

## TOP FISHING SECRETS

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### Turbid Water for Fish on the Bite

*Anything that puts fish on alert will take them off the bite*

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When we get cold, hungry, scared, and tired we do things to make ourselves more comfortable. We modify each stressful situation to better suit our needs; it's the same for fish. Anything that puts them on alert will take them off the bite, and that is true for any species of fish anywhere but in particular Steelhead and Salmon.

One of the best times to go fishing is something most fishermen will avoid. Turbid water diminishes the clarity of rivers, streams, and estuaries. It is a time when fish will gravitate nearer the surface and that is the time to fish for them. When they are unable to see a potential predator they go on the bite and have no qualms about putting their backs out of the water. It is the veritable ostrich theory; if they hide their heads then the rest of the body can't be seen. See the flaw in the theory? But for fish, the reasoning works. Fishermen don't want to fish in water with limited visibility and fish gravitate towards the surface, so as far as they're concerned, they're right. Any offering picked up during these conditions should be done with scent, and a lot of it; fish will strike harder than usual since they're on the bite. It is the lack of pressure that puts them on the bite. As many anglers know, the darker the water is the more likely that rain and wind will accompany the near zero visibility of any given body of water. It is the weather fishermen attempt to avoid and in doing so pass over grand opportunities to get fish on the hook. The opposite is true when the water and weather recede.

*Though the river had begun to recede in this photograph, you can see that the turbidity of the river was enough that visibility was still nearly zero. These two fish on the stringer show that even with no range of sight fish could still be caught using nothing more than a good scent and a sharp hook. Oddly enough, no other anglers were seen on the river this day even though fish were everywhere.*



As river and estuaries clear up out comes the angler to find fish initially on the bite. It is a transitory condition that keeps fish on the bite, fishermen fishing, and neither experiencing pressure...for a short period of time anyway. As turbidity subsides and visibility increases fish will abruptly go off the bite leaving fishermen to scratch their heads. All any fisherman has to do is ask himself a simple question. "What has changed since the last fish bit?" In many cases, fishermen start at the crack of dawn and as the daylight progressively gets brighter fish go off the bite. Fish can see fishermen and that is the vital component of pressure they feel. To alleviate this form of pressure it is to the fisherman to get down low, whether in a boat or on the bank. Getting close to the surface of the water will diminish the shadow profile we portray for fish to see. They don't care whether they perceive anglers to be birds or bears, they only know that it is a potential predator and that is enough to make them stop biting. Fishing a river last year, I had the opportunity to prove this point to a small group of anglers. The color of the river was light green, and with our polarized glasses we were able to see scores of Chinook, Coho, and Steelhead. None of us were hooking

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into fish so I sat down right there at the rivers edge. The others looked at me as though I had lost my mind. Given that all of us (about 6 or 7 guys) were reasonably far from each other sitting down got me closer to the surface, which made any refractive image I was casting, disappear (refraction works just as well beneath the surface as it does from above). The very first cast I made on my derriere got me a nice steelhead. Clumsily I got up to fight the fish, but the most significant thing for me was the intensity of the strike. The hen I hooked into hit the corkie (lil' corky) as hard as if the visibility of the water was zero. The other fishermen came running over to see what I had been using. We compared drift-fishing setups and found that my setup was not that dissimilar to the others. After landing the beauty and releasing her I went back and sat down. I got another fish on the very next cast. Soon all the other fishermen were on their knees or butts fishing, and that's when the bite went on for everyone. We caught and released many fish from that time until dark. It was a blast. I suppose there are two things that fishermen should do to get fish on when fish go off the bite: be willing to be flexible and entertain ideas that do produce fish even if the premise seems off the cuff; entertain the idea of what the environment is like for fish and work from there. It is surprising to me to find that anglers will not risk embarrassment to get fish on, but if sitting on your hind end is a risk then it's a small price to pay to get them to bite.

*This great looking eighteen-pound Coho was taken on a Daredevil and a "straight" four-pound test line in water that had zero visibility. The water had been rising and threatened to blowout, but I decided to stay and fish until the fishing conditions threatened flood-stage. I was able to hook into this fish just before the bite went off for the rest of the day by using heavy scent and fishing the holds with lures close to the bank, which is where all the fish gravitated to as the river began to flood.*



Taking pressure off fish is something that can be done routinely. The nature of fish is to survive and propagate and their genetic makeup allows them to automatically, instinctively, adapt to fishing conditions that anglers take for granted, and if you're going to catch fish you have to think like one. Ask yourself something the next time it gets cold. If getting cold makes you move slowly then what will it do to fish that are in an even colder environment? Lethargy is another form of pressure that puts fish off the bite. Do you see what I mean? Fishing pressure puts fish off the bite but understanding how fish experience pressure can put them back on the bite if you know how to counter it. If fishing during the most optimal times came down to a single moment, I would say, without a doubt, that fishing during times of turbidity ensures the best fishing opportunities. Don't be surprised if you find that you're the only fisherman on the river. It's always surprising to me to find that the best time to fish is the most ignored time of all. Turbid water for fish on the bite ensures anglers that they'll be able to enjoy the outdoors in solitude, land fish, and have stories to tell the grand children that are true but sound like tall tales.