



Story and Photos
by
Beth Ipsen



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Ice Fishing in the Valley

Alaska Wildlife Trooper Thomas Akelkok tells a family how to make a tasty dish by frying up pike intestines.



Where the Wild Fish Flee

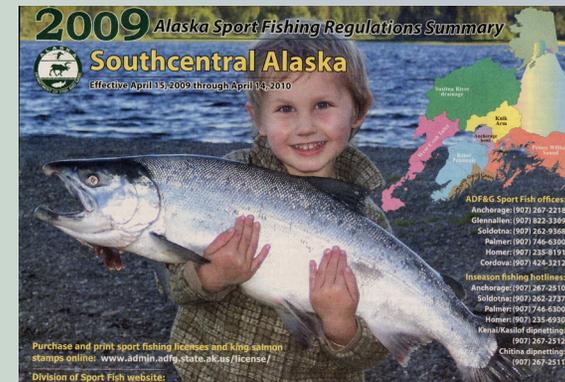
Alaska Wildlife Trooper Thomas Akelkok looked down at a frosty pile of fish heads with their intestines still attached. The pile of northern pike heads were remnants from prior fishers who had earlier pulled the predatory fish from ice holes drilled into Flathorn Lake. They were a sure sign of a lucky spot. Later, a family had taken over the spot, accumulating a pile of their own fish.

Akelkok told this family about how he likes to take the fish intestines, roll them in cornmeal and flour and fry them in butter.

“They taste just like clams,” Akelkok said while smacking his lips.

The family, who spoke very little English and used their 15-year-old son as an interpreter with Akelkok, nodded in agreement. They kept the bellies on the fish they caught. They were accumulating a nice sized pile of pike in the camp they set up to spend a mild winter day on the ice. Farther down the ice were another set of holes. However, they were left unattended as a friend of the family that was fishing there had left the holes to join the family for a bite to eat and tea about 200 yards away.

While Akelkok explained the regulation of keeping a close eye on the fishing holes to him, using the 15-year-old as a translator again, the man explained he had someone read the fishing regulations to him before he headed out for his first try at ice fishing.



Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations

Ice fishing gear:

- Sport fishing through the ice is permitted using two closely attended lines, provided only one hook or artificial lure is used on each line, except that additional gear may be used for northern pike and burbot as specified in statewide or area regulations.
- The maximum number of hooks and type of lines that may be deployed by an angler targeting all species of fish, including northern pike and burbot, is not cumulative and is equal to the maximum number of lines/hooks allowed for a particular species, whichever is greater.
- The maximum number of lines and hooks used to target a species may not exceed the number allowed for that species. For example, in

Alaska Wildlife Trooper Thomas Akelkok chats with Wasilla resident Ken Widmer as he sets up to fish Figure Eight Lake for Northern pike.



“I prefer hunting,” the man said in broken English.

Once satisfied that the man understood him, Akelkok tromped through slush on top of ice back to his patrol vehicle – a snowmachine. It was a mild winter day – perfect for spending the day ice fishing in the Knik Arm drainage area off the end of Point MacKenzie Road. However, Akelkok and at least one pair of fishermen out enjoying a day spent on the ice were surprised others weren’t taking advantage of the warmer weather.



“I’m surprised we have the lake to ourselves,” Wasilla resident Ken Widmer said in between jigs. He and his adult son, Sam, made the rare trip on a Sunday. Sam hustled around dropping lines 10 feet down the holes and set up the tip-up contraptions commonly used in ice fishing. They

This pike caught on Figure Eight Lake still has the bait in it’s mouth.

Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations cont.

a lake where regulations allow 15 lines for burbot and five lines for northern pike, the maximum number of lines you may fish is 15. When setting your 15 lines, only five of them may be placed to target pike.

Possession of licenses, stamps, and harvest record:

All persons engaged in sport fishing or in possession of fish must show their sport fishing licenses, Harvest Records and special permits or stamps to any local representative of the department or to any peace officer of the state upon his request.

Sport fishing gear for burbot: In all waters except trophy rainbow trout waters and rainbow trout catch-and-release waters, and in Big Lake, bait is allowed while fishing for burbot. Burbot may be taken with more than one line and hook only if:



- The total number of aggregate hooks does not exceed the daily bag limit for burbot in the water being fished;
- The hooks are single hooks with a gap between point and shank larger than ¾ inch;
- Each hook is set to rest on the bottom of the lake or stream
- Each line is identified with angler’s name and address
- The burbot fishing gear is closely attended by the angler, except in flowing waters of the Susitna and Yentna rivers, where lines must be tended at least once each 24 hours.
- When fishing for burbot, all other fish caught must be released immediately.

Sport fishing gear for northern pike: Unless otherwise provided by the area regulations, northern pike may be taken by spear.



Palmer-Wasilla Zone flowing waters

The Palmer-Wasilla Zone consists of all flowing waters inside a zone bounded on the north by Willow Creek, on the west by a line half



Alaska Wildlife Trooper Thomas Akelkok patrols Figure Eight Lake shortly after sunrise.

Alaska Wildlife Trooper Thomas Akelkok takes notes while talking to an ice fisherman on Flathorn Lake.

looked more like a miniature catapult. When a fish grabs onto the hook and takes the line, a T-bar swivels around and releases a flag that flips up and signals a hit. The pair had four tip-up lines apiece. In addition, they sat on the back of their snowmachines to jig in two other holes.

The Widmers were having less luck on Figure Eight Lake, a wide lake aptly named for its shape. The first two tip ups produced no fish. The third produced a small Northern pike that the father and son considered throwing back. Smaller pike are commonly thrown back because they're considered boney, but with larger fish, the meat can be fillet off of the Y-bone that runs the length of the long fish.

All those Akelkok encountered that day were searching for the northern pike. Other fish that are sought after during the winter months on neighboring lakes are the ugly-looking burbot and the arctic char, otherwise known as Dolly Varden. Those fishing on Big Lake can fish for one arctic char a day. The lake is closed year-round to salmon fishing, but open to winter fishing with one unbaited single-hook artificial lure from Nov. 1 through April 30. That includes burbot, a member of the cod family that is sometimes referred to as "poor man's lobster." This strange looking fish could be considered a cross breeding of a wolf-eel, a catfish and bowfin.

Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations cont.

mile east of the Susitna River, on the south by Cook Inlet and Knik Arm, and on the east by the Matanuska River and Moose Creek (but excluding Willow Creek, the Matanuska River, and Moose Creek).

- Open season in the Palmer-Wasilla Zone is June 15–April 14, with Little Susitna River exception.

Flathorn, Figure Eight, Anderson, Memory and Prator lakes

- Sport fishing through the ice for northern pike is allowed using five lines, provided standard ice-fishing gear is used, the fishing gear is closely attended and all other fish caught are released immediately.
- Anglers may use two hooks on a single line, provided that both hooks are attached to one single piece of bait.

Fish Creek drainage lakes (including Big Lake)

- Closed year-round to fishing for salmon
- In Big Lake, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure is allowed Nov. 1–April 30, including fishing for burbot.

Akelkok, who is one of four troopers that works out of the post on the edge of Wasilla, tries to get out on patrol in the area at least once a week for not only those fishing, but trapping and hunting as well. That day he only encountered people fishing. All but the one man were following the Alaska Fish and Game regulations, which change from lake to lake.

Akelkok said the most common infraction is people not carrying a fishing license. However, if these people can later show proof that they had a license issued to them before the citation was written, it can be dismissed.

Otherwise, Akelkok spends his days educating resource users on the different hot spots, different equipment and even different recipes. He has extensive knowledge in how to prepare Alaska game because he grew up subsistence hunting and fishing in the Bristol Bay region.

“I have several recipes for pike,” he said.

He even made the seal skin fur hat he wears when patrolling on cold days. He continues to be an avid hunter and fisherman and has passed the knowledge on to his two sons.

“I encourage people to go out hunting and fishing with their kids and teach them to hunt and fish and how to subsist off the land so the tradition won’t be lost,” he said. “Most people think meat is just what they see on the shelf in the store.”



Alaska Wildlife Trooper Thomas Akelkok gives a family directions to another good ice fishing spot.

Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations cont.

- Big Lake Arctic char/Dolly Varden daily limits: 1 per day/1 in possession, must be 20” or longer. Burbot daily limits: 2 per day/2 in possession. Closed to the retention of burbot March 15–April 30.
- In Big Lake, when fishing through the ice, anglers may use two lines, but each line may have only one single hook.

Bonnie Lakes connecting stream

From the outlet at Upper Bonnie Lake to the inlet of Lower Bonnie Lake, open season is July 1–April 14.

Eklutna Tailrace

- Eklutna Tailrace, and all waters within a half-mile radius of its confluence with the Knik River, and to an ADF&G marker located 2 miles downstream of the confluence is open to fishing for king salmon from Jan. 1–Dec. 31. Once you have retained a king salmon 20” or longer, you may no longer fish in any waters open to king salmon fishing on that same day. The daily limit for king salmon 20” or longer is 1 per day/1 in possession; less than 20” is 10 per day/10 in possession.
- In the Eklutna Tailrace, daily limits for salmon 16” or longer (except king salmon) are 3 per day/3 in possession, all three may be coho (silver) salmon.

Johnson Lake (near Palmer) — Closed year-round to all fishing.

Long Lake (Kepler-Bradley Complex)

- Open season is May 1–Oct. 31. Only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure is allowed.
- No retention of rainbow trout allowed.

Nancy Lake Recreation Area lakes

- Nancy Lake is closed year-round to burbot fishing.
- Sport fishing through the ice for northern pike is allowed using five lines in all Alaska State Parks’

Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations cont.

Nancy Lake Recreation Area lakes except Nancy Lake, provided standard ice-fishing gear is used, the fishing gear is closely attended and all other species of fish caught are released immediately. Anglers may use two hooks on a single line, provided both hooks are attached to one single piece of bait.

Little Susitna River drainage

- After taking a king salmon 20" or longer, a person may not fish on that same day anywhere in waters open to king salmon fishing.
- A person who takes a bag limit of other salmon 16" or longer from the Little Susitna River downstream of the ADF&G marker at river mile 32.5 may not fish for any species of fish in the Little Susitna River that same day.
- In waters open to king salmon fishing, no fishing is allowed between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. May 15–July 13.
- A coho salmon removed from the water shall be retained. No person may remove from the water a coho salmon he or she intends to release.

Little Susitna River flowing waters, from its mouth upstream to the Parks Highway:

- Open season for all species (except king salmon) is year-round.
- Only unbaited, artificial lures are allowed Oct. 1–Aug. 5. Bait is allowed Aug. 6–Sept. 30.
- Open season for king salmon is January 1–July 13. The daily limit for king salmon 20" or longer is 1 per day/1 in possession; less than 20" is 10 per day/10 in possession.
- No retention of rainbow/steelhead trout is allowed April 15–June 14.
- Nancy Lake Creek drainage, upstream of an ADF&G marker about a quarter mile upstream of its confluence with the Little Susitna River, is closed to all salmon fishing, including catch-and-release.

Little Susitna River flowing waters upstream of the Parks Highway:

- Closed year-round to all salmon fishing.
- Open season for other species is June 15–April 14.
- Only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure is allowed.



Alaska Wildlife Trooper Thomas Akelkok patrols Figure Eight Lake.