


Fish species in *the Petersburg/ Wrangell area*

Marine waters support catchable populations of salmon, halibut, lingcod, Pacific cod, greenling, herring, and several common species of rockfish. Shellfish such as Dungeness, Tanner, and king crab, shrimp, scallops, and clams are also common in area marine waters.



Salmon

All five species of Pacific salmon resident to waters of the northwest United States and Canada are plentiful in Petersburg/Wrangell area waters—king (chinook), coho (silver), pink ('humpy'), sockeye (red), and chum (dog) salmon. Areawide run timing for salmon and other popular sport fishing species is charted on page 15. Some recommended fishing spots are listed, along with maps, on pages 20 through 25.

King salmon  the largest, least abundant, and most highly prized of the Pacific salmon in this area. Found mainly in area coastal marine waters, kings do not return in appreciable numbers to area streams—other than the Stikine River, which is closed to king salmon fishing.

Mature 'spawner' kings weighing to 60 pounds or more pass through coastal waters from late April through June, and peak availability occurs in June. Immature 'feeder' kings from 10 to 30 pounds are present year-round, but fishing is best from May to July. King salmon migrate through area waters, returning to their mainland streams to spawn each spring.

King salmon can be difficult to locate in marine waters. 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. Nearshore areas that extend out into tidal currents are effective ambush points for feeding baitfish, and, therefore, for king salmon. Baitfish schools may be found near concentrations of sea birds (often diving for fish) or located by fathometer.

The most effective technique for catching kings in salt water is trolling a fresh or frozen herring.

The king salmon sport fishery in fresh waters is closed unless opened by ADF&G emergency order. The only exception to this is in Blind Slough, where Crystal Lake Hatchery

returns are harvested under the Wrangell Narrows/Blind Slough terminal harvest area management plan. Bag limits vary depending on the size of the return; check current regulations and contact local ADF&G offices for recent emergency orders providing additional opportunities for anglers to harvest surplus hatchery-produced king salmon.

Coho salmon 🐟 hard fighters and popular targets for anglers in Petersburg/Wrangell area marine waters. Coho (often called ‘silvers’) weigh from 3 to 20 or more pounds (8–10 pounds on average) in area marine waters. The best saltwater sport fishing occurs mid-August through September, when coho are most abundant in marine waters.

In salt water, coho travel in large schools. They are usually caught within 30 feet of surface, but it’s not uncommon to catch one as far down as 100 feet. Fishing success is better during high tidal series along tide rips.

Coho can be caught by trolling, mooching, or by flyfishing or casting lures from boats. From late August to October, when coho return to spawn in fresh water, fishing is often good in bays or estuaries near stream mouths.

Enhancement of coho salmon stocks has been undertaken at Blind Slough and Whale Pass near Neck

Lake. The Neck Lake returns are summer-run fish that begin showing up in late June.

Pink salmon 🐟 the smallest and most abundant of the Pacific salmon in area waters, pinks travel coastal waters in large schools (hundreds or thousands of fish). They have a 2-year life cycle and weigh 2 to 6 pounds (average 3 pounds). Pinks are abundant in coastal waters from early to late summer. When they enter freshwater streams in summer, they develop a dorsal hump, most pronounced in males; thus the nickname ‘humpies.’

The best saltwater ‘humpy’ fishing is from mid-July through August. Trolling, mooching, or casting lures or flies all produce nice catches when pinks are biting. They are usually brightest and preferred for harvest in open ocean or coastal waters, away from the streams where they return to spawn.

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

Sockeye salmon 🐟 regarded for their fighting skill and satisfying flavor. They are perhaps the most difficult salmon to catch in area waters. Adult sockeye feed on small crusta-

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ceans and other zooplankton in marine waters and stop feeding when they return to spawn in fresh water. However, sockeye are most frequently caught in fresh water in July on flies or spinners. The saltwater sockeye sport fishery is very limited; most fish are caught by trolling or by casting artificial lures.

Chum salmon 🐟 noted for large teeth that develop most prominently in males upon entering fresh water. Chums are caught infrequently in local sport fisheries, usually by anglers trolling in marine waters or drift fishing or casting in streams for other salmon species.



Wrangell Narrows, viewed from Petersburg Mountain.



Trout and Char

photo by Mark Schwan

Other game fish caught in area streams and lakes include steelhead, rainbow, and cutthroat trout, and Dolly Varden char. For peak run timing and availability, see the chart on page 15.

Steelhead 🐟 the most sought-after freshwater game fish in Petersburg/Wrangell area streams from March to May. Its popularity stems from its fighting prowess and low densities, compared to salmon, other trout, and char.

Steelhead are sea-run rainbow trout that, unlike salmon, are capable of spawning during two or more years. Adult steelhead from 3 to 20 pounds or more (7 pounds average) return annually to spawning streams in the Petersburg/Wrangell area.

Relative to most of Alaska, the Petersburg/ Wrangell area has a large concentration of steelhead streams: a few larger systems with lakes support both spring- and fall-run fish, but most steelhead streams support only the main spring-run fish. Spring-run fish are available from early March through May (peak fishing is from mid-April through May in most streams).

Catch-and-release Fishing

Drift fishing with spinning tackle and flyfishing are each effective. A host of hardware, flies, and other artificials will attract strikes. ‘Steelies’ will at times smack almost any offering, yet they may go ‘off-bite’ during cold spells, in low or clear water, periods of heavy fishing pressure, or for no apparent reason.

Steelhead are extremely sensitive to angler-induced mortality from being deeply hooked, enduring prolonged battles, or rough handling. Because of this, and because of low numbers, anglers are encouraged to practice catch-and-release when fishing for wild steelhead.

Rainbow trout 🐟 hard-fighting game fish, highly regarded by anglers. Noted for a visible rosy streak along their lateral line, their overall coloration can vary widely, reflecting habitat or maturity. Rainbows up to 18 inches long are common in some area streams and lakes. ADF&G stocked several area lakes with rainbows in the 1960s and 1970s.

Best sport fishing is in spring and early summer, and again in late fall—but rainbow trout can be caught year-round. They feed voraciously on aquatic insects and larvae, small fish,

Wild steelhead and resident cutthroat trout populations are fragile in many waters throughout this area. Catch-and-release fishing is encouraged for steelhead and cutthroat. Here are recommended techniques for releasing fish without injury:

- ⊗ **land fish quickly by using heavier line and leader**
- ⊗ **do not net fish to be released; keep fish in the water**
- ⊗ **carefully remove hooks from fish with forceps or needle-nose pliers and minimize handling**
- ⊗ **for deeply hooked fish, leave the hook in place and cut the leader close to the fish’s mouth**
- ⊗ **use artificial lures or flies (to reduce deep-hooking) and barbless hooks.**

eggs, and crustaceans. Effective offerings include artificial flies, spinners, spoons, or other artificials that imitate these preferred foods. Rainbows can be caught with flyfishing, spinning, or spincasting gear.

Cutthroat trout 🐟 popular native fish inhabiting many area waters. Like rainbows, they occur both as sea-run and as residents in streams, lakes, and almost any freshwater habitat—including beaver ponds and backwater sloughs.


Special regulations apply to five lakes in the area which are designated ‘high-use,’ or ‘trophy’ cutthroat lakes: Anan, Eagle, Kah Sheets, Thoms, and

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Virginia lakes. Be sure to read the special exceptions for these lakes in the regional sport fishing regulations booklet for Southeast Alaska.

Trophy fish over 3 pounds have been caught in some freshwater systems. However, area lakes and streams do not provide very productive habitat, and cutthroat are slow-growing with low reproductive rates. These factors combine to make them sensitive to overharvest. Catch-and-release fishing is therefore encouraged.


Sea-run cutthroat are usually caught during fall and late spring in area streams. Resident ‘cutts’ often hold near inlet stream mouths and along lake margins, especially near vegetation. Cutthroat will strike various lures or flies. Trolling with artificial lures produces nice fish in some lakes during summer, when fish are deeper. Excellent catch rates often occur in spring, when salmon fry emerge from stream gravels, or in fall, when salmon return to spawn.

Dolly Varden char  known for following adult salmon upstream and feeding on eggs discharged by ripe female salmon. Dolly Varden is the only species of char native to area waters.


Abundant both as sea-run and as freshwater residents in area streams and lakes, these fish are tasty when

smoked or otherwise prepared like trout. Many anglers target other species, and Dolly Varden (especially sea-run Dollies) can easily withstand additional harvest in area waters.

Fishing is good from late spring to early fall. Flies and artificials will catch Dollies in lakes and streams. Casting or trolling spoons or spinners next to marine shorelines and stream mouths will also produce fish.

Arctic grayling  distinguished from trout and char by a prominent dorsal fin. Grayling were introduced into two area lakes (Kane Peak and Tyee) in the 1960s and 1970s.

Grayling grow slowly, and most range from 4 to 8 inches long. They prefer cold, clear streams and are very sensitive to pollution. Their diet is mainly insects; hence flyfishing is most effective. Small spinners or spoons will also take grayling.

Brook trout  not native to the area, but introduced in the 1930s. Crystal Lake is the only lake in the Petersburg/Wrangell area that contains brook trout. Small spinners and flies are the recommended methods for catching brook trout. The best time to fish for brook trout is midsummer through early fall.



Bottomfish

Bottomfish are fishes normally caught on or near the ocean floor: halibut, rockfish, and lingcod.

Halibut 🐟 the most popular bottomfish in area waters because of its size and flavor. Pacific halibut is a toothy flatfish that resembles flounder, but grows much larger—adult halibut over 300 pounds have been caught locally. Halibut live more than 20 years and are usually harvested in area sport fisheries at 15 to 100 pounds (30 pounds average).

Halibut sport fishing is at its peak in summer. The halibut's preferred habitat is along fairly flat sand, rock, or mud bottoms adjacent to abrupt dropoffs or rocky points of peninsulas. They are normally caught near the ocean floor at depths below 80 feet, but sometimes caught at shallower depths by anglers trolling or mooching for salmon.

Halibut will strike a number of offerings—whole or chunked herring, salmon heads or tails, octopus, squid, and chrome or leadhead jigs with various (optional) rubber tails or skirts. Heavy, conventional tackle is recommended for halibut. Use

caution landing and handling halibut: many anglers dispatch a large halibut with a handgun before boating it. Others use a gaff, shark hook, or harpoon, attached to a strong rope and float.

Rockfish 🐟 several species are harvested in this area's marine waters. These light-fleshed fish have a distinctive, appealing flavor. Rockfish weigh between 1 and 6 pounds and average 2 pounds. Rockfish are long-lived—from 30 to over 100 years, depending on species. Yelloweye (red snapper) is the largest species, reaching weights of 30 pounds (average near 6 pounds).

Rockfish are often caught incidentally by anglers fishing for salmon or halibut. Although rockfish are available year-round, the best sport fishing is in the warmer months. All resident rockfish species in the area can be caught with herring or with jigs, spoons, or flies, throughout the water column, from surface to bottom.

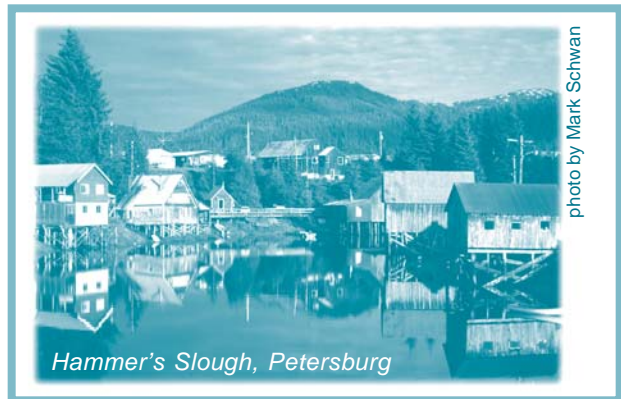


photo by Mark Schwan

Hammer's Slough, Petersburg