

Tips for Catching Burbot

Since their illegal introduction nearly two decades ago, Burbot have become a popular fishery on Flaming Gorge Reservoir (FGR). The Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources are encouraging anglers to harvest Burbot in an effort to reduce their abundance and the impact they are having on the sport fishery.

Numerous Burbot ice fishing tournaments have been held on FGR in recent years. Beyond the large numbers of fish removed at each of these derbies, it is striking how many participants struggle to catch Burbot. With a little preparation, you too can master the art of Burbot fishing. Remember, every Burbot removed from FGR represents a savings in sport fish (e.g., Kokanee salmon and Smallmouth Bass)!



Burbot are typically most active at night. During the day, they find dark recesses under rocks and in holes and cracks in the rocky habitats. Around sunset, they emerge from hiding to feed. The first few hours following sunset and prior to sunrise can be productive periods. Consider hitting the reservoir in the late afternoon to secure a good spot for the evening and do a little Lake Trout fishing. Limits on FGR are liberal for Lake Trout < 28 inches. Find tips for catching small Lake Trout at <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Regional-Offices/Green-River-Region/Flaming-Gorge-Management>. Arriving earlier will insure you are ready to go when the Burbot bite starts around sunset. Some anglers also talk about a productive bite in the middle of the night.

Good Burbot fishing is most commonly associated with rocky areas both on the main body of the reservoir and within larger bays. The substrate may vary greatly, but fishing in or immediately adjacent to rocky substrates is always good! Rocky substrate harbors crayfish; the primary prey for Burbot. The deep vertical habitat immediately in front of most cliffs tends to hold few Burbot. Instead, target the habitat adjacent to cliffs and rocky areas with a slope typically less than 60 degrees. The mouth of bays tucked within a large cliff complex can also be good, especially if there is shoal or gradual sloping associated with it. Underwater cliffs with foraging areas adjacent to them are productive but often times overlooked. Another good spot is a foraging area (rocky slope less than 60 degrees) adjacent to a cliff complex within a bay. A good bathometric map that shows the underwater contours of FGR is essential to identify promising areas that will hold Burbot (for example: Fish-n-Map Company available from local stores or online at www.fishnmap.com or use an app on your phone like Navionics). Good maps will help you select productive locations and identify access roads.

Once you have identified and selected your spot, it's time to get set up. The folks that catch a lot of Burbot through the ice are augering 20-30 or more holes before wetting a line. By drilling holes early, you are not disturbing the fish during "prime time". Burbot can be caught at any depth, but fishing near the bottom in 20-60 feet tends to be the most productive. If you are fishing with multiple lines, spread them across a range of depths to start. As the night progresses, consolidate lines near the depths that are producing the most fish. Lures should be fished within inches of the bottom and if you fish a hole for more than 15 minutes without a bite – try a different hole. Many successful angler groups are spreading out across the available habitat and do not fish close to other groups. It's important to get away from the noise and commotion of other anglers.

Lures that glow are a must for Burbot. Glow lures come in a wide range of shapes and sizes and can be purchased in local tackle stores or by searching the web for “glow lures” or “lures that glow”. Jigs with grub or tube bodies, or jigging spoons from ¼-½ ounce weight with a wide hook gap (2/0-4/0) are recommended. Burbot are not shy of lures or line so use a lure of sufficient weight to get down to the bottom quickly. The glow for most lures dim in 15 to 20 minutes so it is critical to recharge the glow regularly. Glow lures that rattle and vibrate when jigged can also be very productive.

Glowing lures attract the fish while bait, such as sucker or chub meat, seals the deal. A small strip of meat (skin on) less than 1 inch by ½ inch is plenty to add scent and flavor. Stout sharp hooks and strong fishing line (8-12lb test) are recommended as Burbot get big and have hard mouths.

Burbot angling is an active sport. Anglers catching lots of Burbot are actively fishing and constantly moving from hole to hole. Jig a rod lightly, while watching your stationary rods or tip-ups. Tip-ups can be very productive, but anglers should be jigging at least one rod while waiting for flags to go up. Remember to check tip-ups every 20 minutes or so. Burbot will frequently swallow a lure attached to a tip-up and not trigger the flag. Hand jig tip-up lines when you check them, this will frequently incite a strike. Recharge your lures every time you check them - a strong glow will catch more Burbot. Flash lights and head lamps work to recharge lures, but UV lights work better.

As mentioned earlier, the most successful Burbot anglers start by drilling at least 20 or more holes. They typically only fish a hole 10-15 minutes without a bite before moving to a new hole. Burbot often move and forage in small schools. If you catch one, there are likely others close by. Get the first fish on the ice and your lure back down to the bottom as quick as possible. More times than not, you will ice more Burbot within minutes of the first.

A cooler lined with a large trash bag is handy for transporting your catch home. A couple of towels make quick work of Burbot slime after you have handled one. A flashlight or headlamp is a must when night fishing. Extra flash lights can be positioned to shine on rod tips or tip-ups to help identify strikes. Dress warmly and remember to wear a life jacket. A little extra security is a good idea when on the ice at night.

Much of the information provided also applies to fishing for Burbot from a boat. Anglers catching large numbers of Burbot have noted Burbot become more active when water temperatures are below 50 °F. Boat anglers can either vertically jig or cast lures toward shore. When you cast a jig, slowly work your lure along the bottom. The most important consideration for night fishing from a boat is having all the appropriate safety and navigation equipment. In addition to the required safety gear, boats should also be equipped with a spotlight and GPS. Someone should know where you plan to fish and when you plan to return.



For more information, contact the Wyoming Game and Fish Department in Green River, Wyoming at 307-875-3223 or the Utah Division of Wildlife Resource in Dutch John, Utah at 435-885-3164.