

Urban Angler

Trout Mecca Where
Mountains Meet Desert/By John Shewey

BEND, OREGON



PHOTO BY CHRIS MATHER/DOGLEG STUDIOS

Anglers visiting Bend, Oregon, face at least two major dilemmas: first and foremost, the area around Bend, collectively called Central Oregon, boasts about a dozen great fisheries and a whole bunch more good fisheries. Second, and no less imposing, among its several brewpubs the city must offer about 40 different locally crafted ales. Choices, choices.

Luckily, these dilemmas are easily reconciled in and around this beautiful and lively mountain town with a view: you can ponder your angling choices while sipping some of the nation's best ales, and ponder your ale choices while casting over hallowed waters. Downtown Bend is what you might call "grown-up quaint," meaning that, in decades past, it really was small-town quaint—ski town and fishing town quaint—but then came the population boom. Yet even as Bend's population doubled in the span of about 10 years, the city's powers-that-be did an exceptional job of maintaining a spirited,

friendly, compact, alluring downtown area where two-story buildings are rare, and dining choices range from addictive four-star gems to eclectic hangouts. But the adventurous temporary "Bendite" might want to search farther afield than Bend's downtown, as the city offers no shortage of hidden surprises: the popular shopping area called The Old Mill District, golf courses aplenty, myriad lodging options, fantastic eateries tucked into every corner of town, and parks of every description, including several off-leash areas and even doggy day cares for anglers with their canine pals in tow.

But back to those fishing options. They include rivers, lakes, and reservoirs; trout and bass; desertlike canyons and forest-clad mountains. The Bend area makes day-tripping a delight: stay for a week, get up each morning and head out to a new fishery and a new adventure, then return to town and drink in the nightlife, whether you prefer bustling bars or laid-back brewpubs, outlandishly perfect ethnic cuisine or elegant Northwest favorites.





PHOTO BY BRIAN OKEEFE

Though they are hatchery produced, big rainbows like this certainly add to the allure of Fall River.

Access to the Fall River is fairly good, with a large public stretch at the hatchery and mostly public (Deschutes National Forest) land upstream from the hatchery for about 4 miles to the springs. The lower end of the river is more difficult to access owing to extensive private property. Currently, most of the river (upstream from the falls) is open year-round, making this a favorite winter getaway for local anglers.

Davis Lake

The best bass lake in Oregon? The best big-trout lake in Oregon? Davis Lake is a split-personality fishery, and the face it presents varies from decade to decade. Twenty-five years ago it was one of the state's best big-trout waters, until it wasn't; then 10 years ago it was once again—and by best, I mean salmon-size trout, ridiculous-size trout. Nowadays it's probably the best big-bass water in Oregon. The basic issue is keeping enough water in Davis Lake—which sits atop a porous lava field—for long enough periods of time to create ideal conditions for trout to grow fast and big. Those same conditions—extreme fertility and exposed lava flows that help keep the water warm (think pavement during a hot summer day)—are ideal for illegally introduced bass to thrive—and to reach near-state-record proportions.



PHOTO BY BRIAN OKEEFE

The 'bows here range from 14 inches to more than 10 pounds, and 16- to 20-inch fish are typical most years, though currently the trout fishery is a shadow of its former self. The trout feast on damselfly and dragonfly nymphs, leeches, scuds, water beetles, mayfly nymphs, Chironomids, snails, and—significantly—illegally or accidentally introduced tui chub. The trout are self-sustaining, with their numbers bolstered every once in a while when the usual drought cycles take a heavy toll on Davis Lake. Most of the time they respond best

to large flies that mimic chub minnows, leeches, dragonflies, and damselflies.

Davis Lake bass eat the same things. The south side of the lake is best for targeting them. Some of these bass now top 10 pounds, and lots of them range from 2 to 6 pounds. They abound along the lava flow, and each little cove therein seems to hold several nice fish. Creep along by boat and cast streamers or poppers into the coves and weed edges.

Davis Lake spans about 3,500 acres when full and reaches a maximum depth of only 25 feet. Most years you can drive to the lake by early April, but call the local fly-fishing shops in Bend before heading out in the spring. Bank fishing is quite limited on Davis, so a boat is the way to go; if you don't have a boat, take your float tube or pontoon craft.

Walt's Popper



PHOTO BY MIKE HOUSKA/DOGLEGG STUDIOS

Upper/Middle Deschutes River

Perhaps the most underappreciated trout stream near Bend is the Upper Deschutes River. Part of it cuts a rugged gorge through lava fields southwest of town below Benham Falls. For anglers willing to hike, the 8.5-mile stretch from the outskirts of town up to the falls can offer decent fishing for wild brown trout (see the map at www.visitbend.com/CEDocuments/Downloads_GetFile.aspx?id=286840&fd=0).

The best trout water in this stretch tends to be the swift, difficult-to-fish areas near the waterfalls; here big nymphs and streamers generally do the trick, and anglers adept at working heavy streamers on sinking-tip lines through narrow slots

and deep runs find a few surprisingly large browns. But fishing many of these places is only for the agile and fleet of foot. Fortunately, the deeper slow-water stretches also hold trout.

To get to the Deschutes Trail, follow Cascade Lakes Highway (Century Drive) west out of town, following the signs leading toward Mount Bachelor.

After a few miles, turn left on the gravel road adjacent to the east end of the golf course at Seventh Mountain Resort. From there you can drive down to the main trail, which follows the west side of the river, with side trails leading to the water.

Downstream (north) from Bend, the river is called the Middle Deschutes, and it eventually feeds into Lake Billy Chinook. Much of the Middle Deschutes flows through a scenic juniper-clad canyon, and access is somewhat restricted by extensive private property.

Popular public access points include Tetherow Crossing downstream from Tumalo, Cline Falls State Park west of Redmond, Lower Bridge west of Terrebonne, and the “Foley Waters” near Steelhead Falls west of Crooked River Ranch.

Each of these access points gets you to excellent water, and a little map reading will reveal additional access areas.

Wild brown trout, rainbow trout, and whitefish inhabit the Middle Deschutes in good numbers, with the relative abundance of each varying from place to place. This part of the Deschutes is heavily drawn

upon by the canal system that feeds local agriculture, so by late spring the river is but a comparative trickle. The trout survive the summer by taking refuge in deep pools and spring-fed areas. Summer fishing is largely restricted to these locations, but, like the nearby Crooked River, the Middle Deschutes offers excellent fishing from February through April—including dry-fly fishing in midwinter when Little Brown Stoneflies hatch, and then even better surface action as the spring hatches unfold, including March Browns in midspring and even a little-known hatch of Golden Stoneflies (and Salmonflies in some stretches) in late April and May.

Hosmer Lake

Seductive and productive, 160-acre Hosmer Lake, famed for its landlocked Atlantic salmon, is a fly-fishing-only lake just 45 minutes from Bend on the road that leads to famous Mount Bachelor, the Cascade Lakes Highway. Hard-fighting and acrobatic, Hosmer's salmon range from 12 to 20 inches, and the lake also supports some huge brook trout: notoriously difficult to land, they reach at least 6 pounds. The shallow lake is an insect factory, and depending on the fishes' moods, anglers successfully fish dry flies, nymphs, or streamers.

Bright-colored attractor flies are especially effective just after ice-out during May. Typically at this time, snow blocks the access road, so dedicated Hosmer enthusiasts often hike or ski anywhere from 1 to 5 miles into the lake, float tube in tow. A robust *Calibaetis* mayfly hatch likewise begins before the road into Hosmer is free of snow, lasting most of the summer.



Rubber-Leg Stimulator

Hosmer also provides a rare chance to fish damselfly adult patterns. The bugs hatch in enormous numbers during June and July. Watch for adults buzzing around the reed stands during midmorning, and keep an eye peeled for splashy rises near and among the reeds. August frequently brings a bit of a lull in the action, along with an algae bloom. Fishing picks up again in the fall, which is a decidedly fine time to fish this scenic lake.

Fishing Hosmer Lake virtually requires watercraft of some kind because much of the lakeshore is lined with reeds, and that which isn't is largely brushy and devoid of good back-cast room. Anglers here effectively employ everything from float tubes and canoes to prams and drift boats. Only electric motors are allowed on the lake. The lake is divided essentially into two parts: the boat ramp feeds into the south pool, which is connected by a narrow channel to the larger, shallower north pool. The channel is home to some of the lake's largest brook trout.



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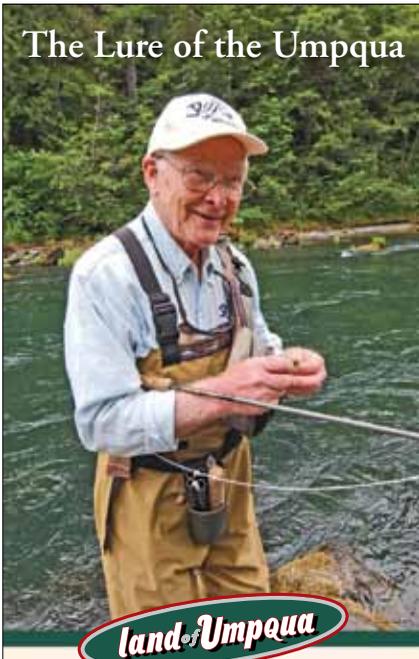
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Bend Area Fast Facts

Upper Deschutes River: A hike-along stretch just outside Bend offers fast-water fishing for brown trout.

Middle Deschutes River: Dry-fly action that peaks February–May just 30 to 45 minutes from Bend.

Hosmer Lake: Fly-fishing-only for acrobatic landlocked Atlantic salmon just 45 minutes from Bend; June–July and autumn are prime.

Crane Prairie Reservoir: Big rainbows in big water in a beautiful mountain setting; prime time: May–July and autumn; bring a boat or hire a guide.

Davis Lake: Big bass and trout one hour from Bend; prime time for bass: May–September; prime time for trout: April–June and fall.

Fall River: Year-round action for 'bows, browns, and brookies less than an hour from Bend; fly-fishing-only.

East Lake: Summer/fall float tube/boat fishing for 'bows, Atlantic salmon, and big browns in a gorgeous setting just 45 minutes from Bend.

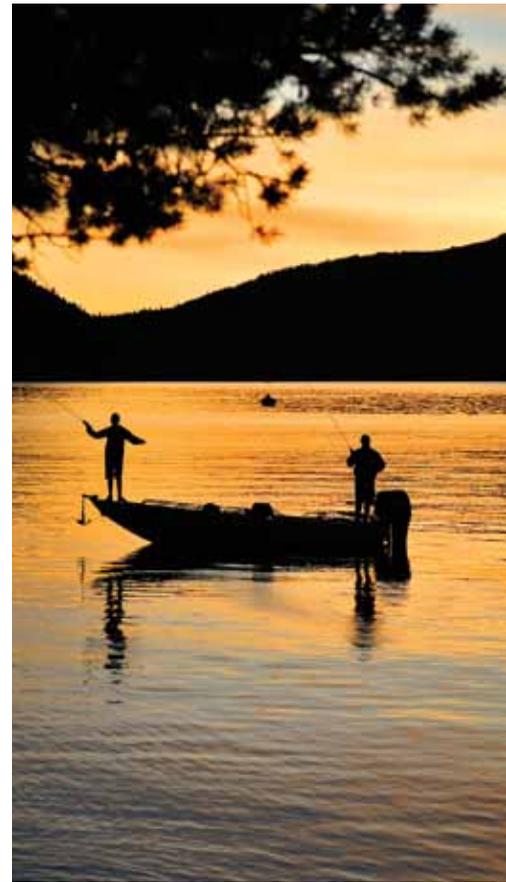
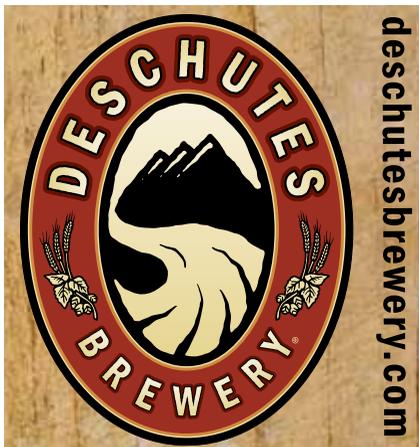


PHOTO BY MIKE HOUSKA/DOGLEG STUDIOS

East Lake

So you're visiting Bend during mid-to late summer and reports suggest Hosmer, Crane, and Davis are slow for trout? Fret not. East Lake is the answer. Filling a volcanic crater south-by-southeast from Bend, East Lake and its sister, Paulina Lake, offer consistent summer fishing, with East Lake being the favorite among fly anglers for its robust population of aggressive landlocked Atlantic salmon, rainbows, and brown trout. Hatching *Callibaetis* mayflies produce terrific dry-fly action on many summer days; nymphs and wet flies are always productive, and streamer enthusiasts with sinking lines can probe the dropoffs for large brown trout, especially during autumn.

Boat rentals are available at East Lake Resort, www.eastlakeresort.com, or just plop a float tube in anywhere along the easily accessible south and east shorelines. East Lake resides within the Newberry National Volcanic Monument, which requires a nominal entrance fee, payable on site as you enter the area.



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Crane Prairie Reservoir

Among Oregon's best trophy-trout fisheries, Crane Prairie Reservoir has suffered the indignity of being illegally stocked with warm-water species, first with largemouth bass and later with panfish and stickleback minnows. The bucket biologists succeeded not only in creating a good bass fishery on Crane Prairie, but also in altering the nature of the trout fishing. After years of glorious trophy-trout action on the reservoir, today's Crane Prairie is a different place: gone are the massive daily hatches of damselflies, *Callibaetis* mayflies, and dragonflies that once assured superb surface action for fly anglers. Recent surveys suggest that entire year classes of trout—in fact, several consecutive year classes—are missing from the lake, indicating failed spawning and/or heavy predation on juvenile fish.

The good news is that, because of its inherent fertility and supplemental stocking, this 3,400-acre fishery remains excellent for rainbow trout ranging from 14 inches to 12 pounds. Located southwest of Bend along Cascade Lakes Highway, the reservoir also produces a few big brookies. Largemouth bass commonly reach 3 to 5 pounds; they stick close to flooded timber, large weedbeds, and reed stands in the lake's shallow margins.

The trout no longer enjoy the luxury of foraging heavily on damselflies and dragonflies that used to exist in unbelievable densities. These insects still inhabit the lake, and their seasonal emergences still draw the attention of the trout, though the hatches hardly compare to those that occurred yearly through the 1980s. Today's Crane Prairie fly angler needs to arrive armed with Chironomid patterns; various attractor wet flies, streamers, and leeches; scud and mayfly nymph patterns; and sinking lines.

Crane Prairie offers an intriguing array of hot spots, all of them bolstered by lush aquatic vegetation and several prominent old river and creek channels. The Deschutes Channel runs more or less through the eastern part of the reservoir. To the west and southwest are the Cultus River, Quinn River, and Rock Creek channels (and inlets), and there are several prominent bays and fingers on the south and southeast side, these latter being good bets for bass. Boat ramps are found at Rock Creek, Quinn River, and Crane Prairie Resort, www.crane-prairie-resort-guides.com, which offers boat rentals and guide service.

Crane Prairie is usually accessible by the April opener, though you must drive down to Sunriver or Wickiup Junction because the route from Bend up past Mount Bachelor is always snowbound until at least late May. May and June are prime months here for trout anglers, and the bass fishing peaks between June and September. Often the reservoir is drawn quite low by autumn, but October fishing can be excellent.



PHOTO BY JOHN SHEWEY

BEND INSIDER

Local intel: Visit Bend, (877) 245-8484, www.visitbend.com; Bend Area Chamber of Commerce, (541) 382-3221, www.bendchamber.org.

Amazing breakfast: Victorian Café, 1404 NW Galveston, (541) 382-6411.

Favorite lunch stop: *Downtown:* McMenamin's Old Saint Francis School (brewpub), 700 NW Bond, (541) 382-5174, www.mcmenamins.com; Toomies Thai, 119 NW Minnesota, (541) 388-5590. *Eastside:* Los Jalapenos, 601 NE Greenwood, (541) 383-1402, www.losjalapenos.biz.

Great dinner: Ariana, 1304 NW Galveston, (541) 330-5539, www.arianarestaurantbend.com; The Blacksmith, 211 NW Greenwood (downtown), (541) 318-0588, www.bendblacksmith.com.

Local beer: Deschutes Brewery, 1044 NW Bond (downtown), (541) 382-9242, www.deschutesbrewery.com.

New brewery buzz: 10 Barrel Brewing Company, (541) 585-1007, www.10barrel.com.

Local spirits: Bend Distillery Martini Bar, 850 NW Brooks, (541) 388-6868, www.benddistillery.com.

Live music: Silver Moon Brewing, 24 NW Greenwood, (541) 388-8331, www.silvermoonbrewing.com.

Doggy day care: Bend Pet Resort, 60909 SE 27th, (541) 388-0435, www.bendpetresort.com.

Get your golf on: River's Edge Golf Course, (800) 547-3928, www.riverhouse.com.

Fly shops: The Patient Angler, (541) 389-6208, www.patientangler.com; Orvis, (541) 312-8200, www.orvis.com/bend; Fly & Field Outfitters, (541) 318-1616, www.flyandfield.com.

Local guides: Deep Canyon Outfitters, (541) 323-3007, www.deschutesflyfish.com.

Best books: *Fishing Central Oregon and Beyond* by Geoff Hill, Gary Lewis, Brooke Snavely, and Raven Wing; *Complete Angler's Guide to Oregon* by John Shewey.



Whitlock Damselfly