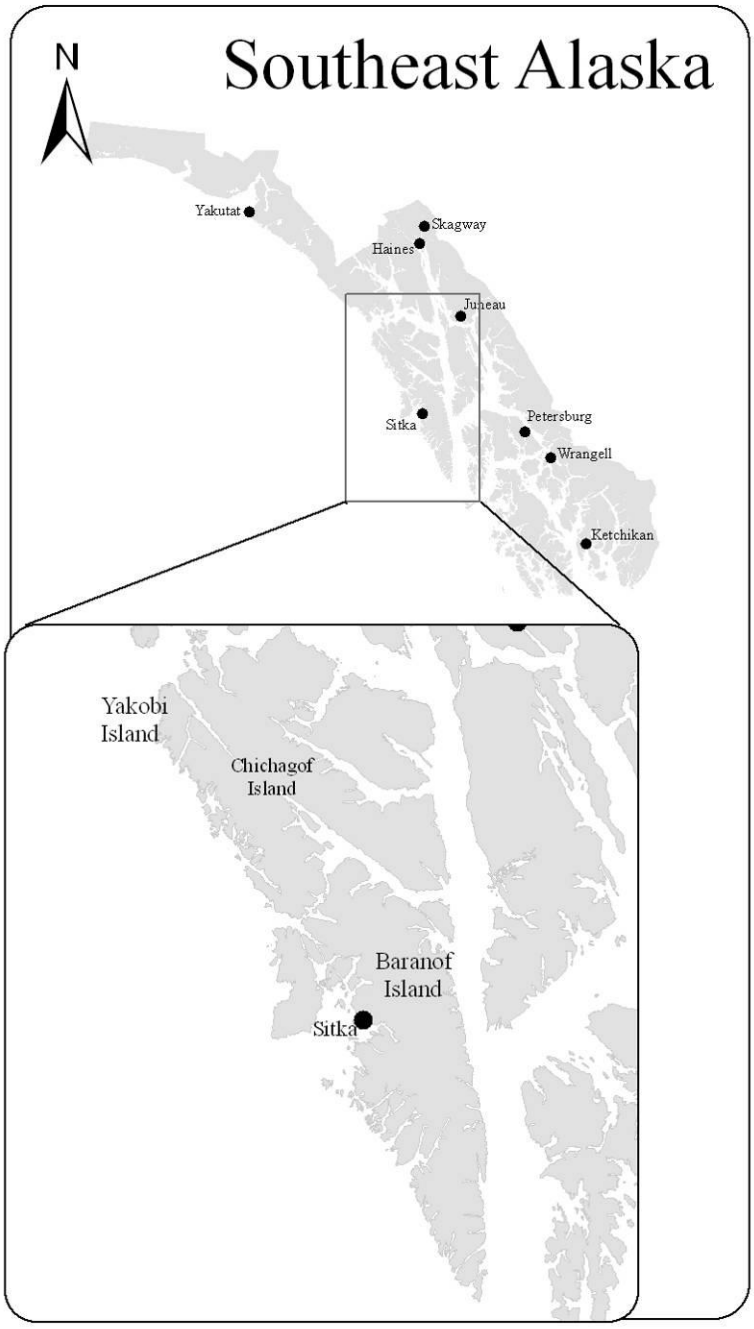
Sitka Area Fishing Guide

The Sitka Area



The Sitka Management Area includes Baranof Island, western Chichagof Island, and Yakobi Island. Here, anglers enjoy a wide variety of sport fishing opportunities including all five salmon species as well as trout, char, rockfish, lingcod, halibut, and shellfish.

The information in this guide outlines fish species, fishing locations, gear types, peak run timing, transportation and access. Feel free to contact the Sitka ADF&G office, Sport Fish Division at 907-747-5355 for more information.

The city of Sitka is the area's population center with nearly 9,000 residents. It is also the largest city, in area, in the United States, encompassing 4,811 square miles. Sitka faces the Pacific Ocean on the west side of Baranof Island. Alaska Airlines provides daily flight service from Seattle, Juneau, Ketchikan, and Anchorage while the Alaska Marine Highway maintains a scheduled route running north and south. Although Sitka is not connected by road to other communities, a local road system does offer 14 miles of paved road, allowing access to shoreline fishing and freshwater systems.

The climate is generally wet, but mild. Average summer temperatures in Sitka range between 52-61ºF and 30-38ºF during the coldest part of the winter. The Sitka area, considered a temperate rain forest, gets an average of 95 inches of rain annually, about 13 inches of it falling in October.

Roadside Fishing

Roadside Fishing in Fresh Waters

Use the map on Page 11 to reference the locations mentioned below.

Blue Lake

Blue Lake can be accessed by traveling along a 2 mile gravel road (Blue Lake Road) which leads uphill from Sawmill Creek Road across from the Sawmill Cove Industrial Park. Blue Lake Road terminates above Blue Lake and parking is available just before a short, but steep and rough section which leads down to the lake. In 1938 and 1939, Blue Lake was stocked with rainbow trout from Sashin Lake on southern Baranof Island. Since stocking, Blue Lake has established a self-sustaining population of rainbow trout that is also the largest and most productive population along the Sitka road system. In 1959, a hydroelectric dam was constructed which increased the dimensions of the lake to that seen today. Blue Lake is 3.5 miles long with a maximum depth of 360 feet. It occupies a steep-sided valley and therefore contains little shallow water along the shoreline. Small boats or rubber rafts can be launched in order to access the best fishing areas near the inlets at the upper end of the lake. While the bank is generally too steep to negotiate, fishing from shore near the outlet is generally a successful location.

Beaver Lake

This small lake is reached on foot via a trail that starts at the Sawmill Creek Campground. It is roughly 3/4 mile to the lake with the trail forming a loop which follows the perimeter of the lake. The lake has a surface area of 29 acres and a maximum depth of 55 feet. The US Forest Service maintains a dock and a small skiff which is available for public use. Most fishing occurs from the skiff or from the few clear spaces along the shore, as the lake's edges are crowded with woody debris and often too deep to wade. Beaver Lake was stocked with Arctic grayling in 1965 as an experiment to determine the success of transplanting the species in Southeast Alaska. The stocking was initially a success with the grayling population reaching a mature age and reproducing successfully. Stocking was discontinued in 2001 because of concerns about transplanting fish over long distances. While Beaver Lake maintains a self-sustaining population, natural production of grayling in Beaver Lake is relatively low, so catch rates are likely to be low as well.

Beaver Lake Grayling

Green Lake

Green Lake can be accessed by traveling to the gated end of Sawmill Creek Road where a graveled access road is open to non-motorized public traffic. By riding a bike or hiking along the seven mile gravel road, you will travel past Medvejie hatchery. Near the end of the road, the left fork will lead uphill to the edge of Green Lake. Green Lake drains into Silver Bay via a steep and generally inaccessible canyon. The construction of a hydroelectric dam in 1979 doubled the size of the lake and created a surface area exceeding 1,000 acres with a maximum depth of 250 feet. Green

Green Lake brook trout

Lake is home to a large and productive population of brook trout. While brook trout are not native to Alaska, they were planted in a series of lakes, including Green Lake, prior to statehood. Brook trout can be caught along the shore line, especially near inlet streams, and less frequently in deeper water.

Sawmill Creek

Sawmill Creek drains from Blue Lake and empties into salt water adjacent to the Sawmill Cove Industrial Park. Though Sawmill Creek parallels Blue Lake Road, there are few accessible places to fish other than the upper and lower reaches. Anglers should use caution moving downstream of the Sawmill Creek Campground due to steep canyon terrain. The upper reaches are accessible from the Sawmill Creek Campground where a short walk upstream will bring you to the deeper holes just below the dam. Fishing for rainbow trout is usually good along this stretch of river, but few large fish are caught. The lower reaches are accessible from Sawmill Creek Road where the opportunity exists to fish for rainbow trout along with seasonal Dolly Varden, coho, chum, and pink salmon in the fall, along with a small spring steelhead run. Occasionally anglers report catching Chinook salmon which have strayed from the Medvejie hatchery.

Thimbleberry and Heart Lakes

These lakes drain small muskeg systems fed from the south slopes of Mt. Verstovia, eventually emptying through steep outlets into Silver Bay. These lakes are accessible via the Thimbleberry/Heart Lake hiking trail. Either of two trailheads can be used to access the lakes, as the trail runs west-east and is accessible from both Sawmill Creek Road and Blue Lake Road. From the Sawmill Creek trailhead, there is a short boardwalk up to Thimbleberry Lake which is well groomed and ADA (Americans with Disabilities) accessible. From Thimbleberry Lake, the trail continues for approximately 1 mile to Heart Lake. The trail then continues to the junction with Blue Lake Road. Anglers reach these lakes from either trailhead.

Eastern brook trout were planted in both lakes in 1928 and stable populations have developed. Eastern brook trout in these lakes rarely reach 10 inches in length. Most fishing occurs from the shoreline, however, these lakes are shallow and wading is difficult due to the soft, muddy bottom. A floating dock and small skiff equipped with oars is available for public use on a first come first serve basis at Heart Lake. Fishing for brook trout in these lakes is most successful during the summer months with small spinners. Fly fishing with bead head nymphs or leach patterns has also been known to work.

Indian River

A US Forest Service hiking trail begins at the end of Indian River Road and parallels Indian River up to Indian River Falls (approx 4.5 miles). Along this section of river and all portions upriver of the Sawmill Creek Road Bridge there are angling opportunities for Dolly Varden, rainbow trout, a small run of steelhead, and pink salmon. Downstream of the Sawmill Creek Road Bridge, including Sitka National

Historical Park, fishing for salmon is prohibited. However, hiking trails and a bridge within the park provide good opportunities to view spawning and migrating salmon in late summer and fall. Dolly Varden can be caught along this lower section of river and are most available in early spring, then again in the summer during early July.

Swan Lake

Swan Lake is a shallow, 21 acre lake located near downtown Sitka. The lake was originally open all the way to saltwater, but as the city grew, its natural course was diverted through culverts and fish can no longer travel unassisted between saltwater and Swan Lake. The lake is stocked with rainbow trout yearly, but also contains populations of Dolly Varden and cutthroat trout. Each year, a Junior Trout Derby is held during early June, a popular event with young anglers. Motorized vehicles are prohibited on Swan Lake and its inlet stream, Wrinkleneck Creek. In addition, Wrinkleneck Creek is closed to sport fishing to protect spawning rainbow trout and Dolly Varden.

Starrigavan Creek and Estuary

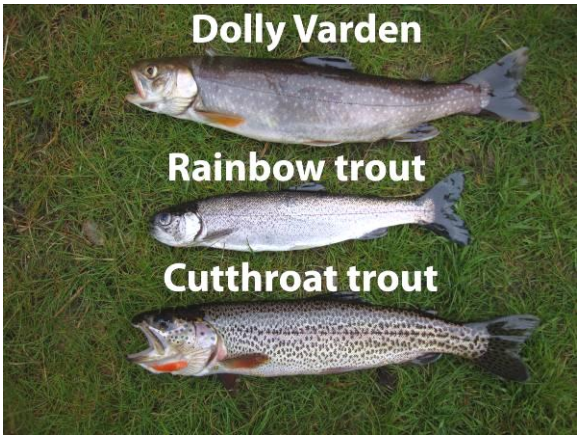
Starrigavan Creek is located at the north end of Halibut Point Road. It is accessible from the Starrigavan Campground to the north and a gravel access road to the south of the creek. It has a population of sea-run Dolly Varden which enter the creek during early July in prime condition after their spring growing season. In the fall, Starrigavan Creek also contains spawning pink and coho salmon. Pink salmon and the rare Chinook salmon are the only salmon which may be retained in Starrigavan Creek. Regulatory markers placed outside the estuary mark the freshwater boundary seaward of which coho salmon may be retained.

Freshwater Fish

Dolly Varden

Dolly Varden have an adaptable life history and are found in nearly all streams and anadromous lakes of Southeast Alaska. They live in lakes and large rivers during the winter months and migrate to the sea in the spring. Salmon Lake and Redoubt Lake are two common overwintering areas near Sitka. An ADF&G study estimated that 35,000 Dolly Varden spend the winter in Salmon Lake, near Sitka. This species supports targeted fisheries in some streams and can also be taken incidentally in systems that support other species. Anadromous Dolly Varden are also targeted in estuaries, along shoreline areas, and in marine waters during seaward and return migrations. Populations of Dolly Varden in Katlian River, Nakwasina Rivers, and in the more remote Lake Eva system provide popular sport fisheries.

Knowing the migratory habits of Dolly Varden can increase an angler's



success rate. Dolly Varden migrate during the spring from freshwater wintering grounds to the sea, making lake outlets, stream mouths, and beaches near streams ideal fishing locations during April and May.

In the spring, Dolly Varden usually strike readily at almost anything an angler has to offer. Favorites are small spinning

and casting lures in lake outlets and saltwater areas. Streamer flies resembling small fish can also produce excellent results when fished along saltwater beaches during the spring and summer.

After leaving their overwintering sanctuary, Dolly Varden spend the summer feeding and traveling in salt water. Marked Dolly Varden have been recaptured at sea nearly 100 miles from their home streams. Anglers trolling for salmon may incidentally catch Dolly Varden. Dolly Varden generally return to their home streams to spawn and feed in August and September, and because of their abundance, nearly every stream provides opportunity for fishing. Around the time of spawning, Dolly Varden transition from chrome-silver with light pink spots to a deep green back, orange belly and fins, and a pure white stripe on the leading edge of the lower fins. Most Dolly Varden mature at 5 - 6 years of age, reach 12 - 16 inches, and may weigh 1/2 - 1 pound. Occasionally, they reach of 10 – 11 years old and weigh up to 8 pounds. Favorite fishing locations for these returning fish are near the creek mouths of larger streams and rivers on incoming tides. Larger systems like Nakwasina and Katlian Rivers often have good fishing for large Dolly Varden.

Lake fishing for Dolly Varden is usually best after mid-August when the sea-run fish arrive at their respective wintering grounds. Schools of these large fish can often be found concentrated near lake inlet and outlet streams.

Steelhead

Steelhead begin returning to freshwater streams and lakes in early to mid-April and the runs peak in early May. Rearing steelhead normally spend 3 years in fresh water before migrating to sea when they reach a length of 6 - 7 inches. Many streams in the Sitka area support small steelhead runs, but unless fed by a lake, their populations are likely fewer than 50 fish. Relatively large steelhead populations exist in Lake Eva, Salmon Lake, Ford Arm Lake, Sitkoh Lake, Port Banks at the outlet falls from Plotnikoff Lake, and the outlet of the Rezanof Lake chain at the head of Sandy Bay. When exploring for steelhead streams, look for streams that drain from an accessible lake system. Sitkoh Creek, on Chichagof Island, has had a weir operating for 13 nonconsecutive years between 1936-2009. The peak of the run generally occurs between May and early June (Table 1.).

Steelhead

In 1994, the current management plan was adopted for steelhead in all waters of Southeast Alaska. Anglers fishing for steelhead may only keep fish over 36 inches in length. The bag limit for steelhead is one per day, 36" or greater in length, with an annual limit of two fish. In 2009 the Board of Fisheries adopted regulations to prohibit steelhead harvest on those drainages which have a fall run. In the Sitka area this applies to Port Banks. A harvest record is required for all steelhead harvested, meaning harvest must be recorded immediately, in ink, with date of harvest on the back of the angler's sport fishing license. Alternatively, a harvest record for sport anglers under the age of 16 or qualifying anglers 60 years or older is available at any ADF&G office and from most vendors.

The Steelhead Management Plan is designed to protect the reproductive

capability of steelhead populations while allowing opportunity to keep a large trophy fish. While cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, and steelhead occur throughout Southeast Alaska, concerns from the public and ADF&G were voiced in the early 1990's that region wide cutthroat and steelhead harvests had declined and angler effort doubled in a few years time. To preserve these fish populations, the Alaska Board of Fisheries set an annual limit on steelhead and modified daily bag, possession and size limits for cutthroat and rainbow trout. A seasonal ban (November 16-September 14) on the use of bait in fresh water was also introduced because higher catch and release mortality rates result when bait is used, especially for smaller fish. Some fresh waters have year-round bait restrictions. Consult the current Southeast Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary for streams with year-round bait restriction.

Saltwater Fishing on the Roadside

Pink salmon and Dolly Varden are the most commonly targeted species of marine shoreline anglers in Sitka, but the occasional king and coho salmon are harvested. Bottomfish such as rockfish, cod, and flounder are occasionally taken, and though they are not usually the angler's target, make an excellent dinner. On a rare occasion, even halibut can be caught along the shoreline.

Starrigavan Bay, Crescent Bay (near the Sheldon Jackson College Science Center), Halibut Point Recreation Area, and the outlet of Indian River (Eagle Beach) are popular roadside fishing locales. However, there are many other roadside areas that will provide for angler success.

The marine shoreline sport fishery occurs all year, with effort focused on Dolly Varden in the spring and salmon in the fall. Dolly Varden are most commonly hooked with a variety of light to medium weight spin casting gear in ¼-oz. to ½-oz weights. Small herring rigged under a float are also effective when drifted along steep shorelines. When fishing for Dolly Varden

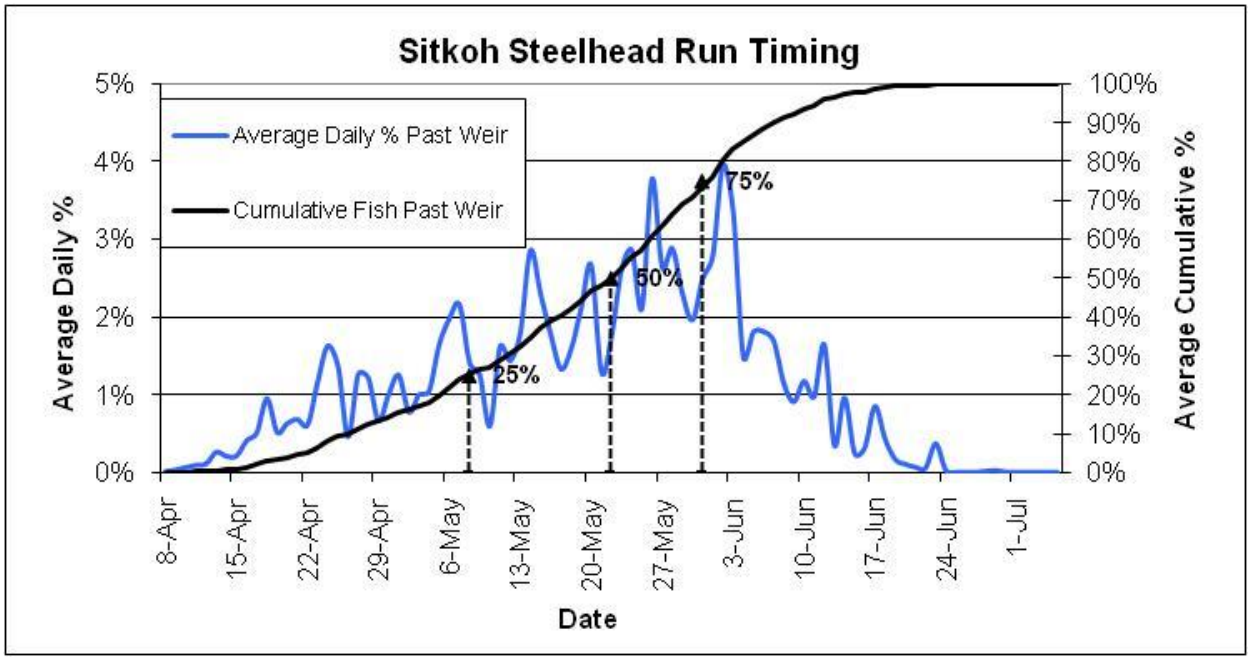


Table 1.-Sitkoh steelhead weir counts 1982-2008.

in salt water, fly fishermen often use small, silvery patterns that imitate salmon fry or small herring.

Pink salmon, commonly known as "humpies", provide a main roadside fishing activity through mid-August. Pink salmon travel in schools along the shoreline toward their natal streams where they will eventually spawn. The shorelines near these streams are, in turn, a good place to fish. Pink Salmon weigh from 3 - 8 pounds and can be hooked with the same tackle used for Dollies. Pink and white or red and white lures tend to be effective.

Sea-run cutthroat, which are also taken along marine shorelines, range from 10-15 inches in length and can be taken on the same lures as Dollies. Cutthroat trout tend to be especially fond of lures in brass and/or brass and red combinations. Fly fishermen hook cutthroat using imitations of salmon fry and small sculpin.

Coho salmon show up in mid-August and remain near the shorelines until September when they travel toward their spawning stream. Adult coho weigh from 5 - 18 pounds and most anglers use medium-weight spin casting or fly fishing gear. Sometimes a large spinner with plastic skirts or a herring drifted under a float are effective. Fly fishermen generally use bright streamer flies or imitations of needlefish to take coho in salt water and estuaries.

Halibut are the most sought after of the bottomfish, but few are taken near shore. Halibut reside in deep water or near stream mouths where spawned out salmon carcasses have washed out. On a rare occasion, halibut can be caught along the shoreline at Starrigavan Bay.

Remote Angling Opportunities

Due to the limited road system within the Sitka Management Area, the majority of freshwater angling opportunities require remote travel, often by the use of a boat or aircraft. Many of these remote locations have US Forest Service cabins on site which are available for public rental. More information about these cabins including rental instructions can be obtained through the Sitka Ranger District website at

www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/districts/sitka/

Or by contacting

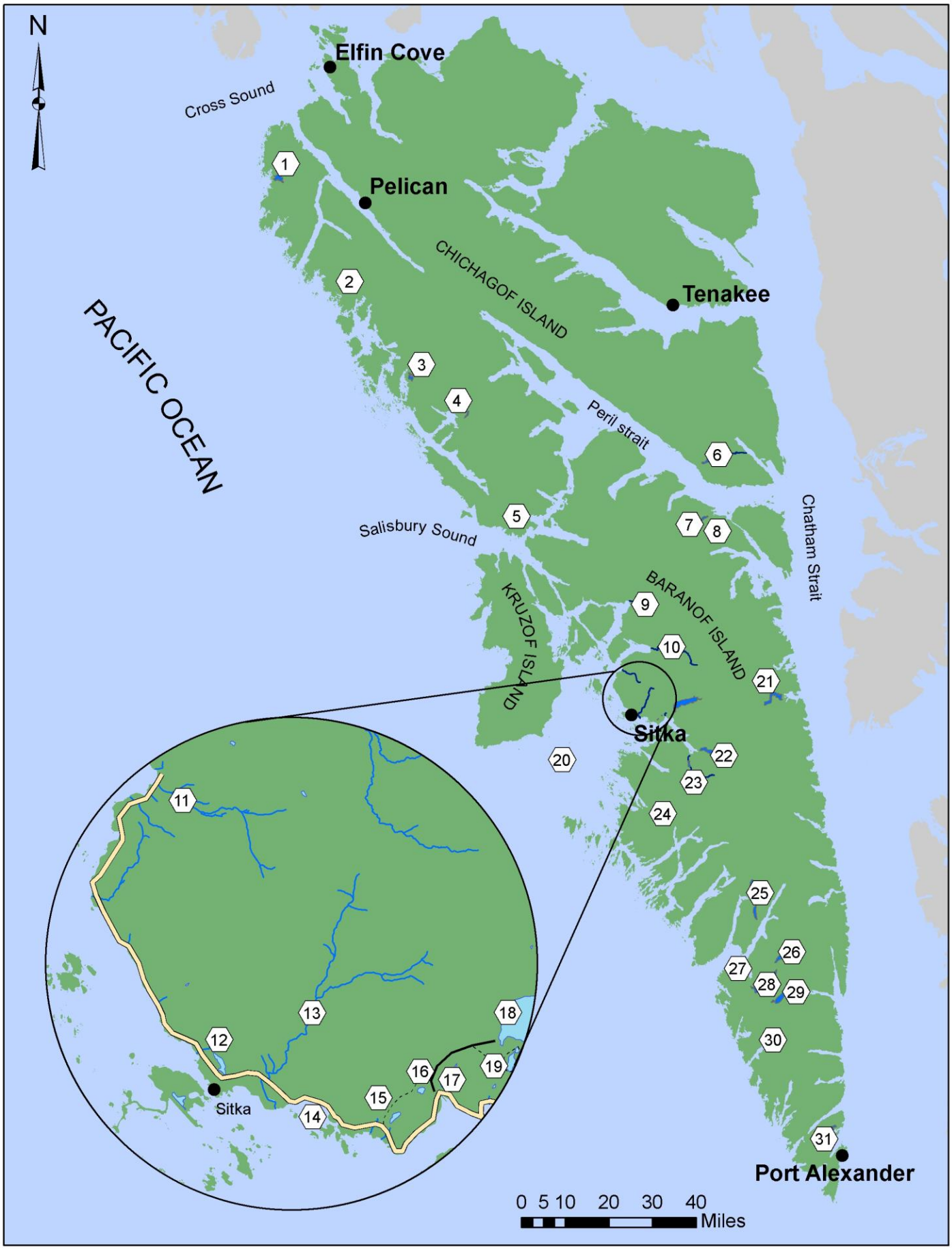
Sitka Ranger District Office
204 Siginaka Way
Sitka, AK 99835
(907) 747-6671

Fishing Spots on Baranof, West Chichagof, and Yakobi Islands

Listed below is a selection of the popular fishing area within the Sitka Management Area.

Map #	Area Name	Fish species	Remote	Road System	Cabin
1	Surge Lake	CS,CT,DV,SH,SS,PS,RS,RT	X		
2	Goulding Lake	CT,DV	X		X
3	Klag Bay	DV,CT,RS,RT	X		
4	Ford Arm Lake/River	CS,CT,DV,PS,RT,RS,SH,SS	X		X
5	Suloia Lake	DV,RT	X		
6	Sitkoh Lake/Creek	CS,CT,DV,SH,SS,PS,RS,RT	X		X
7	Lake Eva	CS,CT,DV,SH,PS,SS,RS,RT	X		X
8	Little Lake Eva	CT,DV	X		
9	Nakwasina River	CS,DV,SS,PS	X		
10	Katlian River	CS,DV,SS,PS	X		
11	Starrigavan River	DV,PS,SS		X	X
12	Swan Lake	CT,DV,RT		X	
13	Indian River	CS,DV,PS,SS		X	
14	Eagle Beach	CS,DV,PS,SS		X	
15	Heart Lake	BT		X	
16	Thimbelberry Lake	BT		X	
17	Sawmill Creek	DV,SH,PS,CS		X	
18	Blue Lake	RT		X	
19	Beaver Lake	GR		X	
20	Sitka Sound	CS,H,KS,LC,PS,RF,RS,SS	X		
21	Baranof Lake	CT	X		X
22	Green Lake	BT		X	
23	Salmon Lake	CS,CT,DV,SH,SS,PS,RS,SH,SS	X		X
24	Redoubt Lake	CS,DV,SH,SS,PS,RS	X		X
25	Avoss Lake	RT	X		
26	Davidof Lake	RT	X		X
27	Port Banks	CS,DV,SH,SS,PS,RT	X		
28	Lake Plotnikoff	RT	X		X
29	Rezanof Lake	RT	X		
30	Gar Lake (Lonief)	RT	X		
31	Betty & Jetty Lake	RT	X		

BT = Brook Trout **CS** = Chum Salmon **CT** = Cutthroat Trout **DV** = Dolly Varden
GS = Arctic grayling **H** = Halibut **KS** = King Salmon **LC** = Lingcod
PS = Pink Salmon **RF** = Rockfish **RS** = Red Salmon **RT** = Rainbow Trout
SH = Steelhead **SS** = Silver Salmon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Baranof Island

Redoubt Lake

Located 12 miles south of Sitka, Redoubt Lake is the largest meromictic lake in North America. It has a surface area of 3,200 acres and a maximum depth of 870 feet, with a layer of salt water starting around 330 feet below the surface. The USFS maintains a cabin available for rental at the Northwest end of the lake. Supplied with a small skiff, which comes with the cabin, there are angling opportunities for steelhead and rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, Dolly Varden, sockeye, pink, chum and coho salmon. The lake is accessible by air, by boating to the mouth of the Redoubt outlet and hiking, or by hiking overland on a USFS trail that connects Salmon Lake with Redoubt Lake. During the summer months those residents possessing subsistence permits are eligible to collect sockeye using subsistence methods, including dip net and snagging gear, in accordance with proper regulations.

Nakwasina River

Located 20 miles north of downtown Sitka, Nakwasina River is a relatively large river system for Baranof Island. The river is generally accessed by boat with the majority of angler effort occurring within the lower 2 miles of freshwater. Nakwasina is well known for its coho salmon run which occurs during the fall as adults are returning to spawn. Coho salmon can be caught using a variety of artificial lures including spinners and flies. Bait can also be used during the time period between September 15th and November 15th. Nakwasina also provides one of the best opportunities for Dolly Varden. In 1985 the world record Dolly Varden was caught in Nakwasina River, although this record has since been surpassed. Other species providing angling opportunities include pink and chum salmon, along with small populations of rainbow trout and a spring steelhead run.

Katlian River

Located 15 miles north of Sitka and is easily accessible by boat. The river is similar to Nakwasina in size and species composition. The river is host to Dolly Varden, pink, coho, and chum salmon, as well as a small population of rainbow trout and steelhead.

Salmon Lake

Located one mile upstream from the south end of Silver Bay. The lake is accessible by a 5-10 minute float plane flight from Sitka or by boating 11 miles and hiking the 1½ mile USFS trail from the south end of Silver Bay. This trail connects Silver Bay to Salmon Lake and then continues to Redoubt Lake. The USFS maintains a rental cabin that includes a small skiff equipped with oars, which is sufficient to effectively move around the lake. The lake is fed by two inlet streams at its south end and is drained by an outlet stream to the north, which flows into Silver Bay. Sport fishing opportunities abound throughout the lake, in both the inlet and outlet streams. Anglers can expect to find cutthroat and rainbow trout year round with a large seasonal population of Dolly Varden. Salmon Lake also hosts all species of Pacific salmon, excluding Chinook.

Plotnikoff Lake

Located 45 air miles southeast of Sitka, Plotnikoff falls within the South Baranof Wilderness Area. Nearly 4 miles in length, Plotnikoff Lake is very long with an average depth of 120 feet. The USFS

maintains a rental cabin supplied with a small skiff. It is recommended that a 2-10hp outboard be brought for use powering the skiff. The lake is known to have excellent rainbow trout fishing, steelhead from May-June, Dolly Varden, and a strong run of coho salmon starting in late summer and continuing through the fall. The outlet stream which drains Plotnikoff to salt water also provides excellent angling opportunities for the above mentioned species.

Avoss Lake

Located 35 air miles southeast of Sitka, Avoss Lake falls within the South Baranof Wilderness Area. Access can be obtained via floatplane between June and October due to winter ice on the lake. The USFS maintains a rental cabin on the lake with a skiff provided. Avoss Lake was initially void of fish until it was stocked with rainbow trout in 1957. The lake has since sustained a stable population after the initial stocking. Fishing is best along the shoreline near submerged structures, such as fallen logs. Avoss Lake receives little angler effort due to its remote location.

Chichagof Island

Goulding Lake

Located 60 air miles northwest of Sitka within the Chicagof-Yakobi Wilderness Area. Goulding Lake commonly refers to a series of four lakes that form an interconnected chain which drains into Goulding Bay. Access can be obtained by floatplane or by boat followed by a one mile hike. The combined surface area of the lakes is estimated to be 2,000 acres. In the center of the chain, the USFS maintains a rental cabin and skiff. From the cabin the two upper lakes can be accessed with the skiff, but travel to the lower lakes is blocked by physical characteristics. Nevertheless, the lower lakes and outlet stream can be accessed on foot. All four lakes are known to have populations of cutthroat trout and Dolly Varden. As is the case with most landlocked lakes with this combination of species, cutthroat are the dominant species. The outlet stream contains these species along with coho salmon. The entrance to the first lake is obstructed by a 40 foot waterfall preventing anadromous species from entering the lakes.

Ford Arm

Located 45 miles north of Sitka, Ford Arm Lake is accessible by floatplane or boat followed by a 1½ mile hike. No facilities are available but Ford Arm lies within the Tongass National Forest and camping is allowed. The valley is the product of glacial action resulting in a very deep lake set within a scenic mountainous region. The lake and outlet stream host an excellent population of rainbow trout, spring run steelhead, cutthroat tout and all species of Pacific salmon, excluding Chinook.

Suloia Lake

Located 30 air miles northwest of Sitka within the Chichagof-Yakobi Wilderness Area. The USFS maintains a rental cabin and skiff on the west side of the lake. It is easiest to access the cabin via float plane or by boating across the lake. The east side of the lake can be accessed by boating to Suloia Bay and hiking ½ mile to the lake shore. Angling opportunities exist for Dolly Varden and rainbow trout.

Sitkoh Lake

Located 30 air miles northeast of Sitka on southern Chichagof Island. The lake can be reached by air or boat, either by

landing at False Island and traveling on old USFS logging roads or by landing at the outlet stream in Sitkoh Bay and hiking the 4.3 miles to the lake. The USFS maintains two rental cabins on the lake, each supplied with its own skiff. A 2-10hp outboard is recommended if travel around the lake is desired. In the outlet stream an angler can target large populations of rainbow trout and steelhead, along with cutthroat trout, coho, pink, and sockeye salmon. While these species are often present in the lake, it can be difficult to catch all but rainbow and cutthroat trout.

Marine Fishing

The Marine Environment

Sitka Sound is popular with boat anglers trolling and mooching for salmon and groundfish. Sport anglers troll for coho and king salmon near Vitskari Rocks, Goddard Hot Springs, and the Biorka Islands Off of Cape Edgecumbe and on the outside of Kruzof Island, anglers troll or mooch for salmon, rockfish, lingcod, and halibut. Katlian Bay and Nakwasina Sound, north of town, provide Dolly Varden fishing and spin casting for coho salmon.

Salisbury Sound, further north, is another popular day-use area with good salmon fishing. A westerly swell frequents Salisbury, sometimes denying access to Peril Straight through Kakul Narrows to the north. Weather permitting; boaters can travel through Peril Straight into Fish Bay, Deep Bay, and Hoonah Sound.

King Salmon

King salmon inhabit the waters of Southeast Alaska year-round. Large king salmon occasionally weighing up to 70 pounds can be found from late April through June. Immature "feeder" kings range from 10 to 40 pounds, travel through Sitka Sound, and remain in the area to feed during August

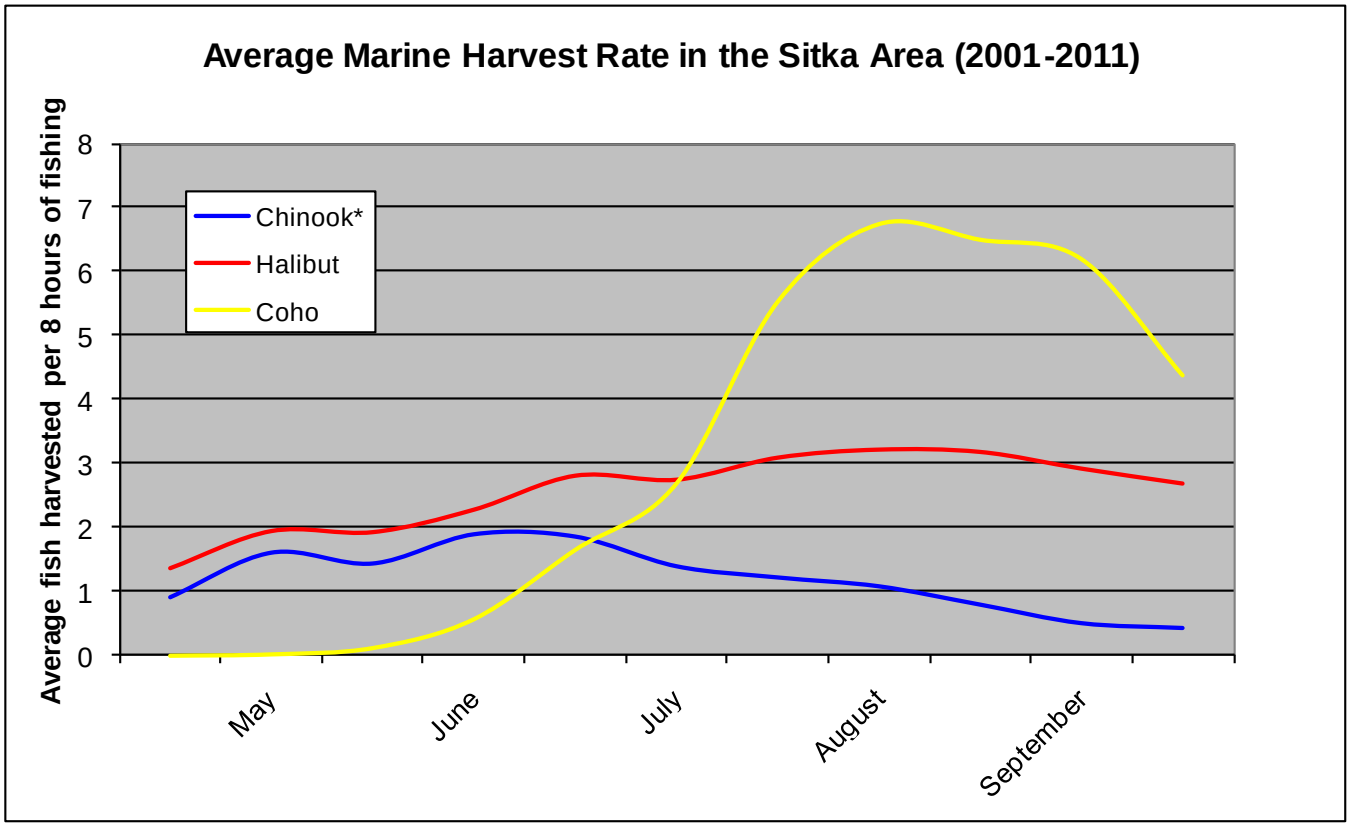


Table 2.-Marine harvest rates in the Sitka area.
*Chinook data excludes 2008 when inseason management actions influenced catch rates.

and September. Persistent anglers can find a few remaining kings throughout the winter months.

"When is the best time to fish for kings?" is a common question anglers visiting Sitka often ask. Fishing greatly improves with spring weather, usually in late April, although prime fishing occurs from late May through the end of June. Catch rates fall with the beginning of the commercial troll fishery in July, although good king salmon fishing continues through the summer months.

king salmon

The best way to locate king salmon is to find bait fish, usually with a fathometer. Once schools of herring or needlefish are found, kings are likely to be in the vicinity. The presence of sea birds can also be an indicator of bait fish. Murres, murrelets, auklets, and other diving birds are notorious for swimming under herring schools and forcing bait fish to the surface. If a fathometer or bird activity doesn't locate bait fish, then exploring around points of land that project out into tidal currents may reveal kings. These currents create eddies and rips that concentrate food for bait fish and, in turn, attract king salmon.

Marine sport anglers primarily use two techniques for ocean salmon fishing: trolling and mooching. The traditional method, "trolling" uses flashing gear similar to that of commercial trollers. However, sport trollers often forego the use of flashers and fish with a single herring behind a sinker, hooked in such a way that it oscillates in a large circular motion.

Trolling usually involves dragging bait or a lure through the water under the power of the boat being used and is often used near under water cliffs or submerged kelp beds. Flashers or dodgers require relatively heavy line (30 pound test or greater) and heavy sinkers (12oz.). 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 manage 5 or 6 feet of flasher leader plus 6 feet of terminal leader. Shorter rods can be used along with a downrigger and in this case, a flasher leader is not required. Rods should be sensitive enough to feel a fish on the line. Terminal gear usually consists of a small herring (or a strip from a larger herring) threaded onto a treble hook or affixed onto twin single hooks with a bait biter so that it is tossed back and forth by the rotating flasher. Single or double hook artificial gear can also be used behind a flasher. These include plastic hoochies (imitation squid), bucktail flies, and small spoons. Most anglers trail the terminal gear 28 - 48 inches behind the flasher when fishing for king salmon. Flasher color and size are individual preferences, based on experience, reputation, or superstition.

Another common salt water salmon fishing technique, mooching, consists of fishing with lighter gear from an anchored, drifting, or slowly trolled boat. During peak summer months, mooching may be more effective for catching large king salmon because one can cover a wide range of depths. Mooching rods are generally 7½ to 10ft fiberglass or graphite composite rigged with a light saltwater revolving spool reel and about 200 yards of 10-30 pound test monofilament line. There are countless types and colors of artificial lures, plugs, and spoons displayed at the tackle shop. All

may all be used effectively, although some colors work better than others during certain months. Many king salmon anglers prefer herring. Three common herring setups include; whole herring, plugcut herring (head severed), or a strip of narrow triangle cut from the side of a frozen or salted herring. Most anglers use two hooks of size range 2/0 - 5/0 that are tied in tandem, depending upon the length of the bait herring. Some anglers prefer a single hook. These herring bait setups are designed to oscillate in the water. Any rate of rotation will work as long as the hook or hooks are baited properly. Choosing which setup to use is a matter of preference and the best way to learn them is to have an experienced fishermen show you.

In addition to these methods, saltwater fly fishing is growing in popularity as a thrilling method of catching ocean salmon.

Coho Salmon

Coho salmon, to most anglers, are second only to kings. More coho salmon are harvested by sport anglers than any other species in Southeast Alaska. They are easy to catch and often travel in large schools that provide intense action. Fishing for cohos can be done with a variety of gear and from any vessel. Large boats can fish farther off shore, but open skiffs (even canoes) can cruise along the margins of kelp beds. Most anglers fish with fresh or frozen herring bait while trolling, drifting, 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 surface. Gear varies with the angler's style. Some anglers use heavy line with leaders, flashers, or dodgers, and a whole herring as bait. Coho can be taken just as effectively on simple gear: 15 - 20 pound test line, 2 - 6 ounce trolling weights, followed by a 25 pound test double hook leader, and a herring fished whole, as a strip, or as a plug. When coho's are biting, nearly anything works. Spinning gear is equally effective as is a fly rod and flies, or bait casting. Coho salmon are aggressive

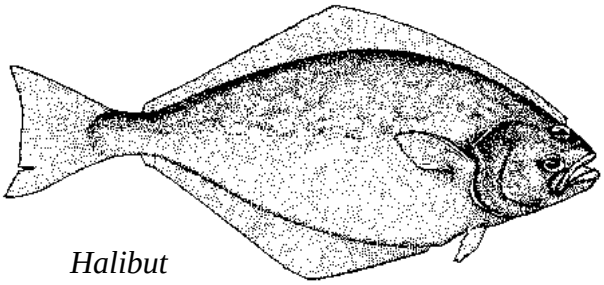
coho salmon

and strike readily; they usually strike on the run and set the hook themselves. The best fishing usually occurs in areas where ocean currents and coastal topography concentrate fish or their food source. The best time is usually an hour or so before or after tide change. However, none of the above seems to matter when the run is at its peak, which is usually around the third week in August. Coho salmon begin appearing in the sport catch in mid-May through late June when anglers are fishing for king salmon. Their availability and catch rates rise through mid-August (see the graph on page 16). In early to mid-September they head 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 of local rivers and streams were low. This created poor fishing from shore areas where spin casting was once a very popular sport. In 1994, record numbers of coho salmon returned to Sitka area streams, and returns have remained moderately high.

Halibut

Halibut, like many other bottomfish, stay near the ocean floor around features or structures such as kelp beds, drop offs, deep trenches, underwater bars, reef pinnacles, and transition areas of rocky, sandy, and some muddy bottoms. They wait in these areas before tides change, but as tides slacken (a period of relatively still water between incoming and outgoing tides), they move and feed. Bottom depth contour charts can help anglers determine potential feeding and migration areas; a good quality depth sounder also helps locate specific fishing holes. When fishing for halibut, anglers should use a heavy, saltwater revolving spool-type reel that is equipped with a good drag system and a large line capacity for non-stretch-type line in 60-100 pound test. Reels should be mounted on heavy, stiff action, 5 – 7 foot fiberglass rods. Some anglers prefer roller guides along the entire rod length to lessen line stress and abrasion. Many anglers use a roller tip to reel in heavy weights from deep water, especially in fast tidal currents. Of the many different options available for terminal tackle, many anglers prefer the slip sinker/leader hook rig for bait presentation. This includes a sleeve-snap weight system which slides up and down the main line coming from the rod tip. The end of the main line is tied to a heavy-duty snap swivel to which a 20 - 30 inch monofilament or wire strand (80-300 pound test to allow for abrasion) leader is attached. The leader should have a large barrel swivel crimped on one end and the hook on the other. Both standard long shank J hooks, size 4.0- 10.0, and circle hooks are popular. As the line pulls freely through the sliding sinker, an angler is able to detect more and lighter strikes. Bait presentation by drifting is one method of fishing. However, anchoring is probably the most effective technique for halibut fishing once the fish are located. Anchoring the boat allows the bait to distribute a scent pattern down-current which, because of the halibut's keen sense of smell, attracts them from some distance. A group of anglers using herring bait will create more scent effect than a single angler. Many baits work: herring, squid, octopus, and salmon heads, tails, or viscera. The halibut's sense of sight is also important in bait presentation. For visual effect, hoochies on baited hooks give a definite advantage. The plastic material in the skirts will pick up the smell of the bait being fished. So, even if the halibut hits and steals the bait, the remaining skirt will emit the bait scent and can invoke another strike. Various lead head jigs and plastic squid or octopus imitations work well. Flashy spoon-type jigs decorated with fluorescent or iridescent green/blue adhesive also prove effective when fluttered erratically off the bottom as most fish can detect greens and blues from the color spectrum better than other colors as depth increases.



Halibut

Halibut move from deep water to shallower shelves near shore in late spring and by late May/early June, catch rates average one fish for every 3 hours of fishing (see the graph above.) Catch rates remain high into September when the halibut move back to deeper water. This fishing period conveniently coincides with better weather and calmer water in the North Pacific Ocean. Halibut can be found late in the fall and early spring, but catch rates are low. The entire month of January is closed to halibut fishing.

Landing halibut can be an interesting proposition, especially when a fish weighing over 100 pounds is on the line. A large salmon landing net can be used on halibut weighing 50 pounds or less, but once it's inside the net and alongside the boat; use a small club to dispatch the fish with a sharp blow to the head. Halibut are very strong and they can do considerable damage if brought aboard a small boat alive. Larger fish are sometimes dispatched with a firearm.

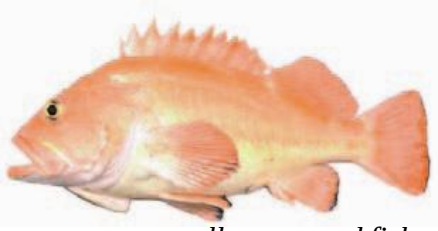
Rockfish

The marine waters surrounding Sitka possess an enormous variety of rockfish species. Rockfishes are slow-growing and extremely long-lived. The most common species in the sport fishery (yelloweye, quillback, and black rockfish) can live to

black rockfish

121, 90, and 50 years, respectively. Yelloweye mature at about 15 years of age, quillback at 12, and black at 10 years. Males mature earlier, but are usually smaller than females the same age. Rockfish are often caught incidentally by anglers targeting salmon, halibut, or lingcod. Rockfish posses swim bladders, organs that are used to regulate buoyancy. Their swim bladders are not vented, so when they are brought to the surface from deep water, the gas expands, causing internal injuries (barometric trauma). Rockfish with inflated swim bladders cannot re-submerge and may not survive if they are brought up from depths exceeding 60ft. Even seemingly uninjured rockfish may have organ and blood vessel damage. If an angler's bag limit has been reached, rockfish should be released using a device designed to get rockfish back down to depth where they will be recompressed. These tools can be purchased commercially, or homemade – such as an upside down weighted milk crate attached to a line. More information about rockfish conservation and deepwater release devices can be found on the Alaska Department of Fish and Game website at http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingSportFishingInfo.rockfishconservation.

For regulatory purposes, rockfish species are grouped into two categories; Non-pelagic (residing on or near the ocean floor) and pelagic (residing higher in the water column). Non-pelagic species (yelloweye, copper, quillback among others), are at a higher risk of barometric trauma. Pelagic species (black, yellowtail, and dusky), are less vulnerable to barometric trauma due to their nature of residing higher in the water column. Regulations can be different for these two categories of rockfish.



yelloweye rockfish

Anglers targeting rockfish should fish rocky bottoms or shoreline areas. The best fishing ranges from May to August (rockfish tend to go much deeper during the winter). Angler's seeking rockfish generally use a fairly limber rod and light saltwater tackle, so that they can feel subtle action at the other end of the line. Jigs, buzz-bombs, herring bait, or most any other lure may be used to hook rockfish. Favorites are the leadhead jigs and the many types of plastic worm-tails; this type of gear can be kept from snagging rocks and is very effective when jigged just above the bottom. Rockfish should be bled and chilled

immediately after catching to enhance flavor and edibility. Rockfish have firm flesh that turns white when cooked. Flavor and texture varies subtly between species, but all are excellent, and the mild flavor lends itself to a variety of cooking methods and sauces.

Lingcod

A large piscivore (fish-eater), the lingcod grows to 50 pounds or more, can reach 33 years of age, and roams along the rocky coastal area inhabiting rocky bottoms and reef areas. Lingcod gear is essentially the same gear used for trolling or mooching for salmon: limber to medium-stout 6 - 9 foot rods and level wind reels with 200 - 300 yards and 20-50 pound test line. You can use lighter gear, but care must be taken with the terminal tackle. Lingcod have a mouthful of sharp teeth. Wire or heavy monofilament leaders are necessary to keep your line intact during the fight. Lingcod are visual feeders, and as such, jigs are usually the best gear type to use. Bait such as herring, salmon tails, and viscera also

lingcod

work well. Adult lingcod live on or near reefs, drop offs, and steep boulder gradients in areas of high current. Lingcod wait, perched on a rock outcropping or reef top, and let tidal currents bring baitfish within reach; once food is within reach, lingcod will dash out to seize their prey. They often feed when the tide is running; if you fish at slack tide, plan to fish deeper. One successful technique is to fish with silver-colored lures over a rocky reef or reef edge while drifting with the tide or wind. If a lingcod is in the area, it will likely be interested. Lingcod have a life history that makes them particularly vulnerable to harvest and predation. They spawn in winter and early spring and males guard the nest of egg masses until hatching. Research has indicated that egg masses are extremely vulnerable to predation when males are removed from the nest. To protect lingcod during this sensitive time, the season is open for a limited time (May 16-June 15 and August 16-November 30). Be sure to check the current Southeast Alaska Sport fishing Regulations Summary along with News Releases to make sure you are in compliance with current regulations. Seasons and bag limits are subject to change.

Shellfish

Shellfish in the Sitka area include several species of crab, shrimp, clams, abalone, and scallops. Resident harvests are regulated by personal use regulations while non-residents follow sport-harvest regulations.

Tanner and Dungeness crab are frequently harvested using pots, rings, and sometimes hand lines. While crab can be found many places around the Sitka area, Dungeness are frequently harvested near the heads of bays in muddy bottoms and Tanner, also known as snow crab or opilio, in deeper flat bottomed areas. Only male crab are permitted for harvest and tend to be found deeper than females.

Clams can be found at almost any beach in the Sitka Area. These include the common Pacific Littleneck, butter clams, horse clams, geoducks, razor clams, cockles and scallops. With the exception of razor clams and geoducks there are no specific size, harvest or bag limits for clams. Clam harvesters should be aware that paralytic shellfish poisoning, or PSP, a naturally occurring neurotoxin, has been, on rare occasion, found in shellfish in the Sitka area. There is currently no testing to determine the presence of PSP at this time, so harvesters do so at their own risk.

The pinto abalone, considered by many to be a gourmet food, is abundant along the outside coastal waters. This marine snail is found in near shore areas between the low tide line and 40 feet below the surface. They are found in areas with a surging wave action like that seen in areas exposed to the open ocean. Abalone, only open to harvest by Alaska residents, are harvested either by hand or by snorkelers. SCUBA gear is prohibited for harvesting abalone.

Several species of shrimp are yet another bountiful shellfish found in the Sitka area. Generally captured using pots, shrimp are found in a wide variety of habitats from steep rocky marine shelves to sandy flat bottoms.

Catch-and-release Fishing

If you don't intend to keep a fish or can't keep it because of regulation, there are steps that should be taken to ensure fish released remain healthy.

- ✓ Land fish quickly by using heavier line and leaders.
- ✓ Do not net fish that will 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.
- ✓ Return rockfish to depth of capture using a deepwater release device.

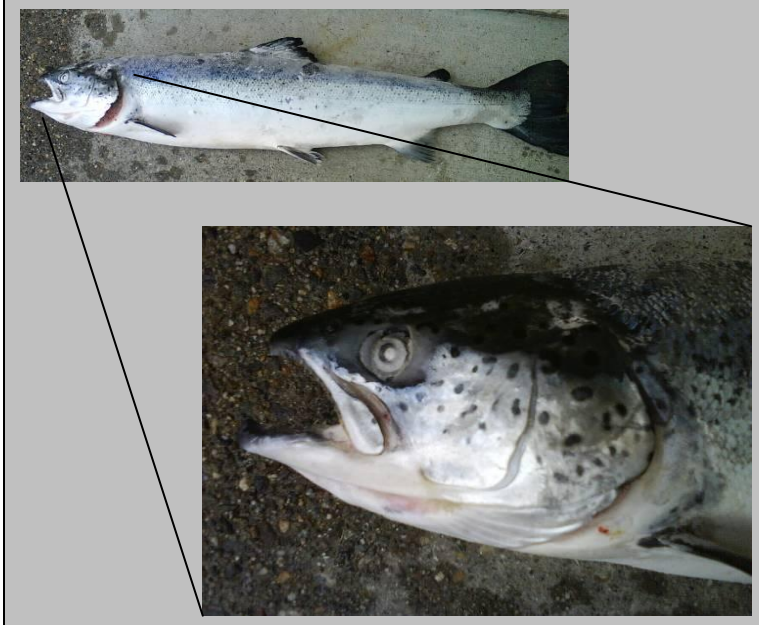
Regulations

A copy of the Southeast Alaska Sportfishing Regulations Summary can be found at the following link: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishregulations.sport

Inseason management often requires that Emergency Orders (EO's) are written. These EO's are issued because situations require immediate restrictive measure, or sometimes liberalization of fishing opportunities. Current Emergency Orders and New Releases can be found at the following link: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingSportFishingInfo.eonr

Alternatively, anglers may contact the local Alaska Department of Fish and Game office to check for any current or pending Emergency Orders.

Atlantic Salmon



Atlantic salmon are not native to the Pacific Ocean. If you catch one please bring the whole fish to the nearest ADFG office. (See the sportfish regulation summary for more details and distinguishing characteristics of Atlantic salmon)

Contacts

Businesses

Sportfish guides and charter businesses must be licensed annually with the ADF&G before services are rendered. For more information about charter business/guide registration, see: http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/statewide/guides/Guide.com. A public list of licensed charter businesses and guides may be obtained from the Sitka Area office at 304 Lake Street, Room 103.

Aircraft charters operating out of Sitka include: Air Sitka, 475 Katlian Street, 907-747-7920, and Harris Aircraft Services, Inc., 400 Airport Road, 907-966-3050.

Hotel, bed & breakfast, car rental, and other general information regarding the Sitka area can be furnished by the Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 1226, Sitka AK 99835, 907-747-5940, or on the web at www.sitka.org.

Cabin Reservations

U.S. Forest Service Cabin reservations can be made by calling the district office or using the toll free National Recreation Reservation Service 1-877-444-6777 or http://www.reserveusa.com.

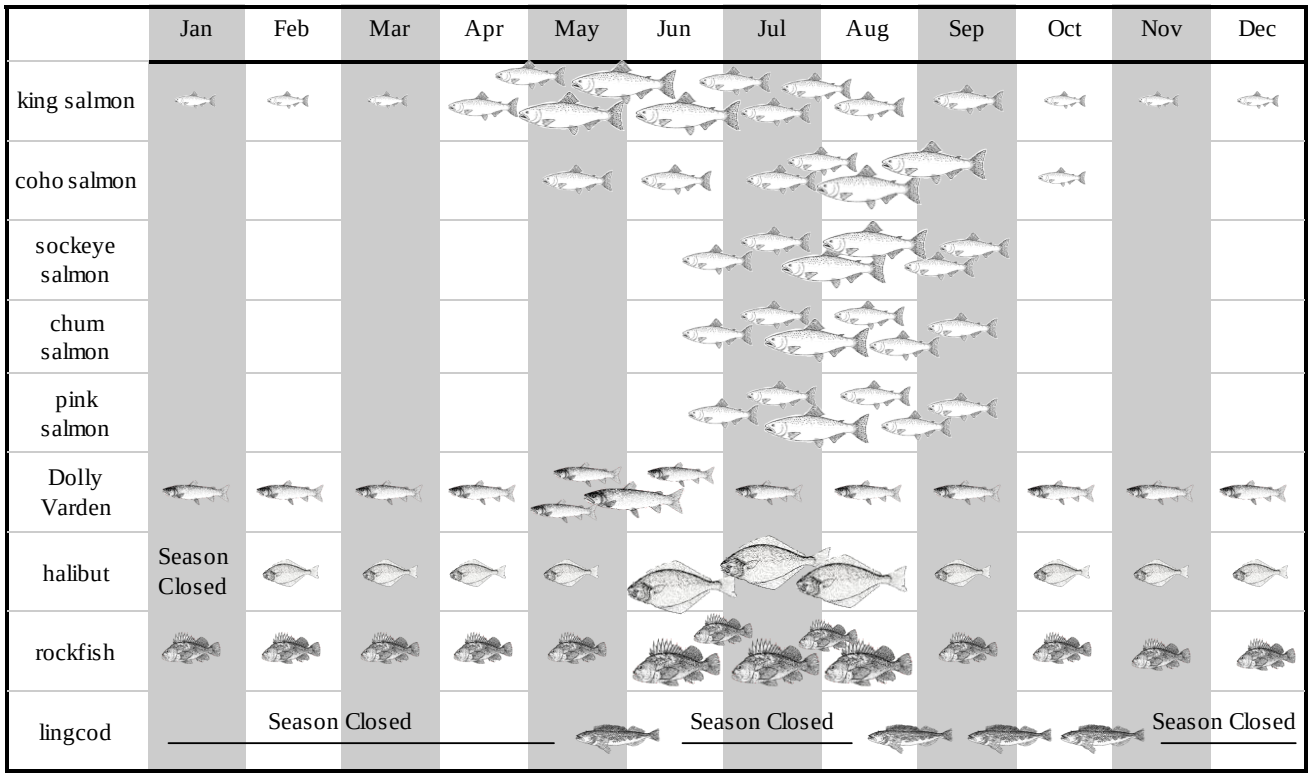
Recipes

For some good recipes, write the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, at 311 N. Franklin Street, Suite 200, Juneau, AK 99811 for their brochure on preparing and cooking rockfish. Or, see them on the web at http://www.alaskaseafood.org.

Sport Fishing in Sitka

For more information and fishing reports please contact the Sitka area office, Division of Sportfish, at: 907-747-5355 or visit the web at http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/region1/sf_r1home.cfm.

Saltwater Timing



Freshwater Timing