

## Fish of the Week: Stocked Coho Salmon January 25, 2021

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Hey to all you fish enthusiasts out there. Whether you're an avid angler or just curious about fish, we'd like to welcome you to Fish of the Week! I'm Katrina Liebich with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska.

And I'm Guy Eroh, I just really like fish and fishing

It's Monday, January 25th, 2021, and we're excited to talk about ALL THE FISH. This week's fish of the week is the Coho Salmon.

We're not talking about just the typical Coho Salmon that you normally think about that come in towards the end of the summers and people fish in the rivers, right?

No today we're talking about stocked Coho Salmon in Anchorage. They're going to be smaller fish, the actually look more like a smolt. They're small. But the reason they're stocked in town is that Anchorage is the most populated area in Alaska and there's a lot of folks that want to do some local fishing during the winter including kids.

So today we're going to focus on stocked Coho and hopefully give you some ideas on how to do a very close to home trip. If you have kids this is a great, kinda easy way to keep busy during the winter. So that's what we're talking about today. It's a put-and-take fishery here in town. They [Alaska Department of Fish and Game] put a lot of fish in the lakes just given the population here. It's quite fun. You can catch a number of fish if you just go out for a few hours. There's a number of lakes in town. Some of the more popular ones are Jewel Lake, Cheney Lake, Delong Lake. Those are really good places to start. You can actually go on [Alaska Department of] Fish and Game's website and see the last time that they've been stocked. You can search by species. So if you were going to try and target Coho Salmon so you can search by that. And it says some of the lakes were stocked. Some of them were stocked in 2019. Some of them were stocked last year in February. I think usually before there's a large kids fishing event that's held in February usually before that...just even a few days before that [this year it's not happening due to COVID] they'll stock the lake in preparation for that because of the amount of kids that come out to those events. But yeah you can get a pretty good idea about which lakes have been stocked, size of fish you know 4" fish vs 10" fish and decide where you want to go based on that information that you find online.

So they will stock through the ice then. Are they stocking by the shore or through holes?

I've seen it. They've got a big stocking vehicle and they have a big kinda tube that they put down in the hole and basically transfer the fish from the stocking truck down through that tube into the lake. So it's a pretty neat thing to see.

We're talking cohos today but are they stocking multiple different species? How do you know what you might catch and what you should be keeping and how do you know if it's a coho or not?

That's a great question. They are stocking more than just cohos. Also stocking species like chinook, rainbow trout, char. So when you go out to a lake with your kids you definitely want to check – basically each lake says what's been stocked in there. And you want to be familiar with fish ID. You want to be able to tell which one you've caught so you can follow the regulations and keep the correct amount for

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your limit. And I was going to ask you—I mean you helped work on that fish ID tool. What's some advice you might have for folks that are going out with kids, maybe not super familiar with salmonids. Just some quick tips on identification, things for them to think about.

So with Cohos especially when they're this small. Adults you can of course—they're called "skunk jaws" colloquially sometimes because they have black gums with a white ridge along it. But when they're younger you might not be able to see that. Some people look at the parr marks try to say "ok the Cohos tend to have closer together thinner parr marks" but that generally isn't a good way to do it. When Scott Glassmeyer and I were working on this fish ID tool and trying to identify salmon in Alaska what we found was one of the more reliable characteristics...and this is telling between Chinook and Coho because those are the two that really look very similar to one another—is you want to look at the adipose fin. That's the fleshy fin near the tail of the tail of the fish. And if you look really closely at it, and you might want to get even a magnifying glass—you can see that there's pigmentation all throughout the Coho's adipose fin. Whereas on Chinook they'll have an area in the middle of the adipose fin that's kind of clear. Not see-through but you can tell that there's none of those pigment cells on there.

That's super useful. And then it's kind of process of elimination. If you find something with light spots on dark skin, that's going to be a char. You can start to learn those basic features. You can be like "ok I have a char" or "ok I have a salmon or a trout" you can look at the spots. Some of the Rainbow Trout will be a little bit more colored up with those rosy sides. I would definitely recommend brushing up on your fish ID so you're not fumbling around trying to find information on your phone when it's cold out and you're trying to figure out what you can keep or not.

Now Katrina I'm curious. So you've taken many kids out fishing on the ice and on the open water. And I'm curious what can you do to maintain interest? Is there something you can do to make sure your kids are having a good time beyond the fishing aspect just to make sure this is a good experience for them?

I've found that snacks are key. You're gonna want to maybe bring some hot chocolate, maybe a candy bar. That's something that our kids really look forward to We've got a 3 and 7 year old. So I mean obviously you want to dress your kids warm and prepare them to go outside. One thing with ice fishing, you're always going to want to keep the hole scooped of ice so when you have your scooper that's a really great job for a kid to have because you're going to have to be constantly scooping that, keeping them active. And it's good to scoop it anyways because you don't want your line to start getting stuck to the side of the hole or get ice chunked up on it. So I find that works well. Fishing with a bobber is really fun for kids. They can kind of watch the bobber, see when it's moving. You can actually put your head down towards the hole and kind of look through the hole with your hands on either side and you can sometimes see the fish swimming around. So that's a really neat thing to show kids. A lot of times you'll see them laying belly-down on the ice looking down through the hole. Looking for the fish. Then with kids it's just really making it fun.

You want to catch fish when you have a kid. You don't want it to be, you know, super difficult fishing where you're waiting and waiting. It is a really good place in town in terms of these stocked lakes to get kids hooked on fishing and then they can start exploring some of those more um unique Alaska opportunities that we can find throughout the state.

Are you usually...I know this from experience going out ice fishing when I was a kid. I had like 2% body fat and got cold all the time. Do you recommend people fishing out in the open air or having any kind of structure/wind breaks. What would you recommend for that.

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It all comes down to how much you want to invest. At a most basic level you can sit on a bucket. I've done that where you sit on a bucket out in the cold. If there's any wind that can get old pretty quickly. There are a number of different ice shacks you can buy. You can buy a pop-up kind of canvas ice shack. That's a really nice easy thing to set up. In there you can have a small space heater. That breaks the wind. So that's actually a really nice way to get kids started. I've found it's really all about keeping them comfortable. Cause once you get uncomfortable, once you get cold, they're just going to be kind of done with fishing so you can prevent that from happening, you know, through a warm drink or hand warmers or a wind break like that. That's always a good idea for sure.

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Hey everyone. One thing that we always want you to keep in mind regardless of what you're fishing for. Every week we're going to give you a tip or two that you can use to stay safe while you're out on the water. We've talked in this segment before about ice thickness and the dangers of falling through the ice. Today's tip is a rule of thumb that can be used to determine if ice is safe enough to traverse. Four inches of ice is often considered the minimum thickness to be able to support a person on foot. Ice 5-7 inches thick can support a snow machine. To get a small car out there you'll want between 8 inches and a foot and for a truck you'll want at least 12". Make sure to check the thickness in different places because ice is not always uniform even on a given body of water.

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No we've kind of gotten talking about ice fishing and ice fishing kids, but to get back to the fish of the week which is the Coho Salmon, the landlocked variety, the stocked variety, when you're fishing for these through the ice how do you want to approach it? What kind of...maybe you want to use baits rather than artificials. What might you want to use and where are you going to put that in the water column?

Yeah so for Coho—and it's going to be similar for Chinook too, a lot of the lakes are going to have both—I've used anything from cured salmon roe (salmon eggs), they're really brightly frozen, popcorn shrimp that's been frozen. I think that's what they use for those big fishing events. It's visible. It's kind of smelly. I've also tried tube jigs. Any of those things work. What I'd recommend is drill a number of different holes. You're going to drill some close to shore, maybe a little bit deeper. Test out some different depths. You'll quickly figure out where the fish are orienting in the water column. The fun thing about sticking your head down towards the ice is you can actually see them. Another thing you can do to figure out depth is you have a little weight, drop that down, figure out how deep it is and then you're going to be able to set your bobber at different depths by sliding it up and down on your line. Again with fishing it's all about experimentation. If one thing's working better than another you can really start to key in on that and just try different things based on the conditions that you have at whatever lake you're at.

[music and cooking sounds]

So over the course of this episode we've really been focusing on kids and getting them involved with fishing, the whole fish culture. Not fish "culture" but fish culture. And so I'm curious are there any recipes that are pretty simple that even a child could take on at the cooking stage?

How I like to prepare them is I like to take them home. You're going to wash off that outer slime later. Cut the head off and make a cut from the bottom of the neck and down and you'll take out the guts.

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Kids usually seem to be interested in the whole gutting procedure and seeing what's in there. You can actually see what they've been eating. So when you gut a fish even a small fish you can actually see if it's got someone else's cured eggs in there or someone's popcorn shrimp or whatever. And again, kind of like with the blackfish, I like to bake them. So you can put a little oil in a pan. Put a little seasoning in there and when they're done cooking you'll be able to tell if they're done if they're flaking. The flesh becomes kind of white and flaky and you can kind of pull that backbone out with the ribs attached. That's how I like to do it. We run a summer fishing program with kids here in town and that's how we cook them. We cook them right on site with a little propane camp stove.

So you could potentially take a little camping stove out on the ice with you and have the whole process of catching, cleaning, and cooking the fish out on the ice if you wanted to.

Oh yeah. For sure. I think that would be a pretty neat experience to do that whole lake to plate process.

Well that sounds like a great activity for the whole family to participate in, especially when you're trying to come up with new things when you're not allowed to go and see your friends and family.

Sure is!

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Ok so that's your Fish of the Week! Today we talked about Coho Salmon—fishing stocked Coho Salmon in Anchorage Lakes. We'd love it if you would get out there and enjoy all the fish.

Am I supposed to sign off with anything?

[Laughs] No pressure.

Bye everyone see you next week. You're putting me on the spot!

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My name is Katrina Liebich, and my co-host is Guy Eroh.

This show is produced by David Hoffman of Citizen Racecar, assisted by Garrett Teidemann and Kelsey Kohrs.

Fish of the Week is a production of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Region, Office of External Affairs.

As the Service reflects on 150 years of fisheries conservation, we honor, thank, and celebrate the whole community – individuals, Tribes, the State of Alaska, sister agencies, fish enthusiasts, scientists, and others – who have elevated our understanding and love, as people and professionals, of all the fish.