

EASTERN SIERRA • CALIFORNIA



FISHING

continued...



Upper Owens River
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Sierra Trout Magnet Fly Sh

WINTER FISHING continues in Mono County until April 24, 2015 along some sections of the West Walker River, East Walker River, Owens River and Hot Creek (see map). Hire a professional fishing guide to get the most out of your excursion! Special catch-and-release regulations apply.

TOPAZ LAKE at the California/Nevada border is home to the annual Topaz Lodge Fishing Derby with big cash prizes. Come on up and try your luck through April 12, 2015.

FISHING OPENER for regular season in Mono County is Saturday, April 25, 2015. Make your lodging reservations now!

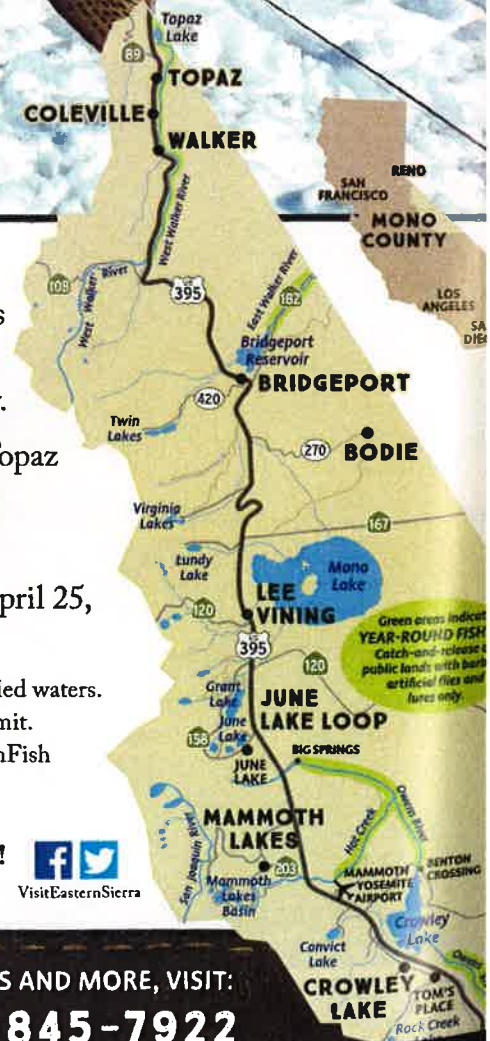
*Year-round fishing regulations apply from November 16, 2014 through April 24, 2015 in specified waters. Catch-and-release only with artificial lures with barbless hooks; zero daily bag and possession limit.

For more info: 800-845-7922 or visit www.DFG.ca.Gov/regulations/FreshFish

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Snow on the ground is common in April in the high country of the Eastern Sierras, such as along Mammoth Creek on last year's opener, though the drought cycle has made for less wintry conditions in recent springs. (MIKE STEVENS)

PREPARING FOR OPENING DAY

WHAT TO EXPECT FOR APRIL EASTERN SIERRA TROUT FRENZY

By Mike Stevens

The only thing certain about the April Eastern Sierra trout opener is its uncertainty.

For instance, the opening day, or "Fishmas," has seen it all. Two years ago, anglers were in T-shirts in various locales by 10 in the

morning. Last year, a snowstorm was set to arrive on Fishmas Eve and deliver 8 inches of the white stuff to the east side. Well, that ballooned into a 30-inch dumping that had anyone heading to the city of Mammoth Lakes after 6 p.m. in a scramble for tire chains just to get to their accommodations.

A white Fishmas, indeed.

Like last season, and for that matter, the two years before that, much was said about the all-important (for the entire state, not just locally) snowpack, or lack thereof. While it is important to the Eastern Sierra trout fishery, it has little effect on opening day. If you

FISHING

Crowley Lake figures to be busy again on "Fishmas Day," when anglers will flock to the Eastern Sierras the last weekend in April. (MIKE STEVENS)



Lake Sabrina is generally the big question mark. It could range from ice thick enough to stand on, in which case, ice fishing is possible and historically pretty productive, believe it or not. If Sabrina is ice free, fishing should be excellent. What you don't want is a thin layer of ice that is not safe to walk out on, yet impossible to fish from shore.

In years past, South Lake has been a popular Fishmas spot that remained incredibly productive for the rest of the season, but it has been plagued by low water levels more than any lake in the area, and, as a result, it hasn't been stocked since 2012.

"For those looking to easy, dependable access to stillwater, but don't mind a bit of a crowd, Intake II is your best bet," says Jared Smith, general manager of Parcher's Resort on Bishop Creek (760-873-4177; parchersresort.net). "The lake is sure to be ice-free and (California Department of Fish and Wildlife) will have certainly stocked it prior to the opener. North Lake may be accessible by road, but more likely folks will have to walk in. Both forks of the creek are typically stocked where the creek crosses the road, camp-

have trips in mind from July and beyond, that's when you want to concern yourself with snowpack, because snow in the high country or not, you'll be spending the opener fishing lower elevation waters along the Bishop Creek drainage (Lake Sabrina, Intake II, North Lake), Crowley and Convict Lakes, and the June Lake Loop. Generally speaking, the Mammoth Lakes Basin is still under ice, and road closures severely limit access. But these are the Sierras, so anything is possible.

FISHABLE WATERS

As far as fishing the Bishop Creek drainage on opening weekend,

MONO COUNTY OPTIONS

For trout fanatics, April 25's season opener for many Sierra Nevada lakes and rivers can't get here soon enough. But in Mono County, there are options to cure your opening-day withdrawal. Since March 2014, the West Walker River has been open to year-round fishing on public lands. Only artificial flies and lures with barbless hooks are allowed until the new season on April 25, with catch-and-release fishing only. From that point on, normal regulations, including the usual five-fish limit will apply on the West Walker.

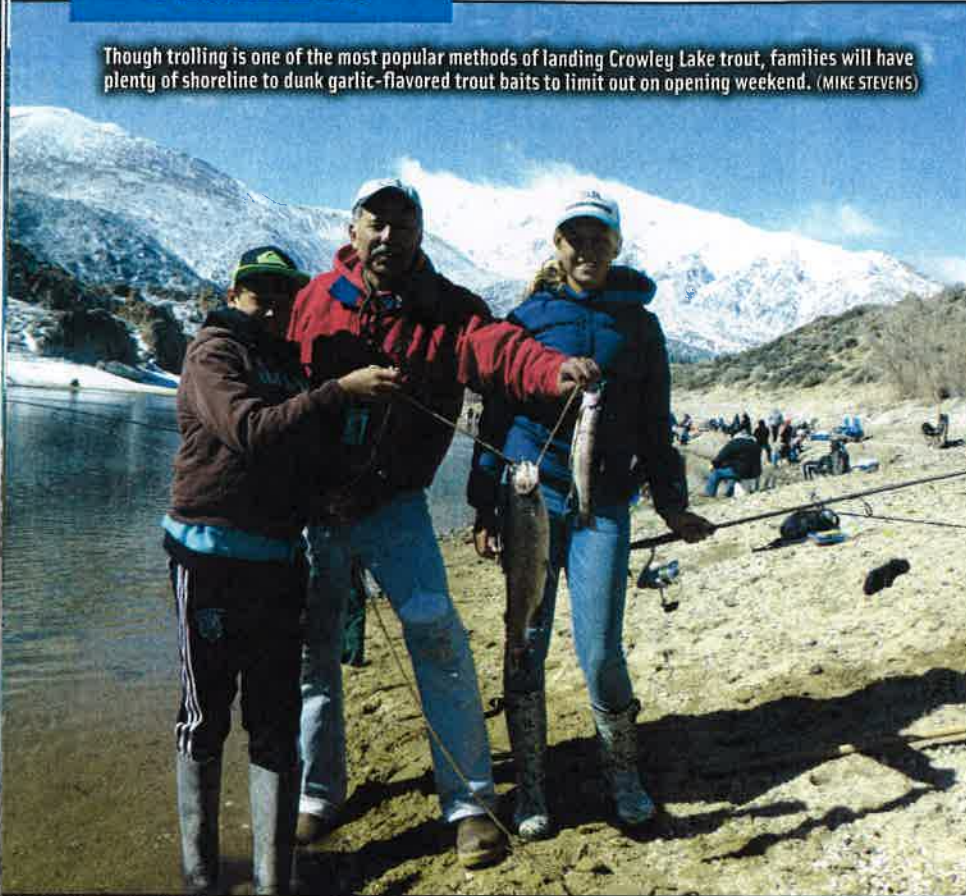
"This (has been) great news for our area and for anglers to come and fish some of the best waters of the year in

the West Walker River," says Pam Hamic, president of the Northern Mono Chamber of Commerce.

Several derbies will highlight the fishing calendar for Mono County this year. The Topaz Lake Fishing Derby, which began on Jan. 1, will continue through April 15 on the lake located right on the California-Nevada border, with tagged fish for cash prizes stocked in the lake. The West Walker's How Big-Is-Big Fishing Derby is scheduled for July 1-31, and the Size Doesn't Matter Fishing Derby is Aug. 7-9. For more information, contact the Northern Mono Chamber of Commerce (530-208-6078; northernmono.com). -CS

FISHING

Though trolling is one of the most popular methods of landing Crowley Lake trout, families will have plenty of shoreline to dunk garlic-flavored trout baits to limit out on opening weekend. (MIKE STEVENS)



grounds, bridges, and areas where turnouts allow easy access to deeper pools."

Smith adds a tip for fishing the creek itself. He says to get out there early (which for many anglers who target this area in particular, is in darkness) to grab a prime spot. But he adds not to spend too much time there if you aren't getting bit, as either the fish are there, or they're not.

THE BIG LAKES

Crowley and Convict Lakes just might stand as the most popular opening-day impoundments. Crowley is where you want to be if you are a boater, as trolling (top-lining as well as leadcore) is a great way to beat up the lake's rainbows, cutthroat and browns, which always seem to be better quality on average, as far as size is concerned. Old standby lures for Crowley include Owner Cultivas, Berkley

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This Crowley Lake brown was caught trolling with a Kastmaster during the 2014 opener. Owner Cultivas, Berkley Flicker Shads and Needlefish are also staples for Crowley's armada of boats that will fill the lake this season. (MIKE STEVENS)

Flicker Shads, and Needlefish.

There are also miles of wide-open shoreline for bank anglers, and over the last few openers, it

seems that the best bite has occurred between 8 and 11 a.m. So while a ton of people get there at the crack of dawn, you really don't need to in order to scratch out limits before noon. Bank anglers over the last few opening days have done well on standard trout baits, especially those with garlic either built in or added. Also effective can be working nymphs slowly on a fly-and-bubble rig, and throwing plastics such as the trout worms and jigs made specifically for the area from Sierra Slammers (sieraslammers.com).

WORK THE LOOP

The June Lake Loop is another very popular area, and it's the place to go if you want a lot of fishing options to bounce around to without wasting a lot of time in the car. The entire loop, which includes June, Gull, Grant and Silver Lakes – along with Rush Creek – should

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Mammoth Creek doesn't always open in frigid, snowy conditions. Shirt sleeves and shorts worked well for 2013 anglers. (MIKE STEVENS)



Convict Lake anglers are counting down the days until late April's first casts. What no one will know until then is how the weather will impact opening weekend. (MIKE STEVENS)

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all be open, but ice conditions are always up in the air.

"If this winter pattern continues, there won't be much ice and fish will already be active and feeding, which means a good opener," says Eastern Sierra outdoor writer Ernie Cowan, who annually covers the June Lake Loop on opening day. "All lakes will be well stocked and anglers should expect to see plenty of 5- to 7-pound fish, but look for something in double digits to win the annual June Lake Loop Monster Trout Derby, held every opening day."

According to Cowan, big fish tend to be caught where Rush Creek dumps into Grant Lake by anglers tossing black Woolly Buggers and willing to work for it. He also suggested targeting the reed lines at both June and Gull Lakes as well as the north shore and Rush Creek outlet of Silver Lake if you are competing in the derby or just out lunger hunting. **CS**