

Landlocked Salmon Fishing is Predictable

July is here.....the exciting, and sometimes frustrating, fishing for salmon in the months April through June makes a noticeable change in July. Some of the best Landlocked trollers say July and August are the best months to pursue these challenging fish.

The perpetual cycle of all cold-water fish is predictable and in our northern lakes we see this repeat time and again year after year. Results vary of course because nature is mostly unpredictable and for all our studying and predicting and hoping, we can still not completely control the fishery through the cycles of cold-water fisheries. Too many variables impact our actions but all in all we regularly repeat great stocked fishing opportunities for landlocked salmon in our NH lakes. Our fishery managers are getting better and better at understanding the balance and while many of us do not realize it they need our consistent factual input to help. Today, postings on Facebook in groups like NH Salmon and Trout Fishing are a kind of "creel survey" for the biologists. So share your results.

So here is how I approach trolling in July and August. Being a professional fly tyer I have the good fortune of a lot of feedback from customers and fishing friends and I seem driven to be developing and offering new patterns with new materials and new looks. I seldom tie traditional streamer patterns, like the Gray Ghost, but mostly try to improve some of my existing patterns or those originated by my father, Chet, or by Ora Smith, both deceased now but they continue to inspire my fly-tying bench.

During June I tune up my equipment, make changes to the boat, do upgrades and so on getting ready for the second half of the season and the last three "hot" months of the season. One predictable cycle for me is that starting in June I seldom troll any of my existing patterns but start tying new variations and when they look just right that is what I run. This year I have around 40 new patterns to try, mostly tandems but some singles. This year had a slight twist as I developed a new single hook hair pattern

that is headed to Alaska with a well-known NH Guide. Two new patterns you may have seen on Facebook are my Purple Panther and my Hawkeye. Both of these have caught salmon so far and will be in my 2022 line-up. Trolling with a new pattern really helps keep my focus underwater and sharpen my skills. If I mark some good fish, and swing by the area a few times without a strike I change streamers. If no strikes I will go back to a proven pattern like the Ten-Ten, work the waypoint where I marked the good fish to give me some comparative results. Frankly, I think about new patterns year-round. Last year I did about 30 new patterns and I think maybe 6-8 are in the tandem line-up.

The second half of the season has a well-defined thermocline, there is a lot less debris on the surface so the food cycle is better defined. Cold-water species are more targeted in their pursuit of baitfish. Smelt, which feed mostly on zooplankton have a good smorgasbord at the thermocline and just above it now so during those good feeding periods the action can be hot. Finding the fish holding areas is best done with a good sonar fishfinder. The fishfinders today are the most powerful tools we have for trolling. My Lowrance HDS has the feature that allows me to create my own chart at extremely accurate 1' intervals. My buddy has a Garmin that does this also. These self-created charts are awesome and give a new perspective that results in an improved strategy. They offer such a detailed map of the bottom you can really find the holding places they big boys frequent and be able to target them with approaches from many different angles, without fear of getting snagged.

July and August find the salmon feeding heavy and putting on weight getting ready for their spawning runs. By the end of July, I am tuned in as to where the fish tend to be and how I plan to fish them. Patience is the key now. Trust your equipment, trust your strategy, and expect aggressive strikes and big fish. Many 6lb+ salmon will strike during these periods and some of them will end up in the net.

When you least expect it, a big salmon will strike and give a screaming run. So sudden and so hard your first reaction is that how the hell am I going to get this in the net? Then he will turn and race towards

the boat and if you are not reeling like crazy you may think he came off. Suddenly when you catch up with the line and feel him, he will scream to the surface, leap into the air with a twisting spinning action trying to dislodge the hook and break the line. This can happen many times in a fight. You better be reeling when that happens. If he is still on, he starts heading for the boat again, trying to relieve the resistance or maybe just getting ready for round three. You reel him closer, see your leader appear and start to tense up. This is where the best anglers and top Charter captains start screaming at the person on the rod. Ask Adam if that has ever happened to him. Can't help it. This is a trophy fish which was proven when he made the first run and the big jump. Also, this is where the real fight begins. When the salmon sees the boat sometimes he will give a line peeling streak to the side and sometimes he will go back and forth a few times likes he is trying to sucker you in that he is ready to succumb. Not so. Because his next move will be a heart stopping dive for the bottom with all the strength he has left. If you are still hooked up, then it's back to the surface for the next round. Maybe he shows you a side once which means he is tiring. Try netting him now and there is a good chance it will be goodbye. If that happens it's no one's fault, it just happens. Key here is to keep good pressure on him, rod tip high. Steer him back and forth. If you see him go on his side again, he is ready for the net. Keep the net high until the angler says it is time to net. Raise the rod tip bringing him to netting closeness, dip the net and scoop the head. Then it's time for hugs, kisses, high fives and glory. And if he is over five pounds, he is probably 5-6 years old, having won a few fights before, and you have just landed what could be a trophy that only happens to a few anglers.

Can't wait until it's my turn again.