



# Matanuska - Susitna Valley & West Cook Inlet Silver Salmon

Silver salmon, also called coho salmon, can be found throughout Cook Inlet and Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley drainages. Silvers are sought after both for their table fare and for their fighting ability, which provides excellent sport fishing fun for all ages.

Silver salmon abundance varies widely from year to year. During the high years, as many as 1 million silvers return to Cook Inlet streams. To measure run strength, ADF&G relies in part on the catch numbers in both the recreational fishery and the commercial fishery. A few weirs are also in place to count escapement

## Catch and release of silvers

Silvers just entering freshwater are very sensitive to hooking and handling, particularly when using bait. A study conducted on the Little Susitna River concluded that 70% of "ocean-bright" coho salmon hooked and released using bait did not live to spawn.

In part because of the results of this research, many waters have special regulations for retention and release of silver salmon. Please carefully read the regulations for the water you plan to fish.

***For opening dates, daily limits, regulations, and special tackle restrictions, consult the Southcentral Alaska regulation booklet.***



*Anglers spend a sunny day fishing at Eklutna Tailrace (page 4).*

## Emergency Orders and the ADF&G website

To ensure enough fish reach spawning grounds, fishery managers may issue Emergency Orders in reaction to conservation concerns. News about Emergency Orders is posted on our website, recorded on our hotlines, as well as released to newspapers, radios, and other on-line sources.

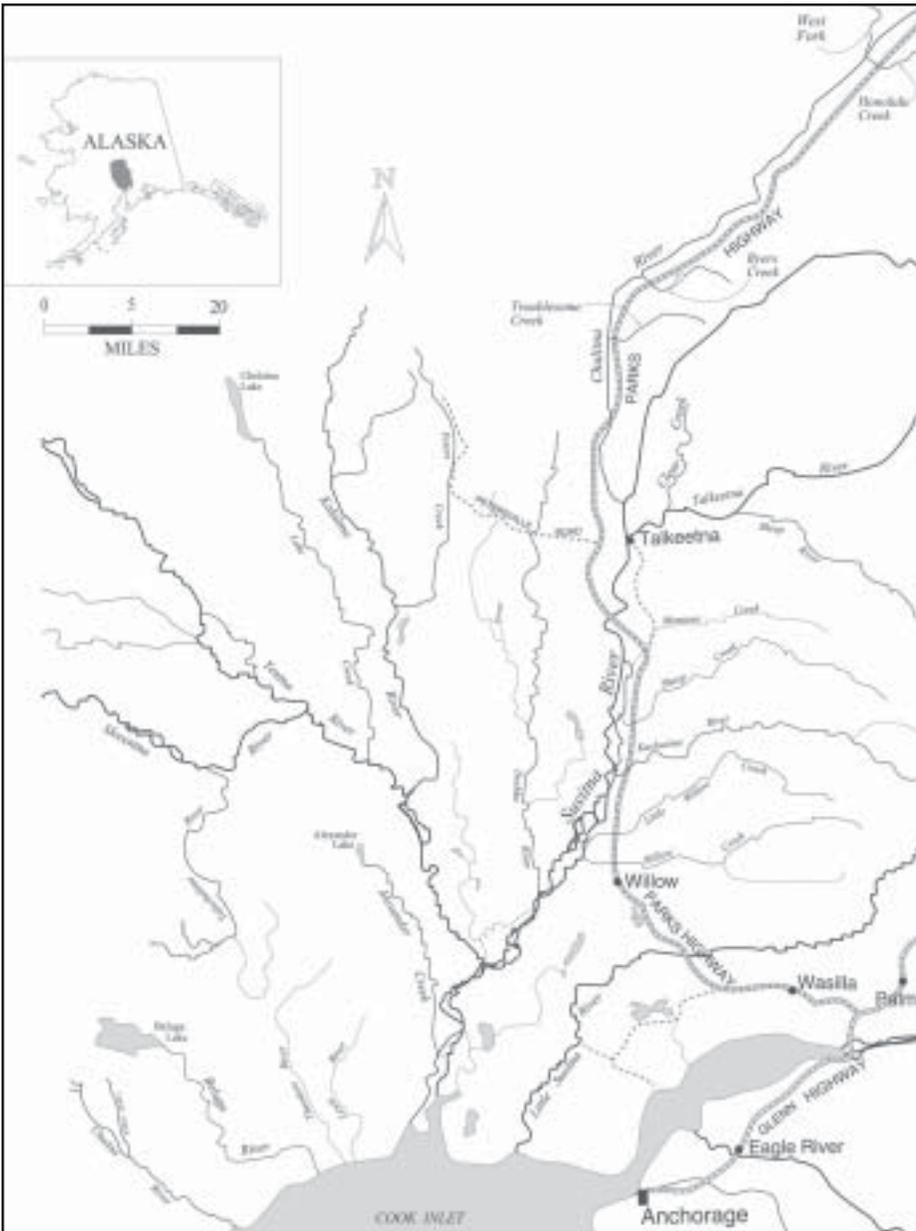
It is your responsibility to understand and be current with fishing regulations. A good source is the ADF&G Sport Fish Southcentral Region website. Point your browser to [www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us](http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us) If you don't have Internet access, call the ADF&G Anchorage regional office at (907) 267-2218 for current information about Northern Cook Inlet silver salmon.

## Do your part to help salmon and trout

### River banks are crucial to the health of Alaska fish.

Vegetation slows runoff and erosion, provides a hiding place for juvenile fish, slows the current so the young fish are not washed out, and cools the stream. Here are some general suggested guidelines that have been proven to help preserve the banks and juvenile fish habitat:

- Do not cut brush or trees within 10 feet of waterline.
- Use established trails to reach the river, and established entry and exit points into the water.
- Wear boots and stand in the river, away from fragile vegetation.
- Pack out what you pack in, including discarded fishing line and tackle.



*The Northern Cook Inlet area. The maps in this publication are not to scale, and are for informational purposes only. The United States Geological Survey is an excellent source for to-scale topographical maps: [www.mapping.usgs.gov](http://www.mapping.usgs.gov).*



These opportunities funded in part by Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration.

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## Sport fishing guides and charters

Many charter services are available. Some are based out of Anchorage, but most are based out of the communities of Wasilla, Palmer, Willow, and Talkeetna. They offer everything from drop-off day trips to full-service lodging and guiding.

Although ADF&G cannot recommend an individual service, there is a listing of registered guides and businesses on our website. Click on "Finding a charter or guide." You can also contact the Matanuska-Susitna Visitor's Bureau at (907) 746-5000, or visit their web pages at [www.alaskavisit.com](http://www.alaskavisit.com).

## General Run Timing

In Northern Cook Inlet, silvers run from mid-July through October. The peak of the run is the last week of July through the end of August, depending on your location. In Susitna River drainages, few silvers enter after early September.

After the peak of the run, silvers are spread throughout the entire Susitna River and Knik River drainages. Anglers fishing later can usually catch bright fish from less crowded fishing holes.

## Knik Arm Drainages

Knik Arm drainages offer the first silver salmon fishing opportunities as you travel north from Anchorage. There are several excellent silver salmon streams in the Knik Arm drainage, with the Little Susitna River the most popular destination. These streams are easily accessible without a boat or airplane, however, many anglers choose to use boats to escape the crowds, and to fish the more remote areas..

Much of the fishing takes place in the Palmer Hayflats State Game Refuge, a 45-square-mile complex of forest, wetlands, tidal sloughs, lakes, and tideflats encompassing the mouths of the Knik and Matanuska rivers.

Each year, anglers spend over 4,500 angler-days on Cottonwood Creek, Wasilla Creek, and Rabbit Slough, fishing for silver and red salmon.

There are three main access points. Off the Glenn Highway, boats can be launched at the Knik River bridge. There is motorboat and foot access at Rabbit Slough (a tributary of Wasilla Creek). Cottonwood Creek, reached off the Hayfield Road at the southwest end of Fairview Loop Road provides canoe, foot, and

limited off-road vehicle access across Matanuska-Susitna Borough land to the refuge.

Visitors to the refuge should be aware that there are seasonal restrictions regarding the off-road use of motorized vehicles and the use of boats and aircraft. Contact ADF&G for more information.

## Fishing for silvers in Knik Arm drainages

Silvers arrive by late June, and continue their run through September. The average weight of Knik Arm coho salmon, excluding those of Little Susitna origin, is just under 6 pounds.

**Wasilla Creek/Rabbit Slough** is accessed from Mile 35 on the Glenn Highway, just north of the Alaska Railroad crossing. Follow the signs along the frontage road to the public access road leading to the slough.

There are seasonal restrictions on motorboat use here.

Salmon fishing is allowed only from the mouth upstream to the Alaska Railroad bridge.

Public access to **Cottonwood Creek** is off the Fairview Loop Road a few miles from its intersection with the Knik-Goose Bay Road. Look for a gravel road on the right at a sharp 90-degree corner. This is the Hayfield Road. Turn here, and watch for a brown sign directing you to a dirt road to the left. This road leads to a parking area on the Palmer Hayflats State Game Refuge near the mouth of Cottonwood Creek.

This section of Cottonwood Creek is intertidal, so most anglers fish about 1 to 2 hours before high tide.

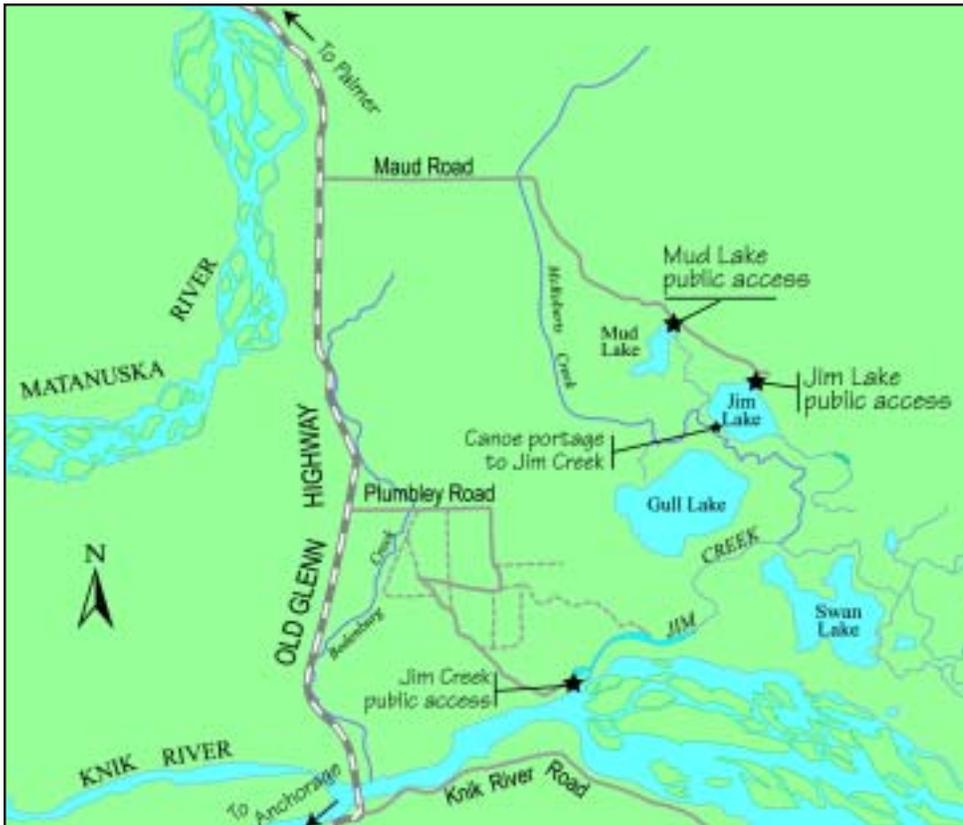
This section has special fishing regulations, including limited opening and closing times, so please read the regulations before going to the creek.

**Fish Creek** crosses the Knik-Goose Bay Road about 16 miles from Wasilla.

The best fishing here is also where the clear creek and the muddy Cook Inlet waters meet. Again, most anglers fish the incoming tide. Be careful when fishing near the mouth of Fish Creek! The Knik Arm tide comes in very fast and it is possible to be trapped by sticky mud and rising water.

Fish Creek has special fishing regulations, including opening and closing times and later start dates.

**Jim Creek**, near Palmer, drains a wetland of shallow lakes then enters the Knik River about 10 miles upstream from saltwater.



*Jim Creek*

These waters provide the latest fishable run of coho in the Mat-Su Valley, with silvers available from late July through freeze-up in October/November. Red salmon and a few chum salmon are also present in Jim Creek.

You can reach Jim Creek by taking the Old Glenn Highway to Plumley Road, which is near Bodenber Butte. Follow Plumley Road to Caudill Road and take a right. After about 1 mile you will come to a large parking area on the left. From here you will follow a rough gravel road for about 2 miles to the mouth of Jim Creek.

A word of caution. On warm days the nearby Knik Glacier melts rapidly and swells the shallow Knik River to flood stage. It is possible for the unwary person to become marooned on a temporary island or return to find his/her vehicle underwater. And worse yet, when the water's high, the fishing success for silvers declines drastically.

The **Eklutna Power Plant tailrace** is located on the Old Glenn Highway across from the power plant building. This fishery is stocked with silver salmon by ADF&G.

You can access the tailrace by parking in a small

unimproved parking area off the Old Glenn Highway across from the power plant. There's a foot trail along the tailrace to the mouth, which is the most productive fishing area.

You can also access the mouth of the tailrace from an unimproved road that intersects the Old Glenn Highway about 1/8-mile to the south of the power plant.

Most people fish for silvers by resting the bait—usually salmon eggs—on the bottom. Silvers caught here are mostly hatchery fish, although there are a few Knik River and Jim Creek fish stopping to rest on their way upstream.

Eklutna tailrace silvers are available from late July through mid-September. Red and chum salmon are also found in tailrace waters.

#### **Other smaller fishing areas**

abound. In fact, just about any place where clear water mixes with the Knik or Matanuska rivers you will find a few silver salmon, generally during August. The mouth of **Moose Creek** at Mile 54.5 of the Glenn Highway is one often-overlooked fishing spot.

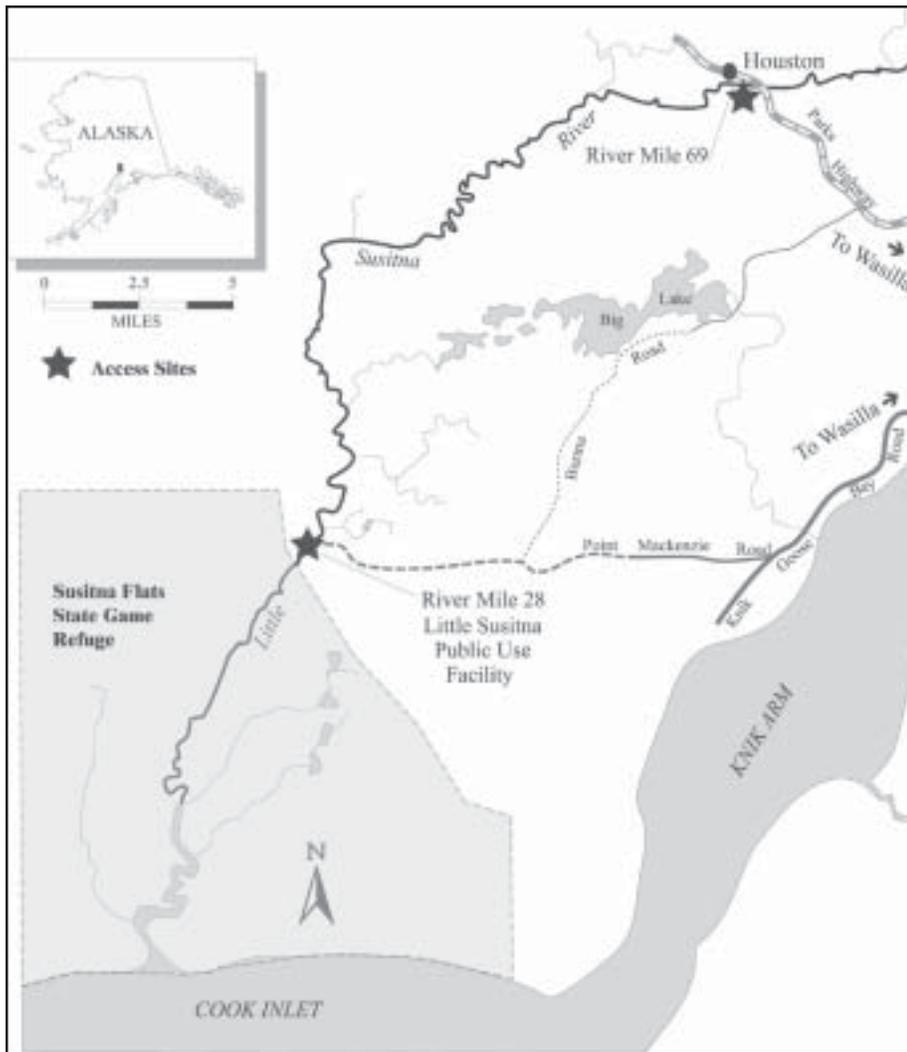
Many silver salmon fisheries have special regulations, so be sure to read the regulations before you head out to fish.

#### **Little Susitna River Silvers**

The Little Susitna River produces the second-largest freshwater harvest of silver salmon in the State of Alaska. The "Little Su," as it is locally known, has 70 river miles of prime coho salmon fishing, from its mouth upstream to the Parks Highway bridge at Houston (Mile 58).

#### **Little Susitna Access**

The Little Su wanders through part of the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, over 300,000 acres of prime waterfowl, moose, coyote, wolf, and bear habitat. Access to the refuge is managed by ADF&G for the protection of fish and wildlife, their habitats, and public use of the area. Uses of state refuge lands are controlled



*The Little Susitna River*

times travel from the mouth up to the Parks Highway bridge. During low water, however, most power boats travel up only as far as river mile 28.

The second access site, the Little Susitna Public Use Facility boat launch and campground, is the most popular site for boat anglers, and for bank anglers who don't have a boat or don't want to risk the strong tides of Cook Inlet.

To reach the LSPUF, drive to Wasilla, then turn southwest on the Knik-Goose Bay Road. After about 18 miles, you'll reach Point Mackenzie Road. Turn right (west). Turn right at the "T" and follow the blue boat launch signs.

The Parks Highway bridge at Mile 58, near the community of Houston, offers the third primary way to access the Little Susitna. Bank angling is available here, and many anglers also launch rafts or canoes at the bridge, then take out at the LSPUF. The scenic 42-mile float trip to the LSPUF takes 2-3 days.

If you don't have your own boat, there are several charter and guide services operating from the communities of Wasilla, Willow, and Houston. The Houston area also has a large private campground and other services to make your fishing trip more enjoyable.

### Fishing the Little Susitna

Productive fishing usually begins mid-July and continues until September. Tagging studies indicate that silvers migrate slowly up the Little Su, and remain available to the fishery for about 4 weeks. In 2000, the average silver length was about 24 inches.

Fishing is generally good in the lower river during the first few weeks of the run. As the run migrates upstream in early August, fishing in the Houston area, near the Parks Highway bridge, picks up.

You can also fish from shore in the Houston area downstream of the Parks Highway bridge (remember: salmon fishing is closed upstream of the bridge!) Silvers arrive in the Houston area by mid-August and remain plentiful through mid-September.

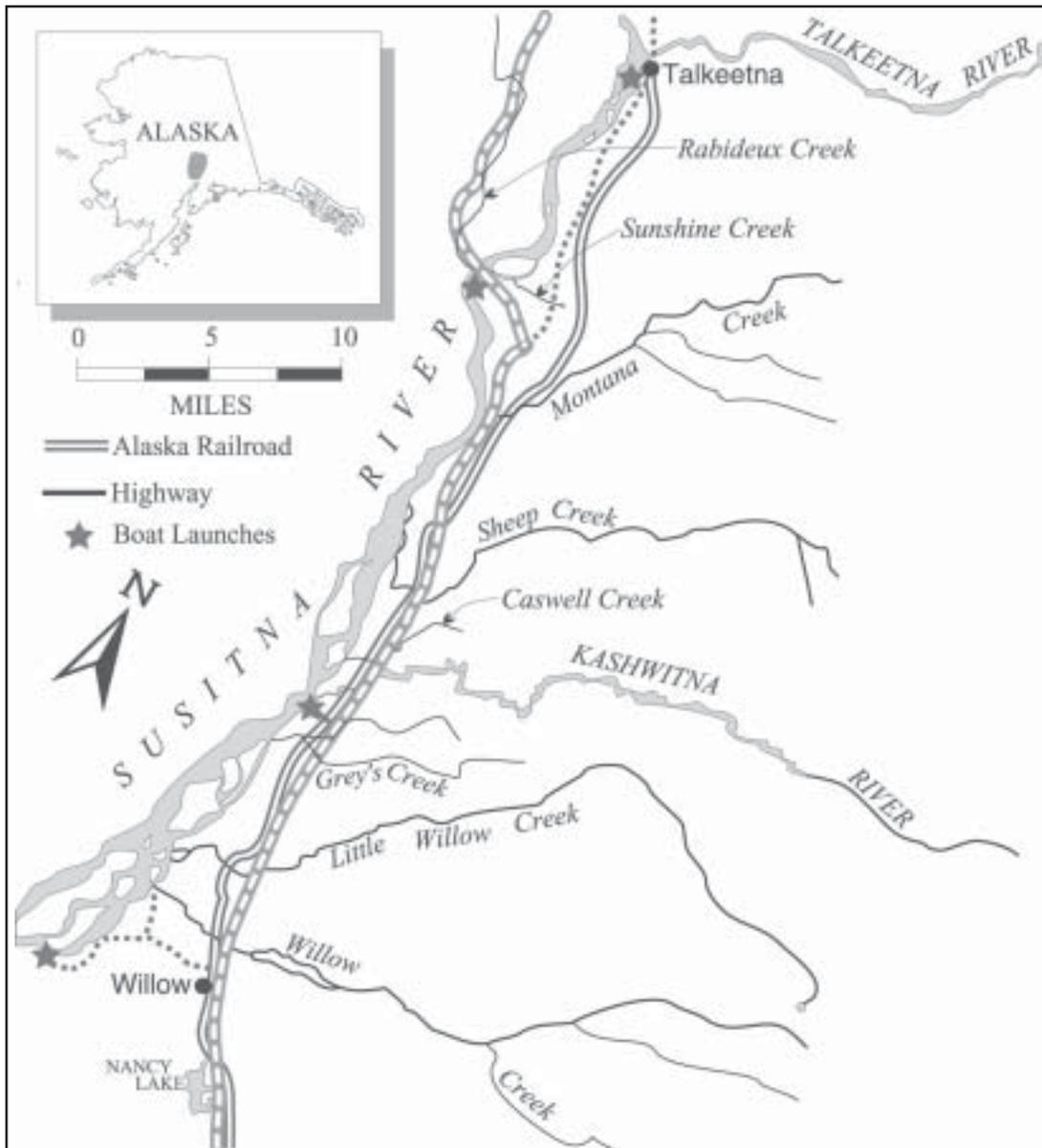
to prevent habitat changes which would be harmful to the wildlife or habitat.

There are three primary ways to access the Little Su. Experienced boaters can gain access to the intertidal reaches of the Little Susitna by launching from the Port of Anchorage and crossing Cook Inlet.

**CAUTION!** Northern Cook Inlet has 30-foot tides and strong winds ... not a good place to begin a boating career! If, however, you are experienced, and have a properly-equipped 20-foot or better boat, or a salt-water-capable inflatable, crossing the Inlet is an efficient way to reach the mouth of the Little Susitna River.

Just remember to enter and exit the river's mouth during the hours of high tide. When reading the tide book make certain you adjust for the difference in time that high tide arrives at Anchorage and then at the mouth of the Little Su.

If the river is running high, power boats can some-



*Eastside Susitna River streams*

## Eastside Susitna River silver salmon fishing

These popular silver salmon destinations are the next silver fishing opportunity as you head north from the Knik area.

Eastside Susitna drainages include Willow Creek and everything north of it on the eastern side of the Susitna River -- Little Willow Creek, Grey's Creek, Kashwitna River, Caswell Creek, Sheep Creek, Goose Creek, Montana Creek, Sunshine Creek, and Rabideux Creek, the Talkeetna River, Fish and Clear creeks, and the Chulitna River drainages.

Silver salmon show up in late July, and fishing is

good through late August.

### Access to Eastside Susitna streams

If you don't have a boat, the Eastside Susitna waters crossed by the Parks Highway or the Talkeetna Spur Road will offer the best opportunity for shore-based angling.

If you're in good hiking condition, the Alaska Railroad "whistle stop" service provides relatively inexpensive access to the Susitna River silver fisheries north of the community of Talkeetna. Call 1-800-208-0200 or go on line to [www.akrr.com](http://www.akrr.com).

If you have a boat or a raft, you have your choice of 4 access sites along the Parks Highway — Deshka Landing, Susitna Landing at the mouth of the Kashwitna River, the Mile 104 Parks Hwy.

bridge crossing the Susitna River, and Talkeetna Landing in the village of Talkeetna. Except at the Parks Hwy. bridge, fees are charged to launch from these facilities.

If you operate a jet boat or have a large boat, the Susitna Landing, Deshka Landing, or the Talkeetna Landing are your best bets, not only because of the excellent launching facilities available for larger boats, but also because you can access the main channel of the Susitna River directly from these sites.

Deshka Landing is located off the Willow Creek Parkway at Parks Highway Mile 71.3. Susitna Landing is located at Parks Highway Mile 82.5. There is

also bank fishing and handicapped access. Talkeetna Landing is close to downtown Talkeetna, near the confluence of the Talkeetna, Chulitna, and Susitna rivers. The launch was initially developed by the community of Talkeetna for public use, and has been upgraded with Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds.

The Parks Highway Mile 104 “boat launch” is basically an un-maintained gravel bar with a road approach. The access road starts from the small state campground on the southeast side of the bridge, then continues through private land to the river. It can be extremely hazardous at high water levels.

### Road-Accessible Fishing: Parks Highway Roadside Streams

**Willow Creek** (Parks Hwy. Mile 71.3) offers easy shore access at the state-operated campground at the mouth, and limited shore access at the state-operated campground upstream at the Deception Creek confluence. There are also several privately-operated campgrounds upstream near the Parks Highway bridge.

Many anglers fish the mouth, but remember that silvers can be found throughout the river as far as Deception Creek. The best time to fish Willow Creek is late July and early August, when the silvers first pass through this area.

The **Kashwitna River** crosses the Parks Highway at Mile 83.1. This is a glacial system, and it get even cloudier in mid-summer and during rains. As glacial melt slows down in early fall, the water level drops and clarity improves, and so does the silver fishing.

Susitna Landing, Mile 82.4, offers a boat launch with camping facilities with excellent handicapped access right at the mouth of the Kashwitna River. Many fishing guides and charters also use Susitna Landing as their launch site.

The mouth of **Sheep Creek** is reached by driving west on Resolute Avenue (Parks Hwy. Mile 86.3). At the mouth of the creek is a seasonally-maintained camping area with public rest rooms. A short trail from the parking area leads to the confluence of Sheep Creek and the Susitna River. Silver salmon can arrive as early as late July, but fishing improves in early August.

Sheep Creek crosses the Parks Highway at Mile 88.4. There is a small unmaintained fishing area on the downstream side of the bridge (within the road right-of-way

only), along the north bank. Silvers generally reach this upstream location by mid-August.

**Montana Creek** at Mile 96.5 of the Parks Highway is a popular silver fishing spot. Coho provide good action here by mid-August. Camping and RV parking is available in privately-operated campgrounds at the highway bridge.

Access to the mouth of **Rabideux Creek** is just north of where the Parks Highway crosses the Susitna River at Mile 105. When the Susitna River is running high, water often floods the road to Rabideux Creek. When this happens, an alternative route from a turnout at Mile 105.4 on the Parks Highway may be usable.

At Mile 105.5 the Parks Highway crosses Rabideux Creek. A large hole on the downstream side of the culverts (within the road right-of-way) provides fair silver fishing. Passable numbers of silvers may be available even after the Labor Day weekend.

Access to the mouth of **Sunshine Creek** is by a gravel road at Parks Hwy. Mile 102.5. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough maintains a parking area near the mouth of the creek. Silvers typically arrive here by mid-August.

### Boat-Accessible Eastside Susitna River Streams

**Little Willow Creek** (Parks Hwy. Mile 74.8) is accessible immediately adjacent to the Parks Highway bridge, but you'll need to boat to get to its confluence with the Susitna River where the best fishing takes place. There are no facilities and no boat launch at Little Willow Creek, and the property outside the road right-of-way along that stream is privately-owned. Silvers arrive at the Parks Highway bridge by mid-August.

**Grey's Creek** crosses the Parks Highway at Mile 81.8. Outside the road right-of-way, the shoreline is private property, and there is no public shoreline access to the mouth from the Parks Highway bridge. Access to the mouth is by boat only, by launching at one of the previously-described facilities. The mouth can provide good silver fishing in August.

The mouth of **Caswell Creek** can be an excellent silver fishing spot. A large gravel turnout at Mile 84 begins the 1/2-mile gravel access road to the mouth and a primitive campground with limited public restrooms and trash service.

The uplands around the mouth of **Goose Creek** is privately-owned, and fishing is boat only. Silvers are usually here by mid-August.

## Upriver on the "Big Su"

Roughly 54 miles of Susitna River separates Talkeetna from the dangerous waters of Devil's Canyon. These 54 miles offers the skilled river boater some exciting water and great fishing.

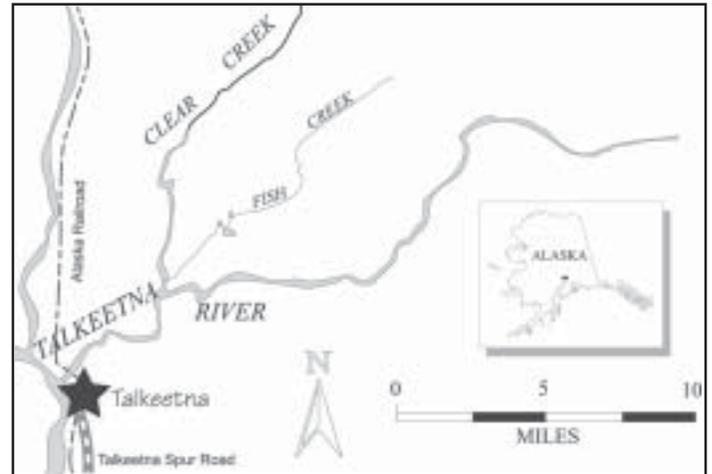
There are many stories of the famous and deadly waters of Devil's Canyon. Few have taken the trip up the Susitna River to the canyon's outlet. This reach of river requires a moderately powerful jet boat and the experience to operate in 10-mile-per-hour currents and three- to five-foot waves. These qualifiers will allow you to access the mouths of Portage Creek and the Indian River. It is not advised that anglers travel beyond Portage Creek.

**Indian River** and **Portage Creek** offer fair silver fishing in mid- to late August.

## Chulitna River Drainages Silver Salmon

Continuing north on the Parks Highway are **Trouble-**

**some Creek, Byers Creek, Honolulu Creek** and the **East and Middle Forks of the Chulitna River**. There



*Talkeetna River/ Clear Creek area*

are several highway pullouts to access these little-fished streams.

After swimming upriver over 100 miles, silver salmon arrive here in mid-August to September.

## Talkeetna River Drainages

A boat is a must for silver fishing on the Talkeetna. The boat launch at Mile 14 of the Talkeetna Spur Road is a popular jumping-off spot for both guided and non-guided anglers. Although not as large or swift as the Susitna, the Talkeetna River also requires extreme caution when navigating its many snags, boulders, and shoals.

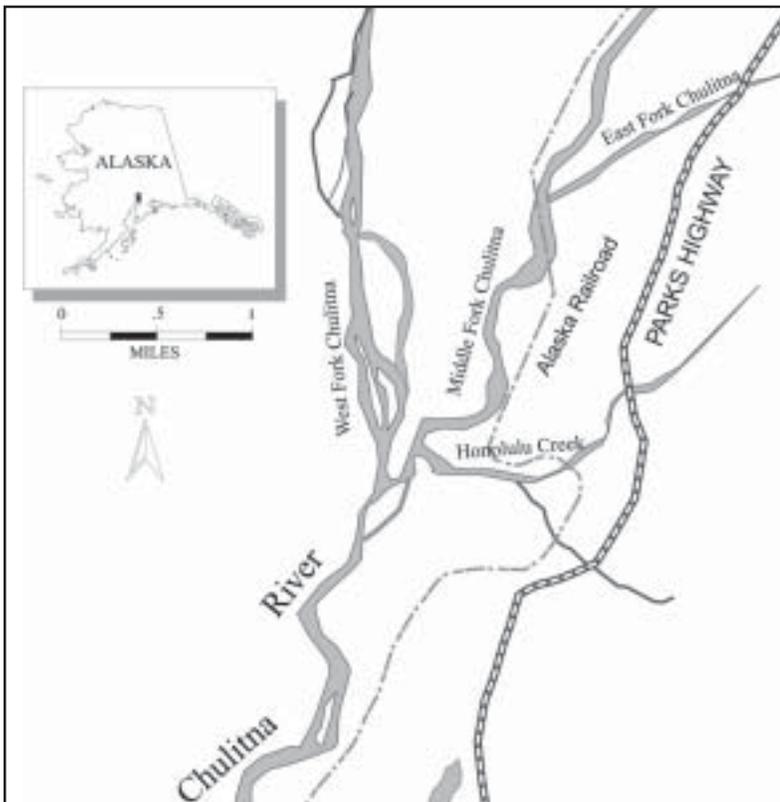
Silver fishing is good from mid-August through early September.

**Clear Creek** is probably the most popular and easily reached Talkeetna River tributary. **Fish Creek** enters Clear Creek on its eastern shore about 1/2-mile up from the mouth.

## Fishing for Coho in Westside Susitna River Tributaries

Westside Susitna River silver salmon drainages include the **Deshka River, Alexander Creek, Lake Creek, the Talachulitna River**, and a myriad of small streams where clear water mixes with the Susitna, Yentna, or Skwentna rivers.

These silvers are early-run stocks, with a normal peak of last week in July. The migration into



*Chulitna River/Honolulu Creek area*

the Yentna River drainage normally peaks the last week of July. Generally, the closer the drainage is to salt water, the earlier silvers arrive. Average size of Deshka River silvers is about 22 inches.

### Road-accessible Westside Susitna silver fisheries

**Moose, Kroto and Peter's creeks** are accessible from the Petersville Road (Parks Highway Mile 114.8). Anglers looking for late-season action will find that silvers arrive about mid-August this far upstream, and have more color than those caught lower in the Susitna/Yentna River drainages.

Moose and Kroto creeks are tributaries of the Deshka River. Peter's Creek is a tributary of the Kahiltna River, which flows into the Yentna River, which then flows into the Susitna River.

There are small camping areas near each creek, and limited services along the Petersville Road. The mouth of Peter's Creek is also accessible by trail from Shulin Lake, a popular floatplane landing.

### Remote Westside Susitna fisheries

**Alexander Creek** flows directly into the Susitna

Location	Silvers Present	Peak Silver Fishing
Alexander Creek	Mid-July to Sept.	Late July to Mid-August
Deshka River	Mid-July to Sept.	Late July to Mid-August
Lake Creek	Late July to Sept.	Early Aug. to Late Aug.
Talachulitna River	Early Aug. to Sept.	Mid-Aug. to Late Aug.

River 10 river miles upstream from Cook Inlet. It's not a big stream, but it is usually boatable by a jet-equipped river boat as far upstream as Trail Creek, about 14 creek miles.

The **Yentna River** enters the Susitna River from the west, approximately 30 river miles upstream from Cook Inlet. This river system drains the high peaks of the Alaska Range from Mount McKinley to Rainy Pass.

The mouth of **Lake Creek** can be fished from shore or from a boat. Boat rental is available from the 15+ local lodges or air charter services, but it is advisable to make reservations ahead of time.

Hiking up Lake Creek is tough. Few people get very far, so boating is the preferred choice. Lake Creek is shallow, rocky, and fast, and there are braided channels and fallen trees. Only experienced boaters should attempt Lake Creek, with extreme caution, and only in

a light, nimble jet boat, an 18-footer for example, with a 40- or 50-horsepower jet outboard. Even with this suggested rig, because of the current, sweepers, and rocks, boaters are limited to 3-5 miles of creek. Above 5 creek miles, Lake Creek becomes hazardous to life and safety, as well as very hard on your valuable equipment.

Lake Creek can also be an exciting float trip, but it is not recommended for beginners. There are stretches of Class III water, so don't overload your raft. Use at least a 12- or 13-foot self-bailing raft with a rowing frame, and tie down your gear. Start in Chelatna Lake and plan on at least four to five days to complete the trip. There are also private guides offering float trips.

Bulchitna Lake, about two miles upstream of Lake Creek's confluence with the Yentna River, offers an alternative to the fly-in angler who wants to hike to excellent fishing. Lake Creek is especially fast in the Bulchitna area, so bring heavier gear, and load up with at least 15-pound line if you want to keep one of the 8- to 12-pound silver salmon.

The **Talachulitna River** is known for its quality rainbow trout and salmon fishing. The "Tal," about 15 river miles upstream of Skwentna, will have silvers by early August.

You can boat up from Skwentna, but be careful. The Skwentna River is a very fast, braided glacial river with many deadfalls and overhanging trees. The mouth of the Tal is not a large area. If water conditions are right only 4 to 6 boats can fish the confluence without compromising each other. The fishing in this area can be excellent.

If you want to float the Talachulitna River for silvers, wait until at least August 10. Few silvers will be in the upper reaches by that time, but the rainbow trout and grayling fishing should be excellent. The Tal is a five- to seven-day float if you choose to do the entire river from Judd Lake to the Skwentna River confluence. The upper third is often shallow, and it is occasionally necessary to walk your raft and make short portages. During high water this section of the river can be very hazardous, as "sweepers" are abundant. Anglers have died as a result of rafts being pinned against, or forced under "sweepers."

A spillway through a short canyon is located about

halfway down the Tal from its confluence with Talachulitna Creek. It should provide you with some excitement, but unless you have an overloaded raft or the river is very high, you shouldn't have any major problems.

### Westside Susitna River boat and plane access

If you plan to use your own boat to gain access to westside Susitna River silver salmon, you can launch from one of the access sites described in the Eastside Susitna River section, or launch at the Port of Anchorage, cross Northern Cook Inlet to the Susitna River, then head upstream.

**CAUTION!** Northern Cook Inlet has 30-foot tides and strong winds ... not a good place to begin a boating career! If, however, you are experienced, and have a properly-equipped 20-foot or better boat, or a salt-water-capable inflatable, crossing the Inlet is an effi-

cient way to reach the streams located in the lower Susitna River drainage.

Just remember to enter and exit the river's mouth during the hours of high tide. When reading the tide book make certain that you adjust for the difference in time that high tide arrives at Anchorage and then at the mouth of the Susitna River.

Small plane access to Westside Susitna River silver fisheries is quite good. However, even for the experienced pilot, tricycle gear is not recommended. There is only one developed and maintained airport in the area, located in the community of Skwentna (year-round population 20), and Skwentna's 2,500-foot-long runway is not monitored.

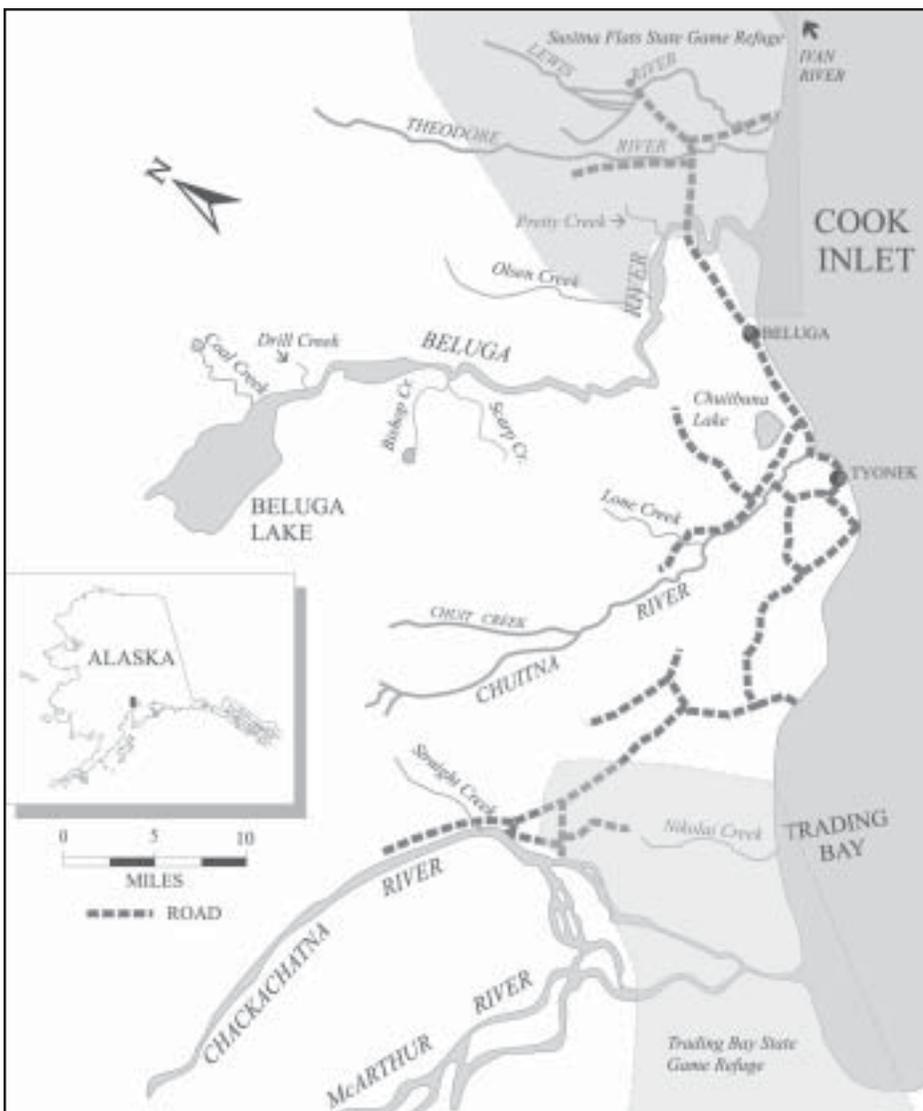
Once you land at Skwentna, you will find a roadhouse offering guide services, rooms, meals and a post office. To find silvers from Skwentna you must have access to a boat.

Other than the Skwentna airport, unless you have a properly-equipped wheel plane and are familiar with gravel bar landings, a float plane is your best option. Float planes can access the mouths of most tributary streams, many of the lakes adjacent to the rivers, or the rivers themselves.

The best advice for pilots is to land only where you feel safe. Call an air charter operator in Anchorage's Lake Hood or Merrill Field and ask where they land. They may not give out any "secret spots," but in the interest of safety they will tell you where the traditional landing areas are.

### West Cook Inlet Drainages

West Cook Inlet offers some of the finest silver salmon fishing around. Since these streams are accessible only by small plane, anglers looking for a less crowded silver salmon experience might want to try one of the air taxi or guide services leaving from Anchorage's Lake Hood or Merrill Field.



West Cook Inlet

As with any remote fishery, public access and services are limited and specific knowledge of the area is often the difference between success and explaining that you “had a good time anyway.”

The West Cook Inlet area consists of all waters north of the latitude of the southern tip of Chisik Island and the mouth of the Susitna River.

### Access — boat or plane only

The West Cook Inlet area is not linked by road to the highway system of Southcentral Alaska. There are a number of Merrill Field air taxi operators that run regularly-scheduled flights to the area.

Once you have arrived in the area you will find a well-developed road system, and this is the key to reaching much of the available fishing.

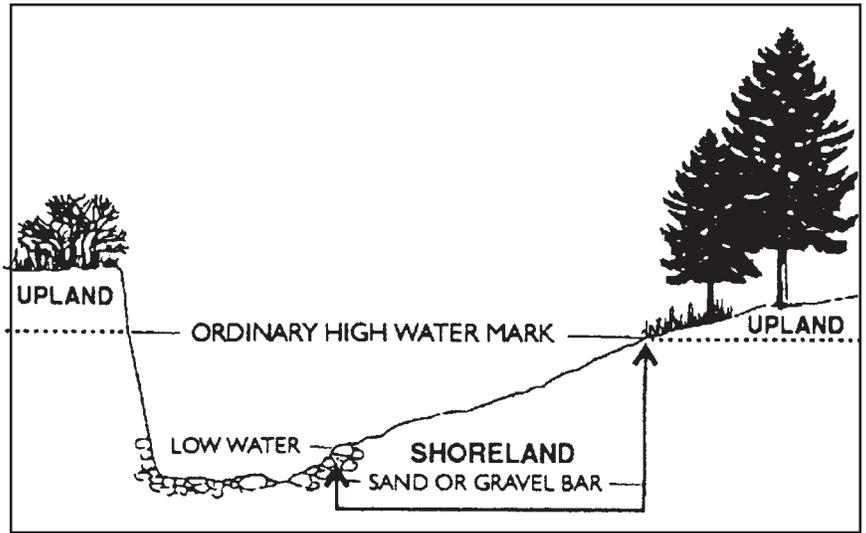
Once servicing oil and gas exploration and the timber industry, these roads are now largely unused and un-maintained. Even though landing strips were also constructed, and you may find some maps with landing strips indicated, with a couple of exceptions, these landing areas are now privately-owned and not available to the angling public.

Once on the ground you may still have to hire transportation, but the cost of a shuttle to the fishing holes is usually reasonable. Wheel plane access to a few of the streams is quite good, using the old road as a run-way.

The oil and gas industry is still very active in the Beluga area, so be careful to avoid their work sites and watch out for equipment on the roads.

If you plan to use a boat to gain access, you are faced with a number of significant logistical challenges. Realistically, boats are not practical in this area.

The first challenge you face is crossing northern Cook Inlet with its 30-foot tides and frequent high winds. In addition, because of boulders, snags, shoals, and extremely fast currents, none of the West Cook Inlet streams (with the exception of the Chakachatna-McArthur and Beluga River systems) are boatable above their intertidal zones. If you get into either the



*The “ordinary high water mark.” Under state law, the public has the right to use any waterway of the state below the ordinary high water mark, regardless of the ownership of the riverbed. However, the right to be in the water does not include a right to enter, cross, or use private uplands.*

Chakachatna-McArthur or Beluga Rivers, you won’t go very far without a jet drive.

The Beluga, Lewis, and Theodore all wander through part of the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, over 300,000 acres of prime waterfowl, moose, coyote, wolf, and bear habitat. The lower reaches of the Chakachatna-McArthur rivers flow through the Trading Bay State Game Refuge.

Access to the refuges is managed by ADF&G for the protection of fish and wildlife, their habitats, and public use of the area. Uses of state refuge lands are controlled to prevent habitat changes which would be harmful to the wildlife or habitat.

The **Beluga River** is glacial and not too productive for silvers, but several of its clearwater tributaries are excellent producers. Silvers are found in Coal, Drill, Bishop, Coffee, Olsen, and Pretty creeks from mid-July through mid-September.

The **Theodore and Lewis rivers** are accessible by plane, and, once on the ground, by a gravel road system connecting with the Beluga landing strip. Silvers are present from mid-July through mid-September.

Public access to fishable waters of the **Chuit River** is limited. If you are interested in fishing the Chuit River, please request the “Chuit River Fact Sheet” from the ADF&G Anchorage regional office.

Further south along the West Cook Inlet shoreline

anglers will find good silver fishing in the **Kustatan and MacArthur rivers, Polly Creek, Cannery Creek, Wolverine Creek** (a drainage of the Big River lakes) and **Silver Salmon Creek**. These streams are accessible by airplane only.

## Methods and Strategies

What type of gear do you need to catch these acrobatic fighters?

Many anglers use a medium weight spinning or bait-casting rod loaded with a high quality monofilament line with about 10-14 pound test. Slightly heavier line—as high as 20 lb.—is suggested if you plan to fish in fast current.

Fly fishers use a 6- or 7-weight rod about 9 feet in length. Fly fishing line should be a weight-forward, rapid-sinking line, which will get the fly quickly down to the fish. A 6-foot tippet of 10-14 pound test monofilament will do.

Fishing for silvers is an excellent opportunity to introduce the pleasures of sport fishing. You don't have to cast long distances when fishing the slow waters where silvers tend to mill around.

Be sure to teach ethical angling practices, including hooking, fighting, and landing or releasing a fish.

Where it's legal, many local silver anglers prefer bait, especially preserved salmon egg clusters.

Regulations concerning the use of bait vary from stream to stream. In some streams or sections of streams unbaited, artificial lures or single-hook artificial lures are required year-round. A review of the regulations is recommended before fishing.

Under the right water and light conditions, brightly colored spoons and spinners can out-fish bait. Although many types of lures will catch a feisty silver, pay special attention to the size and color of the lure. Many novice coho salmon anglers use lures intended for king salmon, which are generally too large for silvers.

Stick with number 2 through 5 spinners and 1/2-ounce spoons. Red is more visible in silty water or near the surface, while greens and blues are more visible in clearer water and at greater depths. Small diving plugs intended for steelhead will also attract silver salmon.

The best bait hooks are size 2/0 or 3/0 single hooks. Most people simply attach a 1/2-ounce sinker 16-18 inches above a quarter-sized gob of eggs, and let it rest on the bottom. The idea is that the silver will pick up the scent trail of the eggs and follow it to the baited hook.

Some anglers also drift the eggs through fishing holes. Other highly productive methods of bait fishing include using a slip bobber, which presents your bait to fish in different levels of the stream.

Silvers will also strike a fly, but the fly must be presented correctly. There are many fly patterns, but it's hard to beat a black or purple egg-sucking leech pattern, preferably one that includes some sparkly material.

Most of the top fly patterns for coho are dark with a bright attractor, but egg patterns can also be effective.

The top 5 coho patterns are Electric Egg-Sucking Leech (black & purple w/pink head); the Marabou Popsicle (black, purple & brown); Bunny Leech (black or purple w/pink head); Dr. Bill's Spin Tail (dark colors); and the Hairball Leech (dark colors).

## Check the Regs!

Always check the regulations before fishing. If in doubt about any fishing regulations, check the website [www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us](http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us), or call ADF&G Palmer Office at (907) 746-6300 or the Department of Public Safety, Bureau of Wildlife Enforcement Palmer Office at (907) 745-2131 for clarification.

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*For information about camping, accommodations, fishing guides, and other visitor services, contact the Alaska Division of Tourism at P.O. Box 110809, Juneau, Alaska 99811 (907) 465-2012 Fax (907) 465-3767 [www.dced.state.ak.us/tourism/](http://www.dced.state.ak.us/tourism/)*

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**Southcentral Region**

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Division of Sport Fish

333 Raspberry Road

Anchorage, Alaska 99518

[www.state.ak.us/adfg](http://www.state.ak.us/adfg) Click on Sport Fish, then Southcentral Region

**Sport Fish Information Center**

(907) 267-2218

M-F 8am - 5 pm

*Except on state & federal holidays*