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COVER STORY

LINGCOD LOOKAHEAD

Photo by Randy Castello

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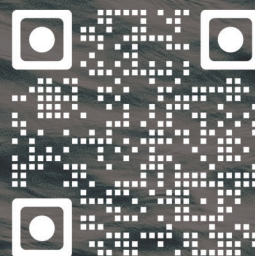
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EDITOR'S CORNER:

Springtime is here! And with it comes the promises of new adventures ahead. I've always made a point of exploring new locations, techniques, and species to fish for, and moving to Montana has certainly made that a whole lot easier. Every week offers the opportunity to see new sights and travel to places not visited before. Fly rods that gathered dust in years past are now in the front rotation, and salmon gear moves to the back. The calendar steadily fills up with trips "locked in". As my wife JoAnn says, "Is it on the calendar?" If I forget to write it in, it isn't confirmed. Marriage requires give and take, flexibility, and good communication. A fair balance must be struck. I have been blessed to have a spouse who gives me a lot of freedom to explore my adventurous side. I try my best not to take advantage of that freedom! Whatever adventures you have planned may they fill your heart and soul with joy. Enjoy this month's issue and see you on the water.

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



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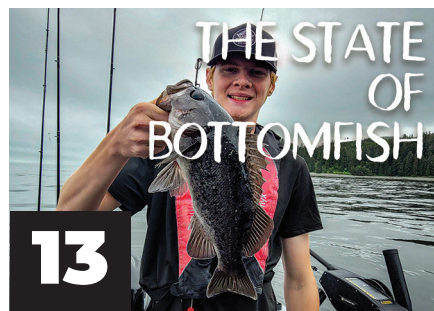
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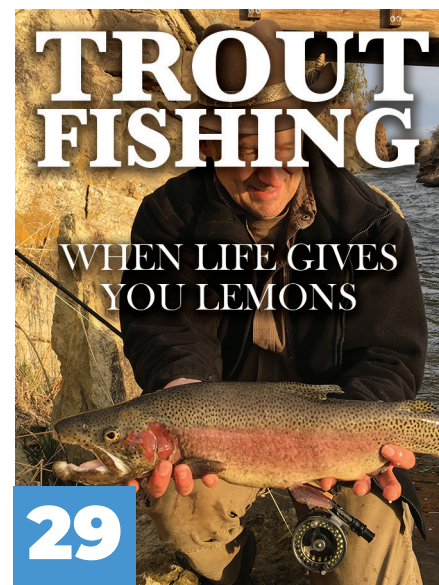
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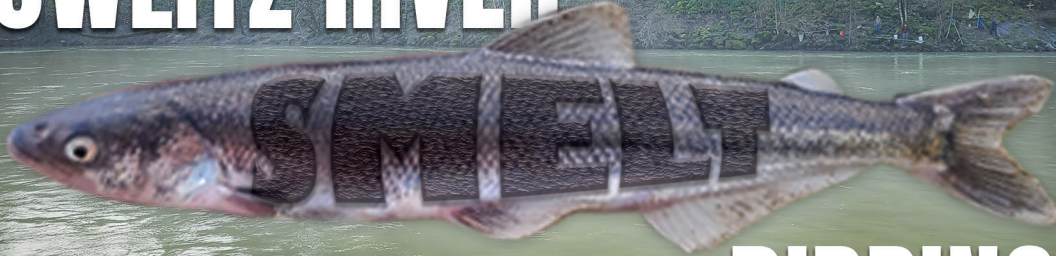
WITH ROB HOLMAN & ERIC MAGNUSON ON AN AREA LAKE JUNE 15TH.
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COWLITZ RIVER



DIPPING

BY HANNAH PENNEBAKER

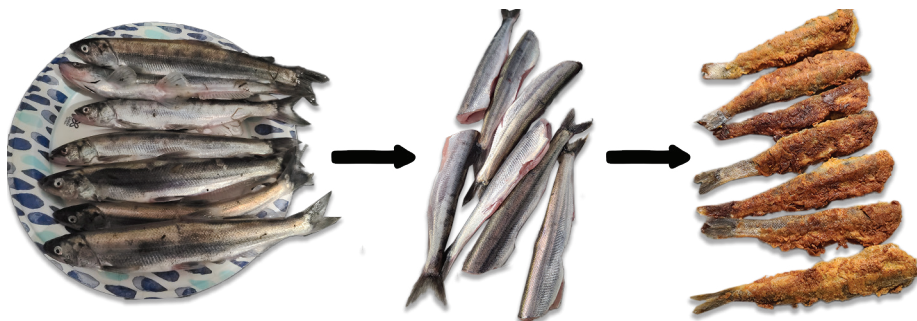
Although this time of year can seem low on fishing opportunities, there is one fishery that I always look forward to. The Cowlitz River smelt fishery is a truly special opportunity. It's unique for several reasons. One, you don't even use a fishing pole! Two, you usually have less than a week's notice when it opens. Three, it's only open for a few hours at a time. Thankfully, there is a generous 10-pound limit, and you don't need a fishing license to participate. Smelt are absolutely delicious when fried or smoked. They're very oily fish, and their meat is soft and sweet. If you aren't interested in eating them, they make great cut bait or crab bait. Interested in trying the fishery? Let's dive into how and where to get them.

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Thankfully, the gear needed for smelt dipping is pretty minimal. You will need a bucket to hold your catch, a scale, and a long-handled net. I typically use a 5-gallon bucket, but you can get away with using a smaller bucket if that's what you have. The limit is 10 pounds, which WDFW says is typically a quarter of a 5-gallon bucket. It's a good idea to carry a scale though, in case you get checked by a game warden. The most important advice I can give you is to make sure your net has a long handle and fine mesh. A typical landing net won't do the job. The handle isn't long enough to scoop down to the bottom of the river, and your smelt will slip through the wide mesh in the net. Here's another word of advice--get your net during the off-season and don't wait until the next dip is announced.

Sporting goods stores can and do sell out when a smelt dip is announced, so if you wait, you might have to drive far to get one, or you can make your own.

If you're interested in participating in the next smelt dip, you're probably wondering where to go. During the last dip, the boundaries were between the Tenant Way Bridge and the mouth of the North Fork Toutle River. This stretch of the Cowlitz River has ample public shore access. You can find a map of popular spots on WDFW's smelt web page, or strike out on your own (but be mindful of private property). You can expect to have company, so it's a good idea to show up an hour or so early to stake out your spot. Longview, Kelso, and Castle Rock all have gas stations and restrooms. There's a dock at the boat



launch in Castle Rock, if you don't want to get your feet wet or risk falling in the river while navigating the steep riverbank.

Once you're at the river, pick your spot. As previously mentioned, riverbanks can be steep, not to mention thorny. Be careful not to trip or slide—no fish is worth a fall in the river! You can wear a life vest to be extra cautious and put life vests on any kids joining the adventure. If the fish are in, one spot is as good as any. Dip your net in the river and sweep through it with one fluid motion. You want to go quickly enough so that the fish can't swim out of the net. You should be able to feel them hitting your net. Don't be afraid to drag against the bottom if you need to. Resist the temptation to net as far away from you as you can. Sometimes the fish are right up against the bank! Deposit your catch carefully in the bucket and keep

weighing them to ensure you don't exceed your 10-pound limit. Like any other fish, put your catch in an iced cooler on the way home so that their meat stays fresh and firm.

I'll leave you with some interesting facts about Pacific Smelt. Just like salmon, they hatch in rivers and spend their lives at sea. They return to their home rivers to spawn when they're between 2 to 5 years old. Again, just like salmon, they're an oily fish. They're about 15% oil! They're also called “candlefish” because they will catch on fire if you hold them up to a lighter. Sadly, they're considered an endangered species. Around the mid 90's, their populations began to sharply decline. WDFW closely monitors their return numbers and determines if they are healthy enough to support a recreational fishery. This year, we were lucky enough to get not one, but two smelt openers.

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Be sure to follow the rules! Don't exceed your 10-pound per person limit, and only net the section of the river that is open. Carry a watch or check your phone so that you don't start dipping until the time WDFW specifies. Most importantly, have fun!

MISC



CHOOSING A FISHING GUIDE



BY BRENT KNIGHT

I have been fishing my entire life, but even today, try to fish with at least two to three different guides a year to learn new techniques and methods. Outside of time on the water, fishing with a guide is the single greatest way to become a better angler. Note that even the most experienced anglers can learn new things and your guide will be your teacher.

What continually impresses me is just how much our fishing methods can change from one place to the next and even within a specific system, such as the
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Columbia River for example. I am also surprised at how confident guides tend to be in their techniques. It is equally surprising how much those techniques may differ from other guides fishing the same fishery. As a client, I find that I receive a constant barrage of feedback on what I am doing correctly or incorrectly and why. It seems that one guide tells me to fish a certain way and when I replicate this fishing technique with a different guide, I am re-educated. As hard as this is, it does build perspective and allows us to become better overall anglers.

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TYPES OF GUIDES:

Now that we have established that guides vary in their approaches, I would like to address how different their client approaches can be. For this purpose, I have categorized guides into three categories, the great, the effective, and for me, the “no thanks”.

THE GREAT

The first guide type, the Great, is without question my favorite. Though their goal is to put you on fish, they are more concerned with providing an experience and making sure that their clients have a great time. This is the approach that makes fishing fun and the type of guide to fish with, regardless of how “fishy” they might be. I highly recommend that you seek this type of guide as I guarantee that you will fish with them again and again and laugh every time. They tend to be a lot of fun, laid back, funny, and willing to teach you little things that allow you to become a better fisherman. Rarely will this guide correct you with sharp criticism. They have generally honed their skills

around feedback and are fantastic teachers who lead with a positive approach.

THE EFFECTIVE

The second type of guide, the effective, tends to be more intense and highly competitive. This guide is all about catching limits and will put in a long day to make this happen. I feel that an angler can learn a lot from this type of guide, but often the experience can be intense, and the fisherman might leave feeling inadequate and exhausted. This is a tough one because the experience itself is not necessarily laid back and enjoyable, but the outcome is often good, and you learn new skills. I have not entirely determined the best approach to use with this type of guide, but I feel like you should give them feedback on their approach and define the limits of your expectations. It is a toss-up whether I fish with this type of guide more than once, but again, they tend to be very good fishermen, and much can be learned while fishing with them.

THE “NO THANKS...”

The third is the guide, whom I call the “no thanks”, who wants to put you on

fish and get you back to the launch or dock as quickly as possible. I tend to avoid these types. As an example, I recently had a guide in Alaska who asked us to be at the ramp at 3:45AM. No big deal for me, but a bit tough for my 17-year-old son. I inquired about going an hour later and the guide responded by telling me that he had six fish in the freezer and would be happy to give them to us if we wanted to sleep in. Really? Did he think that we were only going out to fill the freezer? Needless to say, I will not be fishing with this guide ever again. As you can see from my story, this guide has little interest in the experience that he or she provides, and I feel that their approach is very self-serving. Fishing with this type of guide is why I started writing!

With social media prevalent, it is much easier to find a guide today who meets your requirements and expectations. It is also much easier to determine client approval ratings before you spend money fishing with someone who is only going to disappoint you. This makes things better, but it also does not tell the story of who the

person is. Getting to know the guides that I fish with and building a lifelong relationship is not something that can be done on social media. Join a Facebook group, ask friends, do your homework, and look for guide #1 above. I promise that you will thank me for it later. Need ideas or recommendations, email me at bknight@iss-safe.com and I will do what I can to help.

One final thought. Anglers need to understand that they play a role in their success and the experience itself. The guide can only

do so much; you need to meet them in the middle, listen to what they tell you, and engage with them. Don't be afraid to tell them what you want and how they are doing. If they exceed your expectations, tip them well as they work hard for a meager income. A decent tip is around \$100 per person, per trip.

I hope that you find this information useful and helpful in selecting your next adventure and the guide who is going to take you there. Find a good one and you will go back year after year. An argument

can be made that you can buy your own boat and do it yourself, but I would counter that argument by addressing the fact that when you are running the boat, you are not fishing, and you are often feverishly catering to the anglers in the boat. It is a lot of fun but can be exhausting. I would argue that this is a great option if you love to watch other people catch fish and if you love to teach. This can be extremely rewarding. If you love to fish, go with a guide, and let them do the work so that you can relax and have a great time.

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THE STATE OF BOTTOMFISH

JASON BROOKS



One of the most sought-after ocean-dwelling fish is the bottomfish, also called rockfish and groundfish. Anglers also refer to some of the species as “sea bass” as they resemble freshwater largemouth bass.

Regardless of what you call them anglers who target these fish all call them “tasty” which is why they are so popular. But do not expect the various species of bottomfish to take up a lot of space in magazines or flood your social media feed with lots of sea-bass photos and “how to’s”. Maybe it is because they are often a bycatch or used to fill the time between salmon bites or maybe it is because most daily limits offer enough fish to fill a freezer fast so anglers only fish for them a few times a year. If it is the latter, then be aware that regulations and fisheries are changing quickly.

A few years ago, back in 2010, the yelloweye rockfish was listed on the Endangered Species List as threatened and remains there today in Washington and Oregon waters. This is because it is one of the largest rockfish species which means it lives an

exceptionally long time, like over 100 years, with the oldest living yelloweye aged at 118 years and estimated to be able to live 147 years. This long life means they mature slowly and do not reach adulthood until they are 19-22 years old. When it takes a species this long to mature, the over-harvest can be problematic. One of the saving graces for this species is that they live very deep, averaging 300 feet and can live as deep as 1,500 feet in the abyss. This is also a common detriment to most rockfish species and that is they are prone to barotrauma which is when the swim bladder becomes distended as the fish comes up from the high-pressure deep water. Using a descending device will help reduce mortality.

Like the yelloweye rockfish, most of the rockfish found in Puget Sound are off-limits due to the loss of species. There are some Marine Areas where rockfish can still be caught and kept including the ocean areas such as Marine Areas 1 through 4.

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Daily limits here were reduced a few years ago and now 7 rockfish of certain species combined such as black rockfish, blue rockfish, canary and vermillion, and a few other species. Also new last year is a restriction for certain species between June 1st and July 31st, including copper, canary, and other popular species. There is also a depth restriction of 20 fathoms except for halibut days which can be a bit confusing. As of this writing the current regulations have not been published for the upcoming license season so be sure to check the WDFW website for updates.

In Marine Area 5 which is the only other marine area where rockfish can be retained in Washington, the limit is 1 or 3 depending on which side of Slip Point you are on, and only black or blue rockfish can be kept.

You also must use barbless hooks, even for non-rockfish bottomfish, such as halibut and lingcod which most anglers do not realize is required. After a quick chat last year at the dock at Sekiu with a WDFW Game Warden we learned that the only thing she wanted to check was our hooks. Not worried about our licenses or catch record cards, she just wanted to make sure we were using barbless hooks in the halibut we caught. The last one had swallowed the bait and hook, and it was easier to just cut the leader, so we obliged and allowed her to cut the hook out which was barbless, and she was happy. Turns out that anglers did not know about the new rule, so it was more of a day of education for them. Luckily, we knew the rules. We also showed our licenses and catch record cards just to really put an exclamation point on following all the rules.

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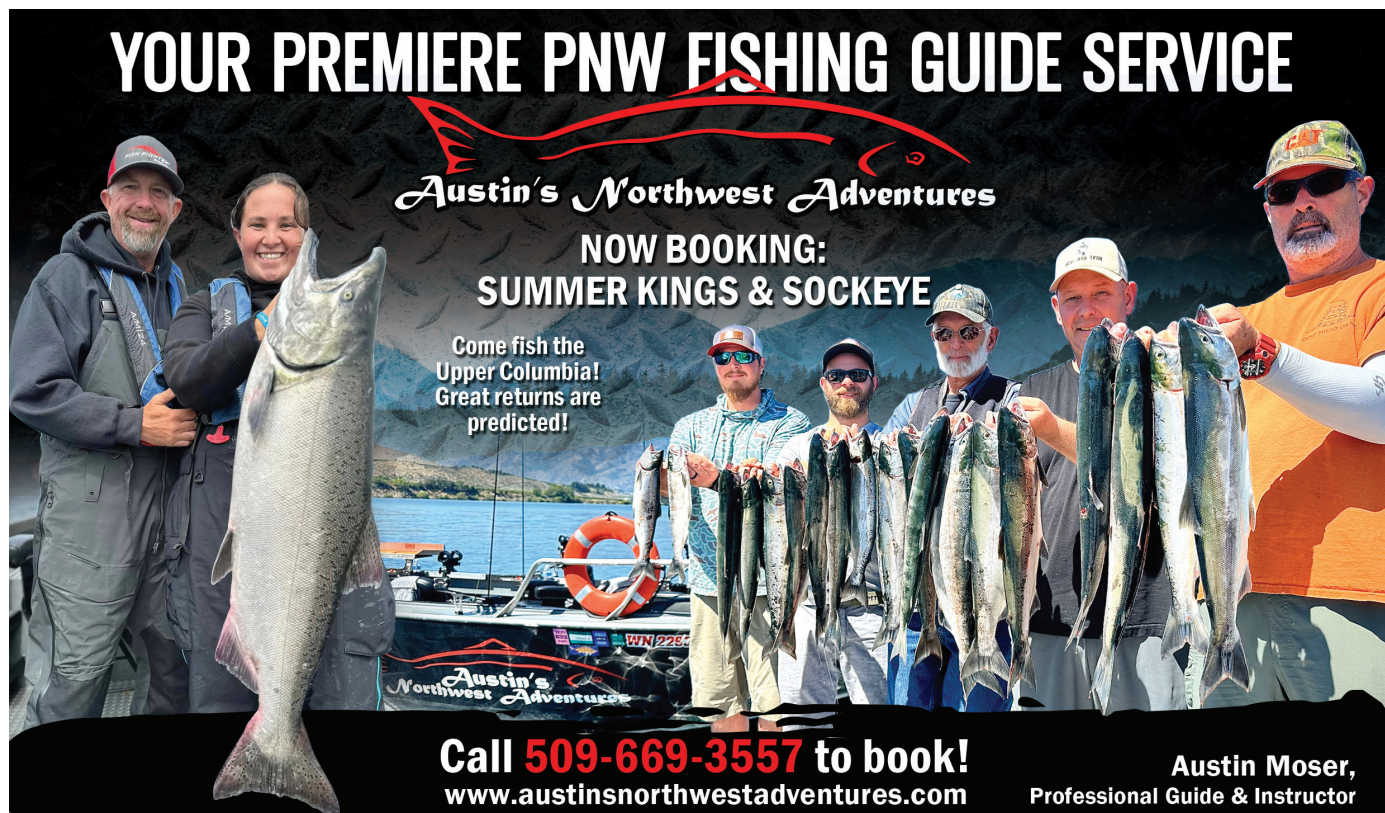
Oregon has simplified regulations compared to Washington but has even more restricted bag limits. As of now, the season is open year-round with no depth restrictions but a daily limit of 5, as well as a coastwide closure of yelloweye and quillback rockfish. Oregon also has a unique gear restriction when fishing deeper than 40 fathoms which is the use of "long leader" gear. Their website has tutorials

on what this means and how to rig it. As always be sure to check current regulations before you go out fishing.

Both states have safety zones or rockfish conservation areas which are off limits to fishing for rockfish or any bottomfish. The reason for these conservation areas is to set aside a breeding and nursery area of sorts where rockfish are threatened, including the yelloweye. All rockfish species take a while to mature and since they tend to school up and live along structures such

as underwater pinnacles, reefs, and rocky ledges they can be easy to locate and target.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council keeps tabs on various fish species along the west coast including groundfish. Since these fish live a long time and can be subjected to over-harvest the Council provides a stock assessment and guideline regarding certain fisheries. When it comes to bottomfish, which again they refer to as groundfish, the Pacific Fishery Management



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Council realizes the importance of these fish. Popular in both commercial and recreational fisheries, bottomfish are prized for their great eating and provide a valuable economy to the fishing industry. A quick walk around the boardwalk and harbor in Westport, Washington does not take long for someone to see how many charter fishing boats there are. Offering an opportunity for anglers who do not own a boat or have the savvy to head to the open Pacific Ocean, anglers can book a day trip on one of the many charters and have a good chance at catching

some tasty rockfish. This is the same for every seaside town up and down the Washington and Oregon coast, and several towns in California.

Keeping management goals of conservations, economics, and utilization of these fisheries the Pacific Fishery Management Council establishes objectives for each management goal outlined for the Pacific Coast groundfish. Taking in everything from gear used by both commercial and recreational anglers to social and economic impacts.



Knowing that groundfish populations can be affected by several factors including areas where caught, as fish can be migratory the need for such a council helps track bottomfish and their populations.

If all of this seems a bit confusing that is because it is, and it is because bottomfish are highly sought after and they can be overfished. Anglers need to realize this and respect the fish population accordingly. Keep a descender device onboard, as required by regulation but also know how to use it.




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When you catch an undesired species then use the device. Also know your own limits, just because you can keep 7 fish per day does not mean you should keep that many. A few years ago, while on a multi-day vacation at Neah Bay my son and I went out and limited on rockfish. Between the two of us

that was 14 fish, and we also caught some salmon that day and our lingcod we came back to the dock with nearly 20 fish to clean and fillet. That made for a long day, and we decided that the rest of the trip would be spent salmon fishing and that only if it were a slow day would we switch to bottomfish. Even

then we kept our personal limits to what we wanted to clean that day, and by our third day we decided we had more than enough white flakey fillets for our trip. The last two days were spent trolling for salmon and watching local wildlife. Rockfish are delicious and fun to catch but make sure to catch responsibly.





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Bucket List FISH

By Matt Carey



FISHING



What an adventure this whole fishing thing is. Like many things in life, often the journey is more fulfilling, exciting, and memorable than the ending. I shouldn't even say "ending". Maybe outcome or result are better words. I have no intention of stopping fishing for what quickly became one of my new favorite fish—the latest stamp to be added to my fishing passport.

I'm going to come right out with it, the fish pictures included with this article are not show-stopping, wall-mounting, brag to your buddies type of fish. Some might look at them and wonder if they were even photo-worthy at all. But to those folks, I'd retort with a new phrase that has newly become part of my regular vernacular. A polite way to say be nice, be joyful for

others, or perhaps more bluntly, a phrase we all heard as kids, if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all. Don't yuck someone's (my) yum. My recent yum, both literally and figuratively as you'll come to read, centers around catching what became a winter fishing obsession. I am referring to one of the more mysterious fish I've come across as an angler, the burbot.

Highly regarded for its taste as poor man's lobster yet criticized for its appearance, I knew I had to catch one, two, as many as I could. They are most active during the winter months and at night, two challenges as we've had an unseasonably warm winter and I'm more apt to hit the snooze button and sleep in than drive to a frozen lake and sit outside in the dark or

first light of the morning hours. Still, I had to add this fish to my checklist of caught species. The fish is an oddity with their eel-like appearance, freshwater habitat (the only cod to live in such an environment in North America), and some seeming barriers in place - fishing during the winter, night activity, and competition with other anglers - I was obsessed. I researched online, talked with other anglers, called MT FWP for information from biologists in the field, asked questions when buying gear at local shops, and watched YouTube clips (check out our ProTip video with Craig Dowdy on the website or our YouTube channel on how to filet burbot), anything you could think of to educate myself on how to best catch this fish.



Maybe a bit counter to the introductory prose, I'm all for enjoying the experience of fishing and the ambiance of the outdoors, but darn it, I really like catching fish, too. Especially with all the work and background knowledge I had completed. Not catching the fish would've been a letdown, surely.

After finding a few reservoirs in my area and properly gearing up, the only thing left to do was hit the ice. A scenic 20-minute drive to my first location yielded no fish. Slightly concerning, but motivating at the same time, another angler told me about some perch and a small ling (another name for the burbot) he released. Good to know, but after a few more evenings on the ice with no fish, it was time to try somewhere new. How about 40 minutes away? I had heard more consistent information about the fish being abundant in this

second location but again, coming up sevens at this new spot. For those without an interest in throwing dice at the craps table like myself, that means I didn't catch anything here either.

So, perhaps where I should've started all along, a trip to White Sulphur Springs, MT about 1.5 hrs. away would host my next attempt. As with most fishing, the lulls made for some long hours. Despite the wait, I had the opportunity to hook into my newest fish friends both jigging for them and through a stationary rod, both targeting slightly off the bottom, about 40 feet. I'll never forget the sight of my first burbot as it appeared from the icy blue depths below. Examining this new-to-me fish, it had greenish, yellowish, olive covered spots all along its body. A catfish like appearance with a more than normal amount of fish slime

coating the body, which I quickly became acquainted with as it slithered snake-like in my hands. Knowing I had finally caught one had me pumped up! All that was left was to see how it tasted.

As mentioned, they are highly regarded for their table fare. Bringing my catch home, I had done my homework as to how I should prepare my meal. Simplicity is sometimes the answer. Boil a little lemon soda, poach the fish for a few minutes and dip in some garlic butter with lemon on the side. Enjoy, easy. One thing I hadn't accounted for, sharing with my family. My wife, not as invested in the pursuit of this fish, was fine to try it, compliment me on cooking it and move on with her evening. My kid, 2 years old, however, grabbed this fish by the fistful. So much so that I started getting a little jealous! I put in the legwork to catch this fish and had



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built my first meal up in my head and here she is eating it all! Rationing out my portion, I was glad to see my daughter enjoyed the meal, but I was for a moment inclined to respond like the 2-year-old I was interacting with - to say "mine" and grab it all back. They don't call this fish the poor man's lobster for nothing I suppose. The white meat is what you'd expect from any similar cod fish, but the firm texture and taste of the fish paired with the garlic butter and lemon certainly lived up to my expectations. The enjoyable meal was the

culmination of my burbot experience and a fitting way to affirm my latest fishing craze. So, now that I've caught what was previously a mysterious fish to me, I look forward to another season with refined skills but the same level of excitement I had before encountering the burbot. A note for myself, I'll have to do some research on some of those other strange fish to be caught...paddlefish, an arctic grayling, pallid sturgeon...all to hopefully be checked off the species bucket list.

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LINGCOD LOOK AHEAD

BY RANDY CASTELLO

While I know that our local lingcod fishery closes June 15th hopefully this will be available for the last few days of the 2023 lingcod season. If not, it will give you a head start on next year's lingcod plans. With the exception of the Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal) lingcod closure, Washington State WDFW Marine Areas 5-Marine Area 13 are open for lingcod fishing from May 1st through June 15th. It's a short fishery managed with a slot limit. You can only retain 1 fish that is 26-36" long each day. With the slot limit, legal fish are hard to come by after the opener.

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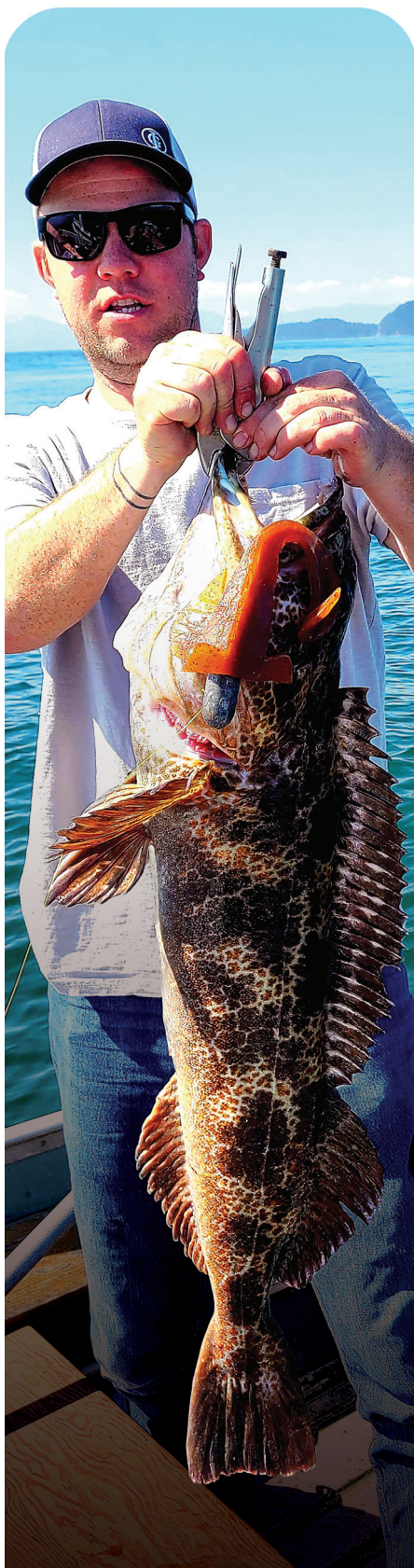
Lingcod is excellent table fare with many preparation options. Sooo, what the heck is a lingcod?

Lingcod or *Ophiodon Elongatus*. They are not actual cod, but a species of greenling. Lingcod are eating machines and can weigh over 80 pounds and tape out at 60" long. They have a 5-gallon bucket for a mouth with 18 needlepoint teeth to make sure their intended meal stays put (handling, never put your hand or fingers in their mouth or try to pick one up via hand in the gills). They are a very cool-looking warrior of the depths. Their color varies but all have clusters of

darker colored and copper-colored patches. Unlike humans, male lingcod mature at around 2 years old and 20". The female lingcod mature at 3-5 years and 24-30". Us mortals are just the opposite; females mature earlier than men and like myself, some of us never mature beyond 12 or so. Initially, both male and female lingcod have similar growth rates and grow very quickly. At around 4 years old the female lingcod growth rate outpaces the males.

Lingcod spawn December-March along reefs and rock outcroppings during periods of strong tidal flows and wave action.





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The eggs are deposited and fertilized in nests in crevasses in the rock. After spawning the males protect the nests until they hatch in 5-11 weeks.

Lingcod are very vulnerable while the eggs are developing. The males are very aggressive and will attack anything considered a threat to the nest. Many become prey while guarding the nests, leaving the nest vulnerable to predators. An unprotected nest is usually decimated in a day or so. The male lingcod is essential for successful spawning.

Although some migration has been observed, generally lingcod stay in the same location most of their lives. They are typically structure-oriented and found in 30-300 feet of water. However on Mother's Day a few years back I caught a lingcod while flyfishing from the beach (not as bad as it sounds.

I was doing a big brunch on a beach and had everything set up and ready to go. Planned or otherwise I had some time before everyone arrived. I know, I know; I still had a rod and gear with me on Mother's Day...)

Fishing for lingcod in the straights, the San Juans, and inner Puget Sound can be a very rewarding adventure. Partially because once you find your rockpile it can hold fish for years. Lingcod can be found along any surface visible structure and here locally lingcod opportunity abounds. I like to meter around to find isolated rockpiles and then mark them on my electronics (note to self, don't try to declutter your chart while not paying attention to what you're doing. Just recently I deleted most of my spots accidentally. I think that I was in tears...) Having a secrete rockpile can make

you a lingcod Zen Master,
The Ling Whisperer!

Once you have figured out where to fish, now what? Lingcod fishing can be either a put-the-rod-in-a-holder passive affair or a highly technical means of working an artificial bait along the edge of a reef. My approach is somewhere in the middle. Typically, I actively fish artificial baits using a less aggressive drop-and-retrieve method. More on that later...

Bait or artificials? Both work and lingcod are suckers for just about

anything that passes in front of them. One of the biggest lings I have ever caught was a massive beast that had latched on to a smaller ling that had inhaled a homemade copper pipe jig. That said; bait can be deadly here in Puget Sound. Although herring or squid work sanddabs are the way to go. Sanddabs are easy to find, catch, and work well dead or alive. A simple way to keep them mostly alive is to keep them in a salt brine in a cooler. A couple of bags of ice, salt water, and an extra cup of rock salt. Not always

but it seems that when you take the sanddabs out of the brine, they perk up a bit. It may be a suspended animation thing, like an old horror movie "The Attack of the Killer Sanddabs"...

I like to fish sanddabs on a 2-6 ounce painted jig head and fish them like an artificial bait. They also fish well on a dropper loop rig or a hard tie heavier mooching rig. If fishing them on the mooching rig, hook the lead hook through the mouth, out through the lower jaw then about 2/3rds of the way down the sanddab's body the trailing

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hook just under the skin on the dark side of the fish.

Insert the hook, point towards the tail, and loop it back out letting it just dangle along the back of the sanddab. Keep a solid hand on the rod. When a lingcod sets its sights on having a sanddab snack, the takedown can be ferocious.

My favorite way to fish lings is with a large curly tail or paddle-tail type swimbait on a jig head but any artificial bait works. I have caught lings using pipe jigs, flutter jigs, and a variety

of commercially molded baits, including molded sanddabs.

Fished correctly the artificials drive lingcod nuts. The picture of the big ling was caught in Rosario Strait by James Vermeer using a home-poured bait.

Actually, a great story; he used a kid's toy plastic shark to create a mold and then poured the lure. After a few testing modifications, he ended up with a heavy-bodied lure that was balanced in the water and sent out all kinds of "come-eat-me" vibrations.

More importantly, James knows how to fish lings.

I was motoring past in the workboat and noticed a guy in a small skiff fishing lingcod. I pulled the throttle back and watched the show. He clearly knew how to properly fish lings on artificial baits. Not long after I stop, he goes bendo and had on what looked to be a serious lingcod. 10 minutes later he and the fish were posing for a picture or two.

"Properly fish lings on artificial baits", what the heck am I talking about?



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Let's break artificial baits down into 3 categories; pipe jigs, dart type jigs, and soft baits.

They each fish a little differently:

Pipe jigs should be fished straight up and down in deeper water. (Unless you are fishing for lings in WDFW Marine Area 4 East-Marine Area 11 and Marine Area 13 where fishing for bottomfish is prohibited in water deeper than 120'). Meter around and find a deeper reef. Either anchor or set up a drift along the side of the reef or from the high point towards deeper water. It doesn't hurt to do a couple of test drifts with your chart trails on to see how you're drifting. Once on station let your pipe jigs fall to the bottom (it helps to make sure they are attached to your line), touch bottom, and then wind up a few cranks. Basically, you want to fish just off the bottom while occasionally bouncing the jig off the bottom. Don't erratically

jerk your rod tip up and down. For lings, you want a slow deliberate motion.

If you go herky-jerky you just attract rockfish.

When fishing **dart type or flutter jigs** think salmon.

Free spool to the bottom of your intended meter mark and stop. Slowly lift your rod tip about a foot and then quickly drop it again. The bite will almost always be as the jig is fluttering down. That said; I have caught a few lings casting and retrieving a Point Wilson Dart. One of my biggest San Juan lings chased down and inhaled a jig right at the boat up at Point Lowrance in the San Juans.

Fishing soft baits is my favorite way to catch lingcod. There is something addictive about the takedown when you are actively working on an artificial bait for lings. My routine is to position the boat then drop your offering via free spool until it hits bottom and reel up

a crank or 2. Then kind of become one with the rod and allow the current to work the bait. Slowly lifting the rod tip or letting out line here and there to avoid snagging the bottom while keeping in the zone.

Lingcod are pretty hardy fish but still be respectful and quickly release any fish not going in for a ride in your fish box. To preserve the table quality, make sure to break a gill raker with dikes or pliers and/or make an undercut at the base of its tail to bleed the fish. Lingcod freeze very well when vacuum bagged and is great for a quick healthy meal.

Start planning for next year's Month of Ling. Take some time learning to catch sanddabs and study a chart for your select area. Look for underwater rockpiles, structures, or hard ledges and mark them to explore next season. Stock up on gear well before the May 1st opener and may your fish box be full in 2024.



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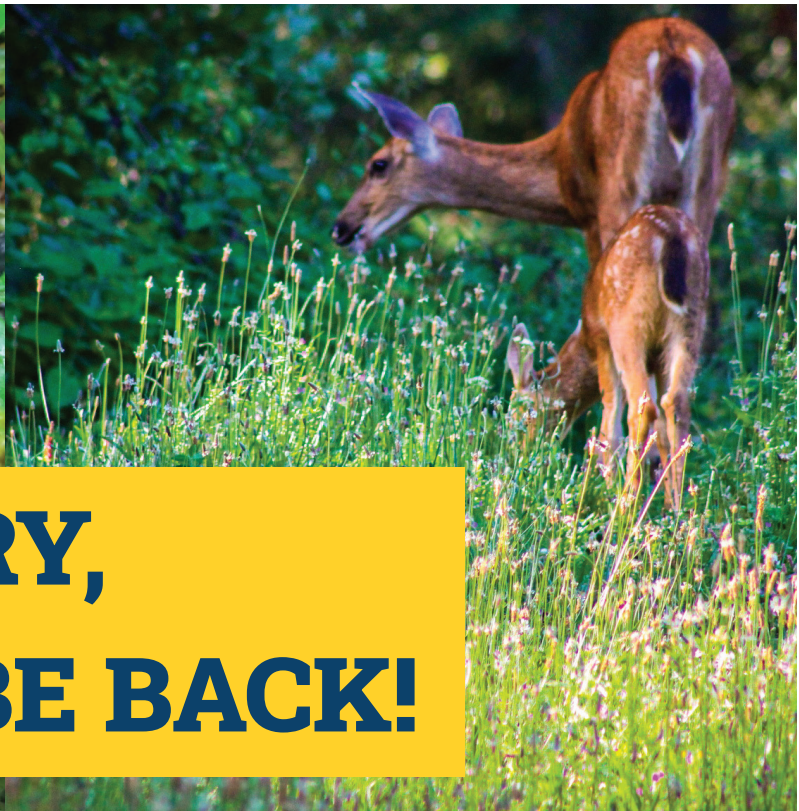
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TROUT FISHING: WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS

BY GARY LEWIS

I fed a rusty orange streamer into the current, threw an upstream mend, and let it swing.

We call it First Water. It's what you get early in the morning when you get to the river before the next guy. First Water makes you smile after a hard week at work. Like making lemonade out of lemons.

A trout hammered the fly and the tippet snapped.

Heart pounding, I cut the leader back to 8-pound, tied on another fly and cast quartering-down. This time when the fish hit, it turned and charged, coming straight out of the water. Five minutes later we slid the net under a four-pound gnarly, hook-jawed brood stock rainbow. We have learned from experience it's hard to revive the big hatchery rainbows, so it was an easy decision to keep it for the table.

FARMED, HATCHERY, WILD OR NATIVE?

Here's a thing that doesn't make sense. We go to the grocery store and complain about the price of groceries and then we drive to the lake and catch and release a limit of rainbow trout at \$10 a pound. I've done it.

Hey, those fish were put there to catch and keep. It's healthy food, high in omega-3 fatty acids and B vitamins. Easy to catch (sometimes). Easy to clean.



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Think of it like this: we have rainbows, cutthroats, brook trout, brown trout, bull trout, and lake trout in our lakes, rivers, and hatchery raceways. Some of them end up behind the butcher's glass at the grocery store. How do we tell where they came from? The ones in the cellophane

and Styrofoam, that's easy. Those are farmed fish, which are generally shoveled a high-quality pelletized food and then fed a carotenoid called Astaxanthin which gives the meat an orange color and improves the taste.

According to Luke Allen, from the Wizard Falls Hatchery and Tim Foulk from the Fall River Hatchery, astaxanthin is produced by microalgae which is ingested by small fish and invertebrates like krill, which are then ingested by fish.

In Oregon, hatchery-raised rainbow trout (and cutthroats) are classified as legals (usually 8 to 12 inches), trophies (usually 14 to 18 inches), and brood stock, which are the surplus breeding trout that tip the scales somewhere between four to ten pounds. In Central Oregon, these fish end up in places like Pine Hollow Reservoir, Walton Lake, South Twin, and Fall River. Hatchery trout may also be released as

fingerlings in waters like Lava Lake, East Lake and Diamond Lake where the natural feed is so good the fish grow fast. Fingerlings are also released in the high lakes every other year. Fingerlings, although raised in hatcheries in geometric order, tend to behave and look more like wild trout as they reach a harvestable age.

The terms wild and native can refer to the same fish or mean two different things. Brown trout, brook trout, and lake trout are not indigenous to Oregon but were introduced. Browns come from Germany and brooks come from the East Coast. That's why we refer to them as German browns and Eastern brooks. But if they were hatched in gravel we call them wild trout.

The term native is inclusive of rainbows, cutthroat and bull trout. In some cases these fish may be caught, kept and eaten, but it's a good idea to release them to spawn and prosper.



THIS HATCHERY BROOD STOCK RAINBOW TOOK A STREAMER FISHED IN A LAKE INLET.

If you catch a brookie in the high lakes, hey, that's some of the best wild food you can get. And you are not eating a native fish.

A steelhead is a rainbow trout that migrated from freshwater to the ocean and returned. If a person eats farmed steelhead, it is probably not steelhead at all, but rainbow trout packaged as steelhead. An angler that catches and eats a fin-marked steelhead has consumed a hatchery steelhead. Surplus steelhead that returned to their hatcheries in places like Nehalem or Three Rivers are often trucked to coastal lakes and set free to give anglers another chance at them. Because they will probably not thrive in the lake, the highest use of these fish is to turn them into a good meal.

Fisheries managers sometimes struggle with the divide between the consumptive and the catch-and-release ethic.

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Bikini Pond to Rock Creek Reservoir to Lava Lake. Those fish are there to eat. And there are some really good things like dill, parsley and lemon that go great with a pan full of eastern brookies or hatchery 'bows. That's why I say when life gives you lemons, go catch a trout.



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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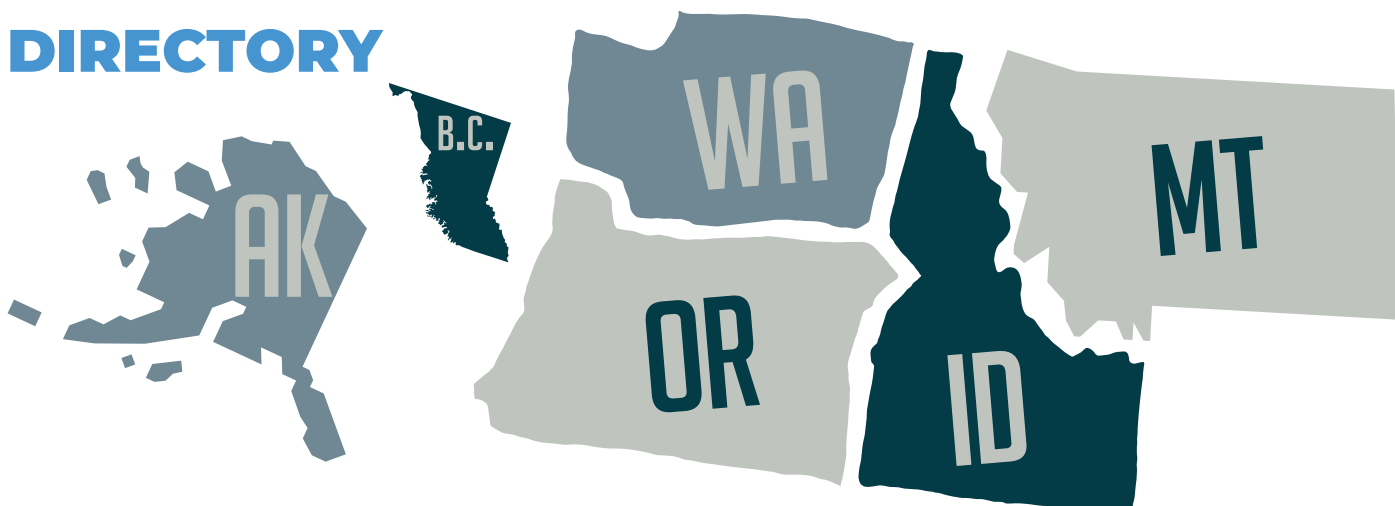


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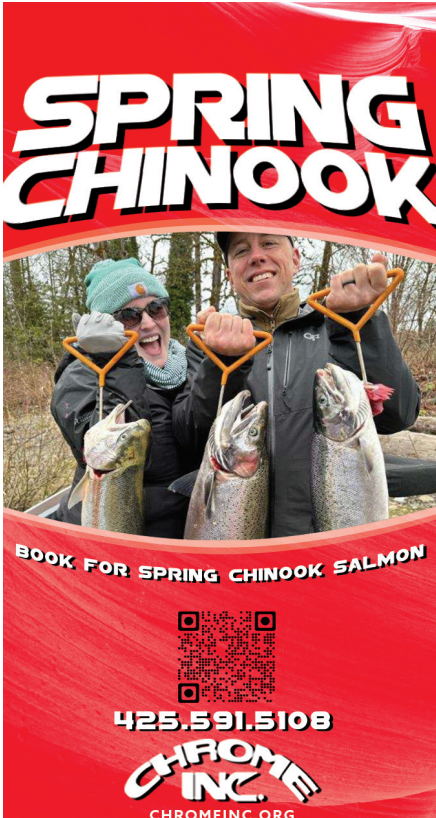
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