

Salmon is king now in Lake Sammamish

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By Dallas Cross

Hey, it is time to take advantage of the overabundance of king or chinook salmon that are heading for Issaquah Creek and to the Issaquah Salmon Hatchery.

The state declared open season for them in Lake Sammamish beginning Aug. 16. By then, the hatchery was expected to have all it needed for egg harvest and to have left the rest for us.

This year's regulations state you may keep up to four salmon, of which only two may be king salmon, the ones with the black lips.

Also this year, you must have a Washington State Discover Pass in order to use Lake Sammamish State Park and its boat launch. The pass may either be purchased on a daily basis for \$10, or for \$30 for an annual pass. Fishing within 100 yards of the mouth of Issaquah Creek is prohibited.

The fishery for kings has been rewarding in recent years, for many have been caught. However, the peak spawning period is generally over when the season opens and you will mostly catch matured and dark salmon. Every so often, you get a late arrival with silver sides that's suitable for the table. For most, the thrill of catching a heavy-duty salmon in a suburban lake makes the outing quite worthwhile.

Because the feeding portion of these salmon's lives is over, you either have to appeal to their instinct to bite what once was food, or trade on their aggressive nature. The former is touted by those who use bare, red, size 4/0 hooks that, to my take, imitate ocean krill upon which they fattened up before entering fresh water.

The hooks are accompanied by a couple of red beads on the leader and trolled slowly behind a bright green dodger that wags them back and forth to induce the bite. A colorful, and perhaps meaningful, comment on this setup was made stating that this "flosses them" when the kings investigate the dodger flashes.

Evoking an aggressive strike falls to the provocation of lures, such as kwikfish or flatfish, along with a piece of herring, smelt or even sardine on the hook. Again, a flasher is a good way to get attention to the lure. The aggression appears to come from the salmon's instinct to fight off rivals, protect spawning territory or just do in a predator fish.

For both types of lures, savvy local fishers use commercial scent attractants. There are some krill scents that work well here, especially on bare hooks.

Slow to medium trolling speed is standard but finding the productive depth at which to fish is paramount to success. A fish finder can help, but varying the depth until you get a strike is the tried-and-true way to plumb the lake.

The best fishing is early in the morning, when the fish school up at shallower depths. So start out at 50 feet of depth and vary down to 80 feet until you connect. Of course, you can call out to a successful boat and ask how deep they were fishing. Then, you have a 50-50 chance of getting the truth. For salmon fishing, them ain't bad odds.

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