



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

GOOD PLACES FOR KIDS TO FISH May, 2012

Remember if a stream or lake is on private property, you must have the landowner's permission to fish. Most landowners will let you fish if you ask politely and mind your manners. Don't litter, don't start fires, don't bother livestock (and don't let them bother you!) and leave gates the way you find them. Report any problems you see, share your catch, and say thanks when you leave—you'll always be welcome back.

If you're taking a kid to fish, take short trips and have other things to do when their attention wanders. Throw rocks, look under rocks, and watch the clouds. Take snacks and a change of clothes (they will get wet and/or muddy). Kid's skin is sensitive. Take plenty of sun block of at least SPF30. Remember mosquito repellent. Repellants low in DEET or Avon Skin-so-Soft are recommended for kids. Try to go when the weather's nice and fish are biting. There's a kind of fishing for everyone. Build memories and a love for fishing. Have fun!

The waters marked "Best Bet" have easy access and are most likely to produce a successful fishing trip. In general, ponds and lakes will provide easier and more productive fishing. For most fish, you will have better luck using small bobbers, size 10-6 hooks, and small baits such as a piece of worm.

STREAMS

1. Flathead River

From East Evergreen Drive (Lybecks Dike) to Old Steel Bridge

Contains westslope cutthroat trout and lake trout. Lake whitefish in the fall. Best fishing from late June through October. Use bait (worms, salmon eggs) and flies for trout. Use bait (worms) and lures or spinners for lake trout. Use chartreuse (yellow-green) jigs for lake whitefish. Cutthroat and bull trout must be released. Old Steel Bridge is a popular site.

Near Columbia Falls and Hungry Horse

Contains lake trout, rainbows and cutthroat. Use worms, cut bait or lures for lake trout. Use worms or flies for other trout.

Both public and private land. Fishing access sites at Pressentine Bar, Kokanee Bend, and Teakettle. Lower 2 miles of South Fork Flathead River at Hungry Horse provides good access and can be clear when main river is muddy.

2. South Fork Flathead River

Lower two miles of river has good access on Hungry Horse side of river. Use flies, small spinners. Cutthroat and bull trout must be released.

3. Swan River

Near Bigfork

Fish under the highway bridge in Bigfork Harbor. Contains lake, rainbow and cutthroat trout and lake whitefish. Use worms, cut bait, small spinners or flies. The big hole below the bridge has lots of snags. Access at the Bigfork fishing access.

Near Bigfork Dam

Contains rainbows, cutthroat and lake trout. Lots of snags so small spinners and lures work best. Bait will work too. Fish the calmer pockets in the river from the dam to Bigfork for rainbow and lake trout but be careful in the swift water. Have to walk or bicycle to dam, 1-2 miles; very rocky. Can also access from Pacific Park side.

4. **McGregor Creek**

The creek follows Highway 2 from McGregor Lake to the Thompson River. Easy access on foot most of the way. Mostly Plum Creek or Forest Service lands so no problem with access. Contains lots of small brook trout. Use worms or salmon eggs in the holes. Sneak up on the holes so you don't scare the fish.

5. **Thompson River (Best Bet)**

Drive 45 miles west of Kalispell on Highway 2, then turn down the Thompson River Road. The first 7 miles are private property but most of the stream below that is open to fishing except for some fields. Contains mostly brook trout in the upper end and mostly rainbow trout in the lower end. Lots of nice places to camp and picnic and the road follows the stream so access is easy. Use worms, salmon eggs (bait for kids 14 and younger only), small spinners or flies.

LAKES

1. **Smith Lake (Best Bet)**

Contains yellow perch, some pumpkinseeds and northern pike. In winter, fish a plain hook, a glo-hook or a jig in chartreuse (yellow-green). Bait the hook with maggots (ew-w-w) or a perch eyeball (gross!). Lower it to the bottom and reel it up one turn of the reel handle. Jig it regularly and use a small bobber if you want. First and last ice is the best fishing—be careful.

In summer, fish from the dock at the fishing access or along the shore where the weeds aren't too thick. It's usually wet so you'll have to wade. Tie a hook or jig 3 to 4 feet below a bobber and bait the hook with worms, maggots or a perch eyeball for perch or smelt for pike. When a fish bites, reel up the slack until you can feel the fish biting and yank HARD. August and September are good months.

2. **Lake Mary Ronan**

Drive 35 miles south of Kalispell on Highway 93 and turn west at Dayton. The lake is open for fishing for perch only between February 28 and the 3rd Saturday in May and for all fish the rest of the year. Note special regulations. Catch perch, rainbow, and cutthroat trout with worms and marshmallows under a bobber, or use flies and small spinners.

In winter walk out on the ice from the state access 200-300 yards or more and fish near other anglers. Fish for kokanee and perch by lowering your glow hook to the bottom and reeling up 1 or 2 turns. Use fluorescent red glow hooks with maggots and jig frequently.

3. **Flathead Lake**

In May and June small lake trout move next to the shore where you can catch them. Fish at rocky points at places like Wayfarers or West Shore State Parks. Stillfish with worms or cut bait or cast lures. At Wayfarers, fish off the dock or along the cliffs to the south.

In winter, fish Somers Bay for lake trout. Watch the ice! Fish a white leadhead jig with a white twister tail baited with a piece of fish just off the bottom. Jig the hook regularly.

4. **Lion Lake (Best Bet)**

Turn at Hungry Horse and drive about 3 miles toward Hungry Horse Dam. Lion Lake is right next to the road and has a USFS picnic area. Lion contains rainbow trout and yellow perch. In summer stillfish with worms and marshmallows or with flies and lures.

In winter, fish a glo-hook with maggots or corn. Fish 10-20 feet below the ice.

5. **Beaver/Murray Lakes**

Drive about 5 miles north of Whitefish on Highway 93. Turn right on the Beaver Lake Road. All lakes contain rainbow and cutthroat trout. Stillfish on the bottom with worms and marshmallows or cast lures. Fish Beaver Lake through the ice for kokanee; access can be difficult.

6. **Little Bitterroot Lake**
In winter, fish 25-30 feet down with a fluorescent red glo-hook with maggots for kokanee. Jig frequently (every 2-3 seconds). Use a light rod or spring bobber so you can see bites and strike at the slightest hint of a bite. Access at either northeast inlet (Lions Camp), northwest corner (Blue Grouse County access), or County access at outlet.
7. **Echo Lake (Best Bet)**
Fish off the causeway or at the FWP Fishing Access in May-June and September-October or through the ice for lots of perch, bass, some trout, and small pumpkinseeds. Use a small hook or jig with maggots, worms, or a piece of fish under a bobber. To get to the FWP access, go west across the causeway (towards Kalispell), and follow the signs.
8. **Foys Lake (Best Bet)**
Drive 3 miles south of Kalispell on Foys Lake Road. Fish below the guardrail where you first get to the lake or near the County boat ramp. Good fishing for rainbows in spring, fall, and early winter. Fish worms and marshmallows or PowerBait on the bottom or under a bobber.
9. **Buffalohead Pond (Best Bet)**
Turn on Grandview Drive just south of the Flathead Valley Community College. Just after the road makes a 90-degree turn south, park in the church parking lot near the gully. Walk down the gully under the road and to the ponds. This is a city park pond stocked with cutthroat trout. Best fishing is in May and June. Fish with worms and marshmallows, flies, or small spinners. Take mosquito repellent! Catch and release for adults.
10. **Dry Bridge Slough (Best Bet)**
Turn off Woodland Avenue in Kalispell about 8 blocks south of the Conrad Mansion onto 11th Street East and park in the cul-de-sac (this is the gully where kids sled in winter). This is a city park and the pond is stocked with rainbow trout. Best bait is worms or PowerBait under a bobber (bottom is weedy). Flies and spinners may also work. Best fishing is in late April, May and early June. Catch and release only for trout for anglers ages 15 and older.
11. **Shady Lane Pond (Best Bet)**
This pond lies between the Old Steel Bridge and the Roller Rink. Access through the Old Steel Bridge Fishing Access. Pond has pumpkinseeds, bullheads, and trout. Fish worms under a bobber for sunfish and trout. Fish flies and spinners or bait for cutthroat. Fish worms on the bottom for bullheads (watch for sharp spines). There are 2 1/2 miles of hiking trails. Catch and release only for trout for ages 15 and older.
12. **Loon Lake (Ferndale)**
Turn south off Highway 209 in Ferndale and go 1.3 miles and turn left at the Loon Lake Road. Follow main road just over 1 mile and turn right into parking lot. Rainbows and yellow perch dominate the catch with pumpkinseed sunfish, largemouth and smallmouth bass also available. A dock adjacent to the parking lot is provided by 4H so please keep the area clean.
13. **Swan Pond**
This DNRC site is managed as a Family Fishing Pond and all anglers are welcome. Anglers age 15 and older must release all fish to leave more opportunity for kids. Younger anglers may keep 1 cutthroat per day. Fishing license requirements apply. Go south from the town of Swan Lake 10 miles to mile marker 61.5. Turn east on gravel road a short distance to closed gate. Park so you don't block the gate and walk east about 100 yards to find pond.
14. **Pine Grove Pond (Best Bet)**
From West Reserve Drive in Kalispell, drive 1 mile north of Whitefish Stage, turn right on Rose Crossing for 3/4 mile. Or, from Highway 2, turn west on Rose Crossing for 8/10 of a mile across the Whitefish River and up the hill. Turn south at the Pine Grove sign. Pond is open mid-April through mid-October for Rainbow Trout and some cutthroat. Fish worms or Power Bait on the bottom or under a bobber. Flies and spinners work well, also. Catch and release only for anglers ages 15 and older.