Remote, fly-in lakes

Several lakes on Baranof and Chichagof islands have been stocked with or have naturally occurring populations of rainbow or cutthroat trout. The U.S. Forest Service maintains public recreation cabins at some of these remote sites (see chart and map, p. 6 and 7), where you can spend a few days in the wilderness, yet enjoy the comforts of a snug cabin with an oil or wood stove. Cabin rental fees are minimal, but reservations are required (see the Visitor Information inset on page 3 for the USFS address in Sitka). Because the cabins are popular both with fishers and hunters, reservations must be made well ahead of time.

On Chichagof Island, Goulding Lake, Suloia Lake, and Sitkoh Lake have USFS cabins. The Goulding Lake chain comprises four lakes that contain cutthroat trout and Dolly Varden. As in most land-locked lakes with this species combination, the cutthroat are dominant and provide an excellent sport fishery. Suloia Lake is also landlocked, with Dolly Varden and rainbow trout. Sitkoh Lake—open to the ocean—has salmon runs (except kings) and sea-run Dolly Varden, cutthroat, and steelhead populations. Sitkoh Lake and Creek also has resident cutthroat/rainbow trout and Dolly Varden.

Baranof Island has several landlocked lakes stocked with rainbow trout, including Avoss and Davidof lakes, where there are USFS cabins. Other lakes (Eva, Salmon, Plotnikof, and Redoubt) are open to salt water and have runs of salmon, as well as trout and char. Baranof Lake is a landlocked system with good cutthroat trout fishing. These lakes are each unique, and a “lake profile” is available from the ADF&G Sitka office.

King salmon fishing

This highly prized sport fishing species is one of the least abundant salmon species in northern Southeast Alaska, but grows the largest and is a powerful, enduring fighter.

King salmon inhabit the waters of Southeast Alaska year-round. Large king salmon bound for spawning grounds and weighing up to 70 pounds are around from late April through June. Immature “feeder” kings ranging from 10 to 40 pounds come through the Sitka area and remain in the area to feed during August and September. Persistent anglers can find a few scattered fish throughout winter.

Anglers visiting the Sitka area most frequently ask, “When’s the best time to fish for king salmon?” Fishing improves greatly with spring weather in late April, but the prime time is from late May through the month of June. Anglers targeting king salmon may have catch rates of up to 5 hours per fish harvested (0.2 fish per hour) in June. Catch rates fall with the beginning of the commercial troll fishery in July, although good king salmon fishing continues throughout the summer.

The best way to locate king salmon is to locate bait fish—usually with a fathometer. Once herring or needlefish schools are found, you can be sure king salmon are not far away. Presence of sea birds also indicates presence of bait fish. Murres, murrelets, auklets, and other diving birds are notorious for swimming under herring schools and forcing bait fish to the surface. When this happens, flapping, anxious gulls can be spotted from miles away attacking the balled-up herring schools. If you don’t find baitfish schools on the fathometer or see bird activity, explore around points of land that project out into tidal currents, where schools of bait fish are likely to be found. The currents create eddies and rips that concentrate food for bait fish, and, in turn, attract king salmon.

Marine sport anglers use two techniques for ocean salmon fishing: trolling and mooching. The traditional method, “trolling,” uses flasher gear like commercial salmon trollers, but many trollers forego the use of flashers and fish a single herring behind the sinker, hooked to swim in a large oscillating circle. This method usually... cont’d on p. 12
**Trout regulations... continued**

The steelhead regulation of one wild steelhead per day 36 inches or longer (two per year) will protect over 90% of adult steelhead from harvest.

The cutthroat and rainbow trout size limits (must be longer than 11 inches and less than 22 inches) will protect female trout until they can spawn at least once and also protect juvenile trout until they can migrate to sea. Buck Lake, Lake 436, and Sukoi Lake (on Kruzof Island), produce fish that mature at a smaller size; these lakes have a 9-inch size limit on cutthroat and rainbow trout.

Some high-use lakes and “trophy” lakes have more stringent size limits. Consult the current Southeast Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary.

Anglers must complete an ADF&G harvest record for each steelhead caught (the harvest record is printed on the back of your sport fishing license). For anglers who are not required to be licensed, a harvest record card will be issued by the nearest ADF&G office or license vendor.

**Wild steelhead trout**

Wild steelhead and resident cutthroat trout populations are fragile in many Sitka area waters—catch-and-release fishing is encouraged for steelhead and cutthroat. Here are recommended catch-and-release techniques to avoid injuring released fish:

- 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 needlenose 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) or **use barbless hooks**.

**Marine salmon fishing... continued from page 8**

Catches larger, although maybe not as many, fish and is often used near dropoffs and submerged kelp beds. Flashers or dodgers require relatively heavy line (30-pound test or greater) and heavy sinkers (12–32 oz). A downrigger with a quick disconnect snap lets an angler fish without heavy weights on his gear and makes fighting a hooked fish much easier.

Rotating flashers or side-wobbling dodgers attract salmon either by resembling a school of bait avoiding a predator or by imitating the flash of a salmon attacking a school of bait.

A suitable flasher rod is long enough to cope with 5 or 6 feet of flasher leader, plus 2 1/2 feet of terminal leader. Shorter rods can be used along with a downrigger, as no flasher leader is required. Rods should be sensitive enough to feel what is on the line. (Flasher gear may appear to be insensitive and unwieldy, but it is in fact so... cont’d
in the tackle shop, because the very best bait day in and day out is herring. The three basic herring setups are a whole herring, a plug-cut herring (head severed), and a strip—a narrow triangle cut from the side of a frozen or salted herring. Most anglers use two hooks of size range 2/0 to 5/0, tied in tandem depending upon bait length; some prefer a single hook rig. All herring bait setups are designed to spin in the water. Any rate of rotation will work as long as there is rotation. Which of the three setups to use is purely a matter of personal preference, and the best way to learn to use them is to have someone who fishes them show you how.

**COHO SALMON** To many anglers, these are second only to king salmon. With the exception of pink salmon in some years, more coho salmon are harvested by sport anglers than any other species in Southeast Alaska. They are easy to catch, and they often travel in large schools that provide intense action. Coho salmon fishing can be done with a variety of gear from any vessel. Large boats can work deeper waters, and open skiffs—even canoes—can cruise along the margins of kelp beds. Most anglers fish with fresh or frozen herring bait while trolling, drifting with the tide, or anchoring in areas of active tidal currents.

Coho salmon are usually no deeper than 30 feet and are frequently caught within a foot or two of the...
Some of the more popular trolling drags and halibut holes around the Sitka area.

Surface. Gear varies with the angler’s style. Some use heavy line with leaders, flashers, or dodgers, and a whole herring for bait, but coho can be taken just as effectively on the simplest gear: 15- to 20-pound test line and 2- to 6-ounce trolling weights, followed by a 25-pound test double hook leader and a herring fished whole, as a strip, or plug. When they’re biting, nearly anything works.

Spinning gear is equally effective, with fly rod and flies, or bait casting. Coho salmon are aggressive and strike readily; they usually do so “on the run” and set the hook themselves.

All anglers agree on one thing: successful coho salmon fishing is a matter of being in the right place at the right time. The right place is an area where ocean currents and coastal topography concentrate the fish or their food source. The right time is usually an hour or so before or after a change of tide. However, none of the above seems to matter when the run is at its peak, usually the third week in August.

Coho salmon begin appearing in the sport catch late in June, when anglers are fishing for king salmon. Their availability and catch rates rise through mid-August (see graph on page 13). In early to mid-September they head rapidly toward their home streams to congregate near the estuaries they left as smolt 17 months earlier. Saltwater fishing for coho salmon is essentially over by the end of September.

In the early 1990s, coho salmon populations in the Sitka area were depressed, and escapements to local rivers and streams were very low. This created poor fishing from shore in areas where spinning was once a very popular sport. But in 1994, record numbers of coho salmon returned to streams and, since then, returns to the Sitka area have remained moderately high.