



# Salmon And Bass Double Play Action at Lake Oroville

by Jack Naves

**L**ake Oroville is nestled just above the City of Oroville in Northern California. This well managed fishery boasts the tallest dam in the United States, which feeds the Feather River. The thing I love about Lake Oroville is that it's a great fishery for both coho salmon and spotted bass.

I can target tasty salmon in the morning and then switch over to hard fighting spotted bass later in the day. I've been lucky enough to make it out to Oroville three times this year and the fishing hasn't disappointed me on any of those trips.

On Saturday, April 17, I took my first trip of the year to Lake Oroville with Jason Carlisle of El Dorado Hills. We hit the water early and found red-hot action on the west side of the green Highway 162 Bridge. On that morning, we had several double hook-ups and filled our five fish salmon limits in less than two hours of fishing.

We put the boat top down, pulled up the downriggers, and moved to a rocky point to do some bass fishing. The bass didn't disappoint, and we caught four feisty spotted bass in about one hour's time.

I returned to Lake Oroville with co-workers Jeremy Johnson and Gil Perez on Friday, May 14. The bite was steady but not as good as it was on my previous trip in April. We picked up some nice cohos in the morning, and then the bite died until about

noon when it broke wide open.

We quickly filled our limits and proceeded to fish for bass. The bass bite wasn't very good, so after catching one smallmouth and one spotted bass we called it a day at 1:15 pm.

The surprise fish of the day was a beautiful 3 pound

brown trout that hit my glow hoochie trolled behind a dodger. The brown put up a great fight and I released it after a quick photo.

On Saturday, May 22 I made my most recent trip to the lake. This time, I fished solo. I really enjoy fishing with company and sharing stories on the water, but once in a while it's nice just to get out on the lake and enjoy some time to myself.

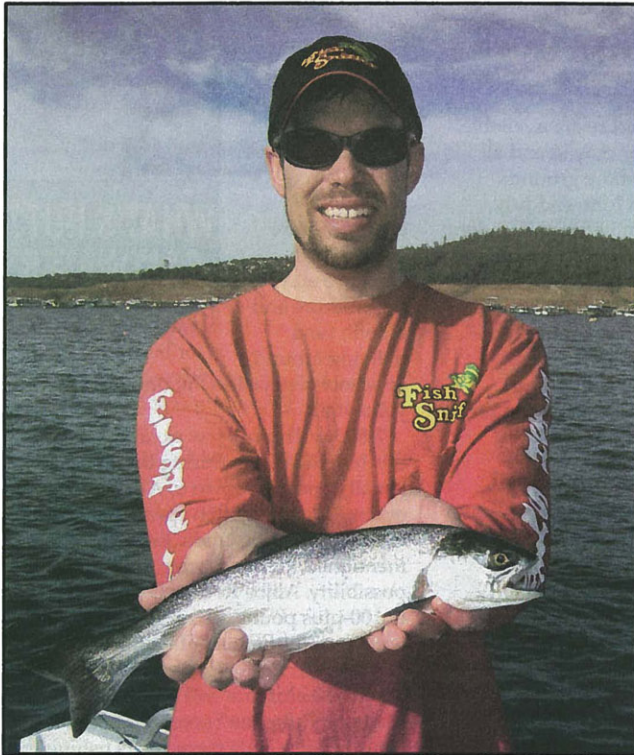
The bite wasn't red-hot, but I was able to scratch out my limit of five cohos by 11:30 am. I made a few casts for bass and was able to pick up two nice spotted bass in about twenty minutes of fishing. The methods for catching both salmon and bass at Lake Oroville are pretty simple.

Coho salmon tactics are very similar to the techniques used for landlocked chinook or kokanee salmon. You can catch them from the shore using a minnow under a slip bobber, but the majority of anglers troll for them.

You can catch coho salmon early in the year on the top of the water column, but as the water heats up the fish will move deeper. Most anglers troll using downriggers or lead-core line to get their lures deep enough. During April and May I've had the best luck targeting cohos from the surface to 21 feet deep.

I've had really good luck at Lake Oroville trolling hoochies

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Quality coho like this chrome bright fish that was caught by Fish Sniffer field correspondent Jack Naves, are the rule at Lake Oroville during the late spring and summer months.

Photo by JACK NAVES, Fish Sniffer Staff.



As good as the salmon fishing is at Oroville, chasing the lake's spotted bass can be every bit as exciting as trading punches with its cohos.

Photo by JACK NAVES, Fish Sniffer Staff.

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behind Sling Blade dodgers. I tie my hoochies with 8 pound test fluorocarbon leaders, which are 6 to 8 inches long. Natural glow or green seem to be good colors at Oroville.

Other lures like Apexes, spinners, or threaded minnows also work well. I like to troll at 1.6 mph but will try going faster or slower if I'm not getting consistent strikes. It's important to tip your lures with small ½ inch long strips of anchovies or sardines.

Cohos will feed on small fish, so it's important to use baitfish instead of corn like you would for plankton feeding kokanee salmon. One thing that I've noticed is that landlocked cohos are attracted to downrigger ball flashers much like landlocked chinooks are.

Most people don't use ball flashers at shallow depths because they think that the boat will scare the fish. I was curious to see if the aggressive cohos would be attracted to flashers on my downrigger ball, even though I was trolling relatively shallow at 21 feet deep.

I figured why not try it, and as soon as I started using the flashers I immediately noticed curious salmon on my sonar unit coming up from the deep water to check out the flashers. I love the anticipation when I see fish coming up on my sonar unit, just waiting for the rod to start shaking at any moment!

The challenge of running ball flashers shallow is that the fish are at the back of the boat immediately after they are hooked. If you are fishing 20 feet deep and are only using a 5 foot setback behind your line clip, this means that there is only 25 feet of line between you and a freshly hooked coho salmon.

If you try to net them too soon, they can do fun things like jump over your net or swim circles around your propeller or downrigger cables. To compensate for this, I have loosened the drags on my reels so that the salmon can make a couple of tiring runs before I attempt to net them.

The bass at Lake Oroville are relatively easy to catch compared to other Northern California reservoirs I've fished. The majority of bass you will catch at Lake Oroville will be spotted bass,

but there are also largemouth and smallmouth bass. The easiest way to catch bass at Oroville is to use plastics like tubes, drop-shot rigs, wacky-rigged Senkos, or jigs. I've had the best luck using browns or green-pumpkin colors.

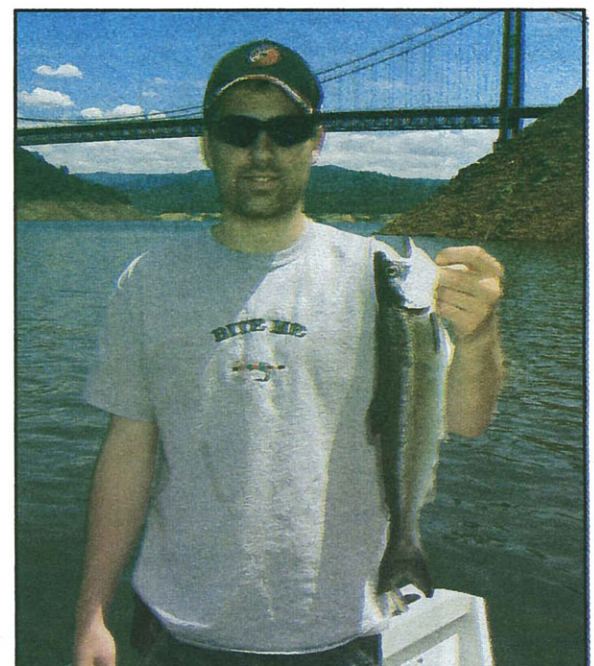
In the spring the bass usually hold between the shoreline and 30 feet deep. Sometimes they are in coves and other times they are on points. I just pitch my bait near the shore and slowly work it along the bottom back towards the boat.

If you don't get bit, the key is to fish really slow and just pause and shake the lure to entice strikes. The bites can be hard to detect, so if you feel a light tick or it feels spongy on the end of your line, reel down the slack and set the hook hard!

I usually release the bass I catch. If you do decide to keep some bass for fish tacos, be sure to read up on the current DFG regulations. Lake Oroville has special regulations that prohibit anglers from keeping bass between 12 and 15 inches in length. Bass smaller than 12 inches or larger than 15 inches can be kept if so desired.

With the lake level rising, it looks like we are in for a great season at Lake Oroville. Right now the cohos are running between 14 and 16 inches in length. Later this summer and fall there will be some really nice fish to be caught.

Try fishing by the dam, the buoy line, or on either side of the Highway 162 Bridge and you are sure to find some salmon. And don't forget to bring the bass gear in case you limit out on cohos early!



The Highway 162 Bridge marks one of Lake Oroville's coho hotspots, the water in front of the dam is another spot that consistently produces salmon.

Photo by JACK NAVES, Fish Sniffer Staff.