

SALMON TROLLERS

Salmon trollers supply fresh and frozen-at-sea chinook and coho salmon to markets in Washington and across the U.S. The vessels vary in size from 18-foot day boats to trip boats up to 60 feet in length. The larger boats can remain at sea for up to eight days.

Trollers fish for salmon by towing lures or baited hooks through the water. Fishing lines are rigged to a pair of outriggers (trolling poles), which, when lowered, hold the fishing lines away from the boat. Many trollers have a trolling pit in the stern so that fishermen can steer while operating the gear.

Stainless steel lines are fished from each outrigger. Two to six lines are used, each with as many as four lures or baited hooks. A 10- to 50-pound weight (called a cannon ball) takes each line to the desired depth. Fishing lines are set and retrieved using hydraulically operated cranks called gurdies.

The lures, which are barbless, can be fished from just under the surface down to 80 fathoms (6 feet per fathom), at speeds of one to four knots.

They include spoons, flashers, plastic or rubber squid (hutchies) and natural baits, such as anchovy or herring. Fish depth, troll speed, type of lure and area fished all help to determine the number and kinds of salmon caught. Professional trollers can easily target the species they want to catch.

Trollers use the gurdies to bring in the salmon. The fish are stunned, brought aboard with a gaff, bled, dressed and washed before they are stored in an iced or refrigerated hold or flash-frozen and stored in freezers.

Salmon trollers can fish up to 50 miles off shore. Their fishing season usually runs from May through September. However, this is subject to change and restrictions may vary from year to year, depending on the condition of salmon stocks.

Washington Sea Grant Program offers classes and workshops, supports research on salmon biology and ocean conditions and produces technical reports and instructional videos to help salmon fishermen improve their operations while using environmentally sound methods to acquire, process and market their catches. For more information on Washington Sea Grant Program, visit the WSGP Web site, wsg.washington.edu or call 206.543.6600.

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