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VOLUME 4, ISSUE 5

10 COVER STORY

DIGGING INTO RAZOR CLAMS

Photo by Mark Yuasa

HOW TO CATCH TROUT
ON A RAINY DAY

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EDITOR'S CORNER:

I don't know about your weather, but here in Great Falls we had three weeks in February of negative temperatures, and then in 24 hours went into the 40s, with 50s forecast to end February. A glimmer of hope as winter gets long in the tooth. Gotta love those chinook winds!

March is always an interesting month as we see that winter to spring transition taking hold. This month's articles are a mix of ice fishing and looking forward to spring opportunities. March also signals the end of Northwest Sportsman shows. I hope you had a chance to visit our booth this year and say "Hi" to the NW Fishing team. We really enjoy visiting with our fans! The last show is the Big Horn Show in Spokane March 20-23rd. Stop by, pick up some free magazines and buy some NW Fishing swag, guaranteed to help you catch fish (or at least look good doing it).

Meanwhile, the ice is solid and with any luck I'll find some time to get out and wet a line...

Mike Carey, Northwest Fishing



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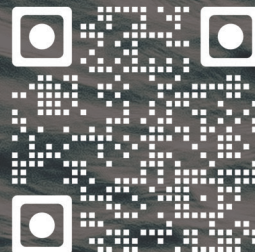
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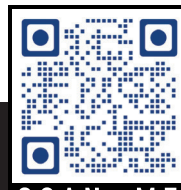
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**All of the articles do not necessarily represent the opinion of Northwest Reel Life magazine.*



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HOW TO CATCH TROUT ON A RAINY DAY

BY GARY LEWIS



They say an angler is a man who spends rainy days sitting around on the muddy bank of a river doing nothing. Because his wife won't let him do it at home.

Once I made a rainy day road trip through Central Oregon early in the spring. I didn't fish much, but I talked to anglers, most of whom were doing nothing. Here's a sample of the folks I met and how they were fishing.

One guy had the door of his Mercedes propped open while he fished the Deschutes at Warm Springs. He had tied a hook direct to the end of the main line and had a worm on it. No swivel. No leader. No split shot. Just a hook and worm. He couldn't figure out why he couldn't cast farther than the end of his rod. I couldn't figure out how he had generated enough brain activity to afford a Mercedes.

8 | **NWFISHING.net**

At Taylor Lake in The Dalles, a father and son were sitting in a Chevy watching their poles. I walked up about the time they reeled in. They had split shot crimped on main lines, big snap swivels, and short, heavy snells on big No. 4 worm hooks. Okay for catfish, maybe, but not for trout. They told me the trout weren't biting today. When they went home they probably said, "The fishing was good; it was the catching that was bad." News Flash: It ain't ever gonna be good.

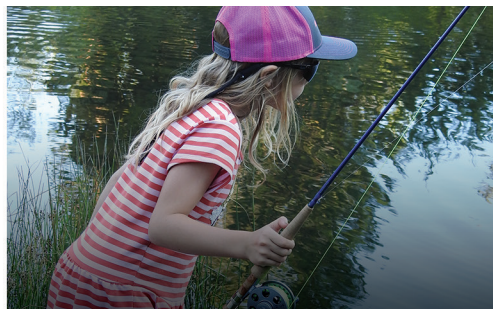
At a kids-only trout pond in Bend, I saw a man and wife in their 90's fishing with fly rods. They were seated on lawn chairs right next to the sign that said *Fishing For Children Aged 17 and Under*. Tied to very short leaders, they had huge Spin-N-Glos with nightcrawlers on 2/0 trebles. Too big for anything smaller than a 30-pound Chinook. Their baits lay on the bottom about two

feet out from the bank. Call me old fashioned, but I think people when they go fishing for trout, should know how to rig for trout.

Here are three easy ways to catch 'em.

PASTE BAITS/JAR BAITS

Use a paste bait, particularly when the water is cold in the early season. Slide a bullet sinker onto the main line and then tie on a barrel swivel. Then tie on a 30-inch four- to six-pound test leader terminated at a No. 12-16 treble hook. Pinch a bit of the paste bait (Power Bait, Gulp! or similar), roll it in a ball and cover the hook with the dough. Cast out, let the bait sink to the bottom, then leave it. Set the rod down and watch it. When the line starts to move, pick up the rod and reel in. This rig catches fish and it kills them. So don't plan on fishing for sport, for catch-and-release. Use this method when fishing for a fish dinner.



BOBBER & WORM/ BOBBER & EGG

The bobber and worm rig is just as effective as it ever was. Rig this way when fish are active and higher in the water column.

Tie a swivel to the main line. Tie on a leader about 24 inches long. Tie on a No. 8-12 bait holder hook if fishing with a worm. Use a No. 12 hook if fishing with salmon eggs. When using nightcrawlers, cut the worm into pieces instead of using the whole worm. Pinch on a bobber above the swivel. Pinch a couple of small split shot on the leader. Cast out, set the rod down and watch the bobber. When the bobber starts to move, let it bounce a couple of times then set the hook.

FLY & BUBBLE

Use a fly and bubble when the water is clear. One of the most effective rigs for catching hatchery trout in clear water is a spinning rod rigged with six-pound test mainline and a float and fly combo. Slide a clear plastic bubble over the main line. Tie on a swivel. Tie on a 48-inch 4-pound test leader and finish with a No. 10 Red Tag Woolly Worm. At the lake, fill the plastic bubble with water which provides the weight necessary for long casts. If the fly doesn't sink fast enough, put on a small split shot.

Cast and reel it back S-L-O-W. Keep moving around the pond until fish are located. This is a good method for catch and release.

Fishing is not hard, but using the wrong baits and fishing in the wrong spots will lower an angler's success rate. Make it easy for the fish to find your bait or fly. Fish where fish are.

Still need help? Stop at a sporting goods store. Take your rod and tackle box inside. They're going to sell you something, and that's okay. But get a tackle expert to rig the rod the right way. They'll do it if you ask nice. Pay attention so you can do it next time. Then go fishing. Your loved ones want you to get out of the house. As has been said before, "Give a man a fish and he has food for a day; teach him how to fish and you can get rid of him for the entire weekend."



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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DIGGING INTO RAZOR CLAMS

BY MARK YUASA

Coastal razor clam enthusiasts are really digging the winter razor clam season, and later in March come much longer days and a switch to morning low tide harvest opportunities.

“Digging has been relatively good this winter when conditions allow, and hopefully we’ll see more spring-like weather as we bid farewell to February and welcome March,” said Bryce Blumenthal, WDFW’s recreational razor clam manager. “Once we receive final marine toxin test results for each series of digs then we’ll proceed with evening low tides during most of March and shift to morning low tides at the end of the month.”

The Department of Health (DOH) requires test samples for marine toxins, and domoic acid levels that must fall under the

guideline level before a beach can open for digging. Domoic acid, a natural toxin produced by certain types of marine algae, can be harmful or fatal if consumed in sufficient quantities. Levels this winter have stayed well below the cutoff threshold and continue to remain that way.

Final approval usually occurs about a week before the start of each digging series. Details about domoic acid, as well as current levels at ocean beaches, can be found on the WDFW’s domoic acid webpage at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/basics/domoic-acid>.

Not all coastal beaches are open for every dig, so diggers are encouraged to make sure their intended destination is open before heading out. Optimal digging occurs between one and two hours before the listed time of low tide.

CLAM DIGGING DATES

CONFIRMED date during late afternoon/evening (noon to midnight only) low tides:

Saturday, March 1:

Low tide minus 0.1 feet, 7:15 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

TENTATIVE dates during late afternoon/evening (noon to midnight only) low tides:

Saturday, March 8:

0.6 feet, 2:13 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

Sunday, March 9:

0.4 feet, 4:18 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

Monday, March 10:

0.2 feet, 5:10 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

Tuesday, March 11:

0.1 feet, 5:52 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

Wednesday, March 12:

0.2 feet, 6:28 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

Thursday, March 13:

Low tide 0.4 feet, 7 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

Friday, March 14:

0.7 feet, 7:30 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

CLAM DIGGING DATES

TENTATIVE dates during late afternoon/evening (noon to midnight only) low tides:

Wednesday, March 26:

0.0 feet, 5:08 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

Thursday, March 27:

-0.1 feet, 5:50 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

Friday, March 28:

0.0 feet, 6:29 p.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

TENTATIVE dates during morning (midnight to noon only) low tides:

Saturday, March 29:

-0.1 feet, 6:58 a.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

Sunday, March 30:

0.8 feet, 7:43 a.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

Monday, March 31:

-1.2 feet, 8:28 a.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

Tuesday, April 1:

-1.3 feet, 9:17 a.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

Wednesday, April 2:

-1.0 feet, 10:09 a.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Copalis.

Thursday, April 3:

-0.5 feet, 11:07 a.m., at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, and Mocrocks.

DOH requires test samples for marine toxins, and domoic acid levels must fall under the guideline level before a beach can open for digging. Domoic acid, a natural toxin produced by certain types of marine algae, can be harmful or fatal if consumed in sufficient quantities. Refer to DOH's website for more information at <https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/shellfish/recreational-shellfish/illnesses/biotoxins/amnesic-shellfish-poisoning>. Details about domoic acid, as well as current levels at ocean beaches, can be found on WDFW's domoic acid webpage at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/basics/domoic-acid>.

On all open beaches, the daily limit is 15 clams per person. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container, and all diggers must keep the first 15 clams they dig, regardless of size or condition, to prevent waste. With spring looming on the horizon, Washingtonians should consider buying 2025-2026 recreational licenses now especially if they plan to dig for razor clams in April. Licenses can be purchased from WDFW's website

at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/fishing>, or from hundreds of license vendors around the state. Be sure to buy your license before current licenses expire after March 31. All diggers age 15 or older must have an applicable fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. WDFW recommends buying your license before visiting coastal beach communities.

As in past years, WDFW is asking beachgoers to avoid disturbing nesting snowy plovers – a small bird with gray wings and a white breast – by staying out of the dunes and posted areas along the southwest coast. Snowy plover nests are nearly invisible, and it is vital to give birds the space to live and thrive during nesting period, especially along the southern end on Twin Harbors – known as Midway Beach – and the north end of Long Beach.

Also avoid leaving leftover food or trash – which attracts predators – on the beach and picnic areas, keep pets on a leash, stay out of dunes, and avoid areas which are clearly marked with posted signs.

Through March 1, WDFW has provided 72 digging

days since the season began on Oct. 3, and if marine toxins aren't an issue it is likely that total will climb to more than 100 days once the season ends.

As of Feb. 1, at estimated 154,759 diggers have harvested 1,806,071 razor clams. The daily average per digger of clams harvested from Oct. 3 through Feb. 1 is 12.1 razor clams at Long Beach (12.6 in 2023-2024), 11.9 at Twin Harbors (12.4 in 2023-2024), 11.0 at Copalis (12.6 in 2023-2024) and 11.1 at Mocrocks (12.7 in 2023-2024).

More coastal razor clam digs are possible in April and early- to mid-May depending on the harvest levels achieved at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, and Mocrocks beaches. Look for details on the WDFW website.

The 2024-2025 Razor Clam Management Plan is available on WDFW's website at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfishing-regulations/razor-clams#management>.

For more razor clam information, go to <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfishing-regulations/razor-clams>.

DIGS ARE BENEFICIAL FOR COASTAL TOWNS

The most recent surveys taken during the 2023-2024 season generated an estimated revenue of \$51.9 million by diggers (351,062 digger trips for 100 days of digging) who visited the small coastal communities.

The highest since occurred during the 2021-2022 season, which generated a robust revenue of \$71.7 million by diggers (474,427

digger trips). According to the WDFW Razor Clam Management Plan nothing has come close to that figure since economic data was tallied during the 1997-1998 season. Stores, tackle shops, restaurants and gas stations rely on these opportunities during the lean tourist times in autumn, winter, and spring to help boost their economy.



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The 10-year average is \$35.9 million for 70 digging dates with 307,041 digger trips. The 20-year average is \$30.6 million for 57 digging dates with 297,174 digger trips.

COASTAL RAZOR CLAM-RELATED ACTIVITIES

The free Ocean Shores Razor Clam Festival, organized by the Convention Center and City of Ocean Shores, is happening on March 21-23. There will be food vendors; exhibitors; live music; Dungeness crab meal (advanced ticket purchase recommended); a Sunday seafood brunch (advanced ticket purchase required); chowder cookoff

and tasting passport available to sample and vote on Friday and Saturday; and a razor clam gun decorating contest. No razor clam digging will be allowed during those days because low tides aren't conducive to digging. For details, go to <https://tourismoceanshores.com/razor-clam-and-seafood-festival/>.

The Long Beach Peninsula Razor Clam & Shellfish Festival, hosted by the Long Beach Merchants Association, is April 26-27 at the Veterans Field in Long Beach. There will be food vendors; exhibitors; live music; clam digging lessons; restaurant chowder

taste-off; amateur chowder cook-off; oyster shucking; crab plates; smallest and biggest clam contest. For details, go to <https://www.longbeachmerchants.com/razor-clam-festival>.

(Mark Yuasa is a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Communications Manager. He also was the outdoor reporter at The Seattle Times for 28 years.)



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Cowlitz River Steelhead *Stories*

By Hannah Pennebaker

The Cowlitz River is truly legendary for its hatchery steelhead run. It is a reliable producer year after year. Many of us here in the Northwest, myself included, caught our first steelhead out of this river. I'll never forget seeing my bobber go down and watching in awe as a 17-pound steelhead exploded out of the water.

My heart was pounding as I fought to hold on while it furiously tried to shake my lure. It was an unforgettable experience that motivated me to return each year. For better or for worse, steelhead can be tricky to figure out. This is what makes them so sought after and rewarding to catch. A bit of preparation and extra knowledge on your side might just be what tips the scales in your favor. Let's take a look at how to have a more successful trip to the Cowlitz River.

Tackle Tips

Like all fisheries, your first step will be gearing up. All traditional steelhead methods will produce fish on the Cowlitz, depending on the day. You will see plunkers, drift fishermen, and bobber fishermen. Plunkers will generally throw Spin N Glo's baited with shrimp and/or eggs, or plugs. Drift/bobber fishermen use bait, yarnies, jigs, or beads.

I will usually bring 2 or 3 rods so I can use multiple techniques without wasting time on the water retying. Experiment with all these different techniques and see what you like. Each technique has its advantages.

Plunking can be extremely effective because you can target moving fish. Beads are becoming more and more popular because they are a small, natural presentation that works well when fish aren't aggressively biting.

Jigs are extremely versatile and eye-catching, especially for fresh fish. Vary up your technique and pay attention to what's working for other anglers as well.

Regardless of technique, it certainly helps to start by arming yourself with knowledge about the species you're targeting. Steelhead are clever and wary. Keep this in mind, even when choosing something as simple as your leader line. Use clear bobbers and light line, preferably fluorocarbon.

Your presentation should be as invisible as possible. Part of the challenge of steelhead fishing is finding the right balance of gear that won't spook the fish but also won't break from a thrashing, jumping fish. Steelhead put up a tough and acrobatic fight. Practice tying your knots before heading out, they will be put to the test.

River conditions are also critical to keep in mind. When the water is low and clear, use small presentations. When it is high and murky, use large presentations. I always recommend having some hardware in your tackle box.

Spinners and spoons can sometimes entice fish that won't bite jigs or beads. Their flash will attract fish from far away. It's a quick and efficient way to work a large amount of water if you aren't sure where fish are holding.

Try fishing seams between fast and slow water. Steelhead also love to hang out around rocks. Read the water and think like a fish. Try a variety of angles and retrieve speeds. If you're using a bobber, you can play with the depth of your presentation. I'd recommend changing up your lure often, even if it's just changing colors. Part of the fun is just changing up your strategy.

Locations

Whether you're fishing from a boat or on shore, Blue Creek will likely be your destination. It is the focus for most steelhead anglers. Blue Creek Boat Ramp can launch two

boats at a time and has a large parking lot.

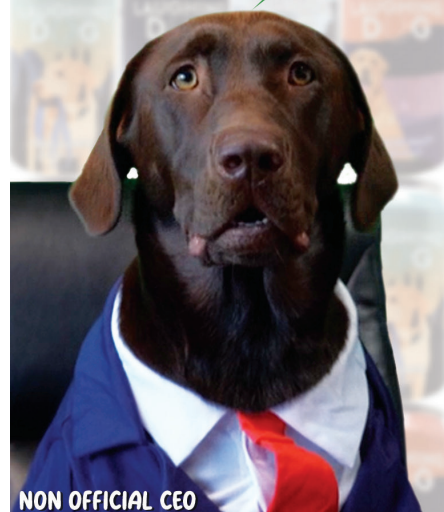
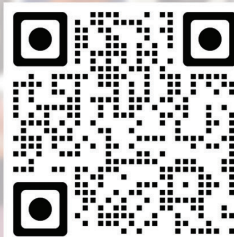
Like most rivers, the Cowlitz is best fished from a boat. It's wide and deep enough that jet sleds are very common, but you will see some drift boats. That isn't to say that bank anglers won't have success. There is plenty of shore access around Blue Creek. If needed, there is an ADA wheelchair-accessible platform near the fish hatchery, relocated from its previous spot in Blue Creek.

If you've never been to Blue Creek, be warned. When the fishing is hot, it gets crowded. Be prepared to hike or wade a bit if you're looking to get some peace and quiet. If you're traveling from afar and need accommodations, Centralia or Mossyrock are probably your best bets. There are good restaurants and hotels in both cities.

As always, check the rules and regulations before heading out. The Cowlitz is subject to emergency rule changes. It's a good idea to check Tacoma Power's website to see the current water visibility and flow. Preparation is key, especially if it's a long drive for you. Good luck out there!

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Why stop fishing just because it's not flip-flops and t-shirt weather? The seasons may change, and the boat may be winterized and put away for storage, but that doesn't mean we have to stop our fishing adventures. On the contrary, there is something to say about the hard water fishing experience when the temperatures drop. Here in Montana, ice fishing is just another part of the ebb and flow of the outdoor lifestyle many residents share and love. Candidly, I have not ice-fished on these bodies of water, yet. I have, however, fished most of them and we even have several episodes at a few of the mentioned locations with future plans to highlight the other fisheries! Without further ado, here's a detailed exploration of five fantastic ice-fishing spots in Montana. Let's dive into each location to understand why they're

great choices for ice fishing enthusiasts.

1. FORT PECK RESERVOIR

Fort Peck Reservoir is a premier destination for ice fishing in Montana. This massive reservoir stretches across more than 245,000 acres, making it one of the largest bodies of water in the state. The reservoir's vast size provides a diverse habitat that supports a variety of fish species, including northern pike, walleye, lake trout, and smallmouth bass. You may recall a chinook salmon episode filmed in the late summer with the NWF crew and Shelby Ross of Ross Outdoor Adventures. While the chinook are certainly appealing, the ice fishing appears to be in its own class as well!

The reservoir's northern pike population is particularly noteworthy, with anglers regularly catching specimens of over 20 pounds. During the

winter months, these fish are more accessible as they move into shallower waters under the ice. Ice fishing at Fort Peck requires careful planning due to its size and the potential for rapidly changing weather conditions. However, for those willing to brave the elements and the drive, the rewards can be substantial.

Local guides and outfitters offer ice fishing tours and equipment rentals, which can be particularly helpful for those unfamiliar with the area. The reservoir's remote location also means that anglers can enjoy a relatively undisturbed experience, surrounded by the stark beauty of Montana's winter landscape. The isolation is perhaps one of the major draws to the area - Circle, MT, just southeast of Fort Peck, is the farthest location away from a Starbucks in the contiguous United States.

2. GEORGETOWN LAKE

Georgetown Lake, located in the picturesque Anaconda-Pintler Range, is a popular ice fishing destination known for its abundant kokanee, rainbow, and brook trout populations. The lake sits at an elevation of over 6,000 feet, and its high altitude ensures solid ice cover during the winter months. Georgetown has been on my radar as a location to fish since picking up ice fishing - and for great reason. One of the appealing aspects of Georgetown Lake is

its accessibility. The lake is located near major highways, and there are several public access points with ample parking. This ease of access makes it a convenient option for both day trips and longer stays.

Rainbow trout are the primary target for ice anglers at Georgetown Lake. These fish can be found throughout the lake, but they often concentrate around the mouths of tributary streams where they feed on insects and other small organisms. Anglers typically use a combination of jigging and



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tip-ups to entice the trout, with small jigs tipped with worms or maggots being particularly effective.

In addition to rainbow trout, Georgetown Lake also hosts a healthy population of brook trout. These fish are often found in shallower waters and can be caught using similar techniques to those used for rainbow trout.

Outside of trout, the kokanee salmon bite makes Georgetown an attractive ice fishing location. There is no limit on kokanee and seeing some of the photos others have taken, they do not appear to be in short supply. The lake's consistent ice conditions and reliable fish populations make it a favorite among local anglers.



3. CANYON FERRY LAKE

Canyon Ferry Lake, located just outside of Helena, is another top-notch ice fishing destination in Montana. This large reservoir spans over 33,000 acres and is known for its healthy populations of walleye, yellow perch, and rainbow trout.

One of the unique features of Canyon Ferry Lake is its relatively shallow depth, which helps maintain stable ice conditions throughout the winter. The lake's shallow waters also make it an ideal habitat for walleye and yellow perch, which are the primary targets for ice anglers.

Walleye can be found throughout the lake, but they often concentrate around submerged structures such as rock piles and drop-offs. Anglers typically use jigging techniques with lures that mimic small fish or insects to attract walleye. Tip-ups baited with live minnows are also effective for targeting these predatory fish. A recent walleye fishing trip with Mackenzie River Pizza Co. saw us bottom-bouncing for several nice eater-sized fish. It's reasonable to assume that ice fishing would produce a similar yield.

Yellow perch are another popular target at Canyon Ferry Lake. These fish are known for their schooling behavior, and once a school is located, anglers can often catch multiple fish in quick succession. Small jigs tipped with worms or maggots are the preferred method for catching yellow perch, and the use of electronic fish finders can help locate schools of fish under the ice.

Canyon Ferry Lake's proximity to Helena makes it a convenient destination for both local anglers and visitors. The lake's abundant fish populations and reliable ice conditions ensure a productive and enjoyable ice fishing experience.

4. LAKE MARY RONAN

For those seeking a quieter and more secluded ice fishing experience, Lake Mary Ronan is an excellent choice. Located west of Flathead Lake, just outside of Glacier National Park, this smaller body of water offers a peaceful setting. The lake is known for its healthy populations of kokanee salmon and yellow perch.

Kokanee salmon are the primary target for ice anglers at Lake Mary Ronan.



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SCAN ME



These landlocked sockeye salmon are prized for their fighting ability and, of course, delicious flavor. Kokanee can be found throughout the lake, but they often concentrate in deeper waters during the winter months. Anglers typically use small jigs or spoons tipped with maggots or corn to attract kokanee. Electronics such as fish finders can be particularly useful for locating schools of these fish under the ice. Yellow perch are another popular target. These fish can be found in shallower waters and are often caught

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using small jigs tipped with worms or maggots. The lake's clear waters and abundant vegetation provide an ideal habitat for yellow perch, and anglers can expect consistent action throughout the winter. Lake Mary Ronan's scenic surroundings and peaceful atmosphere make it a great destination for those looking to escape the hustle and bustle of more popular ice fishing spots. The lake's relatively small size also makes it easy to navigate, ensuring a productive and enjoyable experience. An opportunity to combine ice fishing, a

scenic view and a historic area make Lake Mary Ronan an ice fishing paradise.

5. HEBGEN LAKE

Sticking with the "lakes close to national parks" theme, Hebgen Lake, located near West Yellowstone, is a renowned ice fishing destination known for its populations of rainbow and brown trout. The lake's proximity to Yellowstone National Park adds to its appeal, offering stunning views and a unique winter fishing experience.

Hebgen Lake is one of the first bodies of water in the region to freeze over each winter, providing early ice fishing opportunities. The lake's large size and diverse habitat support healthy populations of both rainbow and brown trout, making it a favorite among local anglers.

Rainbow trout are the primary target for ice anglers at Hebgen Lake. These fish can be found throughout the lake, but they often concentrate around the mouths of tributary streams and areas with submerged

vegetation. Anglers typically use jigging techniques with lures that mimic small fish or insects to attract rainbow trout. Tip-ups baited with live minnows or worms are also effective.

Brown trout are another popular target at Hebgen Lake. These fish are often found in deeper waters and can be caught using similar techniques to those used for rainbow trout. The use of electronics such as fish finders can help locate schools of brown trout under the ice.

Hebgen Lake's stunning winter scenery and reliable

ice conditions make it a must-visit destination for ice fishing enthusiasts. The lake's proximity to Yellowstone National Park also provides opportunities for wildlife viewing and other winter recreational activities. The Madison River Fly Fishing episode with The Rainbow Valley Lodge from this past season was filmed just a few miles north of Hebgen Lake. Imagining those picturesque mountains in the winter season with fresh snow would instill a sense of the rugged west in anyone.

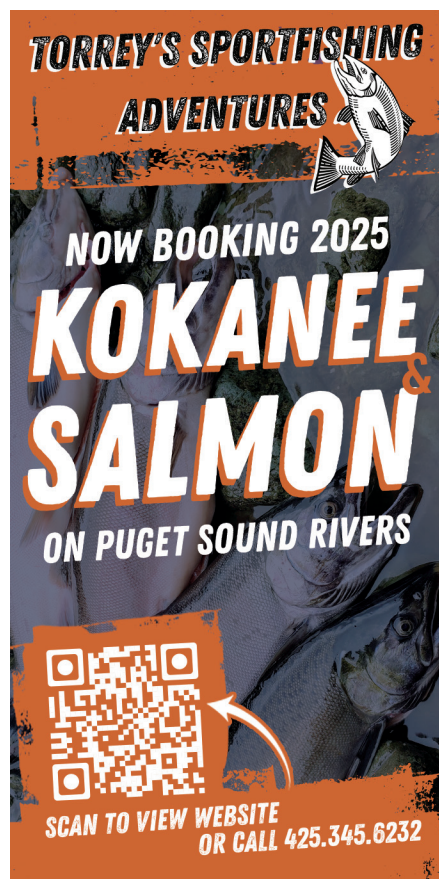
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5 GREAT LURES

FOR SPRING BASS

BY JOHN KRUSE

I love fishing for bass in the Spring! Bass are as big as they are going to get all year and as water temperatures warm and bass prepare to spawn, the bite can be amazing! By early May in the Pacific Northwest, with water temperatures around 60 degrees in many lakes, you can easily catch and release twenty-five bass a day. Here are five lures I love to use in the spring to help me get that done.

FOOTBALL HEAD JIG

A weedless jig is a lure that works all year long. The football head jig can be pitched or flipped into a variety of places bass like to hang out to include

under docks, into brushy cover, rocky or gravel areas, beaver huts, flooded timber and the list goes on. I like to use a quarter, 3/8th ounce or half-ounce jig depending on how deep I am fishing.

One way to fish a football jig is to let it hit bottom and then slowly jig it back towards you. Most bites occur as the jig falls back towards the bottom. Another way is to use a sweeping motion with your rod, allowing the jig to drag across the bottom.

I always put a soft plastic trailer on any jig I am fishing with for bass. Good colors to use are black and blue or a green pumpkin.

CHATTERBAIT

A lot of bass anglers swear by the chatterbait for springtime fishing. This bait features a metal blade on top of the jig head that flashes and vibrates through the water. The chatterbait was popularized by Z-Man, and their original Z-Man ChatterBait still catches fish, especially in the spring. Many anglers, me included, let the chatterbait fall to the bottom and then retrieve it at a moderate pace next to brush or weed lines or near woody structure. If that does not work, try a very fast retrieve, even in colder water.



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SPRING LURES TO USE FOR BASS.

That is a tactic Kyle Clark, an avid tournament bass angler and the owner of PNW Fishing Adventures, swears by. A three-eighth to half-ounce chatterbait is a popular size to fish at depths of 10 feet or less. Popular colors are white, brown/black, black & blue and in stained water, chartreuse.

SENKO

When the bass are on their spawning beds a soft plastic worm called a Senko is hard to beat. This is a shallow water offering and precise casting while sight fishing for bass is a key to success. The number one color to fish is green pumpkin but at times, a purple worm with blue fleck can outshine the green pumpkin. I personally like to fish with a five-inch Berkley Powerbait Senko called The General, because the bass seem to hold onto it longer. However, many other serious bass anglers prefer Senko baits made by

Yamamoto.

The Senko should be fished without weight. You can fish it Texas rigged through the nose and watch it slowly fall towards where the bass are. Others will fish it wacky rigged, with a hook right through the middle of the worm. The way a wacky rigged worm falls triggers vicious strikes from bass as it slowly undulates down through the water. Use a #2 or #1 Wacky hook and if you can find ones with wire weed guards that will help prevent some of the snags, you'll encounter fishing around flooded timber and shrubs.


LIPLESS CRANKBAIT


The lipless crankbait can be fished in cool waters but really starts to prove itself when the water temperature hits 55 degrees. Bill Lewis came out with the original Rat-L-Trap decades ago. This is a hard lure with a slim profile designed to produce a very

tight wiggle. BBs inside the lure provide a rattle as the lure is retrieved.


A lipless crankbait is a great search bait because it can be cast a long distance, and you can cover a lot of water looking for schools of largemouth or smallmouth bass. In the latter half of spring (and all the way into autumn) you can fish the lure with either a moderate or rapid retrieve. Very short pauses as you retrieve often trigger strikes. I like to fish this lure along rocky riprap or just outside the edges of cover like flooded willows or weed lines.

A number of companies manufacture lipless crankbaits. In recent years, I have gravitated to the Berkley War Pig. I have a couple of plastic tackle boxes filled with half ounce, three-inch War Pigs in a variety of colors and they have become a true high-confidence lure for me. In the spring red can be a good color or you can match the hatch and try fishing lures that imitate trout, perch, bluegill, or bass.


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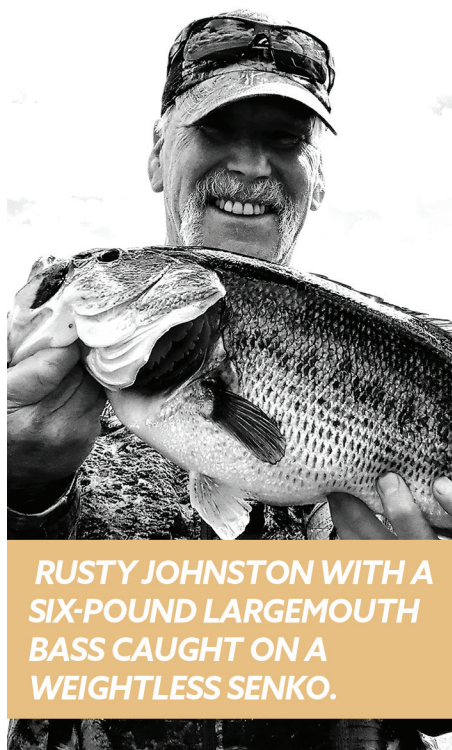
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FROG

Never overlook a soft plastic, weedless frog for springtime bass. They are generally made with a hollow body and have hooks on the back of the body. The “legs” of the frog provide action that attracts bass, and if you have a concave face on your lure, a popping retrieve will often attract even more bass.

This is a lure designed to cast into the weeds or lily pads where you would not dare throw a traditional lure. Jerking the lure on top of the water and weeds can generate strikes from bass

that erupt out of the water to smash the lure. The number one mistake most anglers make while fishing frogs is to set the hook too soon. As tempting as it is to set that hook when that bass comes out of the water, you need to wait until you feel the weight of the fish at the end of your line. That is when you set the hook with a hard jerk and begin fighting that bass.

Conventional wisdom says frogs (and other top water lures) fish best in the early morning and in the evening.

However, a weedless frog is a lure you can really fish all day, especially on a cloudy day.

So, there you go, five great lures to help you catch more bass from March through June (and beyond). Fill your tackle box with these staples and make the most of your day on the water with more hook-ups. You’ll be glad you did.

JOHN KRUSE

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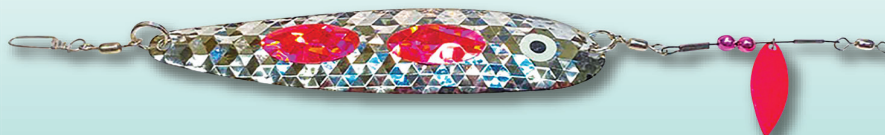
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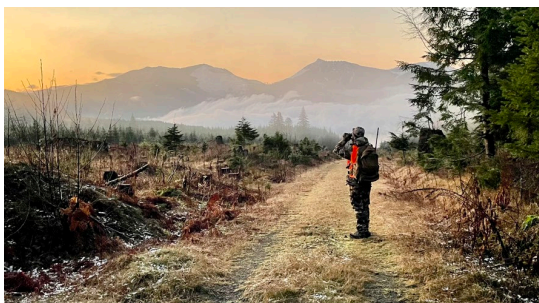




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DRILL BABY, DRILL!

BY MIKE CAREY



The evolution of an ice fisherman parallels that of other angling pursuits in many similar ways. There are the initial baby steps, followed by a slow, but steady progression down the uneven road of knowledge. Over the course of time and experimentation, the neophyte grows in understanding of his craft, with the final result being a functioning ice fisherman, capable of venturing out and having a modicum of success. My journey, I imagine, is not much different from any others. I've reached the point where the "watch one, do one, teach one" adage of my nursing profession gives me the credentials to share a little knowledge with readers new to ice fishing. If you are at the beginner

stage of ice fishing, one of the things that may make you scratch your head and seek advice, are the various options of creating a hole in the ice to actually fish. There's more than one way to drill a hole, so let's run down some of your options before sinking too much money into an unproductive "hole".

First, the "caveman" approach. For this technique, you'll need a hammer. Yes, you're reading my mind. With a hammer, you can break through previously drilled holes. The advanced hammer technique would be to bring a large chisel

and hammer. Before the seasoned ice anglers laugh too much – this technique does work.

The problem is it requires a lot of work! And finding relatively fresh holes to open. A variation of this technique is to use a Spud Bar, a full-size 6-foot pole with a hardened blade on the end of it. Again, it will work and as a bonus give you a nice cardio workout to boot. I predict you will quickly move up the ladder to more refined hole drilling methods.

Handheld augers have several advantages for new anglers. First and most importantly, they work. Second, they are an affordable solution if you're on a budget or still at that phase of deciding how

deeply you want to plunge into this winter sport. Third, they are carbon neutral (and as such the State of Washington should give its users a tax break...).

Finally, they are also a great cardio workout. That said, when my 33-year-old strapping son tells me it's a lot of work, as a new Social-Security-receiving citizen, I know I can pass on manual ice augers.

Which brings us to power augers. Our ancestors didn't conquer fire for nothing! As you explore the world of powered ice augers you'll find three different styles, all of which

work and each of which have their own advantages and disadvantages.

First, let's look at the electric drill ice auger. Electric augers have a couple of nice advantages. First, they are not as noisy as gas augers. That's important to some of us who value the peace and quiet of ice fishing, not to mention not scaring fish. Second, they tend to be lighter than gas augers. As you get more into ice fishing, you're going to find your sled filling up with more "essential stuff". Having a lighter ice auger means you can carry other "stuff", i.e. crap.



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Electric ice augers can be further broken down into two subsets – self-contained augers and drill-attached augers.

The self-contained have everything you need to start drilling. The electric drill auger requires a separate drill that attaches to the auger, and batteries to run it. This drill should be brushless for longevity and should have a minimal amount of power available, around 700-inch pounds with an ½ inch drill chuck and at least a 4amp battery. An underpowered drill will not get the job done and will likely destroy the drill in short order.

Electric drill ice augers work, and many people use them. That said, they have a big negative: batteries. Drilling a 6” deep hole is a piece of cake, but when you get into 12-18” of ice be prepared for a slower process, and more importantly, rapidly depleting batteries. Today’s batteries do not like cold weather and require that you bring several extra batteries. That adds both cost and weight to the equation. These batteries aren’t cheap.

The newer self-contained electric drills are lighter than gas, and the batteries

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last longer. They are also more powerful than most electric drill augers. However, they are also pricey, costing upwards of double the price of a gas-powered auger.

Both hand-powered and electric augers lead us to

another disadvantage – less opportunity to drill more holes and move around. When that battery is done, it's done. This brings us to the next ice augers class.

Gas-powered ice augers give anglers a tool that

doesn't limit one's day of drilling. With a tankful of gas, you'll be able to "run and gun" with the best of them. Drilling holes is easy and fast. The negatives of gas augers are the weight, the sound, and the odor. A variation on the gas auger is a propane auger. The only disadvantage I've heard about propane is that the bottles can freeze up in colder temperatures. Gas augers also can have issues with reliability and starting and require routine maintenance to be in top working order. The noise of a gas drill can spook fish as well. I used an electric drill auger last year, and

while it did the job, I was frustrated by the slow drilling and the depleted battery issue. After finding a lighter-weight (26-pound) gas auger on sale recently, I pulled the trigger. I'm excited to give it a try, especially on those 12-18" thick lakes and reservoirs.

As you can see, there are several options for drilling holes in the ice, each with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. It boils down to personal preference and cost.

Whichever route you go, stay warm and safe on the ice!



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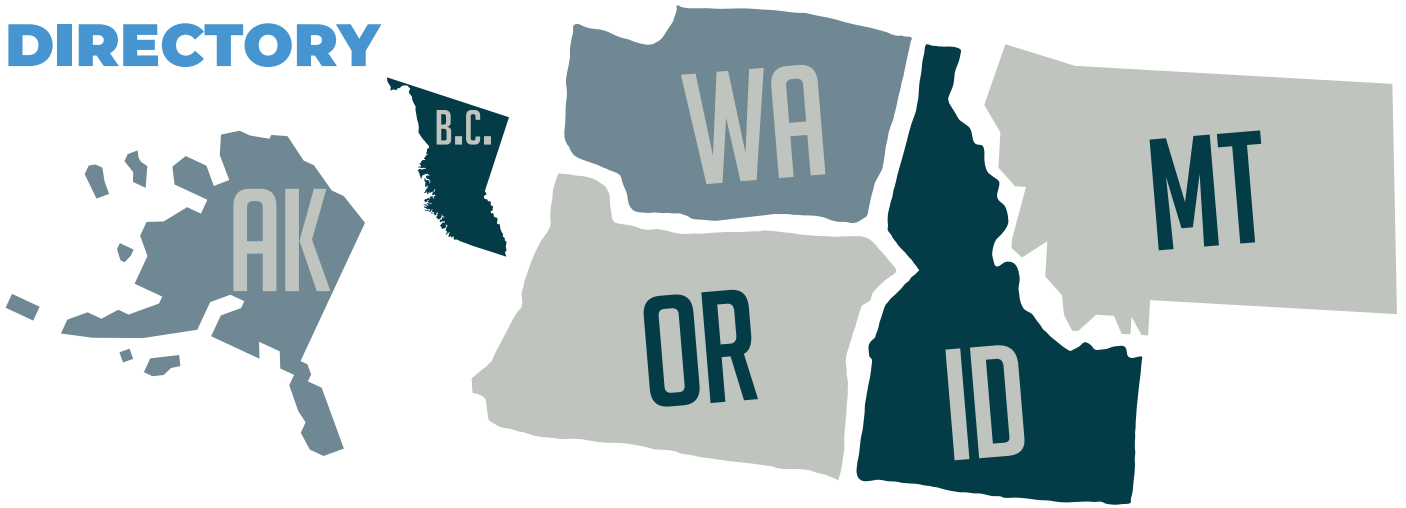
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