



FAMILY FISHING GUIDE

Tips and ideas for fishing in Northwest Montana

From cold water to warm water, big prairie rivers to high mountain lakes and fly-fishing to trolling, Montana offers angling opportunities for all to enjoy. Learn more at fwp.mt.gov/fish.

THE BASIC FISHING ESSENTIALS:

- ✓ **BUY A FISHING LICENSE:** A valid fishing license is required for all types of fishing on state waters for anyone 12 or older. Youth anglers (11 or younger) must still observe all limits and regulations.
- ✓ **GET FISHING TACKLE AND GEAR:** Fishing tackle and gear can be affordable and easy to find through a local sporting goods store, tackle shop, or online retailer. FWP also offers loaner equipment. Call your local FWP office to learn more.
 - Here is everything you need to start fishing lakes or ponds from a tackle and gear standpoint:
 - Spinning rod and reel combo
 - Monofilament fishing line (4 to 6-pound test for panfish, 8 to 12-pound test for larger species)
 - Hook assortment (In general, trout hooks that are size 8 to 14 are going to be best)
 - Bait (such as live worms or maggots)
 - Bobbers
 - Sinkers or split-shots
 - Lures (jigs or small spinnerbaits are two good options for beginners)
 - Pliers with a line cutter
- ✓ **LEARN ABOUT FISHING CONSERVATION:** Before heading to your first spot, find out how to be an ethical angler by applying responsible fishing conservation practices.
 - Here are a few examples of responsible conservation practices:
 - Make sure you know the fishing regulations (including size limits, bag limits) where you plan to fish.
 - Don't keep more fish than you and your family can eat.
 - Learn proper catch and release techniques to help ensure that any fish you don't keep, either when fishing for sport or because they are not within the regulations, have the best chance at survival.
 - Pack out what you pack in, and pick up any litter you see while on the water.
 - Learn about the different types of fish in Montana. There are over 90 different species of fish in the state, including several important native species, such as bull trout.
- ✓ **FIND PLACES TO FISH NEAR YOU:** Check out the list below. Remember, if a stream or lake is on private property, you must have the landowner's permission to fish. The waters marked "Best Bet" have easy access and are most likely to produce a successful fishing trip. In general, ponds and lakes will provide easier and more productive fishing.

Northwest Montana is in the Western District. Lakes and reservoirs are open all year to fishing. Rivers and streams, unless specified otherwise in the regulations, are open the third Saturday in May through Nov. 30. Always consult the regulations before going out.

STREAMS

Flathead River

From East Evergreen Drive (Lybecks Dike) to Old Steel Bridge

Contains westslope cutthroat trout and lake trout. Lake whitefish in the fall. Best fishing from late June through October. Use bait (worms, salmon eggs) and flies for trout. Use bait (worms) and lures or spinners for lake trout. Use chartreuse (yellow-green) jigs for lake whitefish. Cutthroat and bull trout must be released.

Near Columbia Falls and Hungry Horse

Contains lake trout, rainbows and cutthroat. Use worms, cut bait or lures for lake trout. Use worms or flies for other trout. Both public and private land. Public fishing access sites at Pressentine Bar, Kokanee Bend, and Teakettle.

Swan River

Near Bigfork

Fish under the highway bridge in Bigfork Harbor. Contains lake, rainbow and cutthroat trout and lake whitefish. Use worms, cut bait, small spinners, or flies. The big hole below the bridge has lots of snags. Access at the Bigfork fishing access site.

Near Bigfork Dam

Contains rainbows, cutthroat and lake trout. Lots of snags so small spinners and lures work best. Bait will work, too. Fish the calmer pockets in the river from the dam to Bigfork for rainbow and lake trout but be careful in the swift water. Can also access from Pacific Park side.

Thompson River (Best Bet)

Drive 45 miles west of Kalispell on Highway 2, then turn down the Thompson River Road. The first 7 miles are private property but most of the stream below that is open to fishing except for some fields. Contains mostly brook trout in the upper end and mostly rainbow trout in the lower end. Lots of nice places to camp and picnic and the road follows the stream so access is easy. Use worms, salmon eggs (bait for kids 14 and younger only), small spinners or flies.

LAKES

Pine Grove Pond (Best Bet)

From West Reserve Drive in Kalispell, drive 1 mile north of Whitefish Stage, turn right on Rose Crossing for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. Or, from Highway 2, turn west on Rose Crossing for $\frac{8}{10}$ of a mile across the Whitefish River and up the hill. Turn south at the Pine Grove sign. Pond is open mid-April through mid-October for rainbow trout and some cutthroat. Fish worms or Power Bait on the bottom or

under a bobber. Catch and release for trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 trout daily and in possession.

Echo Lake (Best Bet)

Fish off the causeway or at the FWP fishing access site in May-June and September-October or through the ice for lots of perch, bass, some trout, and small pumpkinseeds. Use a small hook or jig with maggots, worms, or a piece of fish under a bobber. To get to the FWP access, go west across the causeway (towards Kalispell), and follow the signs.

Foy's Lake (Best Bet)

Drive 3 miles south of Kalispell on Foy's Lake Road. Fish below the guardrail where you first get to the lake or near the county boat ramp. Good fishing for rainbows in spring, fall, and early winter. Fish worms and marshmallows or Power Bait on the bottom or under a bobber. Ice fishing is best right next to shore along the highway.

Dry Bridge Slough (Best Bet)

Turn off Woodland Avenue in Kalispell about 8 blocks south of the Conrad Mansion onto 11th Street East and park in the cul-de-sac (this is the gully where kids sled in winter). This is a city park and the pond is stocked with rainbow trout. Best bait is worms or Power Bait under a bobber (bottom is weedy). Flies and spinners may also work. Best fishing is in late April, May and early June. Catch and release for trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 trout daily and in possession

Buffalohead Pond (Best Bet)

In Kalispell, turn on Grandview Drive just south of the Flathead Valley Community College. After the road makes a 90-degree turn south, park in the church parking lot near the gully. Walk down the gully under the road and to the ponds. This is a city park pond stocked with cutthroat trout. Best fishing is in May and June. Fish with worms and marshmallows, flies, or small spinners. Take mosquito repellent. Catch and release for adults.

Smith Lake (Best Bet)

Contains yellow perch, some pumpkinseeds and northern pike. In winter, fish a plain hook, a glo-hook or a jig in chartreuse (yellow-green). Bait the hook with maggots or a perch eyeball. Lower it to the bottom and reel it up one turn of the reel handle. Jig it regularly and use a small bobber. In summer, fish from the dock at the fishing access site or along the shore where the weeds aren't too thick. Tie a hook or jig 3 to 4 feet below a bobber and bait the hook with worms, maggots or a perch eyeball for perch or smelt for pike. August and September are good months.

Lion Lake (Best Bet)

Turn at Hungry Horse and drive about 3 miles toward Hungry Horse Dam. Lion Lake is right next to the road and has a US Forest Service picnic area. Contains cutthroat trout and yellow perch. In summer stillfish (on the bottom or with a bobber) with worms and marshmallows or with flies and lures. In winter, fish a glo-hook with maggots or corn. Fish 10-20 feet below the ice.

Shady Lane Pond (Best Bet)

This pond lies between the Old Steel Bridge and the old Roller Rink in Evergreen. Access through the Old Steel Bridge Fishing Access Site. Pond has pumpkinseeds, bullheads, and trout. Fish worms under a bobber for sunfish and trout. Fish flies and spinners or bait for cutthroat. Fish worms on the bottom for bullheads (watch for sharp spines). There are 2 1/2 miles of hiking trails. Catch and release for trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 trout daily and in possession.

Lake Mary Ronan

Drive 35 miles south of Kalispell on Highway 93 and turn west at Dayton. Catch perch, rainbow, and cutthroat trout with worms and marshmallows under a bobber, or use flies and small spinners. Also contains kokanee salmon and the limit is 10 daily and 20 in possession. In winter, walk out on the ice from the state access 200-300 yards or more. Fish for kokanee and perch by lowering your glow hook to the bottom and reeling up 1 or 2 turns. Use fluorescent red glow hooks with maggots and jig frequently.

Flathead Lake

In May and June, small lake trout move next to the shore where you can catch them. Fish at rocky points at places like Wayfarers or West Shore state parks. Still fish with worms or cut bait or cast lures. At Wayfarers, fish off the dock or along the cliffs to the south. In winter, fish Somers Bay for lake trout. Be careful as the ice is not consistent. Fish a white leadhead jig with a white twister tail baited with a piece of fish just off the bottom. Jig the hook regularly.

Loon Lake (Ferndale)

Turn south off Highway 209 in Ferndale and go 1.3 miles and turn left at the Loon Lake Road. Follow main road just over 1 mile and turn right into parking lot. Rainbows and yellow perch dominate the catch with pumpkinseed sunfish, largemouth and smallmouth bass also available. A dock adjacent to the parking lot is provided by 4-H so please keep the area clean.

Beaver/Murray Lakes

Drive about 5 miles north of Whitefish on Highway 93. Turn right on the Beaver Lake Road. All lakes contain rainbow and cutthroat trout. Still fish on the bottom with worms and marshmallows or cast lures. Fish Beaver Lake through the ice for kokanee; access to the lake can be difficult.

Little Bitterroot Lake

In winter, fish 25-30 feet down with a fluorescent red glo-hook with maggots for kokanee. Jig frequently (every 2-3 seconds). Use a light rod or spring bobber so you can see bites and strike at the slightest hint of a bite. Access at either northeast inlet (Lions Camp), northwest corner (Blue Grouse County access), or county access at outlet.

Swan Pond

Go south from the town of Swan Lake 10 miles to mile marker 61.5. Turn east on gravel road a short distance to closed gate. Park so you don't block the gate and walk east about 100 yards to find pond. This DNRC site is managed as a Family Fishing Pond and all anglers are welcome. Anglers age 15 and older must release all fish to leave more opportunity for kids. Younger anglers may keep 1 cutthroat per day. Fishing license requirements apply.