

The Fish Sniffer

Scotts Flat Map Feature

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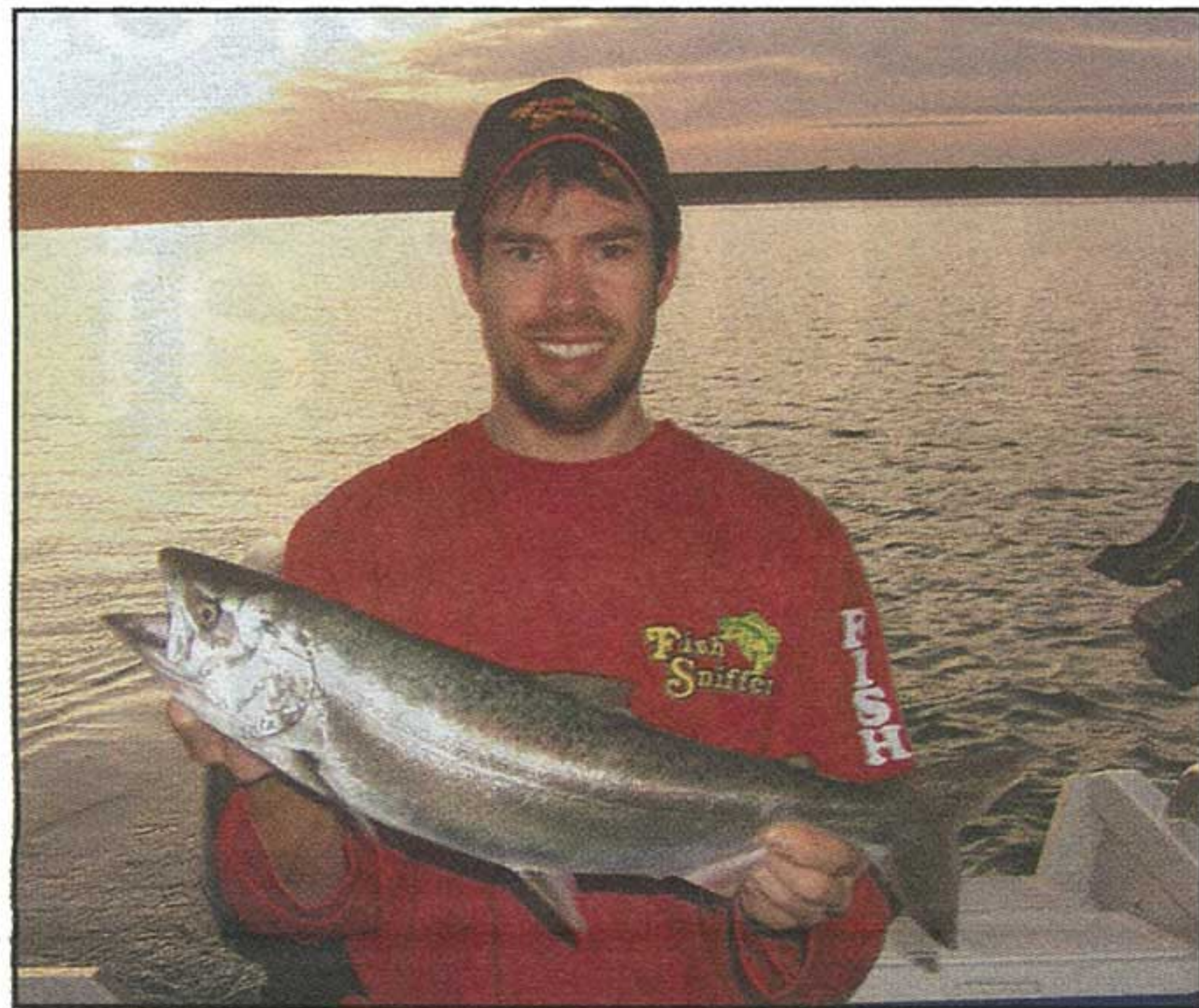


Our
30TH
Year

**"The No. 1 Newspaper In The West
Dedicated Entirely To Fishermen!"**

St. Valentine's Day Sweets, Sweethearts, And Salmon on Folsom Lake

This year on St. Valentine's Day I decided to be romantic and offered to take my wife Gina on a "sunset cruise" of Folsom Lake. The lake is near our home in Roseville, California, so she willingly



Fish Sniffer columnist Jack Naves shows off the big Folsom Lake king he landed while trolling on February 14.

Photo by JACK NAVES, Fish Sniffer Staff.

accepted the invitation. She even mentioned that it would be okay to "put out some rods" while we were on the water.

We had spent the morning together, had a nice lunch, and Gina baked some brownies that we could share on the water. The plan was to enjoy the afternoon on the water while we exchanged our St. Valentine's Day gifts and shared some sweets.

That afternoon, I quietly guided us out of the Granite Bay launching ramp under the power of my electric motor. It was an unusually mild winter day and so far everything was going to plan. The water looked like glass as we proceeded to peacefully cruise around the lake towards the dam. Folsom Lake can be challenging when it comes to catching fish, so I figured that even if we didn't catch anything it would be a nice way to share the evening with my wife.

I had barely put my top line rod into the holder when it immediately doubled over! I was running a 'cop car' pattern Needlefish out 150' behind the boat. I used no dodger and added a small split-shot above the leader. I quickly brought the fish to the boat and Gina netted what turned out to be a beautiful 10" native rainbow.

Although the Department of Fish and Game had recently planted

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**WHAT'S HOT?
FRESHWATER**
by Jack Naves

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What's Hot?..FRESH

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rainbow trout, this fish looked much different than typical hatchery raised fish. It had a silver coloration similar to a salmon, but it had small black spots along its back. At first I thought it might be a rare Folsom Lake kokanee, but upon further inspection the square tail and position of the eye led me to believe that it was probably a naturally spawned rainbow from one of the river arms that feeds Folsom Lake.

We quickly released the fish into the water and were back on track with the sunset cruise. Not two minutes later Gina's rod doubled over and she brought another rainbow to the boat. This fish looked like a classic 14" DFG planter, and we quickly released this fish as well.

The next fish we landed turned out to be a feisty 14" king salmon that hit a trolled hoochie at 25' deep. This fish hit line attached to my downrigger ball. After moving to Roseville a few years ago, I've spent a lot of time experimenting with different setups for targeting king salmon on Folsom Lake.

The first thing that I've learned is that they are attracted to the downrigger ball. I initially used long setbacks, but after seeing fish swimming along with the downrigger balls on my sonar unit, I quickly changed tactics and shortened by setbacks to about six feet.

The next thing I tried was using downrigger ball flashers, which are essentially long strings of flashers attached directly to the downrigger ball instead of the fishing line. I attach my fishing line clip on the wire about two feet above the string of flashers.

I set it so that when slowly lowered into the deep, my trolled lure dangles about two feet above and one foot back of the last downrigger ball flasher. The theory is that the hoochie looks like a small bait fish that has lost its way from the school of flashers and is easy picking for a hungry salmon.

After experimenting with several lure/dodger combinations, I've had the best luck with glow-in-the-dark hoochies behind 6" Sling Blade dodgers. I keep the leaders about 8" long and smear my dodgers with Pro-Cure herring gel. I

customize my dodgers by putting silver reflective tape on both sides of the dodger.

In addition to this, I cut some glow-in-the-dark tape into hoochie sized shapes and stick them onto the dodger on top of the silver tape creating a polka-dot effect. My goal here is similar to the downrigger ball flashers. I try to make my dodger look like a school of hoochies, making the hoochie at the end of the leader look like a wayward bait fish that has lost its way from the pack.

My wife thinks that I am crazy for spending so much time customizing and experimenting with fishing tackle. This was one of the reasons I needed to take her on a sunset cruise in the first place.

During my previous on the water experiments, I discovered that the fish in Folsom Lake seem to be attracted to herring and anchovy scents. The main forage for fish in Folsom Lake is the Japanese Pond Smelt. These skinny little fish are kind of a clear-silver color and run about 2" to 3" in length. Since the fish in Folsom seem to base their diets on these pond smelt, herring and anchovy scents seem to work over plankton based scents like krill.

In addition to scents, I tip the hooks with small strips of anchovies. To get the best results, fillet about five anchovies leaving the skin still on, and cut them into tiny 3/4" long by 1/4" wide strips. Put them into a zip-lock sandwich bag with some kosher or sea salt. Shake it up, and let it set overnight in the refrigerator. You will have some jerky-tough anchovy strips which can be frozen if you don't use them all in one outing.

Anyway, back to the sunset cruise! After several hours of cruising (trolling) around the lake, we had managed to exchange our gifts, enjoy some sweets, and pick up five salmon and three trout. Not bad for a romantic evening on the water. To top it off, right as the sun made its way over the dam I hooked a fat salmon that went 3.25 pounds.

The fish lost some scales when it got wrapped up during the fight, so I put it on ice right next to the champagne. Okay - there wasn't really a bottle of champagne, but it would have been funny if there had been (I hope my wife doesn't read this).

Okay, time for a quick review of the Folsom Lake trolling tactics. For starters,

the king salmon like hoochies trolled at speeds between 1.4 mph and 1.7 mph. In the winter time they seem to concentrate on underwater points in about 40' of water. I usually run my downriggers at about 30' deep for starters. Good sonar and mapping units are a must on this lake.

Huge underwater trees and structures seem to appear out of nowhere and are known to swallow up tackle and downrigger balls with a hearty appetite. You will probably spend about 1/4 of your time pulling up your downrigger balls and resetting them to avoid snagging on structures. I'm not joking - you will feel safe trolling in 100' of water when all of a sudden a 70' high tree will appear on your sonar unit out of nowhere!

For the less adventurous angler, trout seem to concentrate higher in the water column away from the underwater surprises. Top lining trolled Needlefish or F7 Rapalas at about 2-3 mph seems to be a good way to target these fish. Later in the summer both the trout and king salmon

will move much deeper in the water column.

What about kokanee, you ask? Well, despite the fact that the DFG plants them every year, we haven't seen any of them turn up on the end of a fishing line in years. They mysteriously disappear, and most people suspect they are either eaten by bass or have an issue with the current forage in the lake.

One thing you should keep in mind is that the king salmon plants at Folsom Lake ceased for several years due to a disease at the hatchery. It is now believed that many of the kings being caught at Folsom are the product of natural spawning that takes place in the rivers upstream from the lake.

Whether this is true or not, it's a good idea to practice catch and release when possible since this lake can't sustain heavy fishing pressure in this highly populated urban region. I hope you learned some new tactics - good luck and I'll see you on the water soon!



Jack Naves's go to trolling rig for Folsom Lake kings consists of a silver glow dodger teamed with a pearl hoochie tipped with small anchovy fillets.

Photo by JACK NAVES, Fish Sniffer Staff.

