

Fishing In Idaho

For anglers, Idaho is truly a land of opportunity and variety. From alpine peaks to lowland deserts and valleys, a dazzling array of waters await discovery; 26,000 miles of streams and rivers, more than 3,000 natural lakes, and a quarter-million acres of ponds and reservoirs.

Inhabiting those waters are 42 gamefish species, from giant white sturgeon to wild trout, catfish to kokanee, and smallmouth bass to salmon and steelhead. Fishing trips can be as simple as a short walk to a local pond or as challenging as a wilderness float trip; there are plenty of options from which to choose.

Whether budding angler or seasoned veteran, this guide will help you plan your next fishing adventure. From basic fishing gear and fishing tips to biology and management of key sportfish, it's all here. The guide divides the state into eight regions, allowing you to focus on specific areas; maps and information charts will help you find waters to match your fishing preferences.

Most Idaho waters have year-round fishing seasons. However, many rivers and streams and some lakes have special rules and seasons. Pick up a fishing rules brochure which outlines season

dates, special regulations and bag limits. Brochures are available at all Idaho Fish and Game offices and most sporting goods stores statewide.

Every angler 14 years old or older must have a valid license to fish in Idaho. Resident anglers under 14 may fish without a license and keep their own bag limits of fish. Nonresident anglers under 14 may fish without a license if accompanied by a license-holding adult. Purchase licenses at any local license vendor, Fish and Game office, via telephone or through Fish and Game's website: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>.



Use the **Idaho Fishing Planner** on the Fish and Game website **to plan your next fishing trip. Click the Fishing Planner icon to find any stream, lake or reservoir in the state, see what fish species live there and check fishing rules.** You can even print customized maps. <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>

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Fishing Basics

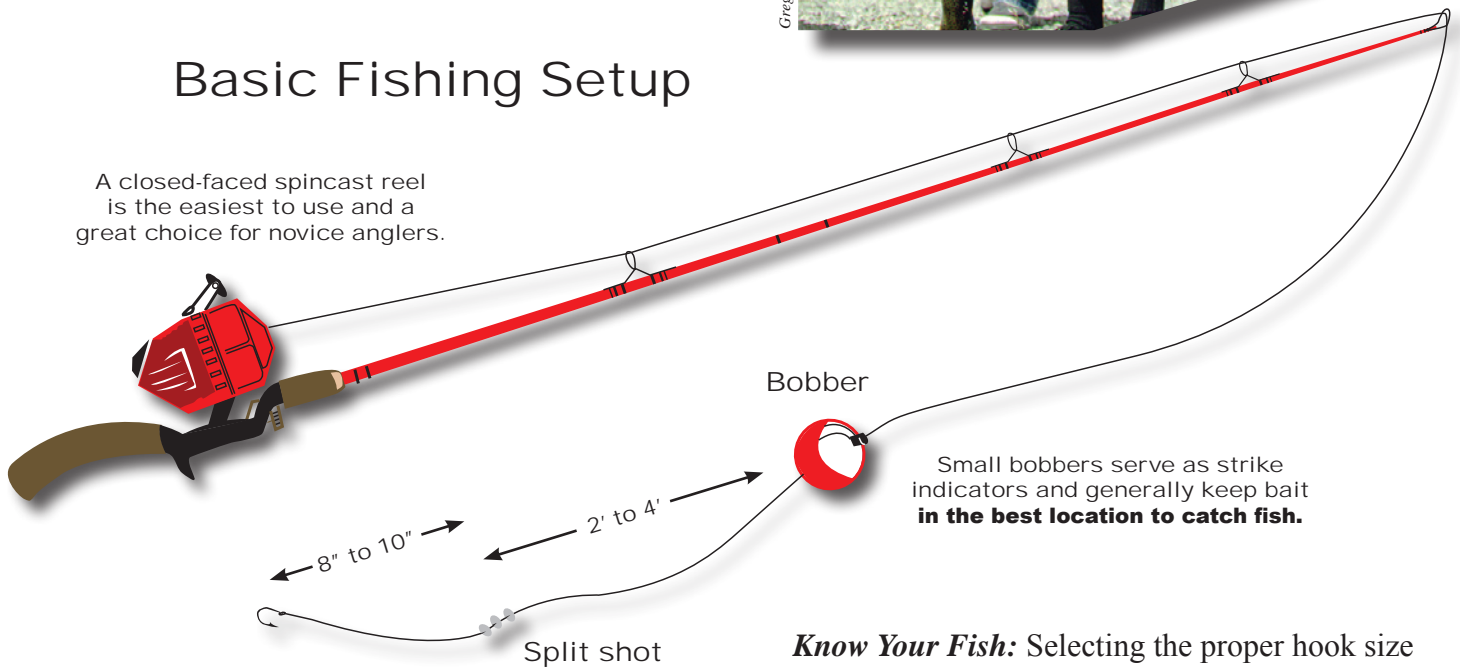
Fishing equipment can vary from a simple inexpensive rod-and-reel combination to highly specialized (and expensive) gear like fly fishing rods or line-counter reels. For the beginner, a trip to the sporting goods store can be a little overwhelming. Here are a few tips to get you and your family ready for your first Idaho fishing trip.

Start Simple: A moderately priced rod and reel combination outfit will work fine for most kinds of fishing. Look for something with a five- to six-foot medium action rod and a closed faced (push button) reel. Add to that some four- to eight-pound monofilament line, hooks in a variety of sizes, sinkers, and small bobbers and you're ready to go. See the diagram below for the basic setup.



Basic Fishing Setup

A closed-faced spincast reel is the easiest to use and a great choice for novice anglers.



Small bobbers serve as strike indicators and generally keep bait in the best location to catch fish.

Pick Your Spot: Good fishing is available across Idaho, but some spots are better for beginners and kids. Use this book to find smaller lakes and ponds close to where you live. Many of these waters are stocked with trout or have easy-to-catch bluegill lurking in the shallows. Many have picnic or park facilities, nature trails or other attractions nearby to enhance your outing.

Know Your Fish: Selecting the proper hook size and bait, and knowing how to fish it, can make all the difference. Remember that fish like bluegill and trout have small mouths, so smaller hooks (sizes 8 to 14) and bait will usually catch more of these fish. Bass and catfish have bigger mouths and tend to be more aggressive, so larger baits can be more effective. Bass and bluegill are usually found along the shoreline, but trout and catfish tend to spend their time in deeper water. Knowing just a little about fish habits can increase your chances of catching them.



Family Fishing Waters – Family Fun Hot Spots

Imagine a handful of choice fishing holes close to home where the family has a great chance to catch fish. That's the idea behind Idaho's *Family Fishing Waters* program. Across the state, select ponds, lakes, reservoirs and rivers with easy access and plenty of fish have been designated *Family Fishing Waters*. These special waters (identified in the following pages) are managed to offer simple and successful fishing experiences for kids and other novice anglers.

Brochures identifying local *Family Fishing Waters* are available at all Fish and Game regional offices. Driving directions, full-color illustrations and text to help novice anglers identify Idaho's gamefish species are all included. Additionally, the brochures provide tips on equipment, fishing techniques, care of fish for consumption, and catch and release fishing. Find the entire set of brochures online at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>.



Family Fishing Waters offer easy access, simple rules and lots of fishing fun for the whole family



Dennis Hardy, IDFG



Dan Garren, IDFG

Ethical Fishing

Ethical fishing is as much about common courtesy as it is about following the regulations. These simple rules can improve everyone's fishing experience.

Please don't litter. Pick up after yourself and others. Remember that discarded fishing line is litter too. Bury fish entrails and leave your fishing location cleaner than you found it.

Don't crowd other anglers. Leave enough room between your fishing spot and theirs to avoid line tangling or other conflicts.

Ask permission to fish on private lands and treat the property as if it was your own. Idaho's trespass law is very clear.

No person may enter private land to hunt, fish or trap without permission if the land is either cultivated or posted with legible "no trespassing" signs.

Proper posting includes lettered signs or 100 square inches of fluorescent orange paint or an entire fluorescent orange metal fence post located every 660 feet around the property and at reasonable access points. In Idaho, a trespass conviction includes a mandatory one-year license revocation.

Panfish - Crappie, Bluegill and Perch

They don't call crappie and bluegill "panfish" for nothing. They're some of Idaho's best eating gamefish. Plus, they're fun – abundant and relatively easy to catch. Panfish are tailor-made for great kid fishing and provide lots of action.

Spring and early summer are the best times to fish for these species because they are spawning in shallow water close to shore. They travel in schools, and once found, the fishing can be fast and furious.

Popular destinations for **crappie** include Hayden Lake near Coeur d'Alene, Mann Lake near Lewiston, Brownlee and C.J. Strike reservoirs in southern Idaho, and Glendale Reservoir in southeast Idaho.

Bluegill are distributed across the state in many lakes and small ponds. The best fishing for bluegill is generally in the southern portion of the state.

Yellow perch are also widespread, but inhabit larger water bodies such as Magic Reservoir, C.J. Strike Reservoir and Lake Cascade.



Evin O'neale, IDFG

***They don't all weigh 3 1/2 pounds!
Nine-year-old Jason Monson caught
this state record crappie in 2003
at Brownlee Reservoir***

Panfishing equipment includes lightweight rods, light line (4 pound test or less), and a variety of small lures and/or bait. Perch can be caught using worms or strips of cutbait fished close to the bottom. Crappie will go after 1/16 ounce or smaller jigs with plastic bodies in a variety of colors. Bluegill can be caught on small artificial lures, worms and jigs; focus on shallow shoreline areas. Be sure to use small hooks (size 12 or smaller), small bait and a small bobber.

While there are no limits on panfish in most Idaho waters, please keep only as many fish as you can properly care for and eat.



Evin O'neale, IDFG

Abundant and easy to catch, bluegill are a great choice for young anglers



Be Outside!
For ideas on connecting children to nature from backyards to mountaintops go to:
beoutsideidaho.org



Catch and Release or Catch and Keep?

Many anglers believe the best way to ensure good fishing is to release every fish caught. While this may be true in some instances, it does not apply everywhere and in some cases may actually be counterproductive to good fish management.

Idaho's fisheries are managed with a variety of rules designed to provide diverse recreational opportunity. There are places to catch (and mostly release) large fish and other waters that provide high

catch and harvest rates. Still other areas are stocked with catchable-sized trout intended specifically for anglers to take home and eat.

Fishing regulations help protect fish populations from overharvest. Fish managers place bag or size limits on fish populations that cannot withstand heavy harvest. Abundant fish populations require less restrictive rules including six-fish limits or unlimited harvest.

Catch and Keep

Most species of Idaho gamefish are excellent eating if cared for properly. Please use fish resources wisely; keep only fish that you will use and release the rest.

- **Plan ahead.** If you intend to keep fish for eating, bring a proper storage container.
- **Get fish cleaned and on ice** as soon as possible, especially trout. Remember to leave the head and tail attached during the trip home.
- **Warm water fish** can be kept in a live well or on a stringer until you are done fishing.



Rob Parkins

Catch and Release

Although many fish are hardy and can be caught and released numerous times, fish survival increases with these proper handling and release techniques.

- **Use barbless hooks** to make releasing fish easier.
- **Land fish quickly** to minimize undue stress, especially in warmer water.
- **Leave hooked fish in the water** if possible. Never hold a fish by the gills. Support the belly to avoid injuring internal organs.
- **For lip-hooked fish**, hold the hook shank with a pair of pliers and pull the hook backwards with a gentle shake. If the fish is hooked more securely, wet one hand to gently grip the fish. Back the hook out with your fingers or pliers.
- **If the hook is swallowed**, cut the line as close to the hook as possible and release the fish. Most hooks will dissolve within a few weeks.



Rob Parkins

Bass Fishing in Idaho

For a Rocky Mountain state most famous for its trout fishing, Idaho has some remarkably good bass fishing on scenic and relatively uncrowded waters. Both largemouth and smallmouth bass can be found from the low elevation lakes in Idaho's Panhandle to the rivers, lakes and reservoirs in southern and southeast Idaho. Smallmouth bass tend to be found along the rocky shorelines of larger lakes and low elevation rivers, while largemouth bass prefer the warmer water of smaller lakes and reservoirs or the shallow bays of large lakes. Both species are popular with anglers because they are aggressive predators that will strike a variety of baits and lures.

A relatively short growing season means Idaho's smallmouth and largemouth bass grow slower than bass in the southern states. It can take four or five years to grow a 12-inch fish and close to ten years to grow a trophy. Most of Idaho is managed with a 12-inch minimum length for bass, while some lakes are managed with special seasons or size limits. Restrictive harvest rules don't guarantee you'll catch a giant, but you will probably get to catch (and mostly release) more fish and bigger fish than in waters with more liberal rules. In some northern Idaho waters, smallmouth bass harvest rules are different from largemouth bass rules, so it's important to know the difference between species. As always, check the fishing rules before you go.



Idaho's more popular smallmouth bass waters include Hayden Lake in the Panhandle Region; Dworshak Reservoir in the Clearwater Region;



Evin Oneale, IDFG

*Smallmouth bass are found in a number
of Idaho rivers and reservoirs*

Oxbow, Brownlee, and C.J. Strike reservoirs in the Southwest Region; Milner and Minidoka reservoirs in the Magic Valley Region; and American Falls Reservoir in the Southeast Region.

Largemouth bass prefer warmer water and are not as widespread. Explore the chain lakes along the Coeur d'Alene River in the Panhandle Region, Lake Lowell and Crane Falls Lake in the Southwest Region, and most small ponds and reservoirs in southern and southeast Idaho.

Fishing tackle for bass should include light to medium action rods with 6 to 10 pound test line. Plastic tube jigs or crankbaits can be effective for smallmouth, while largemouth will strike a variety of soft plastic worms and jigs, spinner baits and minnow-imitation lures. When fishing for bass, focus on shallower shoreline areas, off points and around rocks, brush or other cover.