

## Fishing in the *Sitka, Alaska* area

**A**long the Sitka road system, Starrigavan Bay and the breakwaters next to Sheldon Jackson Hatchery are the main sites for pink salmon, coho salmon, and Dolly Varden fishing. Sawmill Creek Road (a paved highway) leads east from Lake Street to Herring Cove on Silver Bay, and Halibut Point Road runs northwest of downtown Sitka to Starrigavan Creek and Bay (map 2, on page 4). Youngsters enjoy spring fishing for Dolly Varden along Halibut Point Road, and Dolly Varden anglers also fish Starrigavan Creek and Indian River. Short trails lead to several lakes from the road: Thimbleberry and Heart lakes, with brook trout, and Beaver Lake, which contains Arctic grayling. Blue Lake is accessible by road and offers rainbow trout fishing. Swan Lake, in downtown Sitka, is stocked with rainbow trout and serves as a site for children's trout derbies.

**In the marine environment,** Sitka Sound is popular with boat anglers trolling for salmon. Near St. Lazaria (about an hour's run from Sitka) is a well-known halibut hole. People usually go there early in the day before westerly winds make the water rough. People troll for coho and king salmon off of Goddard and the Biorka Islands, south of town. Katlian Bay and Nakwasina Sound, north of town, provide excellent anadromous Dolly Varden fishing and spin casting for coho salmon.

Salisbury Sound, north of Sitka, is another very popular day-use area with good salmon trolling. Salisbury can get rough with a westerly swell and prevent boaters from entering the Sound and passing into Peril Strait through Kakul Narrows. If weather permits, boaters can enter Kakul Narrows and travel up Peril Strait to fish places like Deep Bay and Fish Bay. Sitka boaters usually day-trip no farther north than Poison Cove, where Peril Strait enters Hoonah Sound.

**Many remote freshwater angling areas** are reached by boat or plane. Salmon, Green, and Redoubt lakes are fished by Sitka residents who can boat to tidewater trailheads and then hike to the lakes. More distant and to the north, Lake Eva,

Sitkoh Lake, and Sitkoh Creek are frequented by boaters and fly-in anglers. Sitkoh offers a high-quality steelhead fishery, and Lake Eva offers excellent Dolly Varden and cutthroat fishing.

### *Roadside fishing in fresh waters*

➤ **BLUE LAKE** A 1½-mile gravel road extends from Sawmill Creek Road at the Alaska Pulp Corporation mill and leads to the outlet of Blue Lake. The last short stretch of road down to the lake should be walked, as it is steep and rough. No facilities are present. Access is limited to the outlet area, unless the user has a portable skiff which can be launched by hand.

At an elevation of 270 feet, Blue Lake is about 3½ miles long, 360 feet deep, and steep-sided, with little shallow water. The lake level was raised by construction of a dam in 1959, but the lake had originally been blocked by a barrier falls on its outlet stream, Sawmill Creek. It is the largest and most productive lake on the Sitka road system, and one of the best rainbow trout producing lakes on Baranof Island.

Rainbow trout were stocked in Blue Lake from Sashin Lake in 1938 and 1939, and these fish populated the lake and outlet stream. When the outlet dam overflows, rearing rainbow are flushed over the spillway and populate the creek. These rainbow originated from steelhead stock and subsequently developed a small steelhead run in Sawmill Creek. The best fishing is usually near the inlets at the upper end of the lake, but fishing from shore near the outlet also produces fish.

➤ **BEAVER LAKE** This small muskeg system is reached by a steep, winding trail which heads just across the bridge from Sawmill Creek Campground. The lake lies in a valley at the foot of Bear Mountain with an outlet drainage to Sawmill



Creek. Its surface area is 6.7 acres and its maximum depth is 55 feet. There are no facilities. The average hiker takes about 25 minutes to reach the lake, but the hike is very scenic so you may want to take longer. Biting insects can be a problem—you will need your best bug dope.

Lake edges are too deep to wade, so fishing is done from shore. Much of the shoreline has trees and brush to the water's edge.

Beaver Lake was stocked with grayling in 1965 to determine the success of planting this species in Southeast Alaska. The plant was successful; but when the grayling matured and migrated down the outlet to spawn, several went over the falls just above Sawmill Creek. An outlet control structure was placed above the falls, so later plantings of fry maintained a healthy population. This is the only grayling fishery in the Sitka area. The tendency of grayling to eat almost anything endears them to anglers. They can be caught on lures or flies but at times are very particular about their diet. Grayling are especially popular because of their willingness to rise to a dry fly. The best times to catch grayling at Beaver Lake seem to be early and late in the day.

➤ **SAWMILL CREEK** Its upper reach is accessible from the Sawmill Creek campground. This section of stream supports a limited rainbow population. Deeper holes just below the dam often have good rainbow fishing, but few large fish are found there. Lower reaches of Sawmill Creek can be accessed from Sawmill Creek Road. Rainbow trout are present, and a few steelhead return in early May. Dolly Varden and pink and coho salmon are also present seasonally.

➤ **THIMBLEBERRY LAKE** Access is via a 1/2-mile trail that joins Sawmill Creek Road at mile 3.7. This trail continues 1 mile past Thimbleberry Lake to Heart Lake. Both lakes are small muskeg systems fed from the south slope of Mt. Verstovia and draining through steep blocked outlets to Silver Bay. There are no facilities at either lake. The shoreline vegetation is primarily deadfall trees and snags. Soft, muddy lake bottoms make wading difficult.

Eastern brook trout were planted in these lakes in 1928, and stable populations have developed. Eastern brook trout reach a maximum of about 14

## Visitor Information

Charter boat operators annually register with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and current listings may be obtained from the Department at 304 Lake Street, Room 103, Sitka, AK 99835.

Aircraft charter companies that operate out of Sitka include: Air Sitka, 475 Katlian Street, Sitka, (907)747-7920, and Harris Aircraft Services, Inc., 400 Airport Road, Sitka, AK 99835, (907)966-3050.

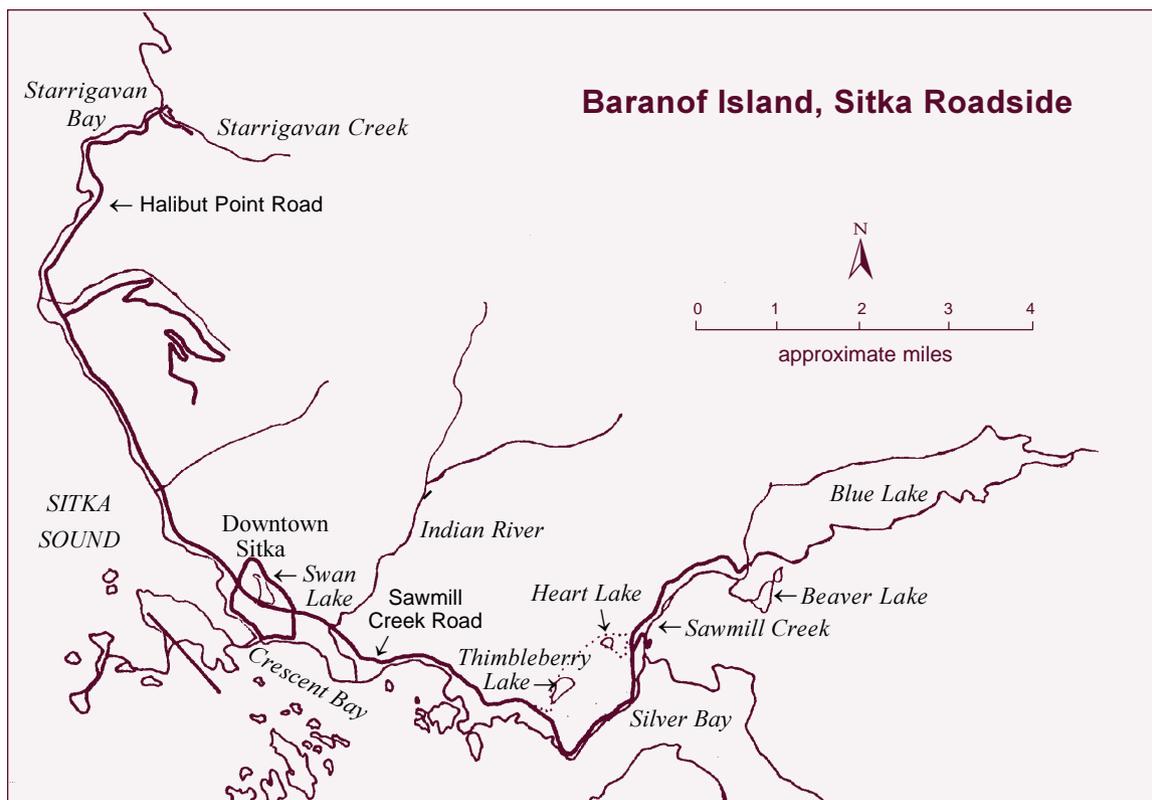
Information about U.S. Forest Service cabin facilities and reservations is available from the USFS District Office, 201 Katlian Street, Suite 109, Sitka, AK 99835, (907)747-4220. Cabin reservations can be made by calling the District Office or the toll-free NRRS number, 1-877-444-6777. Wednesdays through Sundays are the best times to call the toll-free number. An alternate phone number to use is 1-800-280-2267. The USFS has many publications available, including a trail guide, "Sitka Trails."

Hotel, bed and breakfast lodging, and rental car information is furnished by the Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 1226, Sitka (907)747-5940.

inches, but large fish are rare. In summer, small spinners cast over the shallows work well. Fly fishing with a size 6 white bucktail is also an effective method.

➤ **INDIAN RIVER** A Forest Service trail begins at mile 0.6 on Sawmill Creek Road and parallels the river for most of its length above the highway bridge, offering the opportunity for a hike through old-growth rainforest

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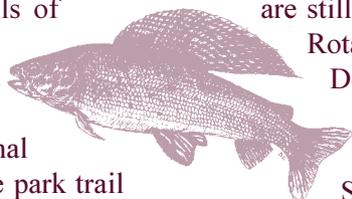


Map 2. Fishing areas along the Sitka roadside.

in a natural setting. From its headwaters in the broad valley formed at the foothills of Gavin Hill, the Sisters, Arrowhead Peak, and Mt. Verstovia, Indian River flows 5 miles to Sitka Sound. The lower river is in Sitka National Historical Park, accessible from the park trail system. Spawning and migrating salmon can be viewed in late summer and fall from the trail and bridges, but *the sport fishery for salmon is closed*.

Anglers can fish for Dolly Varden and rainbow/steelhead trout in Indian River. Dolly Varden are most available in early spring and again in the summer by early July.

➤ **SWAN LAKE** Located in downtown Sitka, this 22-acre lake has an average depth of only 3½ feet. It was originally open to salt water but was culverted as the city grew. The lake contains Dolly Varden, rainbow and cutthroat trout. Some spawning occurs in the main inlet, but rainbow trout are also planted annually to boost the population. Eastern brook trout were planted in the inlet above the



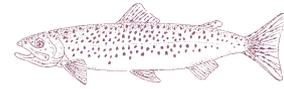
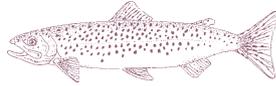
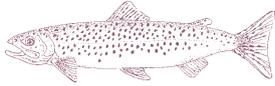
U.S. Geological Survey dam in the 1930s, and a few are still reported from time to time. The Sitka Rotary Club sponsors an annual Junior Trout Derby here—a very popular event with junior anglers.

Motorized vehicles are prohibited on Swan Lake, and its inlet stream, Wrinklneck Creek, is closed to sport fishing to protect spawning trout and char.

➤ **STARRIGAVAN CREEK** Near the end of Halibut Point Road, the creek is accessible from the Starrigavan Campground and from a gravel road originally built when the Starrigavan watershed was logged. Starrigavan Creek is *closed to salmon fishing*, but the State Park Service maintains a fish viewing station about a half mile up Starrigavan Road.

The creek is open to fishing for other species and has a good population of Dolly Varden. Sea-run Dolly Varden enter the creek early in July, when they are in prime condition after their spring and summer growing season, with firm pink flesh.

## Saltwater fishing by the roadside



Every year, sport anglers in Southeast Alaska catch thousands of salmon, bottomfish, Dolly Varden, and trout in marine roadside fisheries without expensive boats or aircraft. These “close to home” fisheries are often overlooked by residents and visitors alike.

Dolly Varden and pink salmon are the most common targets of marine shoreline anglers in Sitka, but in some locations king and coho salmon are taken. Bottomfish such as cod, rockfish, and flounder are also taken by shore-based anglers. Although not usually an angler’s primary target, these fish make an excellent dinner.

The marine shoreline sport fishery begins late in March when the Dolly Varden which overwintered in fresh water move into salt water and begin feeding along shorelines. Dolly Varden typically run from 1 to 3 pounds and are taken on light to medium weight spin casting gear.

Popular lures for Dolly Varden include “pixies,” “daredevils,” “hotrods,” “krocodiles,” and “buzz bombs” in 1/4-oz. to 1/2-oz. weights. Small herring rigged under a float are also effective when drifted along steep shorelines. When fishing for Dolly Varden in salt water, fly fishermen often use small silvery patterns that imitate salmon fry or small herring.

Cutthroat trout are also taken along marine shorelines by anglers fishing for Dolly Varden. Sea-run cutthroat range from 10 to 15 inches long and can be taken on the same lures as Dolly Varden. Cutthroat seem to be especially fond of lures in brass or brass and red combination. Fly casters take cutthroat on imitations of salmon fry and small sculpins.

Starrigavan Bay and Crescent Bay (near Sheldon Jackson Hatchery) are popular roadside fishing spots. Both areas support spring Dolly Varden fisheries beginning in late March and pink salmon fisheries beginning in early July. Dolly Varden are also accessible from the many points of land along

Halibut Point Road (see Sitka roadside map on page 4), and the Halibut Point Recreation Area provides good access to Dolly Varden anglers.

Late in June, Dolly Varden catches decrease in marine areas, and the pink salmon catch increases. Pink salmon, or “humpies,” provide the main roadside angling activity through mid-August, traveling in schools along the shoreline toward parent streams where they will spawn. Shorelines near spawning streams are therefore good places to fish. “Humpies” weigh 3 to 8 pounds; they are taken with the same type of tackle as used for Dolly Varden. Pink or red and white-colored lures or flies are particularly effective.

Coho salmon generally show up in mid-August along marine shorelines and remain through late September when they ascend spawning streams. Coho weigh from 5 to 18 pounds, and most anglers use medium-weight spin casting or flyfishing gear. Some favorite lures are “pixies,” “bolos,” “mepps,” and “buzz bombs.” Sometimes a large spinner with plastic skirts or a herring drifted under a float will do the trick. Fly fishermen generally use bright streamer flies or imitations of needlefish to take coho in salt water and estuaries.

Halibut are the most desirable of the bottomfish species, but few are taken by shore-based anglers. Halibut are available in deep water off steep shorelines or near stream mouths where spawned-out salmon have been washed downstream. Halibut and king salmon are also caught along the shoreline at Starrigavan Bay.



*The Last Frontier is not immune to litter problems. Please do your part to preserve the natural beauty of Alaska:*

**PACK OUT ALL LITTER**  
and dispose of it in a designated trash container.