana's Fort Peck for bass action, while Gary Lewis shares Southern Oregon trout fishing on the Lake of the Woods. Then it's back to Montana where Matt and I got to fish a true Blue-ribbon destination, the Madison River. Three places to add to your Bucket List! On a more serious note, Josh DeBruler takes a balanced look at the state of salmon runs in Washington.

This is also the time of year when we start seeing boating and driving accidents in the various social media groups we frequent. Sunken tow vehicles at boat launches, trailer accidents featuring boats ending up on top of trucks, and the tired and unimaginative inane comments display the worst in some of us. Let's resist the urge to add to the negativity that is part of our world and remember that behind each of these accidents is an unfortunate person whose day went from good to bad in the blink of an eye. Our sport can be such an uplifting activity, let's show compassion and empathy – pause and think before you hit that "post" button. See you on the water!

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



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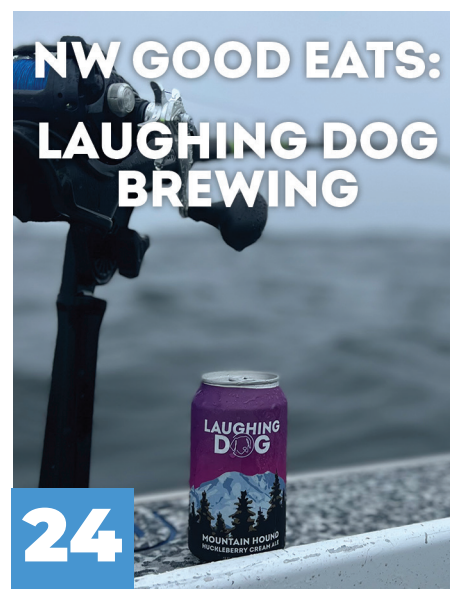
GUEST WRITER



MISC



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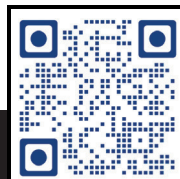
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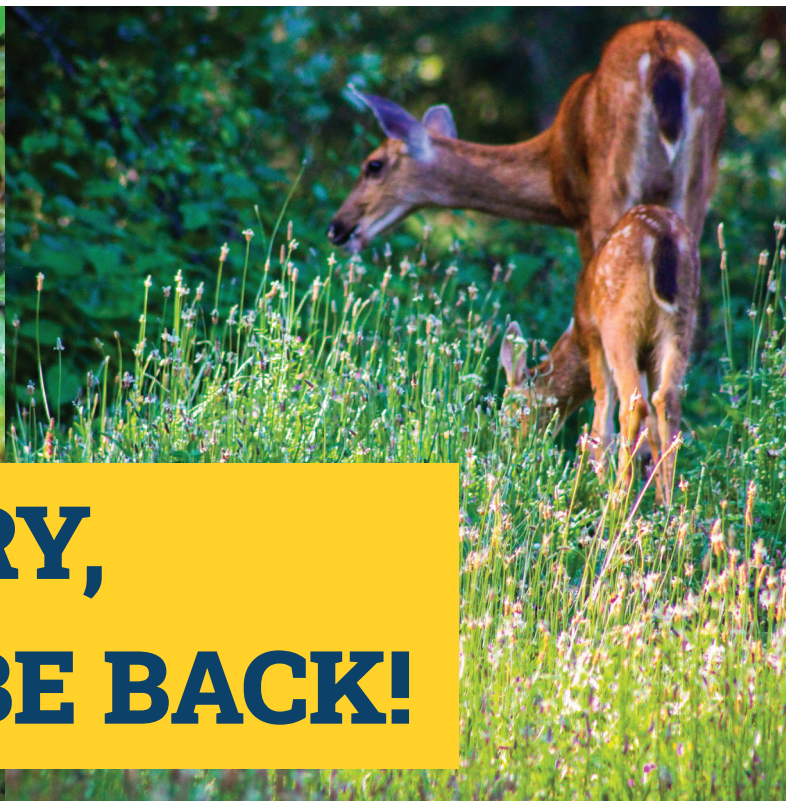


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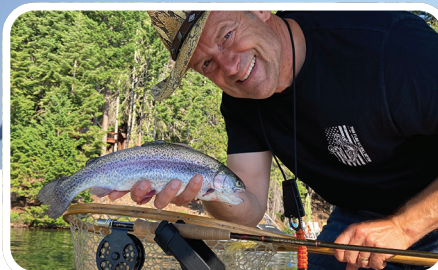


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How to Catch a Conelicker Fishing Lake of the Woods

By Gary Lewis



You know what a cone licker is. You see them in places like Seaside and on the sand at Diamond Lake and they have cone lickers at Lake of the Woods in southern Oregon too. These are the poor folks whose mommas and papas never taught them how to fish. They like to go to the lake too, and they are the ones who, if you bump into them on their floaties, ask "Didja catch anything?" Or, "What kind of fish are in this lake?" It's not a sin to be a cone licker. It wasn't their fault they were born in Sacramento.

There's another kind of cone licker. They are the big trout that eat a steady diet of midge larvae and are particularly susceptible to a pattern called the Ice Cream Cone. Lake of the Woods is a classic fishing lodge destination for

the whole family. It's got something for everybody - a well-stocked marina store with boats and paddleboards to rent, a gift shop, cabins to rent, campgrounds, a great restaurant with a view of the lake, and a bar on the second floor with even better views.

I set up the tent in the back of the F-150, a roomy two-man tent from Napier (napieroutdoors.com), specially made to the Ford's dimensions. Then I went down to the lakeside to look at the boat I had rented for the morning.

I knew exactly where I was headed, remembering it from the last time I had fished Lake of the Woods, which was too long ago. We were going to still-fish, having brought spinning

rods and fly rods and a selection of jar baits and chironomids.

Soaking in the vacation vibe at Lake of the Woods, I could not help but smile. A lot of people are looking for exactly this kind of American experience. They just don't know where to find it.

FISHING CHIRONOMIDS

Set up the rod with a tapered leader down to 4X tippet. Affix a Thingamabob indicator well up the line and tie on a No. 8-10 Ice Cream Cone chironomid pattern. With another 12 to 18 inches of tippet add a second Ice Cream Cone tied off the bend of top fly.

Casting a two-fly rig is not an art form. The main thing is to put the flies at the depth of the feeders, keep slack out of the line, and watch for the indicator to indicate.

The fun thing about this type of fishing is that some of the biggest fish move the indicator the least. Keep the rod tip low, touching the surface of the water, and be ready to set the hook. Like a rattlesnake.

Finding the feeders is the main thing with fishing chironomids. One trick is to drive the boat over the place you will fish then with a hemostat clamped to the bottom hook, gauge the depth of the water. Then adjust the float so that it puts the bottom fly something like 18 inches off the bottom. That puts the top fly 36 inches off the bottom. Pay attention to which bug gets bit the most and reset the rods accordingly.

You might have heard of the big bait-big fish principle. That doesn't apply to midge larvae. Big trout eat a whole of a lot of these tiny things.

WHERE TO ANCHOR UP FOR TROUT

A large mountain Stillwater in a forested setting, Lake of the Woods is fed by

several creeks but gets the majority of its water from groundwater seepage. The deepest water is found along the western shore where the depth is reported as 50 to 55 feet. There is a good mix of shallows where weeds and bugs grow and colder water deeps and rocky ledges, which makes for interesting fishing.

The resort is situated on the eastern side of the lake on the north shore of Rainbow Bay.

One of the best spots for trout is just outside of the marina. Anchor up anywhere within 100 to 150 yards of the marina and within casting distance of either the east shore or the west shore. Anywhere out in front of the marina can hold trout.

The other great trout area is along the west shore where a deep ledge makes for a great spot to anchor up or troll for rainbows and/or kokanee and the browns that hunt them.

We caught nine trout, a catfish, a perch, and a

couple of smallmouth bass in a couple of hours on both fly-fishing gear and spinning gear.

Standard trout rules apply for the Southeast Zone with a limit of 5 trout per day (only 1 trout over 20 inches) and 25 kokanee per day in addition to the trout limit. There is a 5 bass limit with only 1 bass over 15 inches. Angling is allowed 24 hours per day.

This lake is capable of growing hatchery trout big and holding them over. Trout can be caught year-round, but spring and fall are peak seasons for rainbows and browns. Trolling is popular on the lake, but still-fishing can fill out a limit faster, at least in my opinion.

Looking for a family fishing tradition to start? It's hard to beat Lake of the Woods with something for the whole family, even those cone-licking cousins who grew up in Sacramento. Heck, you might even teach them to fish.



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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FORT PECK RESERVOIR'S PLETHORA OF FISHERIES

BY JOHN KRUSE



Big lakes often mean big opportunities and Fort Peck Reservoir, located in Northeast Montana, qualifies in that regard. This huge impoundment of the Missouri River was formed when Fort Peck Dam was built in the 1930s. The lake is 134 miles long and with 1520 miles of shoreline, it is larger than the length of the California coast. There are fifty different species of fish swimming in the waters of Fort Peck Reservoir, and one of the most important is the cisco, introduced as a forage fish for walleye and lake trout by Montana Fish Wildlife

10 | **NWFISHING.net**

and Parks in 1984.

The cisco population is thriving now and so are a variety of species that feed on them.

Today anglers flock to Fort Peck from spring into the fall for a variety of fisheries. The most popular of them being walleye, which can grow to a huge size here. Jason Mundel is a top walleye tournament angler in Montana who hauled in a 17.76-pound behemoth earlier this year, just missing the state record of 18.02 pounds. Mundel says he is certain the big female was over the limit when he netted it but when it was brought into the boat

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it began rapidly squirting eggs all over the place. By the time Mundel was able to weigh it and photograph the weight, it was down several ounces, to the still impressive weight of the big hen. He then released to finish spawning.

Mundel lives near Fort Peck and spends lots of time fishing in the reservoir (147 days last year). He likes to work long primary points and secondary points and uses sonar to find schools of Cisco. Once he finds the bait fish, he usually finds several different species in the same area feeding on them including

walleye, northern pike, and smallmouth bass. Mundel likes to cast paddle-tail jigs to the fish in the spring and will transition to trolling spinner worm harnesses behind bottom bouncers as the waters warm up over 55 degrees. The northern pike as well as the walleye are often caught with live bait. You are not allowed to use the ciscoes found in the lake for bait, but you can use fathead minnows, creek chubs, and shiners which he will simply fish in a dead-stick fashion, dropping them towards the bottom (but not on it) from the side of the boat. As spring turns to summer topwater baits can be very effective for both the smallmouth bass and pike.

Lake trout are another option. In the spring they will be found in relatively shallow water (15 – 20 feet deep) feeding on the ciscoes along with the bass, walleye, and pike. As the waters warm though, the Mackinaw head to deeper water. The Mackinaw run big here, up to 38-inches, according to Mundel.

In these deeper waters, you will also find Chinook salmon as well as coho salmon, all stocked in the lake from a hatchery below Fort Peck Dam.

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Mundel will troll using downriggers and flashers in front of his bait or lures to catch all three species.

The salmon can get big here. The state record Chinook a 32-pound specimen, as well as the state record coho, a 4.88-pound salmon, both caught out of Fort Peck Reservoir. Speaking of state records, the current record smallmouth bass, sauger, saugeye, shortnose gar, and freshwater drum were also caught out of this big lake.

The primary access points for most anglers are near Fort Peck south of Glasgow which is almost all paved. Another option

is Hell Creek Marina north of Jordan where you'll travel 25 miles over gravel roads to get to the marina. There are campgrounds and boat launches at both locations. Additional access is available from Glasgow, Malta, and Highway 200 near Jordan though these roads can involve lengthy routes over gravel.

If you are looking for places to stay, eat, recreate and more in Montana's Missouri River Country check out the local tourism bureau's website at:

www.missouririvermt.com
and be sure to ask for a free travel guide while you are there.

If you are fishing out of the Fort Peck area, you really need to make the time to visit the Fort Peck Interpretive Center. This first-class museum is operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and tells a variety of stories.

The biggest attraction is the story of the reptiles that lived here 65 million years ago. The Interpretive Center is part of Montana's Dinosaur Trail. Two fossilized Tyrannosaurus Rex skeletons have been found near here.

One is now on display at the Smithsonian Museum and the other can be seen at the

Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman but replicas are on display here. Several other fossilized skeletons and replicas of dinosaurs and prehistoric marine reptiles can also be seen here. The fish and wildlife found in and around Fort Peck Reservoir and the Missouri River are also on display. Fish can be seen in two large glass tanks and taxidermized animals can be viewed in an impressive diorama.

Finally, the Interpretive Center tells the story of how the dam, called the largest hydraulically filled earthen dam in the world, was built

and how the community of Fort Peck came to be. The interpretive center is open from Thursday through Monday from 9 AM to 4 PM between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekend. There is also a nice campground and up to a two-mile-long nature trail adjacent to the Center.



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HOLDING ONTO HOPE

THE COMPLICATED STATE OF SALMON IN THE PNW

BY JOSH DEBRULER

Well before the Pacific Fur Company set up their first trading post in Astoria, Oregon, Before the earliest fish canneries on the Columbia River began popping up in the mid-1800s, the Pacific Northwest and its people have been defined by a culture of sustenance and heritage that is deeply steeped in the very existence of the pacific salmon.

The rich abundance of salmon didn't just sustain the indigenous communities of the northwest, it allowed them to thrive and aided in developing rich cultures over the millennia. It was, and is, the cornerstone of art, sustenance, ritual, and community within

nearly all of the Pacific Northwest First Nations people. This history of Northwest salmon harvesting dates so far back (an estimated 10,000 years) that it forces us to consider salmon as a sport and commercial fishery, as something that exists only as a small blip in time—200 years, to be exact. Furthermore, it's within that 200 years that many northwest salmon populations have been pushed to the brink of extinction. So, where did we go wrong? And is there any fixing a fishery that has changed so dramatically over the years? To look at the details within context may be a good place to start, and perhaps this article can help us navigate through the weeds of a topic that has historically

sown divisions between anglers, commercial fishermen, tribes, and fish and wildlife agencies.

HISTORICAL DECLINE OF SALMON

It's no secret that salmon runs were once much healthier than they are today. Though the state of Washington didn't start record keeping on fisheries until 1935, we have plenty of scientific and anecdotal evidence that depicts a long history of vibrant salmon runs which looked significantly different than they do today. Lewis and Clark noted the great abundance of salmon observed by their party on the Columbia River, early settlers took advantage of the fish for sustenance use, and soon, savvy entrepreneurs seized what was viewed

as a highly profitable market opportunity. Taking advantage of the great numbers of salmon in the Columbia, early commercial fishing companies constructed fish wheels—a large ferris wheel like trap that scooped considerable amounts of salmon out of the water. It's said that some of these fish wheels were known to harvest up to 70,000 salmon per day.

DAMS

Then came the dams. A number of dams were erected throughout the northwest for the purpose of hydroelectricity, a zero-emissions source of power. All these dams, in some form, inhibited salmon and other fish from reaching miles of prime spawning habitat while also disturbing their natural habitats in several ways. On the Columbia—the Grand Coulee and the Chief Joseph Dam, on the Snake River—the Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental, and Ice Harbor Dam. These dams are likely the most contentious, but other smaller dams up the Snake River have effectively eliminated salmon returns at the furthestmost portions of the Columbia River basin, specifically, northeastern

Nevada. Historically, salmon would make a 900-mile journey from the Pacific Ocean, up the Columbia River, up the Snake River through eastern

Washington and Idaho, then finally arriving at their spawning grounds in the Owyhee River, where Shoshone-Paiute tribes would spear a portion of these fish for sustenance.

DEFORESTATION

Whether it be for commercial timber harvesting or development, deforestation has created a multitude of problems for salmon habitat. When land is cleared around streams, the natural ecosystems become compromised, and the various organisms that salmon feed on diminish or disappear. Aside from the loss of food resources, the natural shade produced by the canopy of the trees diminishes or disappears as well. Without shade from trees, streams are subjected to an increased amount of sunlight, thus increasing the temperature of the water. Salmon are incredibly sensitive when it comes to water temperature, and drastic increases or decreases in temperature affect metabolic rate, cause salmon to seek out colder water upstream,

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and increase vulnerability to predation. In a nutshell, altered ecosystems due to altered habitats complicate the survival and reproduction processes of salmon.

DEVELOPMENT & POLLUTION

Water pollutants are believed to have a detrimental effect on salmon health, size, mortality, and reproductive success. Though the effects of pollution and salmon survival can be hard to quantify, it is well-accepted amongst scientists that pollutants from a variety of

sources like storm runoff from vehicles or improperly disposed industrial waste, are contributing factors to the decline in salmon stock.

POSITIVE TRENDS

On the West Coast, there are currently 17 salmon populations listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. These populations range from California to Washington State and include (but are not limited to) the Lower Columbia River Coho, Snake River Sockeye, Hood Canal chum, and Puget Sound Chinook salmon.

Though these facts might not inspire optimism at first glance, it's important to note that "threatened" doesn't necessarily mean these populations aren't on an upward swing in terms of recovery. For example, the Lower Columbia River Coho has steadily been making progress toward the federally approved recovery goal.

Hood Canal Summer Chum and Snake River Fall Chinook are both currently approaching that set goal. Yet, more needs to be done.

DAM REMOVAL

Enter damn removal...

Dam removal works for salmon recovery, but there are many issues created by the removal of dams. For example, on the lower Snake River, dams create vast amounts of clean energy, and reduce water velocity, thus allowing easy movement of barges for agricultural product transportation, and they help provide irrigation for swaths of agricultural land. In short, they are a huge part of local economies and infrastructure alike.

These inherent issues with dam removal were finally addressed in what was a culmination of years of

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lawsuits and litigation and is believed to be the most comprehensive salmon recovery plan to date. In December of 2023, The Biden-Harris administration came to a historic agreement when they signed a Memorandum of understanding between Columbia River Basin Sovereign tribes, the state of Washington, the state of Oregon, and environmental groups. This 1-billion-dollar settlement agreement is a 10-year federal partnership with tribes and states that prioritizes salmon restoration and recovery, while also allocating funds to research on other infrastructural needs that will be an inevitable byproduct of the removal of the 4 Lower Snake River dams. Ultimately, it is up to Congress whether the dams will be removed, but the groundwork is now in place to make these possibilities viable. This is a huge and unprecedented leap in the right direction for salmon recovery.

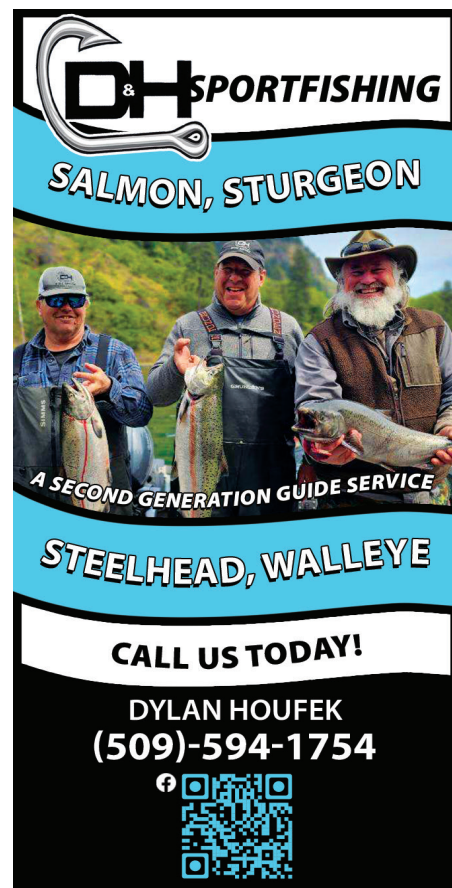
HATCHERY PROGRAMS

Hatchery programs are a lot of things...

They were once believed to be the solution to the impact commercial overfishing had on salmon numbers, they were

offered as an answer to the devastation caused by the damming of waterways, and they were a mechanism to uphold the treaty rights of Washington indigenous tribes under the Boldt Decision of 1974 (decision granting Washington tribes fair and equal share of fish harvest). But despite the best efforts of hatchery managers, these hatcheries have often fallen short of the goals that had been set forth.

Much research has been conducted on the efficacy of hatchery programs, and the findings have often been bleak. One important example is the Columbia River. A journey to the Pacific Ocean down the Columbia River has always been a perilous task for young salmon, and naturally, many don't complete their journey. Throw in a myriad of dams, warming slack waters behind these dams, and an increase in invasive predators, the journey becomes even more fraught with danger. To compound the problem, salmon bred at hatcheries are losing their genetic diversity, and fast. Without the highly developed genes of their native counterparts, the fish become weaker,



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and survival rates drop.

This is not to say hatcheries don't create a positive impact on a declining salmon population. After all, most Pacific salmon returning to our rivers today are hatchery salmon. Amid the new Biden administration commitment to salmon recovery, 60 million dollars is being invested in NOAA fisheries to facilitate improvements to current fish hatcheries, many of which were on the brink of failure.

Furthermore, many West Coast hatcheries are implementing new techniques within their facilities to improve salmon survival rates.

These techniques include changing the way fish are fed so that the process will more closely mimic natural feeding, including natural features in the tanks where fish are being stored, and breeding hatchery-salmon with more wild-salmon to increase genetic diversity.

Habitat restoration To date, 474 acres of wetlands, 9,257 acres of estuaries, and 31,564 acres of waterway have been

restored in Washington state through collaborative efforts between the Department of Fish and Wildlife, NOAA, The Nature Conservancy, various nonprofits groups, and volunteers. Working to improve the waters and land that create salmon habitat is a vital component of the comprehensive approach needed for a task as complex and crucial as salmon recovery.

Together, we can all do our part in protecting a resource that is so important to our communities, our families, and future generations.

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MADISON RIVER SHOULDERS

BY MIKE CAREY



Mountains come out of the sky and they stand there. Snow-covered peaks create a breathtaking backdrop as we work our way down the fast-flowing, slightly off-color river. I could say a whiter shade of pale, but I'd be pushing the '70s music lyrics references a bit too much.

Matt and I are floating the Madison River, Epic, Historic, Blue-ribbon... pick your adjectives. At first glance, I wondered "Where do you even fish this?" To the untrained eye, the river looked uniform from side to side, a fast-moving, rocky, never-ending flow of energy. Hunter and Sam, our guides from River Borne Outfitters, had briefed us on the strategy to fish for this untamed wild river.

"Today you're going to be fishing buckets" Hunter elaborated, "When the water is running this fast, you want to target the small back eddies, slicks, and close to the shore. You'll see the holding water better as the day progresses. It requires some accurate casting but it's not that hard. The fishing can be really good, but I'm a bit worried about the color of the water."

For my part, I was glad to be fishing and not rowing. We rapidly drifted past large boulders that would easily have flipped a less skilled rower.

"That's why you fish with a guide", I thought.

Suddenly Matt called out "Fish on!"

I looked back and his rod was doubled over with the weight of a solid fish, which revealed itself with a series of impressive jumps, clearing the surface a good three feet. A chrome bright, wild (that's the only kind of trout in the Madison) rainbow was giving Matt a good battle. He skillfully took his time and brought the glistening 18-inch fish to the net. Scooping him up, Hunter let out an excited "skunks out of the boat" and it was the start of a memorable day on one of Montana's most amazing and wild rivers.

We had arrived the previous day at the invitation of

Ed and Jeanne Williams, owners of Rainbow Valley Lodge. Ed and Jeanne had moved from California to Ennis, Montana over 35 years ago and taken over the lodge, growing it over the years into a destination for the rich and famous, and the average person. The two of them radiated an aura of enthusiasm and hometown friendliness that I have come to treasure over the past two years of living in Montana. We felt as if we had new friends we could return to year after year, and indeed, many of their guests expressed the same feelings to us. Not the largest lodge in

Ennis, but certainly the most homey and one you'd want to return to year after year. Heated pool, rustic pine wood interiors, and beautiful flowers everywhere give you that "western feel" you are looking for when traveling to Montana's fishing destinations. The impressive collection of fishing memorabilia in the lobby could keep an angler's attention alone, not to mention their well-stocked O'Dell Spring Creek Fly Shop.

The evenings are a gathering of guides and guests, chatting about the day's fishing adventures

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and making new friends and acquaintances.

“Shoulder Season” is the term Ed had shared with me about the lodge’s seasons. Spring and fall anchored a full and busy summer of guests coming through Ennis to fish the famous Madison and use Ennis as a base camp for the 70-mile drive to Yellowstone National Park. Ennis is the last major town on the road to the north Yellowstone entrance. As such, come the end of the school year it rapidly fills up with tourists and summertime adventurers streaming to visit America’s most iconic national park.

Anglers stream in as well, as the Madison River shares its impressive fishing with fishermen from near and far.

While the summer is a busy time for the lodge, spring and fall are another matter, and visitors can experience a slower and more relaxed pace if they’re willing to take a few chances. For us, the weather was outstanding with a day in the upper seventies and sunny. The recent warm-up had increased river flows to over 2,500 cfs (cubic feet per second), which had us drifting at a solid pace, but not too fast to catch fish. And as we found out as the



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day progressed, the visibility at about 18 inches was just fine for fish catching.

Soon after Matt’s nice start to the day, I watched as my strike indicator ducked under the water. I gave a quick tug and felt the heavy pressure of a nice fish. Unlike Matt’s fish which had treated us to a fun aerial display, my fish was a bulldog, the sign of a nice brown trout. Headshakes and hard runs kept me focused and I worked the fish back to Hunter’s waiting net. He skillfully scooped up the brown-speckled fish and after a quick measurement, we



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released a nice 16-inch thick brown trout.

Our setup for the day was a quality 5-weight Orvis rod and reel, floating line, and 8-foot leader. A pair of size 8 girdle (stonefly) bugs tied 18 inches apart were the fish enticement, and bites were monitored by orange strike indicators (all the better to see in the early morning sunny glare). Our instructions – when in doubt, set the hook! While “bucket fishing” requires a degree of accuracy, it is a technique that lends itself well to intermediate and even beginner fly anglers. The casts are not terribly long, and if you miss the sweet spot of the “bucket” there is enough underwater structure that you still have a good chance of getting a hookup.

While the Madison does not have the fish numbers of the Missouri, there are still plenty of fish to be had, and Sam explained that

guides only promote catch and release on the river, so numbers have remained very consistent over the years.

As I noted earlier, this river, at springtime flows, in my opinion, would be a degree of difficulty I would not recommend to beginners behind the sticks. There were more than a few large boulders that could easily pin or flip a driftboat. So, if your rowing skills are marginal, leave the boat at home and hire a guide. Or wait for the slower flows of summer, but plan on having to share the river with a whole lot more anglers. We continued the float catching fish at a regular pace, beautiful rainbows and brown trout, and an occasional whitefish. We didn't catch any of the great white buffalo, AKA arctic grayling, but Hunter assured us they were in there. Brent, our film crew for the weekend,

even caught his first trout on the fly with the help of his guide, Sam. The big fish of the day was Matt's 20-inch brown he caught at the end of the day (what a way to finish!).

If you're looking for the true western trout fishing river experience, keep the Madison River in mind, and don't be afraid of fishing those shoulder seasons. You'll find more than a few big-shouldered trout willing to share their day with you.

Rainbow Valley Lodge, Ed and Jeanne Williams, 800-452-8254

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Laughing Dog Brewing is a must-stop for those fishing in or around Lake Pend Oreille in North Idaho.

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Laughing Dog not only has 12 taps on hand, but their food is an elevated comfort style that triggers curiosity and tickles the pallet. The menu is constantly evolving, being driven by local produce and their award-winning Chef/Owner's imagination. Which in my opinion, is limitless.

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Chef Adam Hegsted is a genius in his field at the top of his game.

THE FOOD:

Laughing Dog takes the hotdog to a whole new level. Their Haute' Dogs menu has something for everyone. Try the Traveler! Made with local smokey sausage, it is topped with jalapeno jam, peanut sauce, cilantro, pickled jalapenos, and basil aioli. Laughing Dog's burger choices are just as imaginative and delicious. The PB & J Burger has jalapeno jelly, peanut butter sauce, cilantro, Thai basil aioli, and pickled peppers on a brioche bun. The Korean Chicken Sandwich is amazing and is my favorite. The Classic Burger delivers for those burger enthusiasts' predetermined expectations of what a hamburger should taste like. The Truffle Mac and Cheese and Avocado

Nachos are two of Rob Holman's favorites.

THE TAPS:

Laughing Dog Brewing is known for many things, and their Huckleberry Ale is top of the list. Amid huckleberry territory, Laughing Dog prides itself on sourcing NW ingredients that are brewed in the Northwest in their Ponderay Brewery. The summit Cider is out of this world and is made with northwest apples. The Dogfather...It's everything the name suggests, and more. Stop in to find a new creation on tap, like the Huckleberry Seltzer, that has made its way from the tap to the shelf because of its taste and popularity. Schedule a tour of the Brewery if you have the time or check out their website to find where you can find Laughing Dog Brewing products in stores near you.



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TIPSTACTICS

It's the time of year when the fish are on their spawn, and in their beds and many of us anglers are throwing artificial baits, especially plastics. I'm going to share 3 different tactics you can use while pitching plastics, may it be Bass, Walleye, or Panfish.

BY ERIC MAGNUSON



1

Pairing two different plastic profiles together on one jig has been an effective way to entice the most finicky pan fish. A collared style with a ton of movement, and a subtle trailing tail gives them the best of both worlds.



2

We've all had the tail, and or legs ripped off the plastic we're using thinking we need to change it out.

Well, don't.... Inspect it, and if it still looks fishy, fish it. Some of these, which I call "Creature Bait" have sometimes outperformed the original profile. Sometimes they may not want all that frill in their face, just something more sized down and buggy.



3

I've tinkered with larger bait while bass and walleye fishing. May it

have been a damaged plastic I refinagled on the jig knowing it would still fish. Or

I change the profile completely myself for a

different look and action. Like this

here Burbot Bomb from Bad Dad's Jigs, I've fished the original profile with a ton of success. One

day fishing Smallmouth, I cut one in half with scissors and tossed it on another jig head, and the action drove the fish "Bonkers"!

DROPSHOT TECHNIQUE FOR BASS



I am no expert by any stretch of the imagination, but I have grown fond of the Drop Shot technique in my short, four-season fishing journey. I have been using it for just over a season's time. This is a very productive method to catch fish in a variety of states. In my first outing for smallies this season, I hooked and caught 3 smallies on three consecutive casts. It is the only method that has done this for me to date, and from the shore to boat. At the very least, I can share with you what I have learned through trial, error, and experience (which isn't much).

You don't need a Drop Shot specific rod. A medium-light to medium-action rod from 6'6" on up to 7' should work for you for now. If you find drop shotting to your liking, you can then

opt to go with a Drop Shot specific rod of your choice. As a rule of thumb, a longer rod will enable you to have more line control and leverage; two big pluses in drop shotting.

I prefer spinning reels (a size 20 or 2500 reel is an excellent choice) because they require less work to give the bait a better (IMHO) descent than a baitcast reel. Sorry baitcast reel users, but the way a spinning drops the bait smokes a baitcast reel any and every day for drop shotting. To those who use baitcast reels exclusively, please note I said for drop shotting. There will not be a need to strip line off just to make the bait fall. With that said, casting reels can also be used. I just prefer a spinning reel. You may use whatever reel you want. Even a Barbie pole can get

it done for drop shotting! However, I would opt for heavier line and a BC reel if I were to drop shot heavy cover.

Drop Shot Weight and Type A 3/16 - 1/4 oz weight is a good starting weight. Going any lighter might make it harder for you to read what is going on until you get experience. As for the shape, I like to use either a teardrop or a cylindrical shape. I have not experimented with other shapes. Windier conditions and stronger currents might make you want to choose a heavier weight, but let's not worry about that for now.

LINE

Because you are drop shotting, lighter line is preferred if the cover you are fishing allows it. Go up in # strength if the

cover dictates this. I like and use 6# fluorocarbon, particularly Seaguar's Invizx. This line kicks fanny. No doubt about it. The plus in going with fluorocarbon in a higher # test if needed is despite having a slightly thicker line diameter; the angler retains the benefit of fluorocarbon's trait of near invisibility as advertisers so claim. Whichever line you choose, I think the fluorocarbon line of your choice will be fine.

BAITS

Keep an open mind here. Many baits of a variety of shapes can be used. The general rule of thumb is a tendency to use smaller baits since we are "finesse" fishing (translates to downsizing in general). The typical length of a drop shot bait usually ranges from 3" - 4.5" but this is NOT set in stone. Roboworm, Senkos, Sniper Snubs and Bolts (these two are locally made baits), Reaction Innovations Flirts, and heck, even Baby Brush Hogs and Tubes can be used. Think out of the box. I have used longer worms too. This season, the 4.5" Roboworm (in Aaron's Magic) and Sniper Snubs in Watermelon and Dark Brown have been



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so effective that to date I have not seen a need to try something else or other colors. It might be different for bass in other waters. If you wish to know, so far the most effective baits for me have been, the snubs and roboworms.

HOOKS/KNOT

I prefer to use size 1 or 2 (mostly size 2) Gamakatsu Split Shot/Drop Shot hooks, or Owner Mosquito hooks. I attach the hook to the line with a Palomar knot and after it is tied, I insert the extra line (tag end) through the hook's eye before attaching the weight.

I have heard good things about size 4 Gamakatsu hooks, but I have not yet had a chance to try them yet.

LEADER LENGTH

The best way to figure this out is to experiment. I have had success with leaders being as short 4-6" to nearly but not quite 2'. Because drop shotting is not limited to a purely vertical presentation, a longer leader is a good idea if you wish to work it somewhat like a Texas or Carolina rig. The longer leader length (which I define here as the distance



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between the weight and your hook, perhaps 18" as a ballpark figure) will enable you to keep the bait off the ground with the shallow angle that will result from a long cast. For a more vertical presentation, a shorter distance from the hook to the bait can work.

Imparting Life to the Lure
Despite the initial perception of working this lure, it is not all about jigging and wiggling the bait. An angler can indeed work the bait this way, but I can tell you from personal experience, that wiggling and jigging has accounted for the fewest number of catches.

So what should one do in addition to the wiggling/jigging tactic? Keep the weight on the bottom for the most part and leave enough slack to let the bait sink on its own weight. Then, when you think the bait is near the bottom lift/twitch the

rod just enough to move the bait a little (without moving or minimizing the movement of the weight on the bottom) and repeat. In effect, what you are doing is working a semi-slack line and this is what is imparting action to the bait. No hits? Repeat if you wish, or add a little dead sticking to the mix or, drag your bait to the next spot. All are good choices. The dragging of the weight from one spot to the next also imparts life and action to the lure and can help to draw a strike. In addition, working with the slack and dead sticking have been far more effective for me compared to wiggling and jigging the bait to death

Not sure what the bait will do? Find some shallow water and drop down your bait. The depth should be one where you can see all the way to the bottom. Once the weight is on the bottom, let your bait

fall by lowering your rod. Before the lure hits the bottom, raise the rod's tip enough to bring the lure up, and do your best to keep the weight in place. Watching this will give you an idea of what will likely be happening when you are not able to see the bait with your own eyes. Visualizing what the bait is doing when I can't see it helps me to focus on what I am trying to do, and that is catching fish.

THE STRIKE OR HIT

This can vary depending on the activity level of the fish, the quality of your set

up to a certain extent, and the line you are using. More sensitive rods do a better job of transmitting what is going on to you. I have had the blessing of drop shotting with my Berkley Cherrywood Rod, which is decent and not too shabby, but comparing it to my Lamiglas Certified Pro Drop Shot rod is something else. Here is my analogy. If the Cherrywood provides stereo sound to me while watching a DVD movie, the Lamiglas gives me the sound in THX, for the full cinema experience. The latter rod is not necessary to enjoy drop shotting, but

it makes it a lot easier to feel and detect the subtle strikes.

The line you use also can influence the feel of the strike. My experience working with both mono and fluorocarbon is that the latter always seemed to give me a better picture. We all know now that although FC line can have as much or more stretch than a comparable monofilament line, it is likely that its density still enables it to beautifully transmit information from the end of our line, to the rod and to our hands. The hit or strike can feel like:



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1) A mushy tug or tick, which could translate to a complete inhalation of your bait or the fish attacking the lure from the hook's side.

2) A nibble or nibbling, that transmits vibrations through the line to you. Sometimes you can see or feel the line vibrate through your semi-slack line. More sensitive rods tell you this much better and more clearly. I believe when the hit is like this (my best guess anyway as I visualize the strike), it is possible that the fish might have taken the lure from the side

opposite the hook and the nibbling/vibrations you feel is the fish taking in the bait into its mouth, eventually getting to the hook.

3) Bam! It's on!

THE HOOK SET

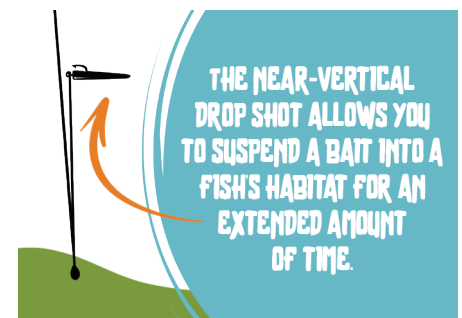
For one and three, just reeling up the slack and adding enough tension to make the line taught is sufficient for most cases to drive the light wire hook home. For case two, you have to wait until the fish gets to the hook and then do as mentioned above. If you don't, you will pull the lure from the fish's mouth. Since it didn't get to the

hook, there is no way the fish can get hooked.

I have written this based on the experience I gained from drop shotting. Take it for what it's worth, an opinion at best. I will close by giving you a final warning:

WARNING: Drop Shotting is as addictive as it is effective.

Good luck and go get'em!



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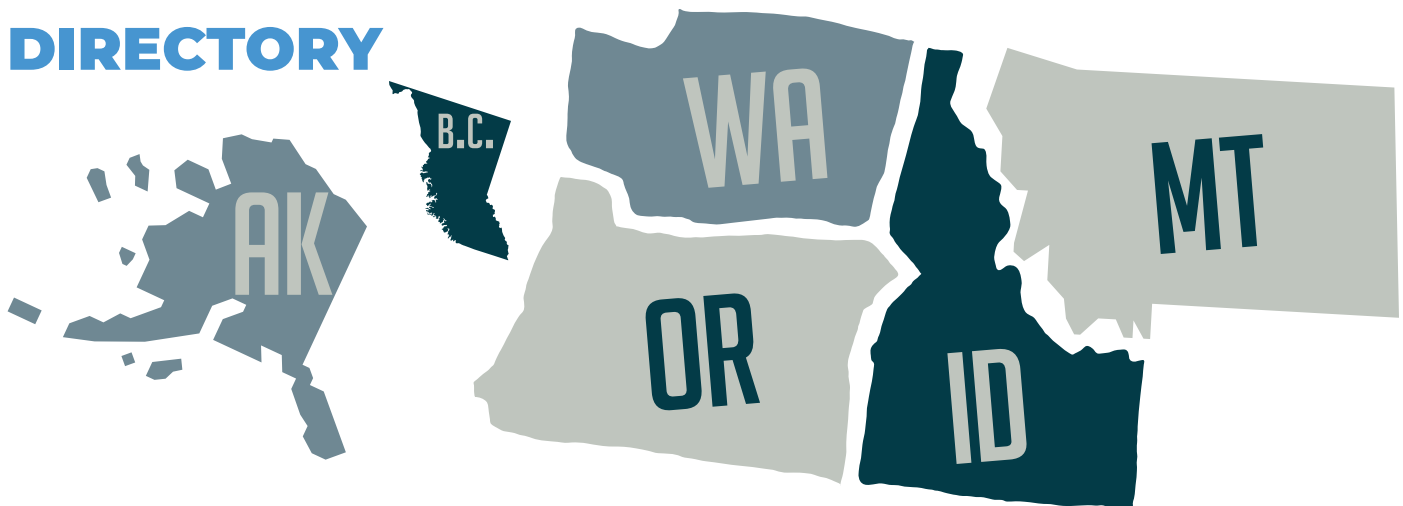
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