

TOP FISHING SECRETS

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Salmon Producing Tides

The height difference of each tide will tell you the forward progress of migrating salmon

Timothy Kuserets

There will never come a time I fish water I haven't first investigated. Fishermen that know me know that when I'm fishing there's bound to be fish close by and they'll drop everything to fish the same area. It's a good bet they'll hook into fish on the basis I have done the necessary homework to ascertain the arrival of salmon no matter where the fish are in the salt; and the tides are everything and knowing how to forecast salmon producing tides will get you into more fish than ever before. The first step is to recon. Recon hatcheries in the area you intend to fish. Holding ponds in the hatchery will tell you everything you need to know. Small schools of bright fish indicate that the season has begun while an abundance of dark fish illustrates a transition of seasons and species. As Chinook and Sockeye finish their spawning cycles Pinks and Coho begin their inland migration before the run of Chum, which usually ends the fall run of salmon. Tides, currents, and seasons are the timepieces salmon use but it is the tide-table that allows fishermen to foretell the arrival of them. Forecasting runs is something that can be done anywhere on earth that has salmon. Tides carry salmon as they migrate and force them to hold in areas that provide cover from torrential currents of the High-high and Low-low tides (Extreme forms Flood and Ebb tides) twelve-feet or more. Geography above and below the surfaces dictate holding areas; eddies, seams, and drop-offs, are the places to look for salmon and the best way to do that is to consult nautical charts that have both soundings and geographical marks. Amongst many novice fishermen tide-tables seem to be the most enigmatic formula for predicting tides but it's not that difficult to understand. The meat of reading a tide-table is to understand that, no matter what, every single day there are two Flood and two Ebb tides with slow moving transitional water called Slack Tide, which happens 4 times a day. The height difference of each tide will tell you the forward progress of migrating salmon as it gets close to each season based on the intensity of each tide. The biggest tides provide the best travel time for maturing salmon and those are the tides you want to watch for at the beginning of the season. Below is an animated tide-table, which uses the colors green and red, think of them as stop and go signs. The green represents good times to fish during the early season and red means the tides don't differ enough in height to make fishing worthwhile during the same time; that of course changes as each season transitions from one species to the next.

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		HIGH TIDE				LOWTIDE			
Day	Date	AM		PM		AM		PM	
		Time	Feet	Time	Feet	Time	Feet	Time	Feet
Thurs	1	12:15	7.7	11:22	10.2	5:48	2.7	5:11	5.4
Fri	2	1:53	8.2	11:59	10.0	6:41	1.9	6:17	6.6
Sat	3	3:17	9.0	7:34	1.0	7:32	7.3
Sun	4	0:40	9.9	4:18	9.8	8:23	0.2	8:45	7.7
Mon	5	1:25	9.9	5:03	10.5	9:09	-0.7	9:46	7.8
Tues	6	2:15	10.0	5:40	11.1	9:54	-1.4	10:36	7.6
Wed	7	3:06	10.2	6:13	11.6	10:36	-2.0	11:20	7.1
Thurs	8	3:58	10.4	6:44	12.0	11:19	-2.4
Fri	9	4:52	10.6	7:14	12.2	0:03	6.5	12:01	-2.4
Sat	10	5:49	10.5	7:46	12.4	0:46	5.6	12:43	-1.9

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Differences in tides that are greater than 8 feet will provide the best fishing conditions during salmon seasons. Most tides will be no longer than 7 hours from one tide to the next and that is important to note. On the animated tide-table, look at the date of the 6th and then at the fields in green to the right of it. At 2:15am there is a high tide of 10 feet and a low tide at 9:54am of -1.4 feet. The distance between the tides is 11.4 feet, which in terms of volume is a lot. It is a perfect mode of transportation for salmon migrating back to natal systems and believe me salmon will always utilize the big tides for that single purpose. If fish aren't riding the big currents then they're at play with the smaller ones and by that I mean tides that have little water movement. Slack tides are transitional periods where tides reverse directions between flood and ebb tides causing zero currents for a short period of time. It is during the transition stage that schools of salmon disperse temporarily making them very hard to find let alone fish. Stronger currents typically create holding areas where surface disturbances allow fishermen to read water enabling them to fish seams, eddies, and drop-offs; however, when a tide that has slack current those holding areas become very hard to see; no water movement means no visible signs to see. Fish don't need to hold during slow slack tides so they don't; for salmon it is a time of the day you could easily call recess or playtime. A good example of slack tide can be seen on Friday the 9th at Midnight where the low tide is 6.5 feet with the flood tide at nearly five in the morning at 10.6 feet. The current will move 4.1 feet of water with the current almost non-existent. The fishing would be terrible at that time. Imagine; it would be like fishing water with a slack tide lasting almost seven hours long. Ironically, fishing the slack tides get easier as the fishing season moves along.

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This Pink and Coho were anticipated on the basis of holding patterns exhibited by tidal influences. The Pink was caught during high volume water while the Coho was hooked into while the tide currents moved very little; however, both were caught in the same area of water, albeit, different times and tides of the day. I can do this anywhere there are more than one species of fish in the water, and you can too by applying these tried and true fishing techniques.

Slack tides become very important as fish hold in estuaries. Salmon that hold in the estuarine environment are put off the bite as they mature and acclimate to freshwater but that doesn't mean they won't strike or travel upriver the moment they get close to the mouth.

Salmon that hold during slack tides will stay as close to the surface as they can because the richest levels of oxygen are found in the upper strata, which is contingent upon fishing pressure not being exerted by fishermen and fluctuating barometric pressure. Later in the season species and tidal transitions take place making slack tides a great time to fish.

Transitional seasons, from one species to the next, become essential to note as slack tides strongly influence holding fish while another species begins its spawning cycle in the same system. As one run of fish begins to end then another filters in with a bright school of new fish, usually another species entirely. Timing to meet those overlapping schools of fish can keep into the fish the entire day.

As Chinook are fished during slow moving tides, at the end of their oceanic migration Coho can be caught as they head inland to replace the remaining Chinook when the tides run high and strong. During this time fishing all phases of tides can be productive using varying fishing techniques.

When the Chinook are meandering around the estuary with slow moving current spinners, buzz bombs, and zingers are excellent lures to use since they've stopped feeding. As Coho head on in try using herring cut-plugs, smelt fillets, and candlefish; bait is best while they still feed, but the offerings should be smaller than what would be used for the larger Kings.

This system of fishing can be used over and over again with each species of fish. It works

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every year for every location. On top of all this good information you can actually extend a regular fishing season by heading in the opposite direction of migrating salmon.

High-high, High-low, Low-high, Low-low, and Slack Tides can all be anticipated with the arrival of new runs of fish. Study the tide book and nautical charts to figure out where shoals of fish will hold. It's entirely possible to predict where fish will be before they get to specific holds allowing anglers to find the best offerings to use and the best times to fish. Predicting Tides like this works anywhere in the world.



Last year I went fishing with a friend of mine and the boat we were in was primarily used for fishing in an estuary where the current was less intense but on that occasion we went out into the bay far from land. I was trying to show my fishing buddy that fish could be caught further out from where he loved to fish; moreover, I wanted to show him that by fishing further out he could fish water that had an earlier season affording him a crack at hooking into fish that were brighter and larger than he was ordinarily accustomed. Because the boat was small it took some time to find the fish but we did and that is the whole point. Seemingly, out in the middle of nowhere he couldn't believe the horde of fish we found out in the middle of what he construed to be an oceanic desert. He just couldn't believe that he had been missing out on all those quality fish all the years and he lived less than ten miles from where the fishing was prime for that time of the year. I showed him that by heading in the opposite direction of migrating salmon he could fish as much as a month earlier allowing him to take a crack at fish that only commercial fishermen had been harvesting. By the end of the season his arms were tired and his rear end sore but the fishing was something he will remember for a lifetime.

It's hard to convince many fishermen that fish are in the water when they don't see them jumping so trust in the tide-table and the technology used to create them and you'll hit into more fish than you ever thought possible. Remember the steps to take when scouting out Salmon Producing Tides: Recon local hatcheries, check the regulation handbook for species, watch the incoming and outgoing tides and fish the big water, and make sure to only fish slack tides when runs of fish overlap each other. If you want to extend your fishing season check the regulations and see if your area allows for fishing multiple areas at the same time; they're not all the same so monitor the fishing regulations often.

All of these tide producing techniques work well. I've been using them for over twenty-years now and it's never failed me and it can work for you too now that you know about salmon producing tides.