



Downrigger balls, side planers, and snap weights all have their place in kokanee fishing. 6-8 pound weights are sufficient for kokanee trolling. If you are going to be dragging bottom, the stick-type downrigger weights are less prone to hanging up. The Church Tackle TX 6 is a good kokanee-sized planer board.

Small, teardrop, and skateboard-style dodgers all catch fish. Be sure to have a wide range of 2"-6" dodgers in both nickel and gold finishes. Get some colored dodgers to match your lure colors as your collection grows.



Have a full selection of colors for each type of lure. Run squids 6"-8" behind your dodgers. With spinners run 9"-12" leaders. For plugs like Apexes or Kokanee Killers, 16"-18" leaders work best.



Try coloring your corn with Pro-Cure dye. Soak 2 teaspoons of dye per 7 oz. can of corn. Soak for three days, then rinse and pat dry before curing with scent. Pautzke and some other companies make pre-dyed corn in jars if you want go that route.

Northern California Kokanee Trolling Basics

By Jack Naves

I am often asked how to troll for kokanee. When answering, I usually pause and say something like, "Well, it's kind of complicated..." Since we are entering the prime months to fish for kokanee in Northern California, this is a great time to cover the basics. I'll throw in some advanced tips as well, just in case you are already a hard-core kokehead.

Boat Setup

You will need a boat capable of trolling between 0.8 and 1.8 miles-per-hour. Most anglers use a bow-mounted electric motor with autopilot for steering and slow-trolling. Thrust for faster trolling comes from either the main motor with a trolling plate, or a kicker motor. Can't troll that slow? Get some drift socks or buckets you can drag out the sides of the boat.

A sonar unit with GPS is critical. You need GPS to accurately track your speed, and sonar is needed to determine the depth of kokanee on any given day. You might as well forget about kokanee fishing without these tools.

Next, you will need some downriggers. You can troll with keel sinkers or snap weights, but downriggers will do a much better job of getting exactly to the right depth. Otherwise, you will need to experiment with speed and weight combinations until you start catching fish. For example, I have caught fish without downriggers at 50 feet deep using 3 ounce snap weights. The weights were clipped 50 feet in front of my dodgers, and I let out a total of 200 feet of line trolling at 1.6 miles-per-hour.

Downrigger line clips are something of hot debate. Some anglers swear by the Chamberlain or Black's mechanical-style releases. I use the black Off-Shore Tackle clip-style releases with a modification. First, I cut off the cable leash

that comes attached. Next, I tie my own 36 inch long 80 pound test mono leash. The longer leash helps me to detect much lighter bites because of the added swing radius.

Rod & Reel Setup

Your rod should be super light and limber. Many manufacturers have kokanee-specific downrigger rods. I prefer graphite rods for smaller kokanee as they seem to lose less fish. Fiberglass rods have a little more backbone for fighting larger fish. Fiberglass rods telegraph light bites better than graphite rods, so keep that in mind when bites are hard to detect.

Bait casting reels with line counters and clickers make it easier, but any light-weight reel with a good drag will get the job done. A super-smooth drag is the most important part of the entire package, but monofilament line also helps to absorb head-shakes.

I use twelve pound test braid for my main line since it cuts the water when fishing deep. It also allows me to detect light bites better due to its lack of stretch. However, I add a 50 foot long ten pound test mono top shot to give me shock absorbing ability when fighting kokanee. I tie a really small duo-lock snap to the end of my main line where the dodger will be attached.

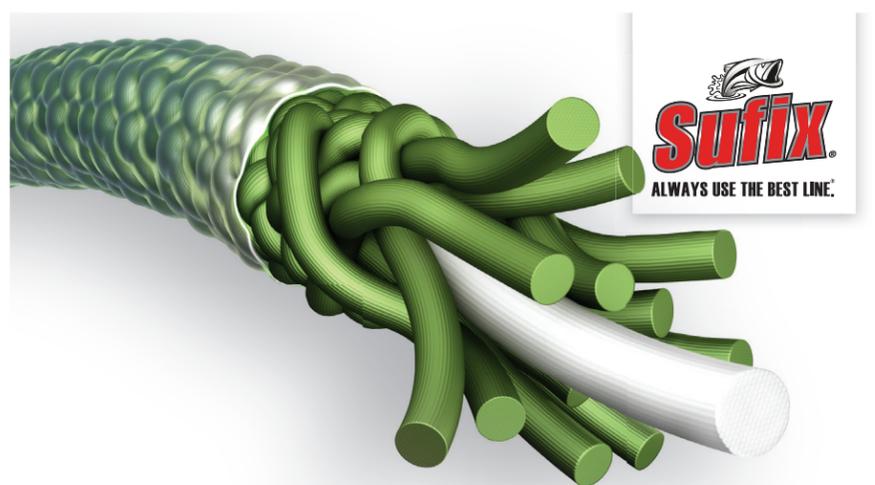
Dodgers

For kokanee we use small 2 to 6 inch dodgers. I mostly use the teardrop-shaped dodgers, but the skateboard-style dodgers work as well. Have at least four or five of each size of both gold and nickel dodgers in your box. My go-to is a 4.5" nickel teardrop dodger.

Lures

Buy at least two squids, spinners, and plugs in each color. Get some squids both

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with and without a gold spinner blade. The most popular lure colors in order are: fluorescent pink, orange, green, purple, blue, and red. Pick up some gold lures too. Keep switching until you find what the fish want on any given day. Certain lures will get hot, so always have backups!

Bait

Don't ask me why, but canned white shoepeg corn is the best option for baiting kokanee lures. I hook one kernel per hook through the fat end of the kernel. Some anglers like to load two or three kernels per hook. Just keep in mind this will kill some of the lure's action.

Straight out of the can is probably fine, but mixing your corn three days in advance with Pro-Cure garlic or herring oil can produce fish. Smelly Jelly Sticky Liquid Kokanee Feast is also popular. An old standby that I usually employ is mixing a can of oil-packed tuna with my corn.

Seasons

I would classify December-April as the winter or early season. Kokanee will be in the top 15 feet of water at most lakes. When fish are above sonar range, you will have to hunt and experiment with depths until you find the right combination. At many lakes the fishing will be tough, so look up some reports before heading out! Bullards Bar is usually good, but those fish seem to hold deeper than 15 feet all year long for some reason.

When fishing shallow, be sure to run long setbacks like 150' to 200' behind the boat. Use side planers and top lines to keep the lines separated. Even when employing downriggers, you will be surprised when you catch most of your fish at four feet deep.

I like running spinners during the early season. I will often downsize to micro setups tipped with smaller pieces of corn, and employ small dodgers like Crystal Basin Wild Things. The trolling speed this time of year is usually around 1.3 miles-per-hour.

The prime season for kokanee is May-June. Some lakes will stratify into temperature zones, stacking kokanee at very similar depths. You may see small schools starting to form. The typical depth range this time of year is between 35 and 70 feet deep. Shorten your setbacks to between 8 and 60 feet behind the downrigger balls.

During prime season I will try spinners, squids, and plugs to see what is working the best. When using squids, I can adjust the bend in my dodger to increase or decrease the zigzag action of the lure. At most lakes I'm running at about 1.6 miles-per-hour, but at lakes with smaller kokanee like Pardee I find myself trolling down around 1.0 miles-per-hour.

July-November kicks off the late kokanee season. Pre-spawn fish will be deep, ranging between 60 and 120 feet deep at most lakes. They will form big schools and won't be hard to spot once you know the right area of the lake. At this point, I shorten my setbacks to between six and thirty feet behind the downrigger balls. I mostly use plugs like the Hot-Spot Apex size 1.5 and the 2" Pro-Troll Kokanee Killer. I always run some glow-in-the-dark lures since it most likely is pitch dark down where the fish are. One trick is to add a small piece of glow-in-the-dark rubber worm on each hook next to the corn.

With late-season kokanee, I'm usually trolling between 0.8 and 1.0 miles-per-hour. Try sudden erratic turns and speed changes to get the big schools to bite. If you can't get them to bite, try speeding up as fast as 1.8 miles-per-hour. Keep adjusting until you get them to go.

Game Plan

It is important to develop a game plan before hitting a lake. Check the latest issue of The Fish Sniffer for recent reports. Review social media sites for individual lakes and kokanee fishing groups in your area. Recent reports on depths, locations, and lures will be more important than any of your gear or tackle. Web sites for organizations like CIFI and Kokanee Power will detail which Northern California lakes are currently being planted with kokanee.

There you have it, kokanee fishing in a nutshell! We are entering the prime season, so get out there and put some delicious orange fillets into your cooler.

Turn To Silver Horde For Salmon And Trout Gear

Micro Squid are perfect for trout, landlocked kings and 'kokes. The squid are 1.75 inches long. They come in a long list of standard, ultra violet and glow colors. Slip them on a double hook leader, toss a dodger into the mix and you're ready to fish!

An Ace Hi Fly is like a hoochie wearing a tuxedo, basically a greatly dressed up version of the old reliable plastic squid. Ace Hi Flies come with a hard bead head that boasts lifelike eyes. The skirt utilizes a hoochie, but adds to it with synthetic flash.

Ace Hi Fly Juniors come either rigged or unrigged. The flies are 2 inches long. I generally go with the unrigged

version and run them off double hook leaders.

For those who are looking for a small spoon for ocean salmon or a larger spoon for trout Kingfisher Lite Spoons are a great option. The spoon comes in three sizes that range from 2 5/8 inches long to 3 3/8 inches. A wide range of color choices in standard, glow and Ultra Violet finishes are available.

When it comes to color try to keep things simple and try to match the baitfish the trout or salmon are feeding on.

For more information visit the Silver Horde website at www.silverhorde.com.



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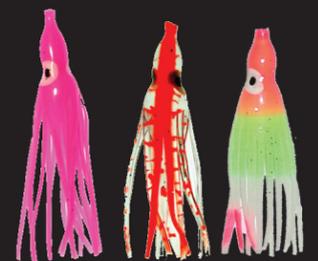
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