

W.O.C. Fishing the Port of West Sacramento and the D.W.S.C. February

Species: Striped Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Largemouth Bass, Sturgeon.

General: This is one of the “slow” to “getting better” months as the water is cold and often dirty. All fishing techniques can catch fish. Bait fishing (live or dead), throwing lures and jigging may do better in colder, dirtier water. Both trolling techniques will produce in clear to semi-clear and warmer water (56 degrees and above).

Water temperature/clarity & likely depth(s) fish will be at: 49 (first of the month) to 56-degrees end of month), clear to dirty, 4’ to the bottom.

Best time to fish: 60-90 minutes before and after a tide change. Go to <http://washingtonoutboardclub.org/> :Tides” 2019 Tide Tables.

Best to avoid days or times of the day with ship arrivals or departures. Go to https://www.marinetraffic.com/en/ais/details/ports/20760/USA_port:SACRAMENTO

Peak times: First light and dusk. The three-hour period around a tide change.

Sections:

Trolling

Drifting Live Bait

Jigging

Plugging/Throwing Lures

Bait Fishing On-Anchor

Trolling

When the water is 56-70 degrees, water clear (you can see your prop) to semi-clear (you can see your anti-cavitation plate) & the tides are right (small to medium size).

Areas:

Rod, reel, main line: 7' MA rod, 10-17 pound, ¼-3/4 oz; line counter reel with a clicker and 30-pound braid ending with a snap.

Leader: 30 inches of 15-25-pound mono with a barrel swivel on one end and a snap on the other.

Scents/bait: In off-color water use garlic or shad scent (gel or spray).

Lures/colors/speed:

12-16' water depth: Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnows (center or outside rod, less likely to use it) or Predators (inside rod, less expensive if you lose it). Predators 50-60' foot back, Yo-Zuris 70-80' back for the center rod and 82-102' back on the outside rod. 3.5 mph. Going against the current will take away depth, and going with the current will add a little depth. Adjust your line out to match the depth, or change lures to match the depth where you see fish, or control your troll on the bottom contours to match the depth of the line. You want to be just ticking bottom occasionally or be really close to bottom for those feeding fish. Vary the speed on tough days. Add a white, chartreuse or pink Trick or Strike King worm to each lure on the treble prong that is in-line with the body. The basic colors of lures to buy are Rainbow Trout, Pearl, Red Head, Clown, Chartreuse & one Fire tiger.

18-24' water depth: Line counter 30" 15-25# mono leader 25#. 2.8 mph. Rig: 3 oz banana or torpedo weight with a snap added to the rear end; splitter rig; 18-24" dropper 15-25# on the small spreader wing, 36-48" 15 -25# mono on the long splitter wing; deep-diving predator or Yo-Zuri on the long leader, 2 oz hair raiser, Rat-L-Trap or fish trap on the shorter leader. Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnows (center or outside rod, less likely to use it) or Predators (inside rod, less expensive if you lose it). Predators 70-82' feet back, Yo-Zuris for the center rod 122' back and 122-132' back on the outside rod. 2.8 mph. Going against the current will take away depth, and going with the current will add a little depth. Adjust your line out to match the depth, or change lures to match the depth where you see fish, or control your troll on the bottom contours to match the depth of the line. You want to be just ticking bottom occasionally or be really close to bottom for those feeding fish. Vary the speed on tough days. Add a white, chartreuse or pink Trick or Strike King worm to each lure on the treble prong that is in-line with the body. The basic colors of lures to buy are Rainbow Trout, Pearl, Red Head, Clown, Chartreuse & one Fire tiger.

24-40' Water depth: Same as for 24-40' water except you need to use a heavier in-line weight and longer set-backs.

Alabama "A" Rigs. There is a 3-hook maximum but each can be a treble hook. Put "attractors on the other wings. Alan Fong uses single hooks with the center trailing lure catching the most fish. Use a keel weight on the bottom to prevent the rig from "rolling". Place the heavier weighted lures and attractors on the bottom and lighter ones on top. Check how the rig looks in the water at trolling speed before letting it down.

Fish finder: Set it to read to the bottom.

Technique:

Put ¼ of an inch of a 5-6" worm on the rear hook that is in-line with the body (normally this will be the bottom hook). Push it on and up into where the three prongs meet.

In dirty water it is a good idea to add scent to the lure, e.g. garlic gel.

Put your lure in the water near the boat and watch it to insure it is swimming in a straight-ahead, skittering slightly side to side line.

Let the line out slowly so that the lure does not foul the line with the front hooks or snag the tail. In 12-16' water let a Predator out 55' on the inside, near the shore rod and see if it swims freely. If it does let it out 5 feet at a time until it bounces bottom then bring it in 5'. This should put your lure within 1-3' of the bottom bring it in five feet.

Put the rod in a rod holder and put on the clicker. Look at your rod tip. It should be twitching up and down rapidly at 2.5-4.5 mph. If not, your rod is too stiff or your lure has picked up some debris, its tail flipped onto a hook or the leader wrapped around the front hook. When in doubt reel in the lure and correct the problem.

When you get a hit or hook-up, you'll know it as your clicker will sound off.

Take the rod out of the holder, take the clicker off and play your fish. The person on the helm should turn the boat out into deeper water to get out of the "trolling lane" so other boats can continue their troll in productive water.

It is generally a good idea to bring in any other rigs in the water while playing the hook-ed up fish. Reel the other rigs in slowly as you may get another hook-up on the way in.

Note: When approaching other boats trolling the same depth water the general rule is that boats are to pass "port to port", e.g. is on their left sides.

GPS: If you have one mark you trail line every 100', all hits, hook-ups as soon as they occur and then stay in that area until the bite stops. Watch the direction of the marks it may tell you which direction the fish headed.

Boat handling: Normally you will troll a straight a straight line following the depth contour you choose, e.g. 12-16'. On tough days you may have to make sharp "S" turns, start, idle your motor to make dramatic lure reactions to incite a hit. Note which rod gets the bites, e.g. outside rod on a turn to deeper water the fish are deep, you might want to troll faster. Inside rod on a turn the fish are shallower, you might want to troll at a slower speed.

Drifting Live Bait

When the water is 54-46 degrees, water clear (you can see your prop) to semi-clear (you can see your anti-cavitation plate) to dirty (you cannot see the anti-cavitation plate and the tides are right (small to medium size).

Areas:

Rod/reel/line: Reel with clicker, 7' MA rod, 10-17 pound, 1/4-3/4 oz; Power Pro braid 30 pound/15-pound mono.

Rig:

Slider on main line; barrel swivel; 20-pound leader 48", #1 mosquito hook, Perfection or Rapala Loop Knot. Dropper 18-24" of 15-pound Maxima. Ball weights 1/2, 3/4, 1 oz.

or

3-way swivel. 20-pound fluorocarbon leader 48", #1 mosquito hook, Perfection or Rapala Loop Knot. Dropper 10-pound Maxima, Duo Lock Snaps. Ball weights 1/2, 3/4, 1 oz.

Other: Trolling motor, bait bucket with batteries, air hose and air stone.

Bait: Jumbo minnows, blue gill, mudsuckers. Hook through both lips upward from bottom jaw.

Tactics:

Find fish with the Fish Finder.

Drifting Blue Gill. Put the clicker on, reel in free spool (so that the striper has plenty of time to mouth and ultimately swallow the Blue Gill which is larger than most minnows). Drop down until you hit bottom and then reel up a couple of cranks. Keep the bait 1-2' off the bottom. Put rod in the rod holder or hold it.

If your bait starts freaking out making the tip of your pole jiggle be ready because usually there is a striper in the area scaring the minnow.

Let the fish take the bait, take off clicker, after a count of 3 engage gear, wait until rod tip loads up then set hook.

Drifting Minnows or Mudsuckers.

Use a three-way swivel.

Hook them through both lips or run the hook thru the nose hole on the jumbo minnows.

Drop down until you hit bottom and then reel up a couple of cranks. Keep the bait 1-2' off the bottom.

Engage the reel and put it in a rod holder with a medium to medium light reel drag setting.

After that watch the fish finder and as the depth changes drop down or bring rig up. Drift along the shore line where the drop off starts which is usually around 12-20 foot. It is very important to stay just off the bottom about 3 to 5 foot or so.

If your bait starts freaking out making the tip of your pole jiggle be ready because usually there is a striper in the area scaring the minnow.

Let the striper completely take the minnow/mudsucker down and fully load up the rod before you take the rod out of the rod holder. Then it's "fish on"! If you get too excited when a striper hits the bait and quickly take the rod out of the rod holder and set the hook more often than not you will either set the hook too soon (and pull the bait out of the striper's mouth) or the striper will feel it and spit out the bait.

A last recommendation/comment for those fishing with live bait: You must have lots of patience and let the striper fully commit to taking the bait before you set the hook.

Fish finder: Set it to read to the bottom.

GPS: If you have one, mark hits, hook-ups as soon as they occur and then stay in that area until the bite stops. Watch the direction of the marks it may tell you which direction the fish headed.

Boat handling: Trolling motor on low, low, drifting your bait as naturally as possible with the current. Note when you get bites, e.g. outside rod the fish are deep, inside rod the fish are shallower.

Jigging

Any time you can find the fish schooled-up. Generally, when the water reaches 54 degrees and lower.

Areas:

Rod/reel/line. You can use the same rod/reel combo for both plugging and spooning. 7' graphite in the 10 to 20-pound test range. It needs backbone and a medium soft tip, so a medium action rod will work. Bait caster reel, such as a Shimano Curado, Chronarch or comparable reel that will hold approximately 150 yards of 30 or 20 pound braided or 25-pound mono line.

Rig: I

Al Fong 11/15/2007. Take split ring off, tie 24 - 36 inches of 25-pound mono directly to lure, tag end to barrel swivel in 1 oz. to 3 oz.

Mark Wilson: I do not use a leader. I tie direct to a cross lock which attaches to the lure.

Other:

Bait/lure: Spoons/jigs such as Blade Runner, Hopkins, Duh, homemade, Kastmaster.

Use dark spoons in dark, deep or muddy water, white in clear or shallow water.

Switch out the treble barbed hooks for 2/O to 4/O Gamma Gatsu Siwash single hooks

Tactics:

Jigging is a vertical fishing technique. Drifting vertical is very important. Find fish on moving current and drift and spoon vertically. Use heavier jig, if necessary, to stay vertical.

Water below 50 degrees.

You want good water clarity. You should be able to see your jig down to, at least, 1-1/2' to 2', or more. If it is muddy, the striper cannot see the jig.

1 hour before to 1 hour after a high tide.

You have to find the fish. Find them by looking for diving birds feeding on bait fish or using a Fish Finder. Don't spoon unless you see fish on the sonar.

Fish edges of the D.W.S.C.

Drop your lure down until you hit bottom and then pop your rod up 1-2', pause, and follow the lure down slowly.

Feel for a tick on the way down, this is a hit. When you feel a hit lift your rod tip to set the hook.

If you see a school, get hit and hook-up throw the jig to the shore popping it jig off the shelf for larger fish.

Keep it near the bottom at all times as bait stays near the bottom in colder water.

Watch the fish finder and as the depth changes drop down or up adjust the amount of your line out accordingly.

Start by drifting along the shore line where the drop off starts which is usually around 12-20 foot. Change to other depths until you locate fish.

Depending on the depth of water, 12' to 50', lighter jigs for shallower water, heavier jigs for deeper water.

Spraying the jig with an artificial smell is an option too.

Fish finder: Set it to read to the bottom. When they are schooled up you will see them on the graph.

GPS: If you have one-mark hits, hook-ups as soon as they occur and then stay in that area until the bite stops. Watch the direction of the marks it may tell you which direction the fish headed.

Boat handling: Use a trolling motor to control your drift speed to be as close to the current speed and your line nearly vertical as possible. Trolling motor in reverse holding into the current. Water 12-50' deep.

Plugging/Throwing Lures

Anytime of the year.

Areas:

Big Stripers (25 to 40-pound+). Are loners and like to go shallow. They do not school and wander off by themselves.

Big striper fishing is best in water from 1.5-7' deep.

Big fish only eat once and maybe not every day. It takes big bait to catch them.

Rod/Reel/Line/Leader:

Al Fong December 12, 2013. G Loomis SWBR953-954 Swim bait 8', 15-30#, 2-6 oz bait rod. Calcutta 400 reel with 30-pound quality monofilament line tied directly to the swim bait lure, no swivel.

Fish traps: Rod 7'6", 8 to 15-pound line, 5:1 retrieve ratio bait caster, 50-pound braid.

Rip baits: Rod 7'6", 8-15" line, 7:1 retrieve ratio bait caster, 20-pound mono.

Lures:

Lipless crank baits (best in June, July, August, September). Rat-L-Traps and Luckycraft LV500. ½ & ¾ oz most common. American Shad, black-blue/chrome. Best in warmer water, e.g. summer. Keep them moving, stripers often miss on their first strike. If you keep the bait moving, they will usually keep on striking until they get hooked. Cast them out, & slow roll them back to the boat. Be sure to retrieve all the way to the boat as the strike often comes right at your feet. If a bass misses your bait beside the boat start pulling the bait in a figure eight-pattern just below the surface with the rod tip.

Swim baits (best December, January, February). Day in and out. 5' Fish Trap, "Striper Special" & pearl together with a 3/8-1/2 oz lead head. ½ oz 90% of the time. Fish these slower than other baits and closer to the bottom. Use scent! Cast out, allow them to fall down near the bottom and then slow roll them back to the boat. Do not set the hook on the tap, tap, tap. Wait until the rod loads up. Keep them moving, stripers often miss on their first strike. If you keep the bait moving, they will usually keep on striking until they get hooked. Be sure to retrieve all the way to the boat as the strike often comes right at your feet. If a bass misses your bait beside the boat start pulling the bait in a figure eight-pattern just below the surface with the rod tip. Alan Fong's favorite swim bait color is white or bone.

Al Fong January 28 2010. Top water produces the biggest stripers. Water temp 42-47 degrees. Lures: 6-8". Pencil Poppers.

Bait has to be the right weight.

7' water ½ oz

4' water 3/8 oz

3' water ¼ oz

Fish trap with a ½ oz Strike King jig head.

Buy the jig heads where the eye comes straight out the front.

50-pound braid.

20" fluorocarbon leader.

Alberto knot.

Tie leader to jig head, do not use a snap.

Reel slow.

Retie leader each trip.

Fish the edge of a shoal or weed bed that faces the current.

If you see "Christmas Tree" bait balls stop & fish them. This means the stripers are there, driving the bait to the surface.

12/29/2004. FR. Alan Fong. Water clear. I am fishing shallow flats. When the water gets into the mid-forties the stripers are all over these weed shoals. Current is very important as to how it directs itself around these shoals. My number one lure is the Fish-trap with a Strike-King 1/2oz jig head. Swim it very slowly over the top of the weeds. Boat control is the name of the game when doing this kind of fishing! Try to keep the boat in 7-10' of water and follow the weed line as it zigzags all around. If the weeds make an inside bend with the current pushing into it this will be a good area! Once you hook one you should catch quite a few in the same spot. I will usually have two or three on all the time when I find the school.

Rip Baits. 3-6' water, as the water cools. Luckycraft 128 SP Pointer (\$15.98!). Ghost Shad, American Shad. Burn it quick-like with pauses, let it sit. 90% of your bites will be when the lure is suspended and still. In cold water let it suspend for 10 seconds. Keep them moving, stripers often miss on their first strike. If you keep the bait moving, they will usually keep on striking until they get hooked.

Topwater baits. Low light conditions, Zara/Super Spooks, Pencil Poppers, Lunker Punks, Delta Wood Bomber (DWB) and Lucky Craft Sammies 128 (\$15.98!).

American Shad, Chartreuse Shad. Super Spooks in largemouth bass, trout, shad & bone colors. You have to learn how to “walk the dog” on your retrieve. This is accomplished by rhythmically twitching the bait on a slack line while slowly retrieving line. Keep the bait moving. Resist the temptation to set the hook. Wait until you feel the fish, is this the same as your rod loading up? Keep them moving, stripers often miss on their first strike. If you keep the bait moving, they will usually keep on striking until they get hooked. Many times, a bass will miss a surface lure two to three times before being hooked.

October 6, 2010 Three Tips for Catching Top Water Striped Bass by JD Richey. fishwithjd.com

Double Split Rings. Big stripers can put a lot of strain on a lure when they’re near the boat, thrashing around. Using strong head shakes as leverage against the tension of the line, they can actually rip a lure right out of their faces. To combat that, simply double up on your split rings between the lure and the hook. By doing so, you give the hook nearly 360 degrees of travel and that will help you keep more fish buttoned up.

Use a Loop Knot. Topwater lures, especially walk-the-dog models, rely on action to call fish in. You can stifle that fish-attracting motion by tying your line to the plug with a conventional knot. To give your lure the best possible freedom of movement, go with a loop-type of knot so that the line doesn’t sink down against the lure.

Also, I use 30-pound braid tied directly to my plugs. When topwater fishing, stripers are rarely line shy, so there’s no need to use a leader (why intentionally add any weak points to your gear?).

Go Barbless. Okay, so this sounds a bit counter-intuitive when we’re talking about catching more fish, right? Well, not so fast! I switched all my topwater plugs out to barbless a few seasons ago and have never looked back. The benefits are numerous: Not only do you not have to mess with hooks tangled in nets, but they also come out of human flesh a lot easier (ask me how I know!). On the same vein, barbless hooks can be removed from fish much faster...which does less damage to the fish when you’re playing catch & release. And, because you can get fish back into the water more quickly, you’re going to catch more of them! It’s happened a million times: I’m in the middle of a wide-open surface frenzy and a striper (usually a little guy) gets every single barb on two or three trebles buried and it takes me way too long to get him off. Sometimes, the blitz is over by the time you get that fish back into the water.

Sure, you’re going to lose a few with barbless hooks, but not really enough to make using barbs worthwhile!

Al Fong rig for pencil poppers. 24” of 25-pound fluorocarbon leader tied to 60-pound braid with an Alberto knot. Direct tie pencil popper to leader. I throw pencil poppers over weed beds. I’ll usually get a big striper on the surface here. Boat

control is the name of the game when doing this kind of fishing! Try to keep the boat in 7-10' of water and follow the weed line as it zigzags all around. If the weeds make an inside bend with the current pushing into it this will be a good area! Once you hook one you should catch quite a few in the same spot. I will usually have two or three on all the time when I find the school.

Glide Baits (e.g. S-Waver). Work best from one hour before high tide until one hour after high tide. Higher tides work best for big stripers.

The lure should always suspend itself in a nose down position, never nose up. If you want to catch big stripers you have to use big bait. The smallest swim/glide bait I use is 8.5". The price for large swim baits varies from \$80-\$169. These lures are floaters, slow sinkers or fast sinkers. Make sure that the lure sets right in the water. Again, lures should suspend themselves in water nose low.

Technique: After the cast there will be a ka-plunk, which attracts fish. Stop, then slowly sweep rod to one side. The lure will make a slow descending nose low turn and then suspend itself slightly below the surface. Stop, while the line slowly coils. You need to wait and let the line coil. Just remember if you try this technique, reel slow, stop, leave it then sweep lure and leave it. Big bait stripers approach the lure from behind, bite it to kill it and then swallow the lure head first. Don't yank on the first hit. Wait for the fish to swallow and run. If you are moving and casting always cast ahead of the boat so that you can reel in slower; never behind the beam, or your lure will be retrieved too fast. If there is current bring line in against current. Position the boat to retrieve your lure from the deeper water to the shallows when possible.

I don't recommend fishing these shallow water areas until they are checked at low tide first. That will expose hazards to avoid at high tide. Bait fish go into shallow water because it is safer.

If you try this large lure method, remember that you are not looking for striper schools only that lone big one. Consequently, you will get a lot fewer take downs, but bigger fish. Perhaps 3 bites in a 6-8-hour day.

Bucktail jigs. Be sure to retrieve all the way to the boat as the strike often comes right at your feet. If a bass misses your bait beside the boat start pulling the bait in a figure eight-pattern just below the surface with the rod tip.

During the midday hours Rat-L-Traps, swim baits and bucktail jigs. During low light conditions topwater Super Spooks and Pencil Poppers.

Alabama "A" Rigs. Probably easier for most fishermen to catch fish on than swim baits. There is a 3-hook maximum but each can be a treble hook. Put "attractors" on the other wings. Alan Fong uses single hooks with the center trailing lure catching the most fish. Place the heavier weights on the bottom and lighter weights on top. Check how they look at trolling speed.

Water:

Must have some current, with current breaks, eddy's nearby.

The best "big" striper fishing is when the water temperatures are between 48-52 degrees.

Any place that provides structure or a change in an area is where you want to work. Think submerged islands, shallow water structure and abrupt current changes. Tullies, points, corners, piles, pumps.

Water depth:

7' ½ oz

4' ¾ oz

3' ¼ oz

Tide: Outgoing best. The outgoing tide is the time when stripers are found along the shoreline & rip rap, when the current is at its peak and most of the forage fish are pushed out of their cover and have nowhere to protect themselves! While it requires a little work throwing the baits, you are not using your main motor burning all that gas, just easing the boat with your electric motor for boat control. Do not burn your baits through the water, just a slow to moderate retrieve and when you get a tap just keep reeling till your rod loads up.

Boat Handling: In 6-8' water. Fish often in 1-3' water. Face the boat into the current.

Fish finder: Set it to read to the bottom. If you see "Christmas Tree" bait balls stop & fish them. This means the stripers are there, driving the bait to the surface.

GPS: If you have one-mark hits, hook-ups as soon as they occur and then stay in that area until the bite stops. Watch the direction of the marks it may tell you which direction the fish headed.

Bait Fishing On-Anchor

Generally best in colder water (December to March).

Areas:

Rod/reel/line:

7' to 8' rods, which are fairly soft in the tip section, have a good strong butt section, and is capable of handling the 15 to 20-pound test lines. Graphite or fiberglass.

Level wind conventional reels with a clicker, capable of handling 150 - 250 yards on line.

Spinning reels. A bait runner type spinning reel is a real good choice.

Main line: A minimum of 125 yards of 30-pound Power Pro or 15 to 20-pound mono.

Leader: 3 feet of 30-pound or 25-pound.

Weights: 2,3,4,5, 6 oz depending upon water depth and tidal flow.

Rig: Sliding sinker rig on the main line, barrel swivel, 3 feet of 25 to 30-pound leaders and a 6/0 to 7/0 hook.

Baits:

Sardines (2#/person) + 2# for chum/person.

Shad (1/2 #/person for bait) plus 1-2# for chum (this can get expensive).

Uncured Salmon Roe balls (10-20/person).

Left over bait for chum.

Pile worms (6/person).

Minnows, mudsuckers, blue gills (4/person).

Scents: Sardine, shad, anchovy, garlic Procure oil with a container in which to soak the baits.

Tactics:

Fish finder: Set it to read to the bottom.

GPS: Use your depth finder to locate fish. You don't need to see big schools of stripers. When bait fishing for stripers, all you need to see is some fish and you know they are in the area. Use your FF to mark spots where you catch fish.

Boat handling: Anchor up-current after you have located fish on the fish-finder or diving terns.

Tactics:

Fall (October and November) best time for big stripers.

Generally, fish shallow, 5-20' of water. Fish the sides and edges of the shoals or ledges where they start dropping off to deeper water. Sometimes you can find fish in the deeper water, up to 35' deep.

When water 55* or lower, off color, tide not right for other types of fishing, e.g. trolling.

Best chance for big stripers 4 days before, 4 days after a full moon using bait.

Tides are important. You need to "pattern" the striper bite. Sometimes they bite on the incoming or on the outgoing tide. Sometimes they bite at the beginning, the ending, or during the hard flow of the tides. Check with your local bait shops and other fishermen for the latest information. The tides flow harder during the full and dark of the moon. On the first and third quarters of the moon, the tides are less strong. During the fall and winter months the striper usually travels with the current. They are not on their spawning run upstream. They are just cruising around looking for something to eat.

Dead bait:

You will catch more stripers if you chum. Sardine, shad. Cut them into 1-2-inch pieces. Faster and deeper water throw upstream. Slower water and shallower water throw behind the boat or right at the boat. You want to try and fish in the chum or just downstream of where you think the chum will hit bottom.

Save unused bait and put it in the freezer, to be used as chum at a later date.

If you don't have room give it to another fisherman on your way home.

Water in the 40s, 50s, light bite. Two schools of thought:

1 - Rod holder/free spool/clicker (early Fall, water 70-60*): When the clicker is strong enough to hold the bait/weight in the current. The striper bite can be very aggressive early in the fall season when the water is warmer and the striper can really run off with your bait. When the clicker sounds feed line, don't set hook until striper moves off with authority. If the wind is blowing pretty stiff, or if I am not paying attention to my rod for some reason use this method.

2 - Balance bar setup (water 60-45*). As the water starts getting colder into winter, the bite will become more lethargic and subtler. Balance the rod on anything that will hold your rod (transom of the boat, balance beam, bait box, tackle box, etc.). When the rod tip twitches or bounces set the hook immediately. In cold water stripers will often play with the bait for 1-2 minutes. Use this method if you are not occupied with something else and are able to pay attention to your rod tip.

Blood Worms. Good for striped bass and sturgeon.

Bullheads/Pacific Staghorn Sculpin.

Rig: Sliding sinker rig on your main line finished with a snap. Leader 12-18 inches of 20-25" mono, 6/) or 7/0 octopus hook.

Use a needle hook/bait threader to pull a loop on the end of your leader through the bait. Poke the needle through the eye or under the gill cover through the body cavity and exit 1" to 1 1/2" in front of tail. Pull leader through your bait until the hook eye is inside bait and half of your hook is exposed. Make 2 half hitches on tail to prevent the bait from sliding down the leader. Use the smallest possible sliding sinker above a swivel to get bait down to, near the bottom.

Two hook rig: One hook thru the upper jaw and another thru the top of tail. The lower one thru the jaw. that way it will get picked up by the striper head first and a hook will be pointing the right way for a hookset.

Pile Worms. Sacramento. Good for striped bass and sturgeon.

Salmon roe. Frozen uncured (pre-tied balls 1- 1 1/2 "in diameter).

Sardines. Frozen sardines 2-5 pounds per person. To cure: Filet sardines, salt with un-iodized salt, stack filets, refrigerate for 3 days meat side up. Repackage, remove air, will keep for 2-3 weeks. Mark Wilson, April 24, 2001. I do not use Miracle Thread, but it is optional, if you prefer. I don't think you need thread with good sardines. Filet one whole side of a sardine. Split the meat side lengthwise and fold back, skin to skin, with the meat exposed on both sides. Use a 6/0 or 7/0 hook on a 3' leader and push the hook and leader entirely through the filet approximately 1" from the tail portion. Then push the hook through the filet about 1" lower towards the head section, turn the hook and reinsert back though the filet so the hook lays inside of the filet, but with BARB exposed (important to hook the fish). Pull the leader tight and finish with a half hitch knot about a 1/2" from the end of the tail portion. The bait should lay flat and WILL NOT SPIN when on the bottom. The bait should just lay on bottom behind the sinker. But, if you reel in a bait, the increased speed from reeling, against the current, might make the bait spin. Note: A little spin or movement of the bait is OK.

Shad, fresh or frozen.

A 4" butter flied threadfin shad with a half hitch on the tail best (anise or shad scent best.) 1 pound/person. Fresh when possible, though frozen works almost as well. Keep it on ice or floated in ice water. Use 3-4" size. Chop up the smaller shad and use for chum (legal on the Sacramento River downstream of the I-80 bridge & on the San Joaquin downstream of the I-5 bridge).

"Butterfly" the shad by filleting the bait from the tail partway to the head, stopping just behind the gills. Start a 7/0 octopus hook about 1/4" from the tail, near the

backbone, on the skin side, and pull the hook and leader all the way through. Then, insert the hook just behind the forward folded flap of the fillet, near the backbone, and insert the hook into the head, exposing the barb of the hook. Now, finish the bait with a half hitch around the tail. The bait is ready for fishing. Change your bait frequently, every 15 minutes to half an hour, or especially after you have had a bite of some kind.

Attractants can be used on your shad bait too. Try various scents/flavors of attractants. But for obvious reasons, one that will work well, is a shad scented attractant. An anise scent attractant would be a second choice.

Frozen is almost as good. If you buy it at a bait store buy the best looking you can. If it too soft, comes off "in the air on the cast" or you're getting cleaned by the fish easily (not normally the case with good shad) as said above use Miracle Thread to wrap the shad onto your hook. Generally, when defrosted it is best not to refreeze. Cut it up & use it as chum. If you intend to refreeze frozen/defrosted shad take an ice chest with you & take out a few shad at a time to thaw & use. Leave the rest on ice, they will refreeze/defrost better than if they are fully defrosted.

If you buy fresh keep it on ice all day. If you have some leftover & want to freeze them take them out & lay them out on a baking pan/sheet of wax paper & freeze them. After they are frozen put them in snack or sandwich bags. Figure on 1/4#/rod/4-6-hour outing. Remove all of the air & put in the freezer. As said above you can brine the shad before freezing them if you wish.

You can have a good day using very poor-quality shad. Put two slits down both sides of two of them, putting them on opposite sides of your hook & Miracle Thread both onto the hook point/eye.

When available in October & November it is a good thing to buy & freeze some "extra" shad to have on hand for late December, January & February when fresh shad is often not available. Again, a good planning factor is to figure you will need a 1/4#/rod/4-6-hour outing. I freeze them in single layers on wax paper. When frozen I shrink wrap them into 1/4# packages. They keep for a year.

Brining Shad/Bait.

As effective as shad baits are, many anglers find even fresh shad mushy and difficult to work with. Properly brining and storing the shad can cure this problem.

Fresh shad that have been brined and frozen can be frozen a couple months. After that they can be thawed in a brine solution for up to 5 days.

When fresh shad are available order 5 or 10 pounds of fresh shad. When you go to pick the shad up take a medium size ice chest. When you get to the shop, fill the cooler about half way with water and then mix in 2 cups of Brine 'N' Bite along with a few drops of pure anise oil. Once you've mixed the solution add a bag of ice cubes

and then gently mix in the shad."

The shad can set in the brine for 2 to 3 days. You'll want to add ice periodically to keep it cold. After the shad have soaked for a couple days you can take them out of the solution, drain them and then freeze them in Zip Lock bags. I like to put a couple dozen shad in each bag and lay them out flat in the freezer. When you get ready to go fishing, mix a cup of Brine 'N' Bite with a half-gallon of water, a drop of anise and a few drops of Pro-Cure Bluing in a small bait cooler. Add a couple pounds of ice and empty in a bag of frozen shad. As long as you keep adding ice to the solution, the frozen shad will remain perfect for at least five days.

Live Bait

Blue Gill:

Use a bluegill that's about half the size of your hand, and hook it through the back somewhere so that it doesn't die and can still swim around. Use no weight, and at least a 2/0 hook. I would use at least 12-pound test with a stout enough rod to handle a bigger fish. Shallow water is preferred, probably 3-10 feet deep. A slower tide preferred, since the baitfish are more active during low flow times. Good times are when you see shad jumping in the evenings. Cast your setup out and let that little doggie swim around. You can drift if there's a bit of current, or poke along if you have a trolling motor.

Bullheads/Pacific Staghorn Sculpin.

Bullheads are tougher than the mudsuckers.

Their skin is pretty tough if you thread them just under the skin you can cast them all day long without them coming off. The bullheads can stay alive out of water for a couple hours if they stay damp.

Use a sliding sinker setup on a 30" 20 to 25-pound mono leader with a single Gama Gatsu 5/0 or 6/0 circle hook.

There are two ways to hook-up the bait:

Run the hook just under their dorsal fin, about 1/4" into their meat. They stay very lively for a long time like this. Use a sliding sinker on the main line to get them out there. The sliding sinker allows the bait to swim somewhat free and natural.

Hooked through the bottom lip and up and out the upper lip.

Presentations:

Throw it out, let it settle to the bottom; or

Use a bobber about 2' above the hook. Fish a couple feet off shore. Most of the time you don't even know you have one on until you move the bait. You don't need any weight.

Mudsuckers.

Run the 6/0 or 7/0 hook under their dorsal fin, about 1/4" into their meat. They stay very lively for a long time like this. Use a sliding sinker to cast them out. The sliding sinker allows the bait to run somewhat free and natural and the striper does not feel the weight when they take it.