



Background

Coho salmon is one of the most popular salmonid species in Indiana. Originally native to the Pacific Ocean, coho were introduced to Lake Michigan in the late 1960s and have enjoyed a strong following by boat, pier, and stream anglers alike. They are excellent eating, and can often be caught using simple techniques. This is an introduction to coho fishing from shore during the late winter and early spring months.

Coho Salmon Biology and Movement

Coho salmon are raised in the hatchery for more than a year before being stocked into tributaries around Lake Michigan. In spring, when they are about 1 ½ years old, they migrate to Lake Michigan to feed and mature. Coho have a diverse diet. They eat various baitfish such as young alewives, shiners and even round gobies. They also eat aquatic invertebrates such as water fleas, midge larvae and freshwater shrimp, and during spring and summer they eat terrestrial insects that get blown into the lake, including flies, lady beetles, and even stinkbugs. Coho spend one or two summers in the lake and then return to the stream in which they were stocked as either 2-year-old “jacks” or fully mature 3 year olds. The peak spawning run typically happens in September and October.



Your purchase of fishing equipment and motor boat fuel supports boating access and Sport Fish Restoration.

Indiana Fishing Regulation Guide:
<http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/2347.htm>

Shore fishing for Coho Salmon in Indiana

Winter - During winter, coho cruise areas of warm water near harbor mouths and warm-water discharges that attract baitfish, and in deeper, more stable offshore zones in 150+ feet of water. They can sometimes be found cruising close to the beach in sandbar troughs near harbor mouths, looking for an easy meal.

Spring - As the water warms in early spring, almost all coho in Lake Michigan swim to the southern part of the lake, which usually has the warmest water. Somewhere between mid-April and mid-May they begin to move offshore and up the east and west coasts of the lake.

Summer – During summer, coho seek cool water temperatures (below 60 degrees) and baitfish. They are highly nomadic and can be found anywhere from 60- to 300+ foot depths.

Fall - Once the water cools in late September or early October, the mature fish return to their natal tributary. The immature fish of 1-2 pounds remain, feeding in the lake, typically farther offshore in deeper water.

When To Fish From Shore: Generally, February-April. The most consistent action is in March, right after ice goes out (if there was ice) until the nearshore water temps reach 48 to 50 degrees – at which point the coho move off shore. However, cohos can be caught from shore from January to mid-April if conditions are right.

Where: East Chicago Marina break wall; BP Whiting Discharge; Hammond Marina break wall; Portage Lakefront Park; Port of Indiana Shore Fishing Site; and Michigan City (pier at Washington Park, or DNR/Coast Guard Access in the inner harbor).

Fishing access can be found using the Where to Fish Finder at wildlife.IN.gov/3591.htm.

DNR Fishing Reports are at wildlife.IN.gov/8270.htm. You can also call *The Indiana DNR's Lake Michigan Office* for more information at (219) 874-6824.

Fishing Regulations are at wildlife.IN.gov/2347.htm. Current bag limits are five trout and salmon combined, of which no more than three can be lake trout

How: Most coho taken by shore anglers are caught on live bait. Up to three rods are permitted, which can increase the odds of catching a fish.

Practically any spinning rod spooled with 6-10 pound test monofilament line will work for fishing live bait.

Usually the best tactic is a simple bobber rig. Suspend a size-2 to size-6 hook about 4-6 feet under a bobber. Bait with small spawn sacs, salmon skein, tube jigs tipped with waxworms, small pieces of shrimp, nightcrawlers or minnows.

Experiment with a mix of bobbers and bottom rigs (pictured and described below), and switch to the presentation that works best. Fishing on bottom is more likely to result in other fish such as brown trout or whitefish.



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Any bobber will work, but you will have more success using smaller bobbers that a coho can easily pull under water. Minimal terminal tackle is key. Tie the hook directly to the line, without using a snap swivel. Place a split shot or two (appropriately sized for the buoyancy of the bobber) 18-24 inches above the hook. Bait the hook and you're ready to go. Experiment with bobber depth, some days the fish want the bait deeper.

Sometimes coho are more active on bottom than the surface. It is a good idea to have at least one rod on the bottom. Use a slip sinker on the mainline and a leader of 18-24 inches to a hook. Either a barrel swivel or a split shot can be used to stop the sinker. Some anglers have success using a small float to keep the bait just off the bottom, as pictured below.



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Casting lures can also be very effective, with ½ ounce spoons such as KO Wobblers, Little Cleos, or Moonshines. Spinners like Mepps, Rooster Tails, Panther Martins, and Oslos also catch fish. Some anglers find good success using jigs and white twister-tails tipped with squid strips.



Other useful equipment: Proper winter clothing (it can be very cold on the lakefront even if the weather is pleasant due to the cold water); good footwear, including ice cleats if there is ice or snow; a long-handled net helps land fish; five-gallon buckets; rod holders; and stringers.