

Tips for Catching Small Lake Trout

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources manage Flaming Gorge Reservoir (FGR) to provide fishing opportunities for a variety of anglers, the majority of which visit the reservoir to fish for Kokanee and Rainbow Trout. Kokanee and Rainbow Trout are also important forage that helps maintain the Lake Trout population in FGR. Population surveys completed over the last three decades have shown an increase in the abundance of small Lake Trout (e.g., less than 28 inches). If the existing population of small fish is not reduced, there could be too much competition to sustain Trophy Lake Trout. Angler harvest is the most viable option for reducing numbers of small Lake Trout.

Once Lake Trout obtain a large enough size, they are highly-effective predators that prey heavily on Kokanee and Rainbow Trout. The predator/prey relationship must be managed to maintain balance between all species. The relationship in FGR is on the verge of imbalance due to the high number of predators, specifically Lake Trout <28 inches. When Lake Trout reach a length of 25-inches, they typically become consume fish. If the existing population of small fish (< 28-inches) is not reduced, there will not be enough Kokanee or Rainbow Trout to support the Lake Trout population, especially the trophy component. Angler harvest is the best option for reducing numbers of small Lake Trout.

Anglers are encouraged to target and harvest Lake Trout <28-inches. Small Lake Trout are delicious and provide substantial fillets when you consider the liberal limit on fish <28-inches. As with all species, anglers are encouraged to review the fish consumption guidelines available on the WGFD webpage.



Good fishing for small Lake Trout, locally known as pups, is available year-round. Lake Trout pups can be pursued from shore, boat and through the ice. No matter how you decide to pursue pups you will have the greatest success if you are fishing the right spot. A good bathometric map that shows the underwater contours of FGR is essential to identify promising areas that will hold pup Lake Trout (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.

Medium action rods are good all-around rods for jigging, trolling and casting from shore. A medium-heavy action rod may help with setting the hook when jigging for deep water fish - as will low stretch lines like braid and fluorocarbon (8-10 lb.). Eight to 10 lb. monofilament works well for trolling.

Shore fishing is most productive during the spring and fall when water temperatures are 55°F or colder and pups are cruising near shore. Try fishing shorelines, submerged flats, and submerged ridges that are close to deep water. Lake Trout will enter shallow water to forage but typically won't stray far from deep water. Throw spoons and soft bodied jigs, 1.5 to 3 inches in length, as far out as you can and vary the retrieve until you figure out what works. Lures that glow help if you are casting to depths over 30 feet. Try counting down your lure until you find the bottom and on your next cast start retrieving just before you hit the bottom.

If you own a boat your options increase substantially. Similar to shore fishing, you can catch pups close to shore in spring and fall. Try throwing white or luminescent tubes and curly tail grubs toward shore in the habitats described previously.

Trolling can be productive any time of year using a variety of lures. Many people have luck with spoons like Needlefish, Crocodiles, Rocky Mountain Tackle Vipers and 2-4-inch-long crankbaits like Rapalas and Flatfish in a variety of colors. Dodgers and squids also work well, like those used for Kokanee or Rainbow Trout.

Vary the depth you present your lure depending on where you see fish on the graph. You can find pups spring and fall near shore in 10-20 feet of water when water temperatures are 55 degrees or less. Planer boards and long lining can be a productive way to present lures this time of year. During summer fish are typically deeper (>50 feet). Down riggers give you precise control over the depth you present the lure. Anglers typically troll between 1.6 and 2.0 mph, but speed changes can also provoke a strike. Lake Trout pups are commonly caught while targeting Kokanee, but the action does not have to end when you fill your Kokanee limit. Consider dropping your lure to fish on your graph below 70 feet. Undoubtedly there will be pups down there willing to take your offering.

Whether you are fishing from a boat or through the ice, vertical jigging Lake Trout pups is productive and a lot of fun. Use your bathometric map and electronics to find fish on flats, humps and ridges adjacent to deep water in 40-70 feet of water. Early and late in the day, pups are likely to be on top of flats, humps and ridges, and a good distance from deep water drop offs. As the sun gets higher they will move closer to deep water and by mid-day you will likely find pups on or just off the edge of deep water drop offs.

Vertically jigging spoons, tube jigs and curly tail grub jigs just off the bottom can produce a lot of fish, but watch your sonar for suspended fish. Lures weighing 1/4-1/2-ounce work well depending on depth - heavier lures work best in deeper water. Vary up your presentation – try active jigging, subtle jigging and dead sticking. Strikes may come after sitting the lure on the bottom for a short while.



Tube jigs and grubs in luminescent and whites seem to always be productive, but earth tones that mimic crayfish will also work. Don't shy away from brightly colored glow tubes – pink, yellow, orange, purple, etc. Tipping your jig with sucker or chub meat adds enticement – typically a piece the size of your thumb nail will do the trick. Anglers also have success with a variety of jigging spoons (Northland Buckhots, Buzzbombs, and Thomas Cyclones), Rapala Jigging Raps, and blade baits (Sebile Vibrato) work for less active fish. Fish attractant can help mask your scent on the lures too.

Next time you have the urge to go fishing or you are looking for some fish for your favorite recipe, do the fishery at FGR a favor and pursue small Lake Trout. Find more information about Lake Trout in FGR read “Questions and Answers Regarding Lake Trout in Flaming Gorge Reservoir” found at the following WGFD website (<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Regional-Offices/Green-River-Region/Flaming-Gorge-Management>). You will also find tasty recipes for cooking your catch.

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.