

Sockeye salmon preppers March 1 2021

Hey to 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 just a fan of fishes.

It's Monday, March 1 2021. And we're excited to talk about all the fish. This week's fish of the week is the sockeye salmon. And today we're taking a preppers approach and that we're going to offer some things to think about in preparation for the summer salmon season.

I don't know about you, Katrina, but I am starting to get antsy here waiting for summer to come. And I know when it gets here, it's Alaska, it can be shorter than it is in the lower 48. And I want to make sure that I can maximize my time fishing out on the water. So this week, I think we're going to be talking about some things that we can do to make sure that we have all our gear ready so that we can enjoy the summer time that we have up here.

Yeah, I think that's a great idea. And summer comes on pretty quick here. And you know, it's light all the time. It's just kind of go go go. And you really don't want to have to be worrying about your gear being ready, or your freezer being ready, when you want to actually be out fishing. So yeah, I think that's a great approach for today.

Alright, so we're talking about sockeye, you might know them also, as they're called reds, or red salmon. And like the other four Pacific salmon, they're silver when they're out at sea. But when they return a freshwater to spawn, they turn this really deep, beautiful red color and their heads turn green. And I don't know about you Guy, but sockeyes are actually my favorite of the salmon to fish for. So Guy, I got a question for you. I mean, when you when you're fishing for sockeye, what's your, what kind of techniques do you like? And what are some things that you would be thinking about this time of year in preparation for summertime?

Well, the first time that I ever went fishing for sockeye was down on the Kenai river with the Russian River population of fish coming up. And what I was taught to do was this kind of flossing method, where it's kind of this borderline snagging where you try and drift leader down and get that caught in the fish's mouth and then basically snag the fish in the mouth. And you're basically using either a heavy fly rod or a heavy, heavy spinning rod and about 20, 25 pound test line that's kind of weighted down. And then big about size to fly hook dressed up with some either like some buck tail colored up buck tail, and some flashabou and stuff like that. And you're essentially casting up and bring it down and snagging the fish like that.

Yeah, so I mean, one of the things in terms of that method that you can be thinking about this time of year is you want to get new line on your reels just a good practice to get into you certainly don't want to be out on the water, catching a fish and then having your line breaking because there's some kind of nick in it from last year, it's just kind of gotten degraded out in the weather. So that's a great thing to think about now, ordering the type of line you use, getting it respooled. In terms of what types of flies or

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different lures you're using, that's another thing to be thinking about. You don't want to be you know, heading down to the Kenai river or somewhere else and go into the store and they don't have the exact type of equipment that you want to use.

Yeah, and if you're tying your own, yeah, you're gonna want to tie a lot as you probably know if you've done this before, because you're kind of dragging this along the bottom, skipping along the bottom, you're going to lose a lot of flies out there on the water. You're going to lose a lot of lures if you're using lures and those that you don't lose are going to get pretty beat up getting hooked on rocks dinged on rocks. So you're definitely going to want to have plenty of these flies for when you eventually lose them or when you have to change them out. So this is what we what we call flossing, which again kind of this borderline snagging method, but in some parts of Alaska you are allowed to just straight snag for these fish. Isn't that right? Katrina?

Yeah, the two spots that I can think of right off the bat. There's a snagging fishery out of Seward there's also one out of Prince William Sound where there's a hatchery and yeah, it's basically you have a very heavy treble hook with weights and you're basically bringing that through the water quickly and snagging the fish anywhere that you can get it in the body. So in terms of prepping for that that's the type of thing where you're gonna want to get those hooks nice and sharp so they're not dull and you lose a lot of those hooks are is the cause in the rivers.

Yeah, you can get hooked up on rocks and stuff like that but it's my understanding that when you're snagging you're more out into the ocean kind of before the fish when they're sort of staging to come into the rivers but aren't quite in the rivers yet. Is the substrate there...Do you wind up losing a lot of these hooks or not really do you just kind of get them done and you can reuse the same one over so long?

Yeah, I didn't I didn't actually lose any last year.

Congratulations.

Keep it kind of in the water column. Um, yeah, just kind of rip it through the water. I was lucky last year. The other the other technique that's kind of different that a lot of folks maybe haven't heard of, if you're not actually a resident in Alaska, it's called personal use fishing. And for sockeyes, that's going to be using a dip net. So it's like a big round net, like a hoop net, with mesh that a salmon can actually swim through. And, you know, there's a couple of different areas to do that, which we'll get into more of the summer. But the copper, the Kenai river, kissy laugh, Fish Creek, those are just some options. And it's kind of rough on your nets. For example, on the copper, if you're holding your net out on the beach, the river currents kind of taken it with it a little bit you're having on rock. So anyway, your nets hitting that rocky substrate, it's going to get a little tore up. And any of those holes that might develop, you want to mend those during the winter, if you can, I sometimes forget. And I always find myself like getting the car packed and wishing I would have mended the net beforehand, so don't have to worry about it that time of year. But yeah, that's, that is something you can do this time of year. And it's actually really helpful when you want to get out on the water.

Now, are there any particular tools that you need to mend a net?

Typically, you know, I'll just use whatever string I have laying around. You can also use fishing line, I don't actually use a tool, but you'll just basically tie you know, a good knot and get those holes covered up. Some people put foam around the whole perimeter of the net and then use line around that. So that gives it a little bit more robustness against some of those rocky substrates as well. But I think Yeah, just kind of if you don't want to actually go out to the local shop and get the specific line you can use or use what's around the house, or you can actually buy a replacement net. If your nets just really kind of getting rough, I would highly suggest having one on hand. In case you do have just a major problem on the water, you can just switch that net out quickly.

Hey there everyone. One thing that we want you to always keep in mind regardless of what it is or where it is that you're fishing is safety. Every week, we're going to give you a tip or two that you can use to stay safe while you're fishing. A lot of the safety tips that we have given you so far this winter have been precautionary in nature. an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure so they say and not falling through the ice is always preferable to the best emergency exit strategy. That said you should be prepared for the worst. This applies not only to the gear you have with you but also to your plan. Run scenarios in your head and on dry ground beforehand so that if you ever do fall into the water, you won't be coming up with a plan on the spot. You want to do your best to keep calm. Assuming that you're fishing with multiple people alert them to your emergency. Know where your ice picks or knife are and how to access them. Then use them to start pulling yourself out onto the ice. When you are out of the water don't stand up. Keep your weight distributed over as large a surface area as possible while making your way to safer ice. Under pressure, everybody regresses to their level of training and preparedness. And you want to do everything you can to ensure that you'll have a cool head under pressure.

So another thing Katrina that we got to be thinking about this time of year is looking at the fish that we haven't yet eaten in our freezer and being able to clear that out to make room for the new fish we're going to catch this summer so

for all you folks that live in Alaska who harvest a lot of wild foods, you probably know about the freezer situation and I mean as much as you can you want to be thinking while you're fishing like what does my family need or what do I need so you're not running into the situation where you run out of fish too early or you have way too much fish by the end of the year. But there are some ways to actually if you do have too many fish and you're kind of getting to March/April and you want to clear that freezer out in preparation for the summer. A great way to do that is jarring. And what jarring does that's nice is that you know you can actually take your filets and get them out of your freezer and onto a shelf so you're not using freezer space and it will extend the life of that meat for another two plus years. And it's really good you can there's a lot of different recipes you can do a jarred fish, and what you're going to need is a pressure cooker, some Half Pint jars and lids and whatever you want to add flavor wise to your salmon. For us it's you know, jalapeno peppers, some canning salts and a little oil. And this jarring technique actually works for any salmon. flays not just sockeye.

So my experience with pressure cooking is very slim. Did mainly just by contact. You know, when I was hanging out with you when I go home and hang out with my mom, she fresher cooked some stuff for canning purposes. But no, I've never actually done myself. So how do you go? So I reckon you got these salmon flavors that are in vacuum sealed bags. And of course we know you probably don't want to be contaminating the meat, you want it to be a kind of clean transfer process from the freezer bags to the jars. So how do you go about keeping that controlled?

Yeah, yeah, for any canning, you want to, you know, be as clean and tidy as possible. What we do, you know, you pull out those vacuum sealed packages, let them thought and their package, and then you know, you're gonna have that Half Pint jar and you want to cut your filets to the height of basically that first line on the jar, you want to leave a little headspace. Whenever you do any, any jarring. So you're going to cut that filet. And you're going to put your ingredients, we usually put it below the filet, and then you're going to pack the jars as tight as you can, you don't want like pieces floating around. But you're going to you know, just kind of stuffed them all in there, you're gonna have a few little extra pieces when you're doing the cutting, and you can just kind of jam those in the middle. The other thing you're gonna want to do is get your lids hot, so they seal down nice. And you know, pressure cooking is a little bit different than I feel at least like jarring jam, it's a little more high stakes, because you don't want to blow yourself up with your pressure cooker. So I mean, you really have to pay attention, get those lids on, usually I you know, you screw it on, and then you just take it one step back, so it's not super tight, you're kind of writing a fine balance of not making it so tight that the jar will crack, but not making it so loose, that it won't seal. And then and then you're ready to basically put everything into your pressure cooker and turn up the heat. And when I'm going to do that, I usually stop everything else and pay attention to what I'm doing. Because you have to cook at a certain pressure essentially to make sure the meat is safe to eat. You don't want to deal with anything like botulism, and stuff like that. So yeah, a little bit of mental preparation. Pack those jars in there. warm it up very slowly. So nothing is cracking with like a fast temperature change. And then you want to keep your pounds per square inch between 10 and 15. And yeah, just you watch it to make sure it's not getting above that kind of higher threshold. And when you pressure cook meat, we pressure cook it for 90 minutes. So you're kind of, you know, paying attention for 90 minutes, making sure everything looks good.

How does the canning process affect the flavor of the fish? I know you mentioned that you can throw in some other ingredients like jalapenos, I believe it's something that you touched on. But how does the canning process affect the flavor and then also were just some other recipes maybe other than jalapenos that you can put in there with the fish?

Yeah, I mean it's definitely not going to taste the same. If you know if you make sushi or if you cook if you bake salmon, it's not going to taste the same as jarred salmon. It's different but good. The texture is I guess if you've had canned tuna, it's you know, it'll, it's flaky but very cooked. You know, very basically and I'm kind of minimalist with this, I'll just literally open the jar and eat the salmon. You could get whatever kind of crackers you like, maybe some cheese, if you smoke the salmon before you jar it. That can be really good if you mix that in with some cream cheese and capers and lemon. But yeah, I mean you can basically experiment I mean, I know some people maybe you add mustard or i mean i don't know you could add kind of any type of flavor you want from very basic salt to garlic to maybe

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some teriyaki with some brown sugar. It just depends on what your palate is and what you like flavor wise, I think

and do leave the skin on when you're putting it in there. Do you take the skin off,

I leave the skin on. I actually like to put the skin out because it's kind of cool looking. So you see it in the jar. But some people like to put the filet out so you see that nice kind of color. But yeah, I know with commercial canning, I think they even leave the vertebrae in and those are a nice little crunchy treat in there. We don't we don't filet our fish with the vertebrae. So we don't have that situation going on. But yeah, you can throw everything in there and cook it. Bonus calcium. That's great. Yep, calcium is good. So yeah, those are just some you know, some ideas during the heart of winter when things are pretty dark out your dream in the summer, just some things you can do to prepare for the upcoming season. I know we're all excited about that.

Yeah. And as we're getting into March here, the ice is getting thinner and less stable. So this is something that you can do to be productive and go out and start getting ready.

Thanks for listening to fish of the week. My name is Katrina Liebich and my co host is Guy Eroh. This show is produced by David Hoffman of Citizen Racecar assisted by Garrett Tiedemann and Kelsey Kohrs. Fish of the Week! is a production of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Region Office of External Affairs. As the Service reflects on 150 years of fisheries conservation, we honor thing 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