

Fishing in the *Ketchikan* area

Marine waters of the Ketchikan area support catchable populations of salmon, halibut, lingcod, Pacific cod, greenling, herring, and several common species of rockfish.

Dungeness, Tanner, and king crab, and shrimp, scallops, abalone, and clams are also common. Other fish, shellfish, and invertebrate species can be found, but this guide covers the most common and popular species.



All five species of Pacific salmon resident to waters of the northwest U.S. and Canada are plentiful in area waters: king (chinook), coho (silver), pink ('humpy'), sockeye (red), and chum ('dog') salmon.

KING SALMON—the largest, scarcest and most highly prized of the Pacific salmon in the area, they are found mainly in coastal salt waters. They do not return in appreciable numbers to area streams (other than the

Unuk and Chickamin rivers, which are closed to king salmon fishing).

Mature ('spawner') kings weighing up to 60 pounds are present from late

April through June, with peak availability in June. Immature ('feeder') kings from 10 to 30 pounds are present year-round, but fishing is best from May to mid-August, when king salmon migrate through area waters to spawn in mainland streams. The primary exceptions are hatchery returns in or near Ketchikan to the Neets Bay facility, the Whitman Lake Hatchery, the Tamgas Creek facility on Annette Island, Deer Mountain Hatchery, and a remote release site at Carroll Inlet.

Before fishing, acquaint yourself with the particular location where you plan to fish and know the sport fishing regulations for that location.

Locating king salmon in marine waters can be difficult. They frequent nearshore areas off points of land, around kelp beds, or in open water. Schools of baitfish such as herring or needlefish are good indicators of kings in the area. Baitfish schools may be located by fathometer or found where concentrations of sea

salmon

birds are observed diving for fish. Nearshore areas that extend out into tidal currents are effective ambush points for feeding baitfish, and, accordingly, for king salmon.

The most effective techniques for catching kings are trolling, mooching, or jigging.

The Ketchikan area king salmon sport fishery is strongly influenced by fish bound for natal streams such as the Unuk and Chickamin rivers. King fishing is also notably influenced by hatchery releases from several public and private hatcheries in the Ketchikan area. Whitman Lake, Carroll Inlet and Neets Bay hatcheries are the largest king salmon contributors in this area, followed by Deer Mountain (Ketchikan) and Tamgas Creek (Annette Island) hatcheries.

Sport fishing for kings in fresh water is closed except by emergency order openings from the ADF&G. Check with the local ADF&G office for pertinent emergency orders which are issued to provide additional opportunity for anglers to harvest hatchery-produced king salmon per the Board of Fisheries directive.

COHO SALMON—hard fighters and popular targets for anglers in area salt waters. Coho range from 3 to 20 pounds or more (8–10 pounds aver-

age), and they are abundant in coastal waters from July to September. The best saltwater fishing is from mid-July through mid-September.

In salt water, coho travel in large schools—they are often aggressive and can provide intense action. They are usually caught within 30 feet of the surface, but it's not uncommon to catch them down to 100 feet or deeper.

Coho can be caught by trolling, mooching, flyfishing, or by casting lures from boats. Fishing success is usually best within one or two hours of a tide change. Fishing is often productive in bays or estuaries near stream mouths from late August to October, when coho return to spawn in fresh water.

Enhancement efforts involving coho stocking have occurred primarily in the Ketchikan area at Neets Bay, Whitman Lake, Deer Mountain and Tamgas Creek hatcheries. All of these hatcheries serve as the incubation and rearing facilities for juvenile coho. Adult returns from these facilities contribute significantly to the area's sport fisheries.

Most area streams wider than 3 feet that enter salt water support at least small runs of coho. Summer-run coho enter some streams in late June to early July, but fall-run fish make up the

majority, entering streams between mid-August and November.

PINK SALMON—the smallest and most abundant salmon in Ketchikan area waters. They have a 2-year life cycle and weigh from 2 to 6 pounds (3 pounds average). ‘Pinks’ travel coastal waters in large schools (hundreds or thousands of fish), where they are abundant from early to late summer. Upon entering freshwater streams in summer, pinks develop a dorsal hump which is most pronounced in males—thus the nickname ‘humpy.’

Saltwater ‘humpy’ fishing is best in mid-July through August. Trolling, mooching, or casting lures or flies produce nice catches in salt water when pinks are biting. They are usually brightest and preferred for harvest while in open ocean or coastal waters, before they enter their spawning streams.

Pinks provide excellent action when schooled near stream mouths in August, and roadside fishing near jutting points can be productive in late July and early August.

Flyfishing is an effective technique for catching humpies in area streams, but baitcasting and spincasting are also productive.

SOCKEYE SALMON—regarded for their fighting skill as well as their satisfying flavor, these are perhaps the most difficult salmon to catch in area waters. The saltwater sockeye sport fishery is very limited and is best described as “experimental.” Most sockeye are caught by trolling or casting artificial lures.

Adult sockeye feed on small crustaceans and other zooplankton in marine waters and stop feeding once they return to spawn in fresh water. However, sockeye are most frequently caught in fresh water in July on flies or spinners.

CHUM SALMON—noted for the large teeth which develop most prominently in males upon entering fresh water (leading to the nickname ‘dog salmon’). Chums are frequently caught in local sport fisheries, usually by anglers trolling in salt waters, drift fishing or casting in streams for other salmon species.

A variety of gear in green or pink colors is usually the most productive for this species in fresh and saltwater. The best time to fish for chums is during the month of August in salt water and late August through early September in fresh water.

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KING SALMON FISHING IN FRESH WATER IS
CLOSED UNLESS OPENED BY EMERGENCY ORDER!
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