

YAKIMA BAIT® KNOW-HOW REPORT

FREE TAKE ONE!



WILLAMETTE SPRING CHINOOK

If you think a run of 50,000-to-100,000 yummy-tasting Spring Chinook are worth chasing the lower Willamette River is the place. This Portland Metro fishery runs from mid February through May, and given a cool spring, early June. And although April is considered the peak month, the action on the lower Willamette and its slough (the Multnomah Channel) can produce limits early and late in the season. The fish are big, averaging 10-to-15 pounds. A few 5-year old salmon can reach 30 pounds. The Willamette is a big river which intimidates many with its size. Like most fisheries there are basic rules (found here), which if followed, will increase your chance of success.

TIDES

Surprising to some, ocean tides affect the Willamette all the way to the falls at Oregon City and can influence the river more than one might realize; for example, a large flood tide can slow, stop or reverse the current of the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel. Willamette Spring Chinook respond positively to tide changes in the same way as ocean salmon – with the best bite often occurring around the tide change. Because tides affect when and where there will be current, their timing makes a difference in which technique you choose and depending on that selection, when and/or where you fish; for example, plunking/still fishing the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel will require moving water facilitated by an outgoing tide to make stationary lures perform.

FORWARD-TROLLING

Forward-trolling is best when tides are flat or flooding. You can enhance your forward-trolling success by maneuvering your boat in a zigzag pattern. By trolling in an irregular pattern your lure or bait will change direction and action, which can trigger strikes from following salmon. You should realize that zigzag trolling may not be possible when the area you're fishing is crowded with other boats, since playing bumper cars (boats) is frowned upon. If you have a small boat, you may have the advantage here since it's a lot easier to effectively zigzag troll with a small boat than a big one.

Depth is one of the most important factors to consider when forward-trolling, and water depths vary a lot in the Willamette. The general rule is: if the water is 25 feet deep or less position your outfit on or just off the bottom, since salmon will usually be found there. If the water is deeper, or when tides are flooding, fish can suspend above bottom. Most anglers find success in deep water (over 25 feet) by trolling their outfits 12-to-20 feet below the surface. There are exceptions to this basic rule; for example, in early morning or when the river is turbid, fish can be found closer to the surface, say 6-to-10 feet down; given clear water conditions combined with a bright sun you may find salmon near bottom - even in water over 25 feet deep.

Although herring combined with a Fish Flash attractor is the most popular outfit for trolling, some anglers will employ offerings other than a herring; for example, a size M-2 FlatFish® or a size 5 Toman™ Cascade spinner rigged 50 inches behind a spreader/weight set up works as does flat lining (without weight) an extra-deep diving Mag Lip® let out 40-to-70 feet behind your boat.

RIGGING TIP: To eliminate line twist when using a spinner, herring or prawn, rig a swivel halfway down your leader.

FISHING TIP: Unlike when fishing herring or a bait-wrapped salmon plug, set the hook immediately on the strike when fishing a spinner.

DOWNSTREAM-TROLLING

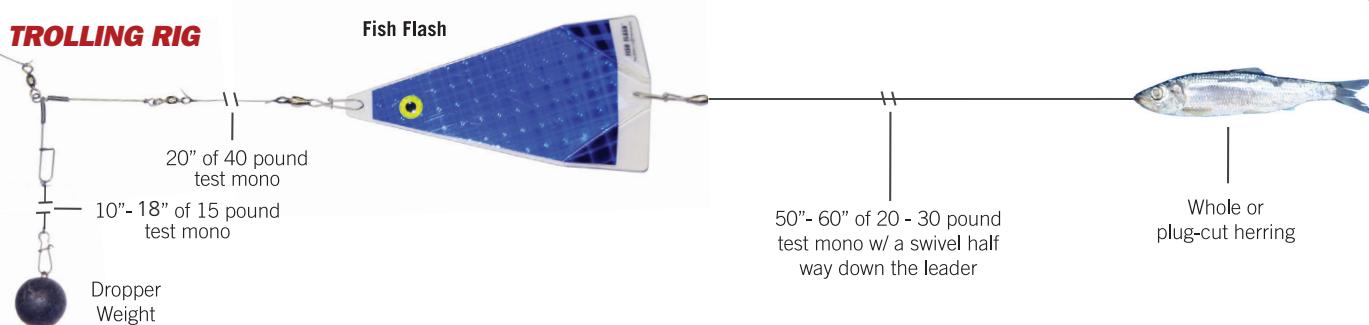
A downstream-troll produces best when tides are ebbing and the current flowing. Many regard the first half of the ebb, referred to as the outgoing tide, to be best. Realize ocean tides affect the Multnomah Channel, lower Willamette and Portland Harbor more than upstream areas. In addition, the flow of the Willamette combined with the height of the Columbia can alter the timing of ocean tides. All this requires a little thought, on-the-water experience and a tide book (available at tackle stores) which show the tide time difference and the amount of fluctuation for various spots along the Willamette River and its slough.

When tides are ebbing, meaning currents are flowing, a downstream-troll is the most effective fishing method; the reason, salmon will face into the current and you will encounter a lot more of them when trolling downstream – the opposite way they are facing. The exception to this is when and where the current is running so fast that it pushes salmon to the edges – a time when back-trolling or plunking/still-fishing near shore might produce best. You should realize, when currents are flowing it may cause salmon to hold tight to the bottom, even in deep water areas, and to congregate just downstream of underwater drop offs, bridge pilings, or points of land extending into the river.

The most popular outfit used by those forward or downstream-trolling is a herring rigged 50-to-60 inches behind a spreader with a 6, 8, or 10 inch no-drag Fish Flash® attractor rigged 20 inches behind your spreader. Both plug-cut and whole herring work. For Spring Chinook salmon, Green Label size herring are the most popular. Both whole and plug cut herring produce results when rigged to spin and then pulled behind your boat at a slow troll speed of two miles per hour or less.

Fish Flash is a spinning flasher used to attract salmon to your lure or bait. The Fish Flash triangular shape and wings that extend outward make it work when attached directly to diver or in-line weight set up. When used in combination with a sinker rigged on a dropper line, like when using a wire spreader or sliding weight system, it's recommended that you rig a 12-to-20 inch section of heavy leader from your spreader to Fish Flash. To eliminate possible tangles, your weight-dropper line should be a few inches shorter than the distance from spreader to Fish Flash.

TROLLING RIG



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RIGGING TIP: In order to keep tangles to a minimum, rig a swivel halfway down your leader.

FISHING TIP: When fishing herring allow salmon to pull your rod tip down 3-to-4 times before setting the hook.

BACK TROLLING

Back-trolling is a method where you hold your boat stationary in the current (bow facing upstream) with the aid of a trolling motor, let diving lures out downstream from your boat 40-to-90 feet, engage your reel, and then allow your craft to slowly slip downstream. Maneuvering your craft in this manner means the current passing your boat can be used to push diving lures, bait or lure/bait combinations near bottom. What makes the back-trolling method effective is by doing so you're taking your lures to the fish – not waiting for them to come to you.

PLUNKING

The most productive areas to plunk/still-fish the Willamette are where the water depth is 25 feet deep or less. One of my favorite places to anchor is just upstream from where the river bottom drops off into deep water. The idea here is to anchor your boat far enough upstream from the drop off so by the time you scope your boat downstream from your anchor and bounce your lures out behind boat your lures are positioned right on the underwater lip or break. I've also found success at the head end of natural leads and along-side or at the downstream end of a log raft. Anchoring at the upstream end of a deep water trough which narrows and shallows to 20 feet or less can be an ideal ambush spot. All can be found by studying the bottom with a quality fish finder – like those offered by Humminbird. Since the Portland Harbor has been deeply dredged most of the best plunk/still fish spots can be found in the Willamette Slough or upstream from the Portland Harbor.

POPULAR PLUNKING/BACK-TROLLING SETUPS INCLUDE:

Size M-2 FlatFish rigged 50-to-60 inches behind a free-sliding diver (back-trolling) or spreader/weight set up (plunking). In water depths of 20 feet or less an extra deep diving Mag Lip 4.5 will dive near bottom, given the right current speed, without the need of added weight or a diver. Just let out 40-to-70 feet of line behind your boat.

RIGGING TIP: To maximize the effectiveness of your salmon size FlatFish or Mag Lip try adding a fillet of sardine or other bait to its belly.

FISHING TIP: When fishing a plug with a bait wrap, allow salmon to pull your rod tip down 3 or 4 times before you set the hook.

BAIT WRAPPING

Enhance the performance of 4.5 Mag Lip and/or M-2 FlatFish by adding a fillet of sardine or other bait to its belly. For these plug sizes you fillet should measure 1-3/4 inches long and 5/8 wide. Center your fillet on the belly eyelet (skin side down) and hold in place by wrapping with light test mono or elastic thread – finish with 3-to-4 half hitches.

OREGON CITY

Although equipped with fish ladders, Oregon City Falls represents a major obstacle to salmon migration - meaning many thousands of fish will hold in the main river waiting for ideal water conditions (flow and temperature) before passing upriver. Because the river in the Oregon City/Lake Oswego area is of a more natural state with gravel bars and side channels, it offers more diversity than fishing areas located farther downstream; for example, the river here is shared by those trolling, back-trolling and plunking. Likewise, while trolling herring dominates much of the fishery in the lower river there are a lot more plugs, spinners and various bait types used in this section of the river.

FISHING TIP: Keep in mind that Mag Lip is an extra deep diving plug that if let out too far behind your boat can dive into the bottom instead of working just above it. While line diameter and current speed can affect plug diving depth, the amount of let out (distance behind your boat) has the most influence. Rod tip action can reveal whether your plug is digging into the bottom. A steady rod tip action means your plug is working correctly while a more erratic, stop then throb, rod tip action could be a signal that your lure is digging into the bottom; try reeling up your line in 10 foot increments or until your rod tip yields a steady throb.

Some of the more popular Mag Lip colors include: Double Trouble, Feeder, Fluorescent Red, Good Ol' Boy, Grinch, Keeper, Mad Clown, Silver Chartreuse Head, California Watermelon, Pacific Watermelon, Scratch, and Searcher.

SAND SHRIMP/PRAWN OR SALMON EGG

Although generally more productive during the latter half of the season, sand shrimp, prawn, or salmon egg cluster can be trolled or back-trolled

in combination with a size 4, 6, or 8 Spin-N-Glo® rigged 4-to-5 feet behind a buoyant diver. The most popular way to rig a prawn is to thread your leader (using a threader) through the prawn (head down) above a 4/0 single hook, like a Wright & McGill #182. Try rigging your sand shrimp on a double hook set up consisting of a 1/0 or 2/0 single and trailing size #4 treble snelled one inch apart.

ANCHORING UP

"Hog-line" is the term used to describe rows of boats anchored in the Willamette. Boaters anchor side-by-side so when one hooks up they can avoid tangling their fish into another's anchor or fishing line by dropping downstream from the line up. Upon hooking a salmon they will throw off their anchor line (leaving it attached to a buoy) and let the current push their boat downstream where they will then play their fish. If you try this, use your trolling motor to maneuver yourself around the next downstream hog-line or away from yet other boats that may be nearby.

Hog-liners use a variety of lures that include M-2 FlatFish or 4.5 Mag Lip to entice salmon. Most rig their high-action salmon plug 40-to-50 inches behind a spreader with a 24-to-36 weight-dropper line – longer dropper line when currents are strong or when employing the extra-deep diving Mag Lip. In clear water try employing a smaller plug size like a T-4 or U-20 size FlatFish or all-new 3.5 Mag Lip in a Fluorescent Red color.

Nothing fishes as well as a spinner, when currents are running fast. Try a size 5 Toman Cascade in Red White, Brass Chartreuse Green Blue, Nook Special, or one of the rainbow patterns. Keep in mind that metal or metal/paint finish combinations produce best on sunny days and full blade paint patterns early or late in the day or when it's overcast.

PLUNKING/STILL-FISHING FROM SHORE

You can enjoy salmon success from shore by plunking a Spin-N-Glo and one of the most popular areas to do this is at Clackamette Park or Meldrum Bar, which are located above and below where the Clackamas River enters the Willamette at Oregon City.

RIGGING IS EASY:

Just thread a plastic bead and size 2 or 4 Spin-N-Glo down a 24-to-36 inch leader and connect it to a swivel – where you will need to attach enough weight to hold your outfit stationary in the river current. Then, cast out, attach a bell to your rod and wait for Mr. Salmon to ring it. Some of the more popular Spin-N-Glo colors for the Willamette include: Flame Chartreuse, Fluorescent Red, Pink White, Pearl Pink, and Rocket Red Tiger Stripe. In the black wing finishes, top producers include: Glitter Lime Chartreuse, Lime Chartreuse Tiger, Chartreuse Tiger, and Glitter Fire Tiger.



Although not a guide, Buzz is considered a sport fishing authority for salmon, steelhead, and trout. He writes a regular outdoor column, is a seminar speaker and has appeared on many TV fishing shows. He is a hall of famer for The Association of Northwest Steelheaders and The National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame. Berkley offers a line of Air IM-8 rods Buzz Ramsey designed for salmon and steelhead. Currently, Buzz is Brand Manager for Yakima Bait Company and a member of the management team – www.yakimabait.com.



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