

Gamefishes of Alaska

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King Salmon

Alaska's largest and most prized salmon, common in coastal waters and streams, Ketchikan to western Alaska (including Alaska Peninsula). Average size around 15 lbs; to 50 or more in some areas. Full bodied, with purple-blue to black to green back, silver sides and silver-white belly. Large black, irregular markings across back and entire tail fin. Black gumline in lower jaw. Breeding fish imbued with dusky red to copper shading. Flesh is white to pink to red-orange.

Run Timing: Immature king salmon available year-round in nearshore marine waters; mature prespawners from late April-July (May-August in rivers, with peak June-July).

Best Areas: Large river systems and coastal waters rich in feed or near migration routes, SW-SE.

Best Flies: Alaskabou, Popsicle, Flash Fly, Hareball Leech, Bunny Fly, Wiggletail, King Caviar, Herring Fly.



Sockeye Salmon

Red salmon- Also known as sockeye, an abundant, medium sized salmon found in southern coastal river systems, SE-SW. Average size 4-6 lbs.; to 10 lbs. or more in some areas. Body sleek, with steel blue green or gray topsides, silver sides and whitish belly, No prominent markings. Sea bright fish easily mistaken for chum salmon. Flesh bright red. Breeding fish striking, with bright red sides and greenish black heads.

Aloof biters, sockeye salmon are taken with sparse bucktail, yarn or hackle flies; rarely anything else. Can be taken in saltwater by trolling spoons & hootchies.

Run Timing: Late May-September for stream fishing, peak June-July most of Alaska.

Best Areas: Major lake and river systems, SW-SE (including Kodiak).

Best Flies: Russian River, Comet, Supervisor, Yarn Fly, Sockeye Orange, Brassie



Chum Salmon

Chum salmon- A medium to large salmon, widespread and common, SE coast to Arctic. Average size in Alaska, 6-10 lbs.; to 25 lbs. or more in certain areas. Metallic blue or greenish back, silvery sides and silver white belly. Markings absent. May be mistaken for sockeye salmon when fresh from sea. Spawning individuals darken to olive or yellowish white sides with distinct vertical bands of purple, black and white; males develop hooked jaws and prominent teeth. Flesh orange.

Run Timing: June-September for stream fishing, peak July & August.

Best Areas: Larger coastal streams and adjacent saltwater, SSE-SW.

Best Flies: Flash Fly, Clouser Minnow, Alaskabou, Coho Fly, Wiggletail, Everglow, Comet



Silver Salmon

Silver salmon- An abundant, widespread (SE to NW) medium-sized salmon, prized for its aggressiveness and hard fighting abilities. Average size 6-8 lbs.; to 15 lbs. or more. Similar in appearance to king salmon, only smaller, with blue, green or gray back, silver sides and white belly. Irregular black markings across back and upper tail fin; no dark gumline on lower jaw. Breeding fish duskier, with greenish shading on backs, maroon on sides, head dark. Flesh is orange-red.

Run Timing: Available in near shore salt waters June-August, then in streams late July-October (or later), peak August-September

Best Areas: Coastal streams and adjacent saltwater, north Gulf, Southwest Alaska, Kodiak Island, Kenai Peninsula and Southeast.

Best Flies: Egg Sucking Leech, Coho Fly, Alaskabou, Woolly Bugger, Flash Fly, Bunny Fly.



Pink Salmon

A small, very abundant, widespread salmon, SE to Arctic coast. Average 2-4 lbs.; to 8 lbs. or more. Blue to bluish green topsides, silver sides, and whitish belly. Large, oval shaped black markings on back and entire tail fin. Spawning individuals turn dirty brown with slight vertical markings and develop ridge backs (hence the name humpy salmon). Flesh is pink.

Run Timing: Available along coasts, June-October; in streams late June-September, peak July-August,
Best Areas: Coastal streams and adjacent saltwater, SE-SW.
Best Flies: Flash Fly, Egg Sucking Leech, Everglow, Coho Fly, Comet, Alaskabou, Krystal Bullet



Rainbow/Steelhead Trout

Esteemed, hard fighting, small to medium-sized Alaska gamefish, to 10 lbs. or more, found in streams along southern coast, Ketchikan area to Kuskokwim Bay (including parts of Alaska Peninsula). Steelhead, sea-run form, more robust, to 15 lbs. or more, but less common. Rainbows usually olive green to gray back, silver sides, whitish belly, with trademark rosy red, scarlet or pink horizontal stripe and similar shading on gill plates. Black spots or small hatch marks prominent on back and sides. Sea-run and lake resident forms more silvery with less noticeable stripe. Flesh is white to pink.

Availability: Year-round, best in spring and late summer-fall
Best Areas: Large productive lake and river systems, SE-SW.
Best Flies: Polar Shrimp, Smolt, Muddler, Glo Bug, Adams, Egg Sucking Leech, Flesh Fly, Mickey Finn, Woolly Bugger, Mouse, Hare's Ear Nymph, Green Butt Skunk.



Cutthroat Trout

Small (8-12 inch average), colorful trout native to coastal streams, ponds and bogs of southern coast, Ketchikan area to Prince William Sound. Also sea run form. Sides bronze to silver, back olive green to blue; belly pale white, with red slash marks under lower jaw. Heavily spotted. Flesh white to pinkish white.

Availability: Year-round, best in spring and late summer-fall
Best Areas: Coastal streams, lakes, ponds & estuaries,

Best Flies: Smolt, Polar Shrimp, Egg Sucking Leech, Woolly Bugger, Adams, Black Gnat, Mosquito, Muddler, Hare's Ear Nymph



Dolly Varden/Arctic Charr

Widespread and abundant sport species complex, found across entire state in rivers, lakes and coastal waters. Average size 1-2 pounds; up to 15 lbs. or more. Back gray, brown or bluish gray, sides, gray to greenish gray or silver, with creamy white belly. Marked with pink, red or yellowish oval spots over back and sides, with prominent white edged, carmine or yellowish belly fins. Breeding fish have pronounced colors and red-orange shading on lower sides. Flesh white to pink to pale orange-red.

Availability: Year-round; best in spring and late summer-fall

Best Areas: Large lake and river systems, SE-SW; also large rivers of NW and ARC.
Best Flies: Egg Sucking Leech, Polar Shrimp, Smolt, Muddler, Woolly Bugger, Copper & Orange, Bead Egg, Fry, Battle Creek.



Lake Trout

A common landlocked charr of alpine lakes in mainland Alaska. Average 3-5 pounds; up to 30 lbs. or more. Troutlike form with large mouth, silver gray to brown topsides, creamy white belly and numerous gold, yellow or white oval spots and vermiculations. Fins milky, yellow or orange with white edges. Flesh is white to yellow-orange.

Availability: Year-round; best in spring and fall
Best Areas: Headwater lakes, Bristol and Kuskokwim bays (SW), Alaska Range (SC) and northern Alaska Peninsula (SW); upland lakes in Interior and Brooks Range (NW).
Best Flies: White Ghost, Smolt, Woolly Bugger, Muddler, Black Ghost, Minnow, Supervisor, Deceiver



Arctic Grayling

A small, whitefish-like game fish common in upland streams and lakes across Alaska mainland. Average 8-14 inches long; to 18 inches or more and 3 pounds. Varied coloration, with silver gray to purplish blue or black topsides and whitish belly. Has huge dorsal fin. Markings sparse, with black or purple spots on sides, red and pink on top fin. Mouth is small and delicate. Flesh is white.

Availability: Year-round; best spring-fall.
Best Areas: SW, NW and Interior rivers.

Best Flies: Black Gnat, Adams, Mosquito, Woolly Worm, Glo Bug, Polar Shrimp, Leech, Hare's Ear, Krystal Bullet, Egg Sucking Leech, Brassie



Northern Pike

A widespread, voracious, predatory gamefish of mainland Alaska's rivers/lakes. Average 4-7 lbs.; to 30 lbs. or more. Elongated body with duckbill snout, large mouth, prominent teeth and yellow eyes. Topsides green to greenish gray to brown, with rows of irregular, oval yellow-white markings. Belly creamy white or yellowish white. Fins usually greenish or yellow orange with dark mottling. Flesh is white.

Availability: Year-round; best spring-fall.

Best Areas: Large mainstem river habitat, SW and INT.

Best Flies: Pike Fly, D's Minnow, Deceiver, Rabbit Lemming, Dahlberg Diver, Flash Fly, Articulated Leech



Sheefish

Large, predatory whitefish, found in rivers and estuaries of western and interior Alaska. Migratory, seasonally abundant in certain areas. Usually 4-8 pounds, but up to 25 lbs. or more in NW Alaska. Long, slender body with light brown to metallic green or blue topsides, silver grey sides and silver white belly. Fins dusky or clear; has no body markings. Flesh is white.

Availability: Year-round; best spring and fall

Best Areas: Large Rivers, NW & Interior.

Best Flies: D's Minnow, Deceiver, Supervisor, Smolt, White Ghost, Gray Ghost, Alaska Mary Ann, Herring



Halibut

A prized eating, large, elongated flatfish of Alaska's coastal waters, SE to NW. Bottom dweller, found at various depths throughout year. Average weight 15 lbs.; to 100 or more. Topside dark gray or dirty brown, with irregular cream or white blotches; bottom white or yellowish white. Flesh white.

Availability: Year-round; best late spring-fall

Best Areas: Productive coastal waters, SE to Alaska Peninsula.

Best Flies: Herring, Squid, Baitfish, Halibut Flesh Fly, Seaducer, Deceiver



Lingcod

Fearsome, predatory bottom dweller (found over structure-rock piles, reefs, seamounts, etc.) of Alaska's southern coastal waters, SE to Alaska Peninsula (SW). Average size 10-30 lbs.; to 5 feet long and 100 lbs. Body elongate with large head and mouth, prominent teeth and long dorsal fin. Color varied, mottled bluish-green to black or brown, lighter towards belly. Flesh usually white (can be greenish to bluish white).

Availability: Year-round (check ADF&G regs for seasons); best summer-fall

Best Areas: Outer waters-North Gulf coast, Kodiak Island and SE.

Best Flies: Herring, Seaducer, Baitfish, Whistler, Squid,



Rockfish

Widespread and common, small to medium-sized, long lived game fishes (30 species) found along rocky shorelines, kelp beds and reefs throughout southern coast, SE-SW. 2-5 lbs. average; certain species to 30 lbs. or more. Perch-like or bass-like in form, with prominent scales, large mouth and spiny dorsal fins. Color and markings vary with species, may be dark brown to blue or red, with mottling or stripes. Flesh is white.

Availability: Year-round; best late spring-fall.

Best Areas: North Gulf coast (SC) and SE.

Best Flies: Deep Six, Squid, Shrimp, Seaducer, Candlefish, Calamari, Sandlance



Salmon Shark

Large, pelagic shark seasonally common (found around returning schools of salmon in summer-fall) along SE-SW coast. Average size 6-8 feet, 250-400 lbs.; to 10 feet and 700 lbs. or more. Streamlined but robust body with prominent dorsal and tail fins, conical snout and dagger-like teeth. Color bluish gray on topsides, gray or white on bottom with grayish blotches. Flesh grayish to pinkish white. Potentially dangerous; should not be pursued casually or incidentally.

Availability: Summer-fall

Best Areas: Prince William Sound and parts of SE.

Best Flies: Large baitfish/attractor streamers (8-12")