

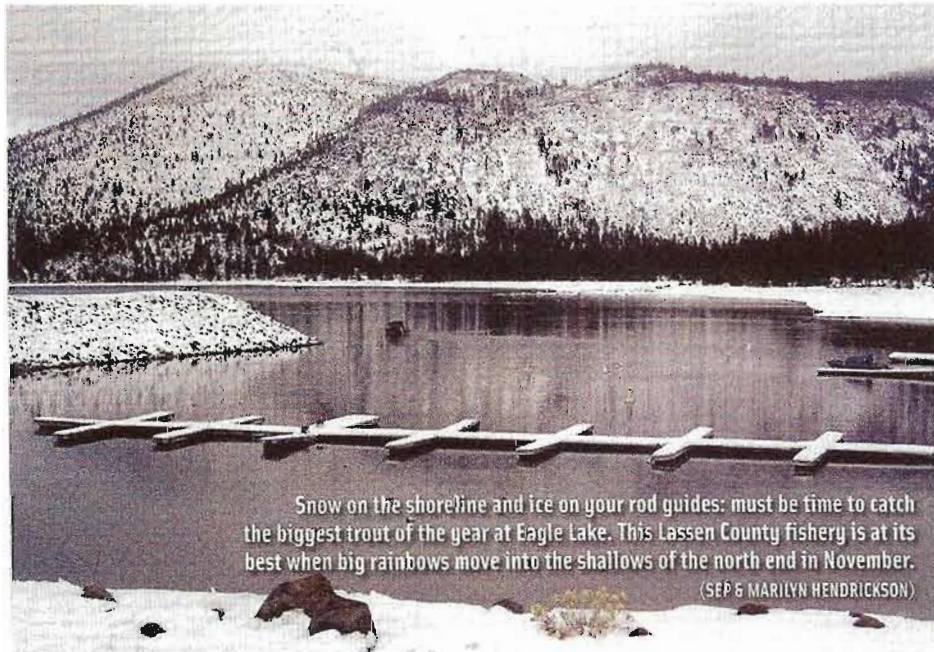
TROPHY TIME

EAGLE LAKE'S BIGGEST FISH COME WHEN WEATHER IS AT ITS GNARLIEST

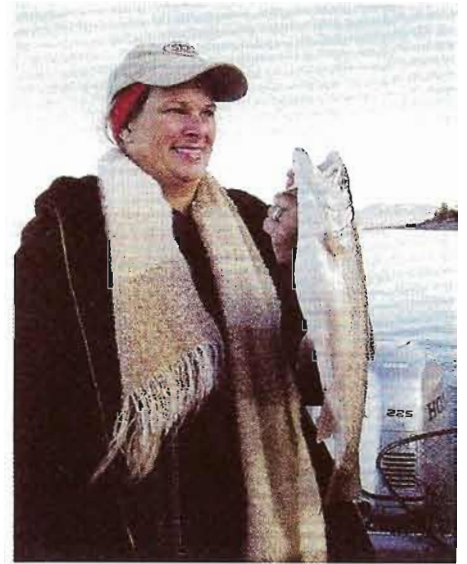
SPALDING— As late fall/early winter begins to tighten its grip on Lassen County's trophy rainbow trout fishery, tactics and feeding locations for the famed Eagle Lake rainbow change. To be successful, an angler must be flexible and have the ability to abruptly switch techniques.

Key winter locations: This time of year, the Eagle Lake trout begins its annual migration to the shallower north end of the lake, where waters - partic-

ularly in this drought year - average just 5 to 10 feet in depth. Structure, from tules, underwater vegetation and rocky outcroppings, becomes important, and all may contain big trout, concealed and waiting in ambush for an easy meal. This shoreline, above Pelican Point and the Lassen Youth Camp, is dotted with tules and rocky areas that provide shelter to many of the natural food sources within the lake: tui chub, red-side suckers, leeches, freshwater shrimp and aquatic insects.



Snow on the shoreline and ice on your rod guides: must be time to catch the biggest trout of the year at Eagle Lake. This Lassen County fishery is at its best when big rainbows move into the shallows of the north end in November. (SEP & MARILYN HENDRICKSON)



Dana Von Sistine trolled up this Eagle Lake rainbow with a bright orange Sep's fly and sidekick dodger. (SEP & MARILYN HENDRICKSON)

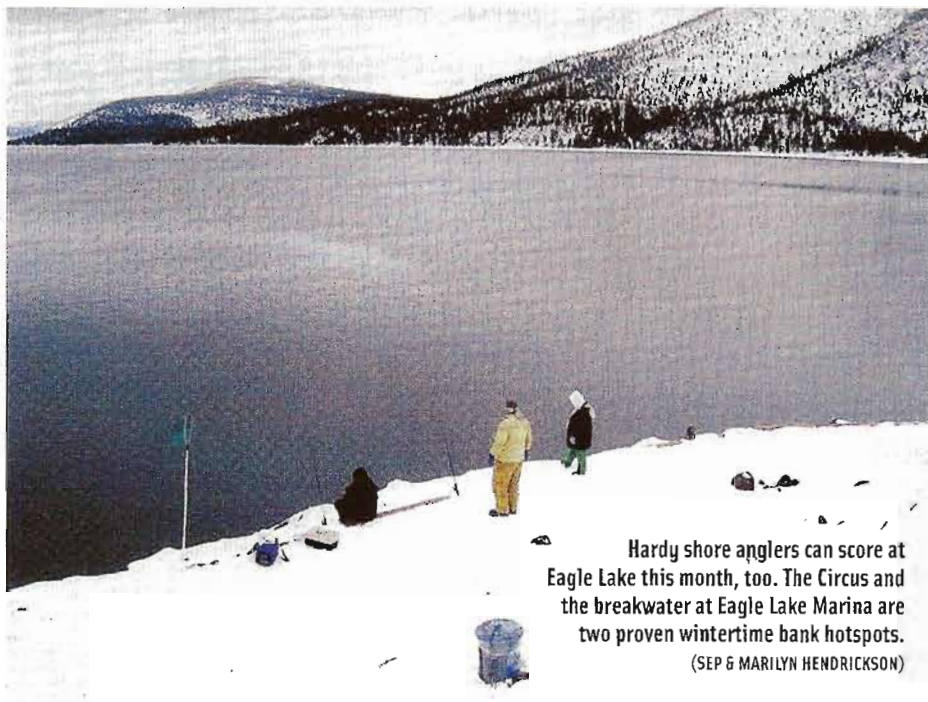
Trout move through, feeding heavily, both early and late in the day.

Big rainbows are routinely found near Big Troxel and Rocky and Bucks Points, but the most heavily fished areas are the Airport Tules, Goat Island, Alcatraz, the Youth Camp and Pelican Point.

Cold-weather tech check: Whether anchored or fishing from shore, a popular tactic is casting a nightcrawler and slip-bobber combination. That's right...it can be as simple as that. A properly presented nightcrawler, threaded on a #2 or #4 baitholder hook, suspended just a few feet below the surface, with a bobber, can be a deadly combination at Eagle Lake.

When fishing these shallow areas, it's best to enter slowly and quietly, avoiding spooking fish. Simply cast offerings varying distances from shore, and wait for the bobber to start moving. Don't be too quick to set the hook - allow the fish ample time to taste and enjoy the 'crawler before setting the hook.

Another proven technique is casting a bare threaded nightcrawler, allowing it to slowly drift and sink on its own. After about 5 minutes and no hits, reel in and cast again, toward a different area. Try to intercept feeding fish, or



Hardy shore anglers can score at Eagle Lake this month, too. The Circus and the breakwater at Eagle Lake Marina are two proven wintertime bank hotspots. (SEP & MARILYN HENDRICKSON)

“Trout move through (the north-end shallows), feeding heavily, both early and late in the day.” – Sep & Marilyn Hendrickson

fish on the move, so keep an eye on depth of the water.

Stay tight to shore in the early morning, but as the sun rises, drop deeper and move out into the lake. Eagle Lake is a basin: 100 feet from shore might only be 5 feet deep so pay close attention to the fish locator, fish behavior and water conditions.

A shore thing: Eagle has several good locations to still-fish from shore, the most popular being the Circus, a shallow area at the south end along Highway A-1 between Merrill and Christy campgrounds, with parking and easy accessibility. The breakwater at Eagle Lake Marina, also on the south end, is another excellent location and offers shore access in the toughest of conditions. Rocky Point, off Highway 139, has numerous shallow water spots available to shoreline anglers casting lures or baits.

Fly fishermen have many alternatives at the lake. When flies are pre-

sented and retrieved properly, action can be seemingly non-stop. One of the most favored techniques is using an electric trolling motor to move with stealth along the shoreline, picking spots to present the fly where fish may be prowling or just waiting in ambush. Open bays and weed beds often hold good numbers of fish.

Some fly fishermen prefer to work from shore or wade out to intercept cruising fish near shallow points or coves. Wooly Buggers, small streamers especially in bright colors of white, orange, black or brown, all work well. They imitate the lake's population of minnows and leaches and have fooled many a trophy at Eagle Lake.

It's all about location with flies. Where are the fish, where will they prowl, what are they feeding on? Presenting a fly to the right spot is one thing, but proper retrieval is equally important. A slow-swimming retrieve might work best early, but a fast and

erratic offering may get strikes later in the day.

Fish attractants greatly enhance opportunities for hook-ups. Whether trolling or still fishing, scents such as Smelly Jelly shrimp or crawfish, or Pro Cure's Trophy Trout Gel, when smeared lavishly on lures, are deadly effective. Whatever techniques or locations an angler prefers, proper presentation and tackle are vital to success. When an angler connects, it's important to play the fish, using rod, reel, drag, knowledge and expertise, all the while remaining calm and keeping surging adrenaline and battling fish under control!

Safety: Eagle Lake, because of its size and location, demands respect, and wind, weather and moon cycles all play important roles. Venturing to Eagle Lake at any time throughout the year requires advanced preparation and should not be taken lightly.

Weather conditions are very unpredictable, and wind, rain, snow or icy launching conditions can turn a fun fishing trip into a nightmare. High winds, white-out conditions and white caps can appear without warning. However, the discomfort created by wind and cold does have a benefit.

As waves churn the surface, baitfish and minnows become increasingly disoriented. This action in turn, starts the “food chain” of predators. When the wind is blowing, baitfish move close to shore for added protection - trout will line the shoreline facing directly into the wind, waiting for natural baits to be washed their way.

An old adage, well known by experienced Eagle Lake anglers states...“the rougher the water, the better the fishing”.

Eagle Lake provides fishing the way it was meant to be: during November and December anglers always connect with the largest fish of the year, and we hope you do, too!

The lake closes to fishing on December 31 and re-opens on Memorial Day weekend the following year. **-Sep & Marilyn Hendrickson**