

Fishing in the *Prince of Wales Island* area

Marine waters of the Prince of Wales Island area support catchable populations of salmon, halibut, lingcod, Pacific cod, greenling, herring, and at least ten common species of rockfish.

Dungeness, Tanner, and king crab, and shrimp, scallops, abalone, and clams are also common. Other fish, shellfish, and invertebrate species can be found, but this guide covers the most common and popular species.



salmon

All five species of Pacific salmon resident to waters of the northwest U.S. and Canada are common in the area: king (chinook), coho (silver), pink ('humpy'), sockeye (red), and chum ('dog') salmon.

KING SALMON—the largest, scarcest and most highly prized of the Pacific salmon in the area, they are renowned for their fighting strength and endurance.

The king salmon sport fishery in marine waters off the west coast of Prince of Wales and nearby islands is

strongly influenced by fish bound for spawning streams and hatcheries in the Pacific Northwest and Canada. King salmon fishing off the coast is also affected by hatchery releases from the Ketchikan, Sitka, and Petersburg areas.

Kings are found mostly in coastal marine waters as they pass through on their migration to mainland spawning streams. Mature ('spawner') kings weighing up to 65 pounds can be found in area waters from May to August, with peak availability during June. Immature ('feeder') kings from 10 to 30 pounds are around all year, but fishing is best from May to July.

There are no king salmon spawning streams in the area, although a few mature king salmon stray into island streams every year. King salmon fishing in fresh water is closed unless opened in-season by ADF&G emergency order.

Locating king salmon in marine waters can be difficult. They frequent nearshore areas off points of land, around kelp beds, or in open water. Schools of baitfish such as herring or needlefish are good indicators of king salmon in the area. Baitfish schools may be located by fathometer or found



where concentrations of sea birds are observed diving for fish. Nearshore areas that extend out into tidal currents are effective ambush points for feeding baitfish, and, accordingly, for king salmon.

The most effective techniques for catching kings are trolling, mooching, or jigging; flyfishing is less common.

COHO SALMON—hard fighters and popular targets for anglers in area salt waters. Coho range from 3 to 20 pounds or more (average 8 pounds), and they are abundant in coastal waters from July to September. The best saltwater fishing is from mid-July through August. In salt water, coho travel in large schools, are often aggressive, and can provide intense action. They are usually caught within 30 feet of the surface, but it's not uncommon to catch them down to 100 feet or deeper.

Coho can be caught by trolling, mooching, flyfishing, or by casting lures from boats. Fishing success is usually best within one or two hours of a tide change. Fishing is often productive in bays or estuaries near stream mouths from late August to October when the coho return to spawn in fresh water.

Hatchery-reared coho are released into two island streams—the Klawock River and Neck Lake. Those released into Neck Lake (near the community of Whale Pass) are a summer-run stock, and anglers can find excellent fishing

Before fishing, acquaint yourself with the particular location where you plan to fish and know the sport fishing regulations for that location.

for these fish in the outlet stream of Neck Lake from late June through August. Fishing for the Klawock coho is best in August and September—anglers often find excellent fishing from the shoreline along the road between Craig and Klawock.

cont'd . . .

Most area streams wider than 6 feet that enter salt water support at least small runs of coho. Summer-run coho enter some streams in late June, but most coho are fall-run fish that enter streams from mid-August to November.

PINK SALMON—the smallest and most abundant salmon in Prince of Wales Island area waters. They have a 2-year life cycle and weigh from 2 to 6 pounds (3 lb. average). ‘Pinks’ travel coastal waters in large schools (hundreds or thousands of fish), where they are abundant from early to late summer. Upon entering freshwater streams in summer, pinks develop a dorsal hump which is most pronounced in males—thus the nickname ‘humpy.’ Saltwater ‘humpy’ fishing is best in August, but it’s also good in middle or late July.

Trolling, mooching, or casting lures or flies produces nice catches in salt water when pinks are biting. They are usually brightest and preferred for harvest while in open ocean or coastal waters, before they enter their spawning streams. They often provide excellent action when schooled near stream mouths in August, and roadside fishing near jutting points can be productive—especially in August.

Flyfishing is usually the most effective technique for catching humpies in area streams, but spinning,

baitcasting, and spincasting can also be productive.

SOCKEYE SALMON—regarded for their fighting skill as well as their satisfying flavor, these are perhaps the most difficult salmon to catch in area waters. The saltwater sockeye sport fishery is very limited. Most sockeye are caught by trolling or casting artificial lures or flies. Adult sockeye feed on small crustaceans and other zooplankton in marine waters and stop feeding once they return to spawn in fresh water. However, sockeye are most commonly caught in fresh water in July on flies or spinners.

CHUM SALMON—famous for their large teeth, which develop most prominently in males upon entering fresh water. Chums are caught infrequently in local sport fisheries,



usually by anglers trolling in salt waters, drift fishing or casting in streams for other salmon species.