

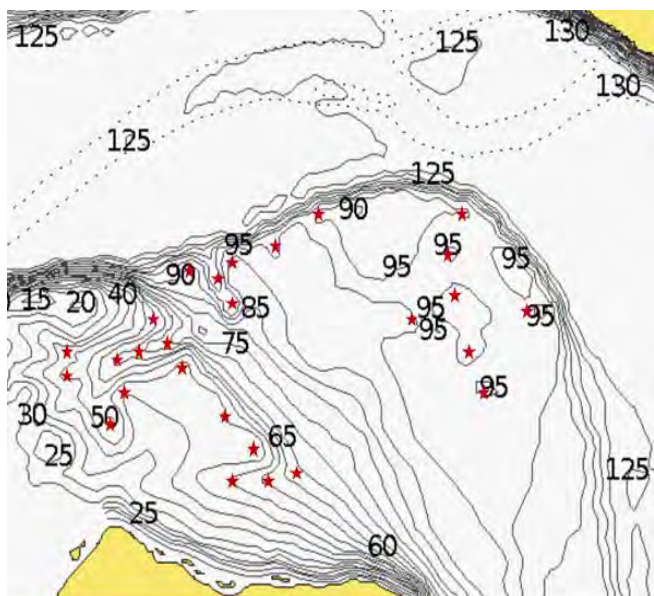
Ice Fishing for Blue Mesa Lake Trout



FISHING TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR CATCH RATE

Blue Mesa

Lake trout are an exciting and challenging fish to fish for in Blue Mesa Reservoir. They inhabit deep water, moving into shallower water to feed on kokanee, trout, perch, suckers and crayfish. Kokanee salmon are a critical diet item for growing large lake trout. Anglers are encouraged to keep as many smaller (<24") lake trout as possible in order to reduce predation on the kokanee population while maintaining a trophy lake trout fishery. Small lake trout are great table fare, especially when smoked.



Example map of good lake trout fishing locations (points, humps and stream beds). Red stars are good locations. The dashed line is the main river channel. This is not a map of Blue Mesa.

Habitat

Lake trout utilize two main types of habitat: holding and feeding habitat. Successful anglers can find and catch fish in either habitat type, as well as in areas that lake trout utilize to move between the two types. Holding habitat is typically deeper water, such as old stream beds or the Gunnison River channel. Feeding habitat is typically shallower (50-80 feet) and consists of flats, humps and points. Some of the better places to fish for lake trout at Blue Mesa are points, channels, and flats adjacent to deeper holding water. Lake trout will often use old stream channels to move up onto feeding areas, and anglers can intercept them during these movements.

Gear

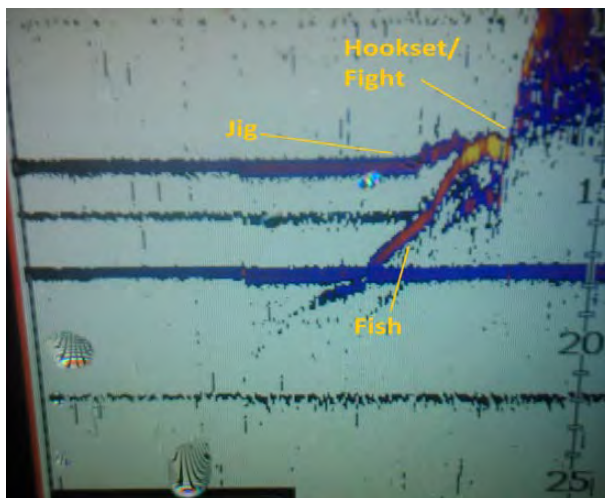
Rod-Reel – Stout rods are important for driving hooks into the bony mouth of lake trout in deep water. Sensitive, heavy action graphite rods of at least 30 inches are recommended to feel subtle bites and hook the fish. Both spinning and baitcasting reels will work for lake trout provided that they have a smooth, dependable drag.

Line – Low stretch line is important for hooking lake trout. Florocarbon line has low-stretch and low-visibility and is a great option. Another option is to fish braided line which has no stretch, and then attach 6 feet of fluorocarbon leader. The line attached to the jig should be 6-12 lb for smaller fish and up to 15 lb for larger lakers.

Sonar – A portable sonar that will mark both lake trout and jigs in water to 100 feet is an invaluable tool for lake trout fishing. There are many great options available from companies like Lowrance, MarCum, Humminbird and Vexilar.

Ice Auger – Any auger will work, but having the ability to move frequently with a power auger can be nice.

GPS – GPS is invaluable for locating lake trout habitat and saving productive locations. There are many options that have topographic maps of the lake installed. Additionally, Navionics makes a smart phone app that has Blue Mesa topography and will plot your position. This app costs around \$10.



Sonar with fish swimming up to jig and being hooked.

Lures – Tube jigs have probably caught more lake trout than any other lure. Tubes from 2.5-5 inches long are good for smaller fish, with tubes to 12 inches good for the big ones. Three general colors will cover most situations: White, chartreuse and dark olive. Twister tail jigs and spoons like Sweedish Pimples can also be effective. It is good to tip jigs with a small piece of sucker meat about the size of a postage stamp to get fish to hold on longer. The sucker meat should be attached in a streamlined way so that it looks like part of the jig.

Jig-Heads – Jig-heads are used to get your jig to the depth the fish are at. Jig-heads from ¼ to 1 oz are effective for lake trout. Use premium hooks if at all possible. Owner makes some great jig-heads with super-sharp hooks. This is vital for setting the hook into a tough mouth in water up to 100 feet deep. Hooks matter.



Tube jig with sucker meat.

Catching Fish

Time of Day – Lake trout fishing is almost always best from sun-up to around noon, and again in the last hour before dark. Make a point to get out early. Sometimes shallower areas will be better in the morning when fish are feeding, and deeper areas adjacent to the feeding areas can be better in the afternoon when fish use them to rest.

Locating Fish – Finding lake trout is one of the most important and difficult parts of fishing for them. The best way to sum up how to be successful is: MOVE, MOVE, MOVE. Anglers should move regularly between good looking habitat locations as described above. It is common on Blue Mesa to catch several fish within the first few minutes of fishing a new location. These are the active fish in the area, and once they are caught, it is often difficult to catch many more fish in the same spot. If the fishing slows down, MOVE. It can be good to come back to productive locations later in the day once new fish have moved in. A sonar is very helpful for determining when to move. If you aren't marking fish frequently, MOVE. There are thousands of good locations on Blue Mesa, and finding the ones that produce is half of the fun.

Presentation – Most lake trout in Blue Mesa will be caught near the bottom. Drop your jig to the bottom, and reel up a couple of feet so that the lake trout can see it. Watch the sonar for fish coming through. If a fish comes in at a depth different than the jig, try to get the jig to that depth. Triggering lake trout to bite can be difficult, and a sonar helps determine what they want. Try aggressive jigging or quickly raising or lowering the jig 10 to 20 feet to make them think it is getting away. If this doesn't work, try gentle jigging, or no jigging at all. Sometimes, hitting the bottom with the jig will trigger a strike. Experiment until you find what works. It is like playing with a cat with a piece of string.

Setting the Hook – Most strikes will be light and often happen on the fall. If your line stops sinking, or gives a subtle twitch, a laker probably has it. When in doubt, set the hook. When you set the hook, set it hard to drive the hook into the bony mouth of the laker. It is important to set your drag well, so that it pulls just before the lines breaking point to prevent break-offs while still allowing the maximum power of your hook set to transfer to the fish. Once the fish is on make sure to not let slack into the line. Lake trout like to swim up toward the hole and will often fall off if there is any slack. On big fish, let your drag work for you.



A good day of Blue Mesa lake trout fishing.