Catching Lake Trout in Flathead Lake

Jigging: Tips and Recommendations

A Handbook and Companion to the Tribes' Jigging Movies

THE FISH
Learn about lake trout—their habits, where they are at different times of the year, what they can see and can't see in deep water, and how your jigging technique can either scare or attract them.

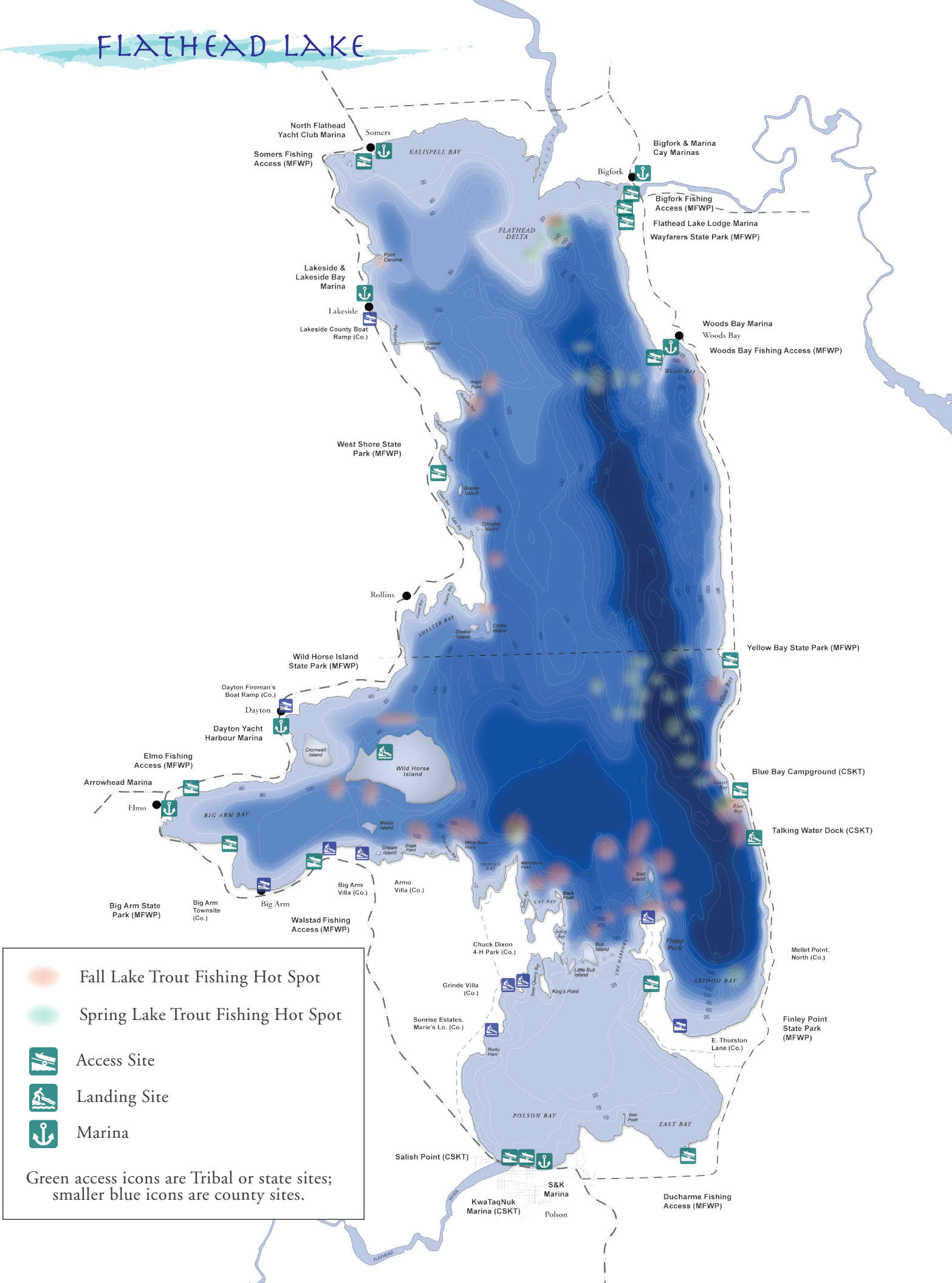
THE JIGS
Learn what jigs the top Mack Days jiggers are using and where to find them.

THE ROD AND REEL
Learn what to look for in a rod and reel, what kind of line and leader to use, and how to rig your rod.

THE TECHNIQUE
Learn the best jigging action from Mack Days champions, everything from how close to the bottom to fish to how frequent and how high you should jig.

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
NRD, Div. Fish, Wildlife, Recreation, and Conservation
406 Sixth Ave., Polson, MT 59860

FLATHEAD LAKE



Rods and Reels

1. Shimano FX Spinning Reel 2. Abu Garcia 5600 C4 "level wind" Baitcasting Reel 3. Shimano Curado Baitcasting reel 4. Stradic Ci4 Spinning Reel.

Reels

Most of the anglers we interviewed prefer baitcasting reels rather than spinning reels because they twist the line less. They also prefer a reel with a high line-retrieve ratio (for example, 7 to 1).

"Light rods tips are key because the bites are very, very light."

Rods

Our anglers were unanimous: choose a medium to light or ultra light rod because you want a soft, flexible tip. Also, many anglers like short poles because with a short pole you have more of a tendency to jig with a short jigging action, which the fish seem to favor.

1. Ocuma 2. Ugly Stick
3. Carrot Stix 4. Lamiglas.

Lines and Leaders

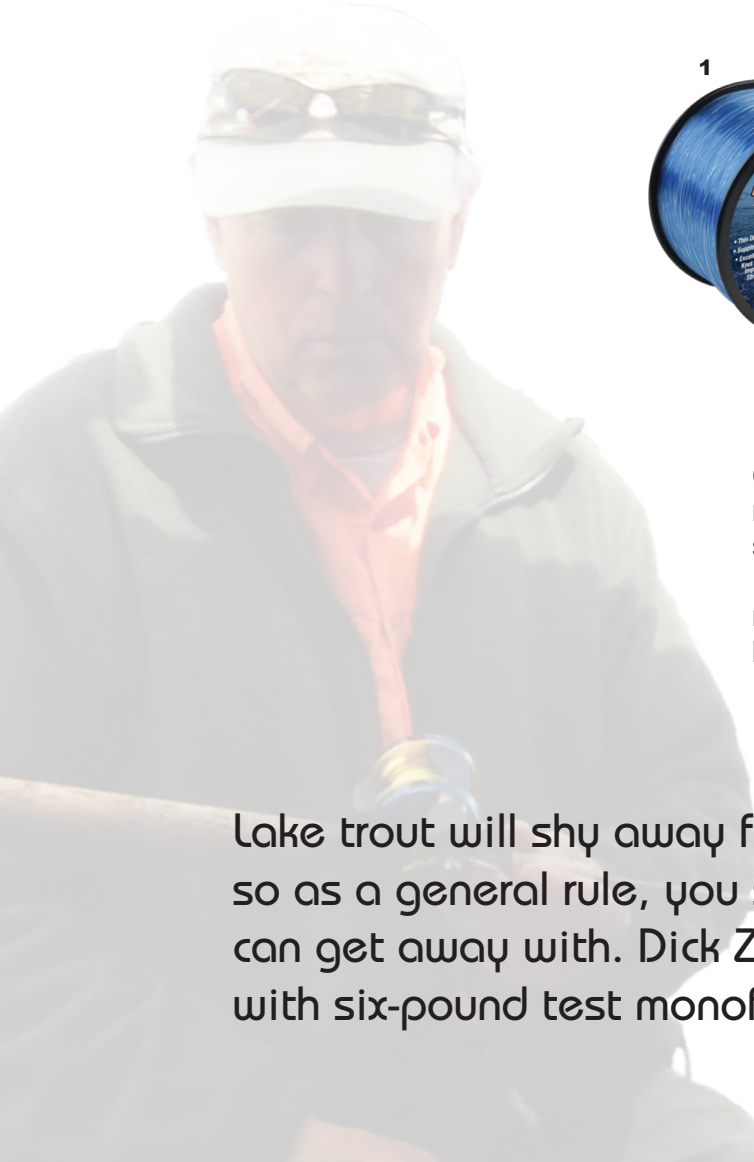
"When you jig, fishing right next to the bottom is important. You've got to feel the bottom when you jig. Having good gear: a good rod and good line (no stretch line) allows you to feel that bottom"

— Don Peters

1. Braided line (teflon-coated Kevlar)
2. Low-stretch monofilament

Main Line

Almost all of the anglers we interviewed use braided line for their main line and several said they prefer a yellow color because it is easier to see. They favor braided because it has very little stretch. At the depths Flathead Lake jiggers fish (200 to 300 feet), that's important. Monofilament stretches too much. Another option (though not as good) is a quality low-stretch monofilament.



1. 15-pound Fluorocarbon
2. 15-pound Monofilament

Leaders

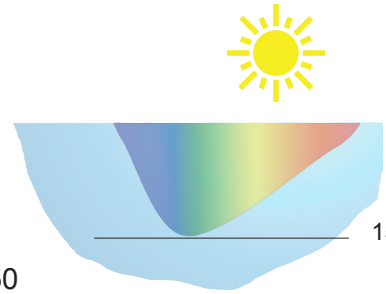
Our anglers recommended either fluorocarbon or monofilament leaders. Fluorocarbon is relatively expensive but is more abrasion resistant and extremely clear. It also has limited elasticity, zero water absorption, and resists UV radiation. Monofilament is inexpensive, has better shock absorption, and is a good, all-purpose line.

Lake trout will shy away from leader material they can see, so as a general rule, you should use as light a leader as you can get away with. Dick Zimmer says he gets the most strikes with six-pound test monofilament.

Jigs

Colors and Light

Jig color is important. The colors favored by the jigging anglers we interviewed were white, chartreuse green, and fluorescent green. Most colors don't penetrate below 60 feet (right), and there is no light penetration at all beyond 150 feet—in other words no matter how bright it is above water, it is completely dark below 150 feet. So in deep water, it is best to use white or glow colors. You also need to recharge your jigs with light using an inexpensive portable UV light (photo at left). Successful anglers charge their jigs with light before they send them down.



What your glow jig looks like at 200 feet.

Jig Size

Dick Zimmer says the old adage "big baits catch bigger fish" is not necessarily true with lake trout. His favorite jig size is a one ounce, and if that is not working, he moves to a half-ounce or smaller jig. In Flathead Lake, you often catch more fish using smaller jigs, and even though the average size of the fish you are catching might be a little smaller, many large macks have been caught on small jigs.

Single vs Treble Hooks

Two very successful Mack Days fishermen, Mike Benson and Wes Shockley, have different preferences when it comes to the hooks on their jigs—Mike says he looses fewer fish using jigs with treble hooks, while Wes says he has come to prefer single-hook jigs, though he says he had to learn how to be successful with them.

Adding a Fly

Many jig anglers add a fly to their rig (12 to 18 inches above their jig), something Dick Zimmer recommends. Don and Nicole Peters use white zonkers (left) and say they have caught 25 to 30 pound lake trout on the fly.

Mike Benson and Wes Shockley's recommendations: *1. 2 oz. Leadagator 2. 2, 1.5, and 1 oz. Rattle-d-Zastor 3. Trilobite 4. Round Head Jigs and Glow Grubs (1 through 4 are from Zimmer Tackle) 5. Single-hook Jig from Kits Tackle.*

Nicole and Don Peter's recommendations: *1. Trilobite 2. Country Mile 3. Tube Jig 4. TJ Special 5. Rattle-d-Zastor 6. Ducky Special.*

Bait

Cut Bait

Because you will often be jigging in deep water where there is no light, you need to attract fish with scent, which is why all of the jig anglers we interviewed use cut bait. You can buy it from most sporting good stores. Zimmer's sells bagged bait (below) that is peamouth, sucker, or northern pikeminnow (**it is illegal to use a salmonid species for bait**). He mixes the fish pieces with a glow dye and a scent (his recipe includes ground salmon eggs, sausage, and salt and sugar (a blood scent). Most anglers enhance this with a scent and/or a glow lotion (right).

Keep it Fresh

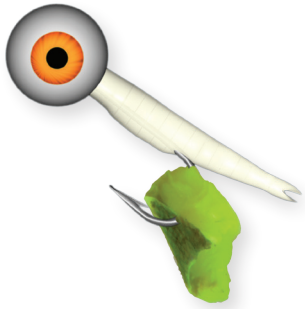
When you are fishing, you need to keep your bait fresh by storing it on ice. Bait that has gone bad gets mushy and is harder to hook. It will also catch less fish. And you should store your bait in a container (below) so it doesn't make a mess on your boat.

Bait Size and Color

You need to cut your bait to the right size (about an inch or less), and for this, jig anglers use a good, sharp pair of kitchen scissors or a sharp knife. Bait that is too large will not catch as many fish. Bait that is not sharply cut and has little fragments hanging off it won't work well because the fish will pull on the dangling edges, and miss the hook. The favorite color among the anglers we talked to was green.

Baiting the Jig

Bait your hook by inserting the hook through the meat side, coming out through the skin. It is easier, and the bait will stay on the hook better.



Baiting the Fly

Some anglers who use a fly above their jig, bait the fly with a Gulp maggot, which adds even more scent to your rig. Don and Nicole Peters believe the maggot makes a difference when it comes to catching lake trout.

Change your Bait Often

All the jig fishermen interviewed emphasized that it is important to change your bait (or at least re-scent it) every 15 to 20 minutes when you are fishing. This is because the scent leaches out of bait when it's in the water.

A Basic Rig

Typical Jigging Set Up (not drawn to scale)

braided line (150 yards)

leader (16 pound fluorocarbon or monofilament)

selected alternative flies

about 8 inches

about 6 feet

fly

gulp maggot (can also use cut bait)

portable UV light source (to charge your glow jig)

12 to 18 inches

swivel

jig

cut bait

selected alternative jigs

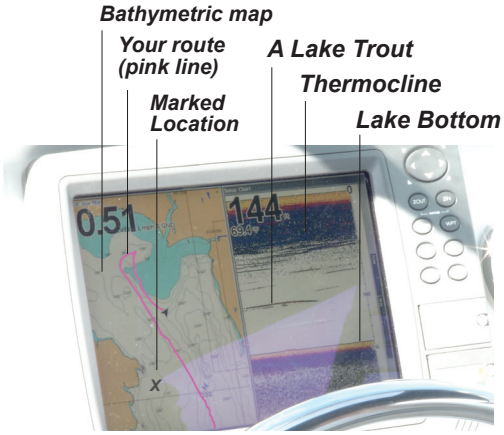
Finding the Spot

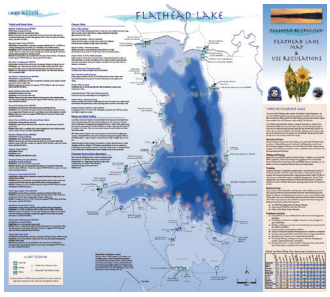
Lake Trout Preferences

Habitat within Flathead Lake is ideal for lake trout. They prefer temperatures between 44 and 58°F, which means in Flathead Lake they are generally limited to depths greater than 50 feet during the summer months. That gives them lots of room because Flathead Lake is so large and deep. Lake trout utilize all habitats within that zone and move throughout the lake, however, they do prefer certain areas, and anglers generally have their best luck fishing these: points, sloping areas of large rubble, or narrow flats and shelves adjacent to drop-offs and steep slopes. More expansive flats usually do not hold many fish. And spawning—which occurs from mid October to mid December—tends to occur in nearshore areas in depths of less than 50 feet.

Sonar

A sonar/GPS unit or fishfinder is essential when you are jigging for lake trout because in addition to telling you the depth and structure beneath your boat, it can help you locate lake trout and schools of baitfish. But keep in mind lake trout can hold so tight to the bottom that most fishfinders won't show them. With additional software, you can add a bathymetric map of the lake to your device to help you locate the lake-bottom structures that hold fish. You can also see the route of your boat and mark good fishing spots so you can come back on another day.



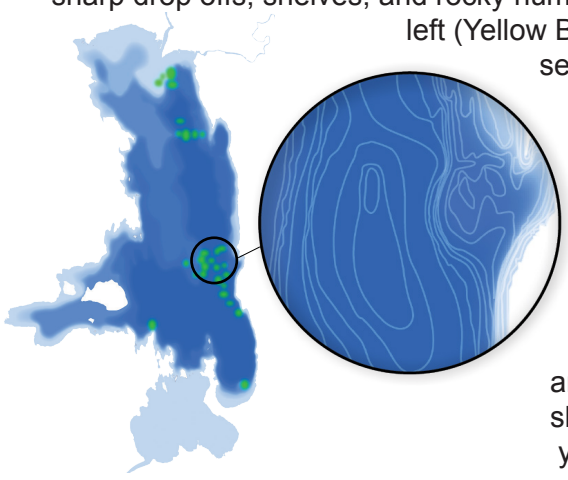


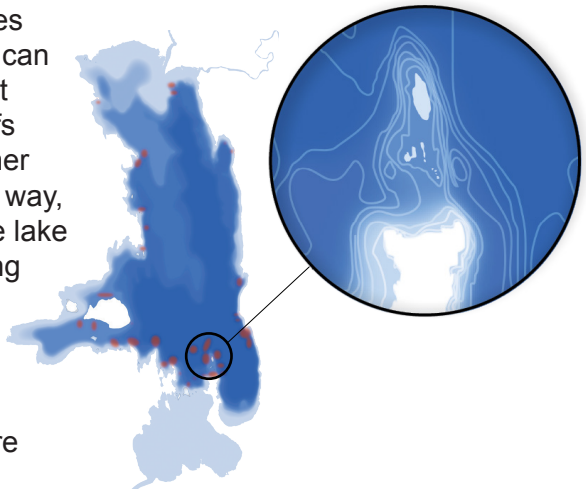
Bathymetric Maps

Whether you have a fishfinder or not, you will need a good bathymetric map that you can study both at home and on your boat. There are several different bathymetric maps available for purchase at sporting goods stores and tackle shops, but the Tribes offer a good one for free through their Division of Fish, Wildlife, Recreation, and Conservation (available in Pablo, Polson, and at Blue Bay). The Tribes' map also includes a great deal of additional information about things like access points, regulations, and aquatic invasives.

Look for Structure

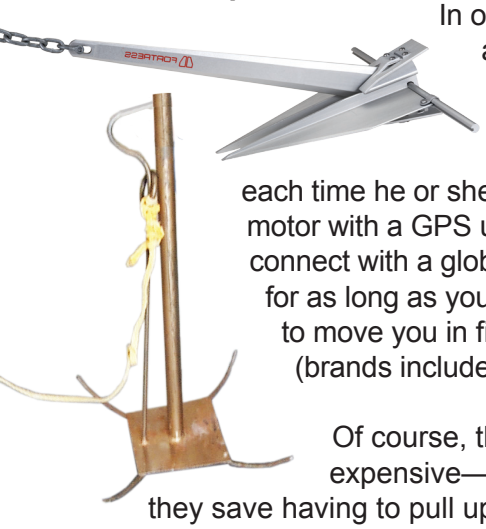
All the jig anglers we interviewed emphasized the importance of looking for specific structures on the bottom—sharp drop offs, shelves, and rocky humps. By looking at the map images left (Yellow Bay) and right (Finley Point) you can see from the bathymetric lines that these areas have steep drop offs and shelves (lines close together indicate a steep area). By the way, the green and red dots on the lake maps indicate lake trout fishing hot spots in spring and fall, respectively. The hot spots are for the most part located around sharp drop offs and shelves—the kinds of areas where you should be fishing.

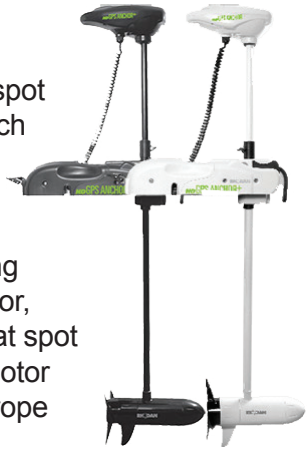




Anchoring

Two Ways to Anchor

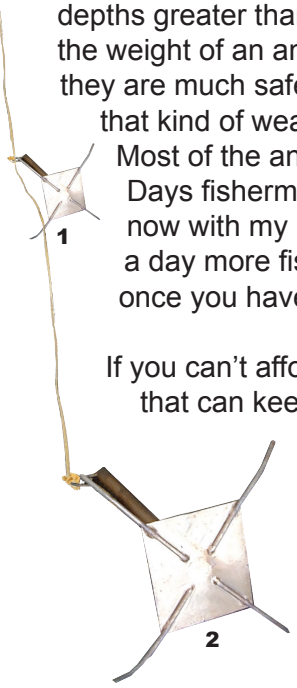




In order to vertically jig and catch fish, you need to anchor in a spot and stay put so that your jigging action remains vertical, which is hard when there is any wind at all. Traditional anchoring systems use anchors like those at left in combination with a rope. The angler drops and retrieves the anchor each time he or she moves to a new spot. The other system is an electric trolling motor with a GPS unit. It's ropeless. When you find a spot, you drop in the motor, connect with a global positioning satellite, and the motor then keeps you on that spot for as long as you want. If the fish are not biting right there, you can tell the motor to move you in five-foot increments, all without messing with a long anchor rope (brands include the Rhodan GPS Anchor+ and the Minn Kota i-pilot).

Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages to both. Electronic trolling motors are expensive—they start at just over $1,000—but they are by far the best system for jigging: they save having to pull up the anchor line each time you move (in Flathead Lake, jiggers often fish at depths greater than 200 feet, which means that each time you want to move you have to pull up a lot of rope with the weight of an anchor on the end). Electric trolling motors keep you in the same spot even in windy weather, they are much safer (holding your spot even with winds up to 27 mph and 4-foot swells—throwing an anchor in that kind of weather is dangerous), and there is no chance of another boat getting tangled in your anchor rope. Most of the anglers we interviewed strongly favored this type of anchoring system. In the words of one Mack Days fisherman: "These units have made the old rope and anchor obsolete. I have fished 3 tournaments now with my GPS anchor system and have not thrown an anchor and rope once. I believe I can get 2 hours a day more fishing time than when I was throwing my old anchor and rope. I know its a big purchase, but once you have one, you will be wondering why you didn't get one sooner."

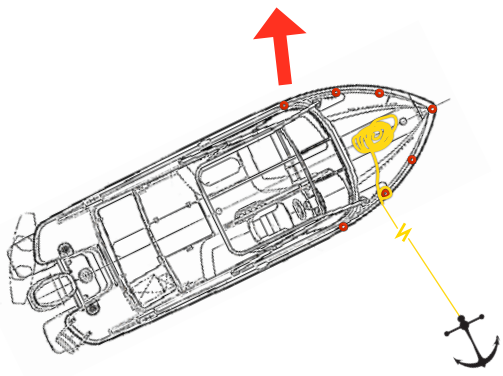
If you can't afford a GPS anchoring system, Zimmer Tackle has developed a good rope anchoring system that can keep you stable (on your spot) even in windy conditions. It uses two anchors: a secondary smaller anchor in front of your primary anchor (left).



Zimmer's two-anchor anchoring system: *1. secondary anchor* *2. primary anchor*

Moving on Your Anchor Line

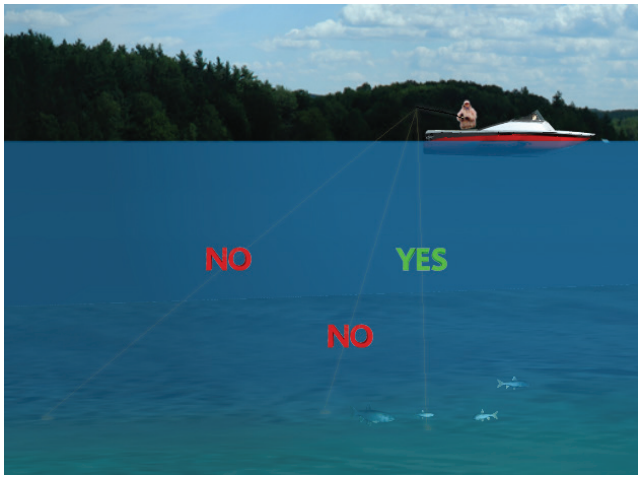
When you are jigging, you will often want to move just a short distance to stay on the bite. If you have a traditional rope anchor, this can be tough. But there's a technique Dick Zimmer describes on his video for moving short distances on your anchor line. Normally, anglers anchor off the bow to minimize wind resistance. But if you move your anchor line from the bow to the starboard side, the wind resistance is going to pull your boat to port (red arrow below). The farther back on the starboard side you tie your anchor line, the more wind resistance there will be and the farther your boat will move to port. Watch the video for Dick's full instructions.



Technique

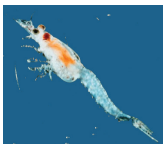
Be there at the Right Time

The best times to fish for lake trout in Flathead Lake are mornings and evenings (dawn and dusk are the best). The action drops off markedly the closer you get to midday. Also, during Mack Days, some areas are fished-out by mid morning.



Fish Vertically

The key to vertical jigging is to have your jig straight below your rod tip. If it's at an angle, your jigging will have a horizontal movement to it, and most of the anglers we talked to said the fish don't respond well to horizontal movement (one theory is that your jig mimics a dying or stunned fish, and a dying or dead fish mostly moves vertically). To keep your line vertical you need to stay stationary, which you can do by following the suggestions in the anchoring section of this primer.



Fish Close to the Bottom

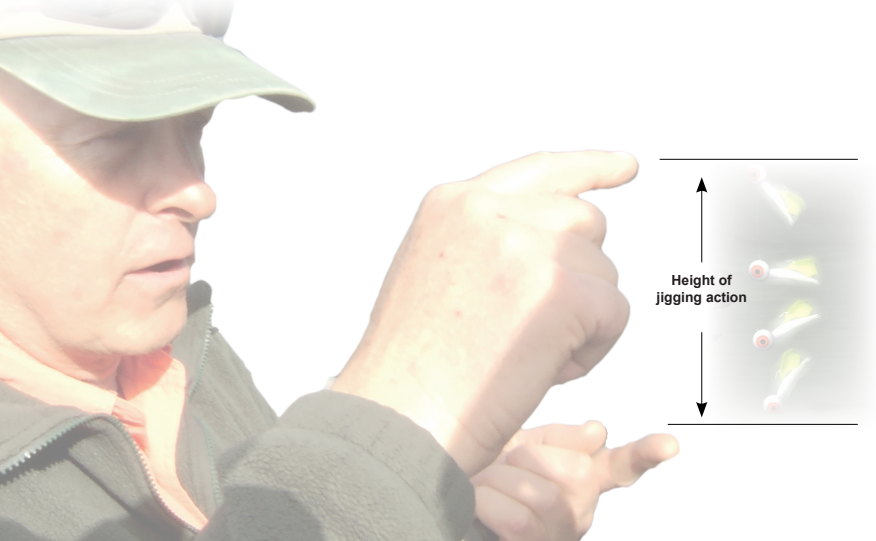
The lake trout you are jigging for are feeding on *Mysis* shrimp. The *Mysis* are swimming against the lake bottom, and so the lake trout are there too—so close that often you won't be able to pick them up on your fishfinder. But don't worry, they're there, and if you want to catch them, you need to be jigging within a few inches of the bottom all the time—all of the jiggers we interviewed emphasized how important this is. Bottom line: keep track of where the bottom is and where your jig is in relation to it.

Use a Muted Jigging Action

Your jigging action is just as important as your proximity to the bottom. The jiggers we talked to strongly recommended a muted jigging action—that is short jigs of just a few inches—either bouncing off the bottom or coming within an inch or two of it (no-stretch line is the only way you can do this effectively). Unless the fish are feeding vigorously, more aggressive jigging actions—more rapid and higher—seem to scare the fish. You can watch the Peters and Bombard videos to see expert jiggers in action.

Catch the Hits

When you are jigging, lake trout hits are subtle—very subtle. If, on the up action of your jig, you feel a weight on your line, that's a fish. If your line stops before bottom, that's a fish. Many beginning jiggers miss a lot of fish because they miss the bites. You also need to watch rod tip constantly because you will often see bites that you can't even feel (and even visually, a bite will be hard to see, moving the rod tip almost imperceptibly).



Move Often

Lake trout are generally easy to catch but they move a lot and action can turn on and off. If you're not catching fish move to a new location. Don and Nicole Peters use a five minute rule—if they don't get a hit or catch a fish in five minutes they move. Sometimes moving just a few feet can make a difference (see the anchor section to see how you can move along your anchor line). If not, move 20 feet or try an entirely new location. If you think the fish are below you, try different lures and colors, and vary your techniques. And change or freshen your bait every 15 to 20 minutes.

Other Tips

Move Often

We can't emphasize this enough: if you are not catching fish, move. Because it is completely dark at the depth you are fishing, the lake trout have relatively small territories and are foraging based on scent and possibly vibrations rather than sight. That means you can be jigging within 10 or 15 feet of a group of lake trout without them knowing your jig is there. So if you aren't catching fish, move. If you are catching fish and the bite suddenly drops off, try moving 5, 10, or 15 feet, using your electronic trolling motor or, if you are using a rope anchor, by moving along your anchor line as described in the anchor section of this primer.

Keep Up-to-Date on What's Working

The anglers who have fished Flathead Lake for years know that the lake trout are constantly adapting their feeding habits. These anglers told us, "What works is constantly changing." In other words, the gear, techniques, and strategies that worked a few years ago, may not work now. For example, the advice used to be to jig your lure "up sharply 1 to 3 feet and then let it free-fall back." Now the advise is to use a "muted jigging action", lifting your lure up only 2 to 6 inches and then letting it fall. The message: Stay up-to-date. Talk to other anglers. Read local fishing blogs. Check in with the tackle shops. You can also experiment. Most of all, be willing to adapt your fishing gear and techniques. Remember, there are lots of good anglers who were once highly successful on Flathead Lake who now—using those same old methods—don't catch many fish, meanwhile other anglers are catching 50 to 70 lake trout a day.

The Daily J

Sunday, February 15, 2013

Jigging Technique Changes

Anglers are reporting that by aggressive jigging Ren
the jigging technique that actions—the same actions foll
caught lots of lake trout a that worked well a few imp
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fame, reports that lake up a foot or two, you The
trout seem to be shying should be moving it only a that
away from jigs animated few inches with each jig rela
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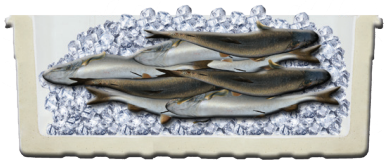
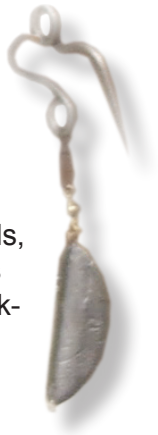
Keep your Catch Fresh

Lake trout donated during Mack Days or even for your own use need to be kept on ice. Pack your catch in a cooler with plenty of ice—ice above, below, and around the fish. Once you get back, the fish should be processed and frozen as soon as possible. Failure to promptly ice your catch can result in the flesh having a soft, open, unappetizing texture. Inadequate bleeding and delayed gutting can cause blood clots to form in the flesh, and those fish are not suitable for freezing.



Releasing Bloated Fish

When you bring up a lake trout from deep water, the pressure change causes its swim bladder to swell, and that prevents it from diving back to depth once it's released. But there are techniques you can use to improve the fish's chance of survival. These include: (1) burping the fish by holding it with both hands and vigorously plunging it headfirst into the water (2) holding the fish horizontally and gently squeezing it from the vent forward—only going halfway up the belly and not forcing it if the fish can't "burp", or (3) use a 60-foot length of heavy cord or line and attach the weighted device shown at right. Stick the pointed end through the jaw of the fish and drop it into the water and let it drop 50 feet or more. The device will carry the fish down, and then when you pull it back up, the fish will slide off and be able to swim on its own. For any fish you want to release: wet your hands and protect the fish's slime coating and fins. Avoid squeezing the gills or soft organs behind the gills, and don't put your fingers in the gills. Hold an exhausted fish in the water by wrapping your fingers around the base of the tail and holding it until it starts to struggle. Gently move it forwards and backwards to help it get water moving through the gills so it can breathe.



Lake Trout

Habitat and Diet

Lake trout inhabit deep, clear, rocky lakes with temperatures of about 50° Fahrenheit and oxygen levels of six to twelve milligrams per liter. Water temperatures above about 74°F can be lethal. Lake trout also inhabit shallow lakes and rivers, but this is usually in the northern parts of their range. They are a bottom-oriented species regardless of depth, and juveniles are usually found in deeper water than adults. The species is “negatively phototropic”, meaning it avoids light. In large lakes with many fish species, lake trout are typically piscivorous, meaning they eat other fish. In Flathead Lake, *Mysis* shrimp make up an important part of the diet as well.

Reproduction

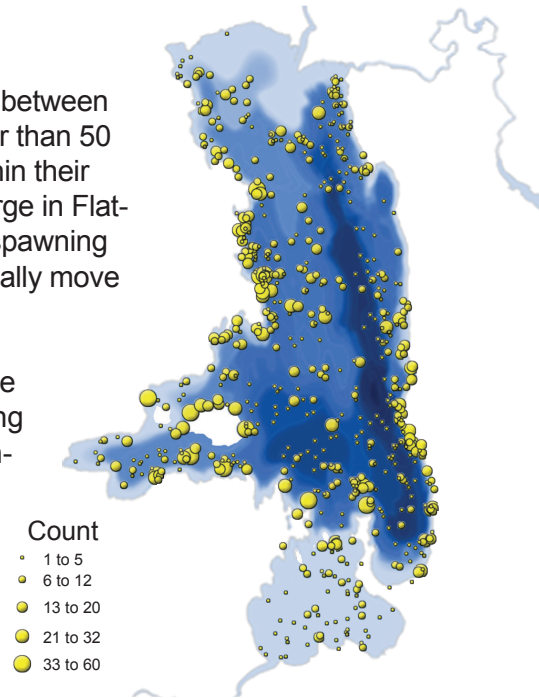
Lake trout have a relatively low reproductive potential because of their late age at maturity, large egg size in relation to body size, broadcast spawning behavior (no parental care to increase egg survival), and a six-month incubation period. They are fall spawners and normally reproduce every second year from September to November in most parts of their range. Temperature, light, and wind are factors that contribute to the onset and duration of spawning activities. They spawn at night on offshore shoals, near shorelines, and points near islands exposed to the prevailing winds. The substrate is a combination of broken rubble and edged rocks 1-to-6 inches in diameter. Unlike most salmonids, they do not construct reds, and they do not form single mating pairs. Spawning may involve several females laying their eggs into crevices in the rocks or spaces between the rocks. Typically, several males fertilize the eggs. Egg incubation lasts up to six months, depending on temperature and oxygen levels. The eggs hatch between February and April, but the fry do not emerge from the rubble until their yolk sacs are absorbed a month later. The fry ascend to the surface to fill their swim bladders and then descend into cooler, deeper water where they remain for two to three years.

In Flathead Lake

Habitat within Flathead Lake is optimal for lake trout. They prefer temperatures between 44 and 58°F, which generally limits their distribution in the lake to depths greater than 50 feet during summer. Thermal habitat volume—the quantity of water column within their preferred temperature range during summer—is limiting in many lakes but is large in Flathead Lake. Based on observations during autumn-gillnet sampling, it appears spawning tends to occur in nearshore areas in depths of less than 50 feet. Juveniles typically move to the deepest portions of the lake to avoid predation by adults.

A group of lake trout in Flathead Lake referred to as dwarf lake trout (because they do not exceed 24 inches in length) have restricted movements, remaining consistently in deep-water habitats where they feed on *Mysis* shrimp throughout their lives. In contrast, the original stock introduced into Flathead Lake, called the “lean” form, utilizes *Mysis* primarily during juvenile years then switches to fish as adults. They grow large and use shallower water than the dwarfs.

Lake trout have become abundant in Flathead Lake since *Mysis* became established, and their population has now stabilized at near carrying capacity. Estimates derived from mark-and-recapture studies, length distributions derived from gillnet and angler catches, and advanced modeling put the abundance of lake trout in Flathead Lake from age 1 to age 30 at about 1.5 million fish.

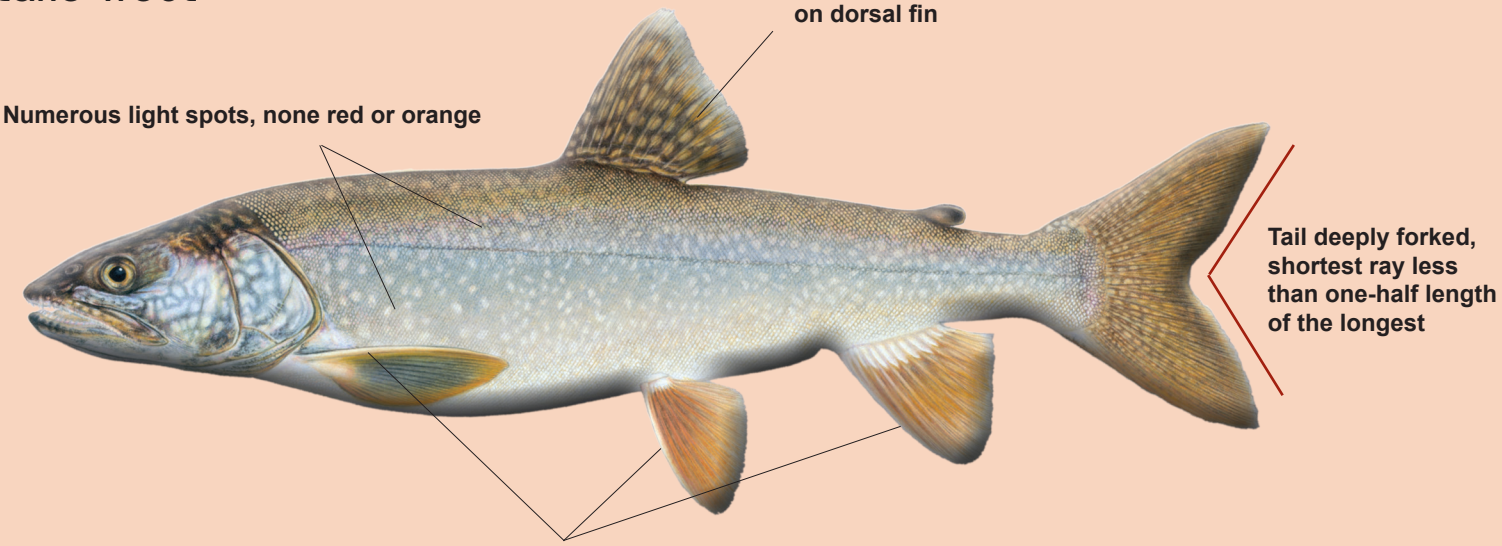


Lake trout capture locations in gillnets set predominantly during autumn between 1998 and 2010. Each circle represents a gillnet location; the circle size indicates the number of lake trout caught in that net.

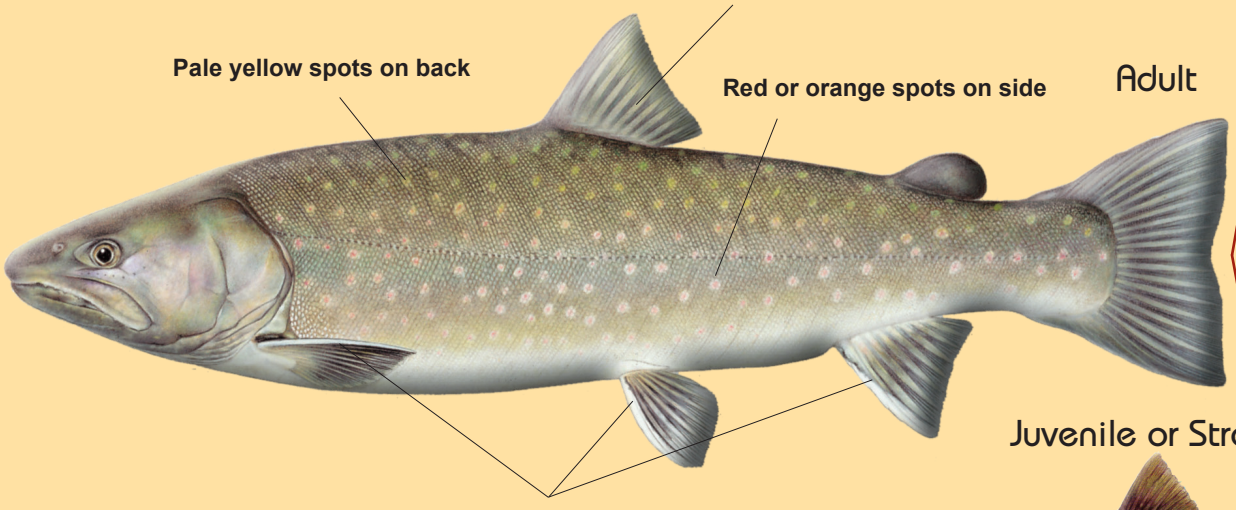
Fish ID

Good Anglers Can ID the Fish they Catch

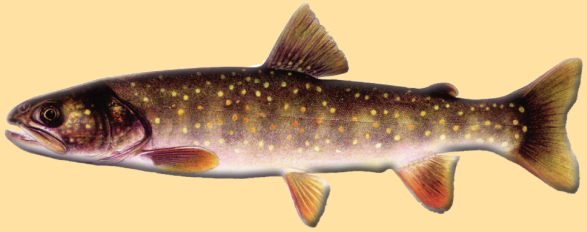
Lake Trout



Bull Trout



Juvenile or Stream Resident



The distinguishing characters shown for the adult also apply to the juvenile or resident form.

Bull Trout are a Threatened Species listed under the Endangered Species Act, and Montana and Tribal law requires all bull trout caught in Flathead Lake be released immediately.

Protect Flathead Lake

Invasives

Aquatic invasive species are a major threat to Flathead Lake. Zebra and quagga mussels, Eurasian watermilfoil, New Zealand mud snails, and whirling disease are just a few of the destructive and aggressive invasive species that could destroy fishing opportunities on the lake. Boats, trailers, and equipment that come in contact with aquatic systems easily transport these invasives, introducing them to new areas. Many of these species have the ability to withstand extended periods out of water or in small amounts of water, making their transport to new locations possible. To protect the lake, clean your boat, drain water from everything, let it dry, and then inspect it from top to bottom to make sure there are no invasives hiding somewhere. 1-877-786-7267 is the National Hotline for aquatic nuisance species. If you suspect a new infestation of an invasive plant or animal, call to report it.

Zebra Mussel

Quagga Mussel

New Zealand Mud Snail

Eurasian Milfoil

Clean Boating

An individual's contribution to pollution may seem insignificant, but taken collectively, the pollution from the thousands of boats on the lake add up. Follow these simple guidelines to help restore and maintain the lake's outstanding water quality and fishing opportunities:

- Use litter bags on your boat and in your camp.
- Bring back all cans, bottles, and litter after an outing.
- Bag and recycle fish parts for compost or fertilizer.
- Do not release dead or live bait into the water.
- Know where toilet facilities are and use them.
- Read labels and buy products that are environmentally safe. Never use WD-40 as a fish attractor. For disposal purposes, WD-40 is classified as an ignitable hazardous waste. It is harmful or fatal if swallowed. We don't want it in the lake. Besides, scientific tests have shown that commercial fish oils and lotions are much better for attracting fish. The company that makes WD-40 asks anglers to not use the lubricant as a fish attractant because of the damage it can do to the environment.
- Clean boat bottoms ashore, over hard surfaces or a tarp, and contain debris for disposal.
- Buy only 'non-toxic' 'phosphate-free' cleaners. Avoid cleaners with bleach, ammonia, lye, or petroleum distillates. Use alternatives like baking soda, lemon juice, vinegar, and elbow grease.
- Tune your engine regularly.
- Keep fuel and oil from getting into the water at all times. Carry oil/gas marine absorbent pads on your boat.
- Use orange-pink colored propylene antifreeze/coolant instead of toxic blue-green colored ethylene glycol.
- Use an oil-absorbent bilge pillow and avoid using bilge cleaners that are detergents or emulsifiers.
- Do not use detergents or emulsifiers on oil slicks. It's illegal.
- Do not dump untreated sewage into the lake. It's illegal. Secure your toilet closed so it cannot empty overboard. Use only environmentally compatible holding-tank deodorants.

Bull Trout

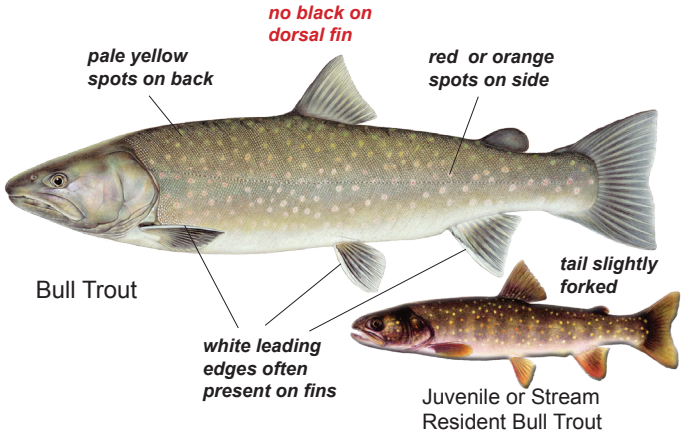
For thousands of years, bull trout have traveled some of the longest migration routes of any trout in North America, and throughout that time, we, the people of the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai tribes, fished for them. The Salish and Pend d'Oreille call the large migratory form of the fish, *aay*, and the smaller, juvenile or stream resident form, *łʔay.* The Kootenai call bull trout, *tuhuł.* So abundant were bull trout in rivers, streams, and lakes that many of our place names refer to the fish. For example, the confluence of Rattlesnake Creek and the Clark Fork River—in what is now Missoula—is called by the Salish *Nłʔay*, meaning Place of the Small Bull Trout. A few miles upstream, the confluence of the Blackfoot and Clark Fork Rivers—the area of present-day Bonner—is called *Nʔayčstm*, meaning Place of the Large Bull Trout, in reference to the fluvial or adfluvial form of the fish.

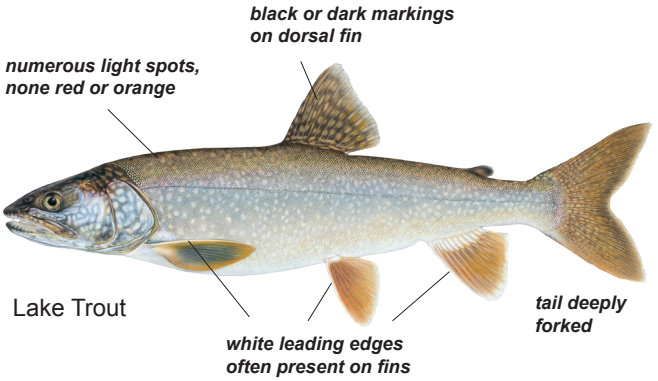
Bull trout are actually "char", related to costal dolly varden, brook trout, and lake trout. Over the eons, the species has developed three life histories: Some—called the resident or non-migratory form—spend their entire lives in tributaries; others—called fluvial bull trout—live as adults in rivers and enter tributaries to spawn; adfluvial bull trout live as adults in lakes, like Flathead and Swan Lakes in northwestern Montana, and spawn in tributaries.

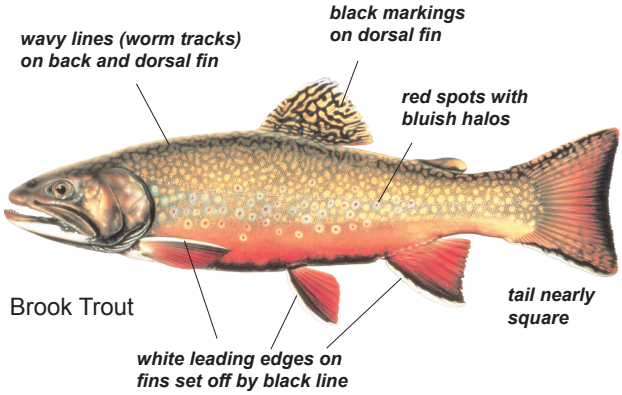
Like other char, bull trout spawn in the fall, about the time larch needles turn golden. Their eggs remain six inches deep in spawning gravels until spring, when they hatch and the fry emerge. Young bull trout then use the area among the stream-bottom rocks as habitat for several years before migrating downstream to larger streams and lakes. This life history means bull trout are highly sensitive to changes in stream-bottom habitats, and consequently, they are important indicators of stream health.

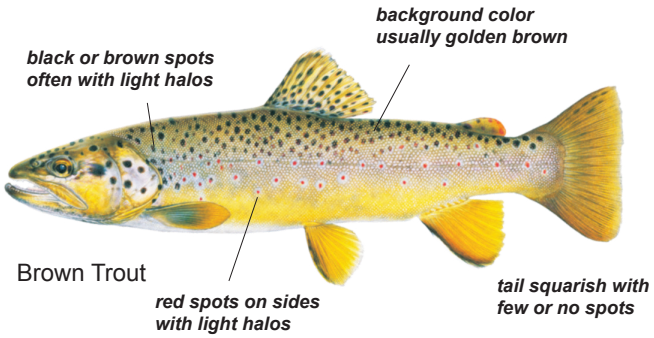
Once common throughout the inland Pacific Northwest, bull trout now live in reduced numbers in five western states and two Canadian provinces. Their numbers have been decimated by damage to stream habitats, competition from introduced species like brook trout and lake trout, and poaching. They are now listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act, and they are extinct in California. Montana is the bull trout's stronghold in the U.S., but even here, they are threatened and considered a "species of special concern". They face the possibility of extinction in most of the waters where they still live.

Montanans have made saving bull trout a priority and a measure of our ability to be good stewards of our rivers, streams, lakes, and riparian areas. You can help by knowing how to identify bull trout. They can be separated from lake trout, brook trout, and brown trout by a few characteristics, which are shown at right.





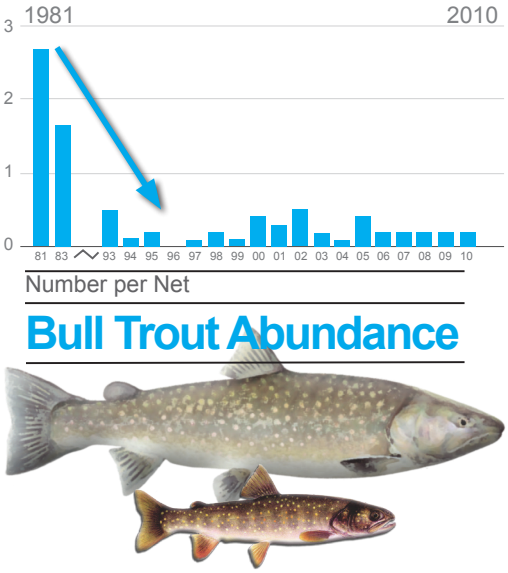


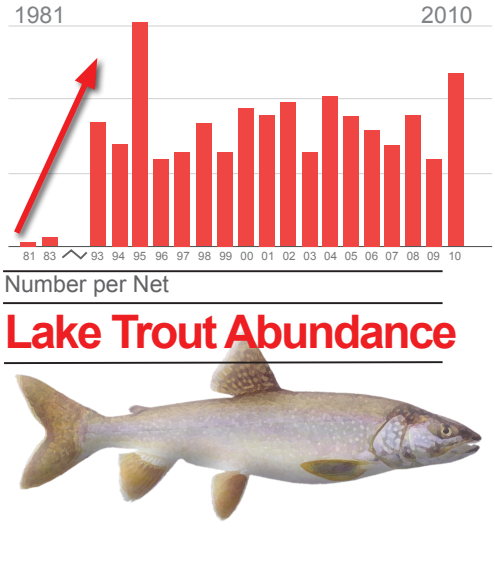


Management

Restoring Native Fish

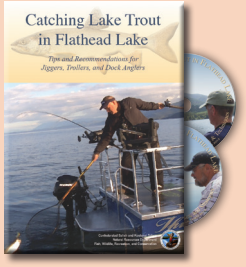
Bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout are Native Species of Special Concern (a Tribal and State designation). Bull trout are also listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Both species use Flathead Lake, the Flathead River, and its forks and tributaries for various portions of their life histories. For example, most bull trout grow to adulthood in Flathead Lake, migrate upstream through the main stem and two of the forks, enter a tributary to spawn, then return to the lake. Offspring rear in tributary habitats for several years then migrate downstream to the lake where they grow to adulthood before returning upstream to complete the cycle. Thus, all parts of the aquatic system are crucial to life stages of these native fish. Because of their migratory nature, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the fisheries management agencies for the system, manage the lake and river as a single entity.





Bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout populations have declined dramatically due to a variety of human activities, chief among them the introduction of non-native fish species. In Flathead Lake, the most significant of those introduced species is lake trout. Research indicates that the increase in the lake trout population is the main reason the numbers of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout have declined so precipitously. Because the large number of lake trout have put our native trout at risk, there is a need to reduce that risk through management actions or strategies set forth in the Flathead Lake and River Fisheries Co-Management Plan. The actions are designed to: (1) increase populations of native fish, (2) decrease numbers of lake trout, (3) maintain clean water, (4) improve angler-access, and (5) sustain 40,000 angler days in the river and 50,000 angler days in the lake. By restoring a greater balance to the Flathead Lake fishery, the long-term viability of native, migratory fish will be improved.

You can help us achieve that goal by participating in Mack Days and other opportunities to catch lake trout in Flathead Lake; by following clean-boating practices; by ensuring that your boat, trailer, and equipment are free of aquatic invasives; and by doing all you can to protect the lake's water quality and natural beauty.



This handbook is a companion to the Tribes' jigging movies available at mackdays.com or on a DVD from the Tribes' Division of Fish, Wildlife, Recreation, and Conservation. Contact Cindy Benson at (406) 675-2700 ext.7294 or cindyb@cskt.org.

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