

KOKANEE 2010: BANNER DAYS AHEAD

IMPROVED WATER CONDITIONS SHOULD TRANSLATE INTO
EXCELLENT KOKANEE ACTION THROUGHOUT GOLDEN STATE

VACAVILLE—After suffering through three consecutive years of below-average precipitation and snowpack – and shockingly low reservoir levels – California’s anglers will not face a fourth year of serious drought. The winter of 2009-10 brought better-than-average precipitation, and the resulting runoff is filling lakes and reservoirs.

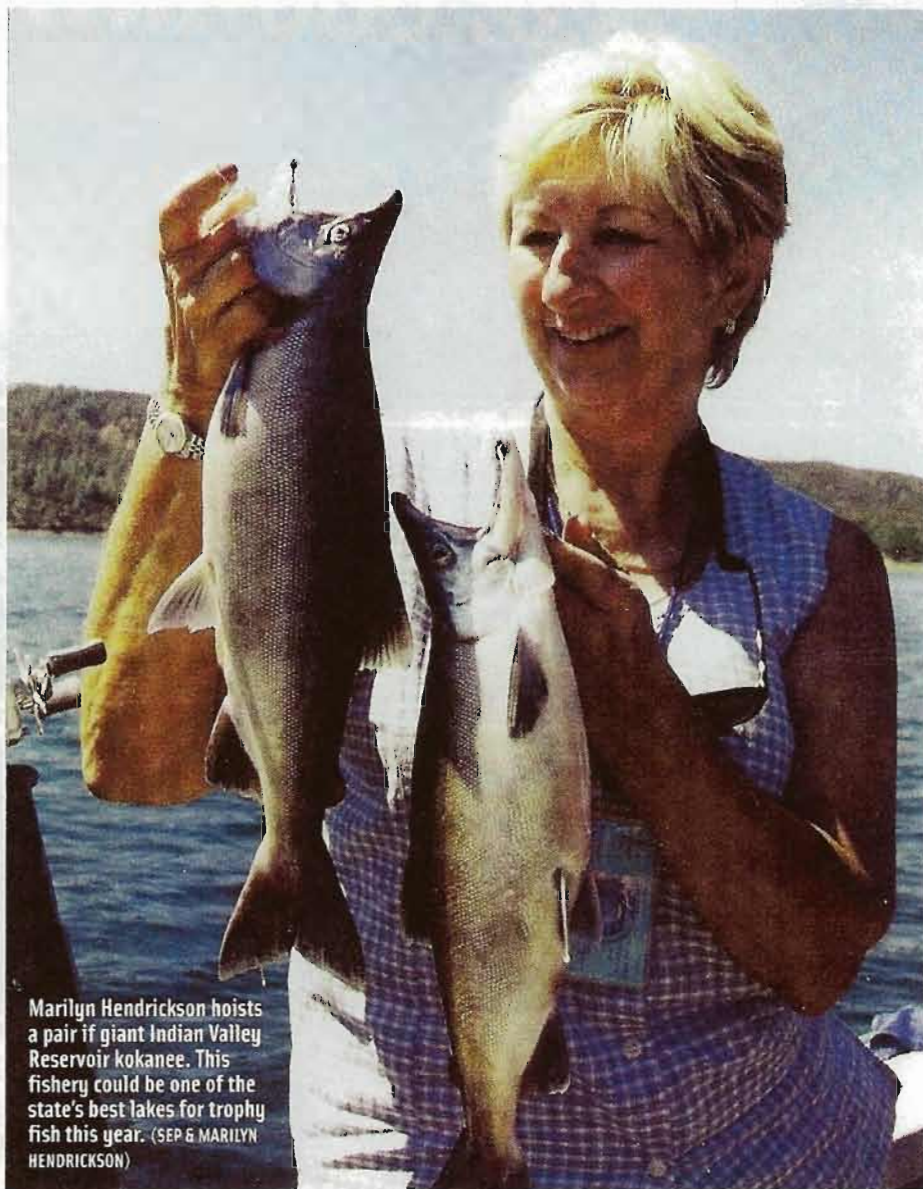
The kokanee angling we will have this season – this spring ... this summer ... this fall ... this year – will be good. VERY good. Plankton, zooplankton and other aquatic food supplies are growing, and will continue to aid in the production of a solid food chain. Kokes will flourish in the nutrient-rich waters and temperature ranges they prefer.

Northern California’s kokanee anglers finally have something to look forward to.

We’ve fanatically fished kokanee salmon for over 30 years, and along the way we helped many companies to pioneer, create and promote new products, tactics and techniques for anglers with the same addiction. Our fingers have been in the middle of all of it as this major fishery evolved, so it seems kinda strange to be so excited about “just another kokanee season.” It’s anything but: This could be a spectacular season at some locations!

We’re willing to bet that one lake in particular will host some surprising action for kokes, for many different reasons. But more on that later.

The growth of the fishery: Over the past 15 years, anglers have seen a remarkable change in kokanee fishing. What was once a two- to three-month window from July to September has evolved into nearly a year-round fishery. Kokes are now being managed by the California Department of Fish and Game for size in some lakes, and for quantity in others.



Marilyn Hendrickson hoists a pair of giant Indian Valley Reservoir kokanee. This fishery could be one of the state’s best lakes for trophy fish this year. (SEP & MARILYN HENDRICKSON)

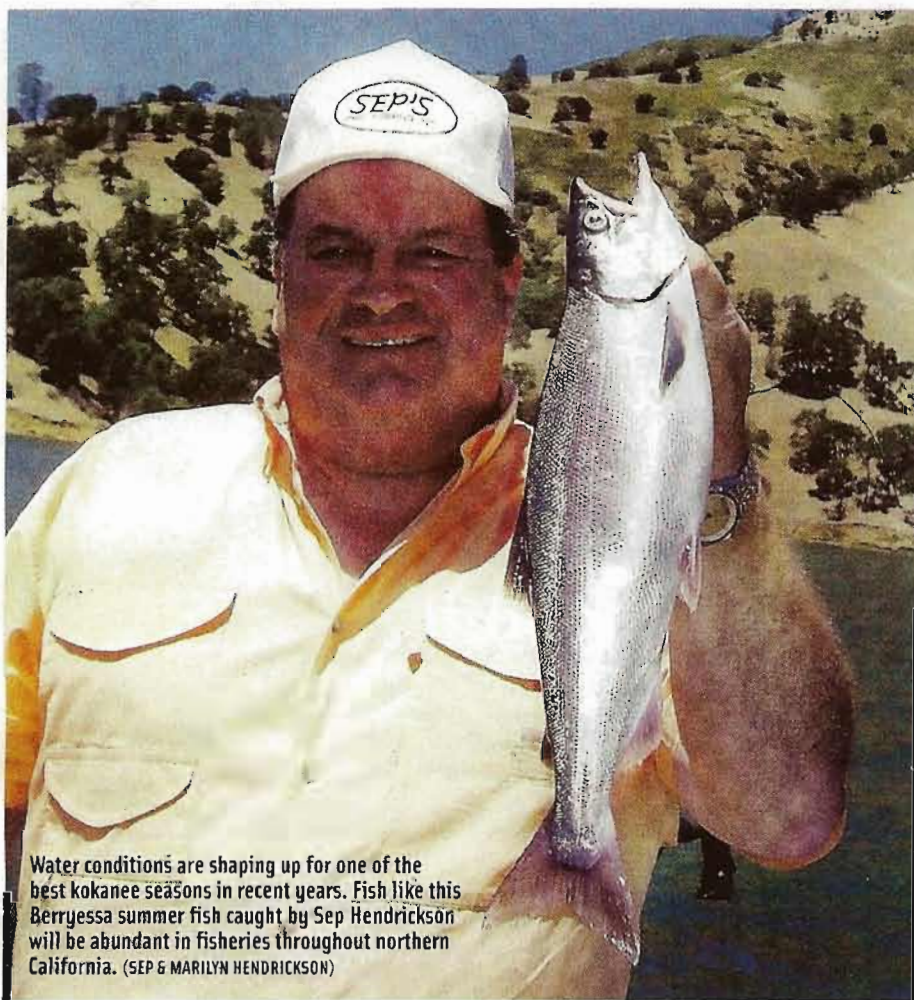
This provides opportunities for those anglers searching for trophy sized, 16- to 20-inch kokanee and for others wishing to catch lots of fish, the smaller 12- to 15-inch class.

Simply put, the *Oncorhynchus nerka*,

(“Little Red Fish,” as Native Indians called it), has changed California’s fishing calendar.

NorCal’s big-caliber kokanee

Wherever you fish for kokanee, mature fish



Water conditions are shaping up for one of the best kokanee seasons in recent years. Fish like this Berryessa summer fish caught by Sep Hendrickson will be abundant in fisheries throughout northern California. (SEP & MARILYN HENDRICKSON)

will be on tap from April through September/October, and of course it's always possible to catch some of the smaller year-class fish year-around. But, if you're there for the harvest of big, strong, hard-fighting freshwater sockeye salmon, let the little ones go and harvest some of the "big dogs" that destroy

your tackle and your confidence when they strike. You will not be disappointed.

While California offers anglers dozens of good opportunities for large kokanee salmon, there are a couple consistent big kokanee waters that anglers will want to hit for sure this year. And there's one "sleeper"

lake that could surprise us all.

Here are some suggestions where you can land the biggest kokanee our state has to offer:

New Melones Reservoir produces a solid population of kokes in the 14- to 17-inch-plus range. This large foothill reservoir is rated one of the top kokanee fisheries in the state with plenty of fish, and big ones, too. Even with drastic water level fluctuations, this body of water sustains a dependable, good-sized population.

Virtually the entire main body of the lake will produce fish but the dam, spillway, islands and the "humps" at the south end are great year-around producers.

Lake Berryessa began producing kokes in the 17- to 18-inch range in early spring, indicating that fat, healthy kokanee will easily reach 20 to 21 inches and larger this year. Plenty of water, slow draw-downs and good food supplies make this lake a "must-hit" for anglers.

Kokes will be abundant near the Big Island, Skiers Cove and the Monticello Dam area.

Whiskeytown Reservoir just outside of Redding produces early-season kokes in the 17-inch range and larger, and by fall they can be 20-plus inches. This lake is always a must-hit for any experienced kokanee angler. Because of the exceptionally cold water, fish can be found scattered from the surface to the bottom as the season progresses.

The Highway 299 bridge, the shoreline below the visitor's center and the area in front of the dam always produce good numbers of nice-sized fish.

CA DFG KOKANEE PLANTS

LAKE	2007	2008	2009	LAKE	2007	2008	2009
Bass	35,088	50,830	50,086	Isabella	0	30,012	0
Berryessa	32,436	70,940	50,126	Little Grass	13,050	32,950	20,000
Boca	16,416	50,052	0	McClure	12,502	20,150	20,146
Bowman	0	12,336	0	New Melones	80,304	100,118	100,138
Bullard's Bar	32,896	50,086	50,002	Pine Flat	0	72,692	0
Del Valle	12,932	10,128	20,088	Rollins	24,186	40,125	0
Donner	32,469	50,086	0	Scott's Flat	16,530	25,038	0
Don Pedro	6,517	10,080	10,050	Shaver	35,559	40,299	50,160
Folsom	80,202	200,420	100,000	Stampede	73,448	75,012	75,000
Hell Hole	16,416	37,950	28,272	Tahoe	150,036	150,556	120,024
Huntington	0	10,080	10,138	Union Valley	32,640	50,076	50,000
Indian Valley	32,537	50,048	50,262				



If early-season results are any indication, Lake Berryessa will provide some of the best trophy kokanee fishing in years. This stringer of fat kokanee came out of Berryessa in March on a guided trip with Troy Bar. (PHOTO COURTESY T-ROY'S GUIDE SERVICE, WWW.FISH-TROYS.COM)

Sleeper alert! Sleeper alert!

After three years of very low water levels, continued plants of kokanee and plenty of water this year, is **Indian Valley Reservoir** ready to start producing big kokes again?

Conditions are good, but only time will tell. Anglers with enough tenacity and desire should find the road and the fishing bumpy but there is a good chance that I.V. reservoir is poised to start anew.

Here's why we feel Indian Valley Reservoir is an untapped resource that will be worth the trip:

Stocking: Just a few short years ago, I.V. produced the largest kokanee in the state. It had never been stocked before, and two to three years later, the fishing was phenomenal with 22- to 24-inchers at 3 pounds and larger. Then Mother Nature stepped in and the kokanee's growth evened off at 16 to 18 inches, their size being dependent upon the body of water, available food supply and the competition with other species for food.

Poor access: The 13-mile drive into Indian Valley Reservoir is legendary, rough, dusty and known to rattle vital parts off boats and trailers.

Low water levels: By late fall, water gets drawn very, very low for irrigation and hydroelectric purposes, leaving little in the way of food supplies and suitable water conditions for fish survival.

Launch ramps: Launch facilities have been high and dry, making it all but impossible for fully rigged, full size boats to launch.

Few fishing reports: No one makes the trek or the drive into the lake unless they

know it's accessible and the fishing is good.

Poor facilities: No fresh drinking water.

The economy: This has kept many people from heading to the lake.

What does that all mean? Absolutely zero pressure on a biomass that just might

include the biggest kokanee in the state.

Indian Valley is located ten miles off Highway 20, 26 miles west of Williams. This fishery has the potential this year to rebound with great results, and it needs to be checked by serious anglers, soon!

Gearing up

For pure fight and tenacity, the kokanee is a much-respected gamefish. Doing battle with a kokanee requires specialized equipment, electronics, tackle, finesse, luck, some skill, and a great deal of patience. It's not as simple as it may seem. Kokanee catching is a matter of doing everything right at the same time and it is essential to match one's tackle to the task. It can be a raucous, net-waving success or a humbling fishing experience.

Rigging right

A wide variety of specialized tackle, tactics and techniques are effective, particularly when trolling attractor devices such as ultralight flashers that create vibrations and are highly visible. Experienced anglers pull flashers followed by an 18- to 22-inch leader with a bug, lure, grub or spinner attached.

Because of the kokanee's soft mouth, using a rubber snubber, working as a shock absorber, is recommended to protect the leader.

Small 4/0 dodgers by Sep's Pro Fishing, Vance's Tackle, or Rocky Mountain Tackle have revolutionized kokanee fishing in recent years. The side-to-side action of the dodger transmits a swimming, surging action that creates more vibration and movement to the lure.

Top-producing colors are watermelon, fruit salad and pink butt. Dodgers are most effective with a 6- to 10-inch leader, tied to a small brightly colored, flutter-type lure such as Sep's Kokanee Kandy, Luhr Jensen's Needlefish, Rocky Mountain's Hornet and Uncle Larry's spinners, which offer maximum action at slow speeds.

Making scents

For no explainable reason – maybe to match the scent of plankton, a primary food source of kokanee, or maybe because it resembles maggots – anglers should put a kernel or two of white corn on the barb of the hook. Whatever the reason, corn often spells the difference between success and failure.

Pautkzke's Fire Corn is a top producer, lasting longer after opening than most others.

Lures tipped with a piece of nightcrawler work well too, and do not forget the scent. Lots of it. Put fresh scent on terminal offerings – whether it's a lure, spinner or bug – at least every 10 minutes or after each fish, and keep it fresh.

Pro Cure's Kokanee Special, Herring or Carp Spit gels are top producers.

Trolling truths

Kokanee are a schooling fish just like their salt-water cousin, the sockeye. They attack offerings, even those rigged just a short distance behind the downrigger ball, because of competition for the bait. To stay with the school, fish 5 to 10 feet behind the downrigger ball. When "short-lining" in this manner, troll offerings right through the school, quickly turn around and troll right back through, and do it again (without tangling lines). This will increase the number of hookups.

Slow trolling at about .8 to 1.5 mph with exaggerated "5" turns is by far the best method. On a turn, the inside lure slows down and drops while the outside lure speeds up and rises. This changes the depth, action and vibration of the lure, which triggers strikes and allows anglers to cover more surface acres in search of feeding fish.

Timing truths

Early-season kokanee are scattered about the lake. They relate to structure, points, rocks and streams but basically roam, searching for food sources. Fish at least 40 to 50 feet behind the boat when kokanee are scattered and tough to find. They will be holding close to the surface and will drop deeper as waters warm.

Use stealth: An electric trolling motor like Minn Kota's Terova offers 101 pounds of thrust, moving the largest of trolling boats quietly at speeds up to 3 mph, and not spooking fish.

As the fall spawn approaches, mature kokanee congregate and travel in large schools, making them aggressive and easier to catch. Kokanee anglers look forward to August, September and October, when limits can often be nailed in minutes and it's possible to play catch-and-release for hours. It's also "harvest time": Kokanee do not successfully spawn in most lakes because of the fluctuating water levels and inadequate spawning habitat. They're managed as a harvestable resource, and can be enjoyed at the dinner table as well as on the end of a surging fishing rod. –**Sep & Marilyn Hendrickson**