

Lake Trout feat. Jarred Stone, February 15, 2021

Hey, all you fish enthusiasts out there, whether you're an avid angler or just curious about fish, we'd like to welcome you to fish of the week. I'm Katrina Liebich, with the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska, and I'm Guy Eroh, an affiliated fish enthusiast.

It's Monday, February 15 2021. And we're excited to talk about all the fish. The fish of the week is the lake trout.

We have a special guest today, Jared Stone, who's a biologist with the Office of Subsistence Management in Alaska. He's also an avid lake trout fisherman. Can I say that about you Jared? Yeah. I've seen all your pictures on Facebook. So yeah, I guess my first question would be, you know, how would you describe a lake trout to someone who hasn't seen one before?

Oh, yeah. So they're an amazing fish, it'd be really big. They grow to be sometimes really fat. And they're kind of the top predator in their own environment. They have special color markings that allow them to be camouflage essentially. And so they have this kind of dark gray too, sometimes green backs with white spots. And this really actually lets them be great ambush predators. They kind of blend into the substrate environment that the their forage fish, the fish that they eat. When they look down on the lake trout, they're sort of camouflage perfectly, which makes them really well adept at being predators in their environment.

Are lake trout your favorite fish to fish for ? Is it the experience of you know, snow machining out onto the ice? Or like, just what about them draws you to them?

Yeah, lake trout probably are one of my top five favorite fish to fish for. And for me, my favorite time to fish for them is in the spring. Out of nowhere, you see this dark mass, come out of nowhere and start to follow your spoon. And there's like three to five seconds there where you're like always, come on, he's coming. And then finally, when that fish grabs it, they fight so hard. And they're just there's so much fun to catch

if they got this coloration that is kind of dark and helps them blend in with the bottom are they kind of like is that where they live? Are they down on the bottom?

It depends on the season, they are kind of, they're able to really go anywhere in the water column, they have this unique adaptation in their swim bladders that actually allows them to burp excess air out of their swim through their esophagus, and then let them raise and lower through the water column to better catch their fish.

I didn't know they burp, that's pretty cool.

And it's a unique adaptation that many fish don't really have. These fish typically love well-oxygenated cold water, depending on the season. You know, like particularly in the summertime, the lakes become really well stratified with different water temperatures and the columns of the water and so that of cold

water will actually sink down to the bottom of the lake, and that warmer water will reside on the top of the lake. And generally in the summertime when these layers of water become stratified those fish, the lake trout particularly like to spend their time down the bottom and colder more well oxygenated water. But then this all kind of changes come fall and winter during the fall months. These lakes experience what we call turnover. And there's a lot more mixing of the cold and warm waters in the lake. And so this allows the lake trout then to feel comfortable to go into different parts of shallower areas that maybe they wouldn't spend time in and then come winter. You have somewhat of a similar story with the water layers in the lake. But this too allows the fish to go into shallower areas and new bays

so what are they eating typically

What are they eating typically select trout or a piece of horse fish which means that they are primarily eating only fish and they are diet generalist they do not discriminate among their board fish, they will eat pretty much anything they can they can get their model upon. And lake trout will actually eat prey items up to about half of their length. And so you've got a lake two feet long. It's not uncommon for that that two foot long lake trout to eat prey fish that are up to one foot and like

wow. So two foot long lake trout is that a pretty common size that someone might encounter when they're fishing for them?

I would say pretty common depending on where you live. They can grow to be three to almost four foot long some of these fish I think currently the world record resides in Saskatchewan for a 102 pound plate trial. And I'm not sure the length on that fish but it was likely very massive. And when they reach those, those sizes, they're just real fat real big. So their size is generally dependent on the environment that they live in. And so these fish grow very slowly. And these fish typically are long lived fish, they'll reach sexual maturity around six to seven years old. And then typically would grow to be 25 plus years of age. And there are a few exceptions, there's been some known fish to live to up to about 60 years of age. They determine this the aging is done through aging the otoliths, on the fish these are that your bones and biologists can take a small section and put it under a dissection microscope and actually count the annual eye the circular on the mandala and determine its age. based off of those, those readings.

It's kind of like rings on a tree and ageing trees. Super cool.

I grew up in the Intermountain West, I've worked out in Alaska, I have caught a lot of trout, salmon and char species, but lake trout has evaded me for some time. And when I was living in Utah, I know that they there was an introduced population in Bear Lake and I had some buddies who, the only way that they could get to them as a go up in October when they were spawning. And they'd go out at night, because that's when they're actually spawning. And they would use spotlight and when they'd see them, they'd immediately turn off the light, so don't spook them, and they cast their flies out, I'm gonna try and get him. And that's the only way that I could get them. And now I don't have a lot, I don't have a boat, I don't have downriggers to really get down there. How do I catch these fish? Or do you need that special equipment to actually go out and catch these lake trout,

you don't need that special equipment. I think part of it is just knowing what times of the year they occupy different parts of the lake. And like you'd mentioned during the summertime, the general practice to catch lake trout is using downriggers which deploys a small LED ball down, you know, 60 to 100 feet deep, and helps bring your Lord to these depths where otherwise would be really difficult without these, these downriggers. And so, come spring and fall, those are your two time periods that without a boat, lake trout can be easier to target and to fish. When they're spawning, you definitely can see them sometimes in these shallow waters as shallow was like three to 15 feet deep. And that makes them a little bit easier to target fishing. But also in the springtime, these trout also come into the shallows. And it's not exactly known why I think you know, I've mentioned a little bit before and the spring there's another moment where the lake is what we call changing over and that cool waters mixing with the warm water and allows these fish to comfortably go into shallower areas. Come spring you can often find lake trout that are really eager to hit a spoon or to hit baits or to chase any kind of lure, like you had mentioned fly fishing and, and so fly fishermen particularly like to target lake trout come spring and then also in fall when they're in shallower waters. And they can be seen which, you know, honestly, I just that just gets me all giddy thinking about it because huge lake trout just come out of nowhere and destroy your fly or your spoon. It's just it's an absolute blast.

So So Jared in the wintertime for ice fishing, how do you go about doing that? Are there some good techniques or tips that you have?

Yeah, so come wintertime, you're looking for features on the lake that would be beneficial for you, you're looking for transition zones or points, or areas where maybe there's channels, typically the depths that we fishing for lake trout can be anywhere from 12 to 50 feet, and we're using jigging techniques where we've got a large led bait, like a jig. And on that jig, we'll use like maybe a four or five inch rubber worm or if you're allowed to bait is ideal. Particularly it seems these lake trout love to eat white fish and smell you can deploy a lot of different types of fishing lures and bait. You just have to make sure that is legal to use the baits Yep,

so check in with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

You know, part of that I think is due just to how easy these fish can be caught. And, and also there's management implications for these fish too. They're such a long lived fish and they don't reach their sexual maturity until they're older and so they're a fish that can be overly exploited and so be sure to check your regulations for the local areas like fish

in terms of like line or using braided line or ma Know what kind of contests Do you think and since these fish get, they can get quite large,

you can use either. Sometimes folks will use braided line for their main section of line. And that will generally be anywhere from 10 to 30 pound test and then that last little bit of leader can sometimes be like eight foot 10 foot of the monofilament. And that really helps keep your presentation of your lower a little bit more distant guy. And so it's a little more inviting for the lake show to, to come up to and check out your presentation and your lower.

Hey there. One thing that we want you to always keep in mind, regardless of what it is that you're fishing for is safety. Every week we're going to give you one or two tips that you can use to stay safe while you're out on the water. Today we're talking about keeping warm out on the ice. Ice Fishing has the potential to be a very fun activity for individuals and families alike, but the experience can be ruined if someone in your fishing party gets too cold. Winning the battle against winter temperatures starts with wearing the right clothes. Make sure to layer up because you can always take layers off but you can't put on layers that you don't bring with you. Start with a base layer of long John's made of wool or polypropylene and build out to your coat and snow pants. I usually start my day with about four layers and get down to one or two by lunchtime. You will want some nice wool socks, some winter gloves. Some people use the fingerless variety by prefer just taking my gloves off when I have to. And you also want to warm hat. If you find that your extremities need a little extra warmth, you can invest in some hand warmers either reusable or disposable. Lastly, when considering clothing material, avoid cotton, especially in your socks. Cotton absorbs and retains water and will wick away heat from your body if the material gets wet. So opt for wool or synthetic material if you can.

Have you do you eat lake trout? If you do, are there some good ways to prepare them a Kirkham?

Yeah, I love like trout. So there's a lot of great ways to cook them and prepare them. You can pan fry the fish, you can grill them, you can deep fry them, you can smoke them. Generally, the fish that we catch, I like to bring home and smoke. They just preserve longer, you know, generally his fish are really big and to cook off one for the night. It's just too much fish a lot of times and so well we'll take maybe half the fish and smoke half of it and then take the other part of the fish and then maybe have a meal or two out of it for dinner. Yeah,

smoking seems like a good option for those fatty types of fish too. So that sounds good.

Now you to Katrina and Jared have obviously smoked a lot of fish between you. I have never actually prepared fish in that way. I'm curious if you could expand on how you go about smoking fish.

Sure. Yeah. So what you commonly do is first prepare your filets people generally will have two different thought processes on where you take this next there's either a wet Brian technique or a dry rub technique. And I prefer to use a wet Brian. And I'll use soy sauce, brown sugar, you can put in other little things that maybe rice vinegar or orange juice, and you'll let the fish marinate in this for anywhere from 45 minutes to overnight. And then the next day, you'll pull the fish out of that marinade and run it under some fresh water to get rid of the excess marinade. And then you'll pat dry the fish with paper towels. And then you'll start it in the smoker and I'll smoke the fish anywhere for three to six hours depending on the size of the pieces that I'm trying to do. And then when I'm done with it, the best smoked fish is the fish that's just coming right out of the smoker. And a lot of a lot of fish is eaten just then. The other method that you can use that's different than the wet brine method is the dry rub method. And you can come up with your own kind of mix of dry spices and you coat the outside of the fish real liberally and then when you're done. After a few hours, you'll rinse the fish and cold water again. Pull it out and then smoke it

Lake Trout feat. Jarred Stone, February 15, 2021

That sounds awesome. What are some of the lakes in Alaska that have some big ones that you know I've heard some good places to

Yeah, so that's a great question. So some of the lakes that have lake trout populations are predominantly in interior and northern Alaska. And some of the lakes here that are you know, close to South Central include Lake Louise, Paxson Lake building lake. And then there are some small populations of lake trout two and smaller Lake systems in the Alaska range.

Super cool. Thanks so much for joining us today. Jared is fun learning about like chat today. And we hope if you're listening that you'll find some time to get out and enjoy all the fish.

Thank you for having me.

Thanks for listening to fish of the week. My name is Katrina Liebich. And my co host is guy hero. This show is produced by David Hoffman of citizen racecar assisted by Garrett Tiedemann. And Kelsey course, fish of the week is a production of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Region Office of External Affairs, as a service reflects on 150 years of fisheries conservation, we honor thank and celebrate the whole community, individuals tribes, the state of Alaska, our sister agencies, fish enthusiasts, scientists and others, who have elevated our understanding and love as people and professionals of all the fish