

Techniques For More and Bigger Fish!



A Top of Spreader: Chain Swivel > Duo-lock Snap > 36" long 40 pound-test fluorocarbon leader > Duo-lock Snap > Spinner with Salted Anchovy Strip. Bottom of Spreader: Snap Swivel > 36" long 10 pound-test mono dropper leader > Snap Swivel > 4-ounce trolling sinker. Speed: 3.0 to 3.7 mph with the current.



A Top of Spreader: Chain Swivel > Duo-lock Snap > 36" long 20 pound-test mono leader > Duo-lock Snap > Kwikfish with Sardine Wrap. Bottom of Spreader: Snap Swivel > 36" long 10 pound-test mono dropper leader > Snap Swivel > 3-ounce trolling sinker. Speed: 2.1 to 2.6 mph with the current.



A Top of Spreader: Chain Swivel > Duo-lock Snap > 24" long 80 pound-test mono bumper leader > Pro-Troll ProChip 11 Fin Flasher > Chain Swivel > Duo-lock Snap > 24-inch long 40-pound test fluorocarbon leader > Cut Plug with Anchovy Fillet in Chamber. Bottom of Spreader: Snap Swivel > 36" long 17 pound-test mono dropper leader > Snap Swivel > 8-ounce trolling sinker. Speed: 3.0 to 3.7 mph with the current.

How to Troll for Salmon in the Sacramento Area

by Jack Naves

Salmon are by far the most popular seasonal fishing attraction in the Sacramento Metropolitan Area. Decent fishing will be available between August and November, with October being the peak of the fall-run. Casting off the bank, anchoring, or jigging can produce salmon, but trolling will give you the best chance of putting fish into your boat. In this article, we are going to cover the basics including speeds, tackle, and boat setup.

To begin with, you need a boat capable of trolling between 2 and 4 miles-per-hour. If your boat won't troll down that slow, a trolling plate will usually solve the problem. Ideally, a bow-mounted electric motor with autopilot can be used for steering purposes. You need a sonar unit to see snags and monitor depths. Another requirement is GPS for tracking your trolling speed. Lastly, get a large landing-net with a long handle. Once you have these items, your boat is set!

Up next is your rod and reel setup. Get a medium-heavy salmon/steelhead rod between eight and ten feet in length. Attach a clicker-equipped bait-casting reel spooled with 65 pound-test braided line.

At the end of your main line, thread a plastic bead, and then tie on a duo-lock snap. Snap your main line to a v-shaped wire spreader. Our local bait and tackle shops will have them. On the 'bottom' side of the spreader, you will want to tie a 36-inch long monofilament dropper leader to your trolling sinker. This will keep your lure up off the bottom and in the faces of approaching salmon.

The dropper leader should be lighter than your main line. The idea is that the dropper will snap off on snags so you don't lose your entire setup.

On the 'top' side of the wire spreader, you will attach the leader that runs back to your lure. I recommend that you cut the barrel swivel off the spreader, and replace it with a high quality chain swivel like the ones made by P-Line. You will notice in my photos that I use a lot of duo-lock snaps to connect the different leaders. I have dozens of pre-tied leaders in my box so I can quickly change them out when they get twisted, kinked, nicked, or tangled.

From this point, we are going to cover the three most popular styles of lures: spinners, wobbling plugs, and rotating plugs. Everything I have described up until now will work with any of these lure setups. Look at the photo captions to get a detailed rundown of the individual rigging setups. Here, we are going to dig deeper into some tips and tricks for each type of lure.

Spinners

If you are new to salmon trolling, try spinners, as they are the easiest to master. Many spinners will work, but I've had the most success using double-bladed Silvertrons. Silver or chartreuse blades are my colors of choice. I will rub some Atlas Mike's green 'Salmon' Lunker Lotion on the insides of my blades for some added scent. Additionally, I will pin a 1-inch long by 1/2-inch wide salt-cured chunk of anchovy to one of the hooks.

On the Silvertrons, I cut off the stock hook and rubber sheath. Then I add a size-4 split ring, to which I attach an Owner size-1 black chrome 2X-strong cutting-point stinger hook (model ST-41). I like to run a stiff and heavy leader to prevent line-twist, like 30 to 40 pound-test fluorocarbon.

For spinners, let the side rods out 40 feet. Set the rear rods 60 and 80 feet back behind the boat when trolling with four rods. If you see a snag on the sonar, speed up and raise the rods to clear the snag.

Wobbling Plugs

Kwikfish, Flatfish, and Brad's Killer Fish are different brands of wobbling plugs. I like to use the ones that have rattles inside. Chrome with a chartreuse head and tail is my favorite color pattern. The K14 size is the standard, but the K15 also seems to run well at Sacramento Area trolling speeds.

I make several modifications to my plugs. For one, I add an extra split ring to each hook. The second split ring puts the hook farther back, plus it helps to swivel when a hooked salmon head-shakes. In addition to the extra split rings, I change out the stock hooks with Owner black chrome 2X-strong cutting-point stinger hooks (model ST-41). Use size-1 on K14s, and size-1/0 on K15s.

Using magic thread, wrap a sardine or anchovy fillet centered to the bottom of the plug. This is called a 'sardine-wrap', and you can watch a video online to get a good idea of how to do it. After the sardine-wrap is in place, run your lure at the side of the boat to see if it is running straight. If not, make sure that both hook eyes are straight. Next, adjust the front eye that the snap connects to using pliers. Keep turning the eye until the lure runs straight. This is called 'tuning the lure'.

Wobbling plugs dive, so you only need a 3-ounce sinker to get them down. If you see a snag on your sonar, slow down and raise the rods

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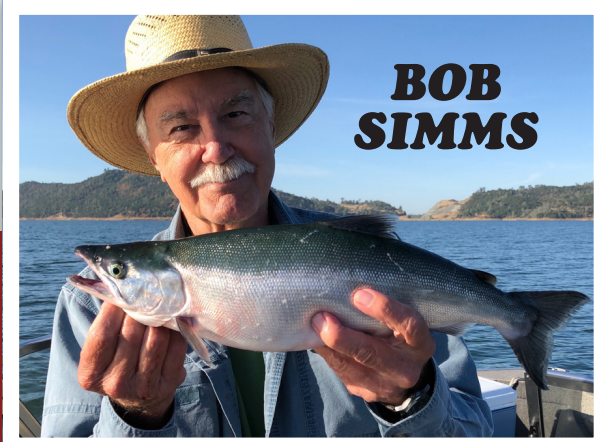
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HOW TO

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to get the lures past the obstacle. Set the side rods back 40 feet, with the rear rods set back 60 and 80 feet behind the boat.

Rotating Plugs

The Brad's Super Bait Cut Plug rig is probably one of the most complicated rigs you will ever use! However, it produces fish, and you can cover a lot of water at high speeds. Yakima Bait makes a similar lure called the 'SpinFish'. Both of these plugs rotate similar to the cut plug herring rig used by ocean trollers.

The cut plug comes with a scent pad inside of the chamber. I will remove this and replace it with a similarly sized anchovy fillet. I switch them out every hour or so to keep the scent trail fresh.

I suggest that you invest in a GDF flasher quick release cable to prevent lost fish when using flashers. Based on my experience, they make a big difference in reducing lost fish.

I replace the stock hook on each cut plug with an Owner size-1 black chrome 2X-strong cutting-point stinger hook (model ST-41). When I tie the leader, I run the line through the rubber-band so the hook is running right at the tail-end of the lure. Similar to spinners, I'll run a stiff and heavy leader to prevent line-twist, like 30 to 40 pound-test fluorocarbon.

With cut plugs, the side rods only go out 25 feet, with the rear rods out



Jack Naves poses with a 23-pound salmon that slammed a Brad's Super Bait Cut Plug on the Sacramento River. The rig was trolled behind a Pro-Troll ProChip 11 Fin Flasher near Freeport, CA.

photo courtesy of Jack Naves

50 and 70 feet behind the boat. The flashers have a lot of pull, so we are using 8-ounce sinkers to get them down. If you see a snag on the sonar, speed up and raise the rods to clear the snag.

Once you are ready to fish, troll downstream with the current. Speed will depend on the current, which is affected by the tides and water releases. You will be at the lower-end of the speed range on the incoming tide, and at the upper-end

on the outgoing tide. Focus on water that is between 12 and 19 feet deep when trolling in the Sacramento Area.

Set your drags loose enough so that a salmon can peel out a little bit of line when hooked. Keep the reel engaged, and turn on your clicker

so you can hear the buzzing sound when they strike.

There you have it – a quick overview of trolling methods that will put fall-run king salmon into your boat. Hopefully I've given you some new ideas for hitting the river. I'll look for you on the water.

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