

Five Alaskan Guide Secrets: What to Do When the Fishing Gets Tough.

Everybody, sooner or later, has one of *those* days on the water. You know the ones: fish seemingly all around, but none of them want to bite. After a day of frustrated flailing with your lucky fly, on your favorite hole of your favorite river, you just can't believe that you didn't catch anything. After all that work and no fish to show, you think "those fish just didn't want to bite" or "it must have been the wind", or something along those lines. Then you feel a little sorry for the guides that have to fish on days like this...just think if you had to get skunked as a job...man, what would that be like?

The truth is, most guides have a bag of tricks for days when the fishing seems a little slow. Guides don't get to pick the kind of days on which they take clients out, so learning tips and techniques to consistently get folks into fish is an absolute necessity. The tips and tricks discussed here are a glimpse into the playbook of the Alaskan Guide, but you can use them to your advantage on your home waters, wherever they may be.

TIP #1: CHANGE COLORS

As rudimentary as it may seem, changing colors to suit conditions is often the key to success. It is always a good idea to have a full palette of colors and hues in your fly box to take advantage of situations beyond your control. Some color and contrast tips include:

- Bright Day, Bright Fly; Dark Day, Dark Fly
- Dark Flies in Muddy water
- Light Flies in Glacial water
- Fluorescent Flies in Tannic water

Sometimes a color change is all that is required to get you back into the fish, but sometimes, you have to do even more.

TIP #2: CHANGE SIZES

Some days size matters. It can mean the difference between non-stop action and no bites at all. Especially during calm days with high sun and bright blue sky, fish are affected by the size of the offering drifting into their view. By going small and sparse on sunny days, and conversely, big and gaudy on high-water days, the diligent angler can often coax bites out of seemingly barren pools. The well-stocked fly box will include several size selections of each profile fly. Don't be shy about changing your offering, just make sure to give each different size a fair shake and let the fish have a good look at it.

TIP #3: CHANGE LEVELS

Every fly angler dreams about days where you throw any old thing into a hole and hook piles of huge fish, but those days are few and far between. Most of the time, fish need to be targeted on a specific level of the water column to consistently provide results. The prepared angler will have either a multi-tip fly line system

with several choices of sink tip, or fish a floating line and carry multiple varieties of split shot to deliver his offering at the proper depth. Some thoughts to keep in mind:

- On sunny days, fish closer to the bottom
- In rivers, fish often hold below current layers
- In lakes, fish often hold below temperature breaks
- Work from top to bottom, not bottom to top

Some days, the fish just don't want to move far, and on those days changing levels is often the ticket to success.

TIP #4: CHANGE LOCATION

Just like in the real estate business, in fishing, location is everything. Run-timing for anadromous fish like salmon and steelhead can play a large part in your fishing success, and the ability to find these fish is often what sets the dedicated angler apart from the rest of the crowd. When fishing still water, one end of the lake will often produce more fish than the other...why is that? Many times, the wind direction or sun intensity will answer that. Fish tend to congregate in areas of increased feeding opportunity, so it is only natural that if the feed is being blown to one side of the lake, the fish will follow. If the sun is heating one side of the lake for a longer duration, chances are you will find fish there in the spring and fall, and the opposite side during the heat of summer. Some other things to consider:

- Fish closer to estuaries on high tides
- On rivers, fish the lower end of the river at the start of the season and then fish higher up as the season progresses.
- In lakes, look for areas where fish congregate like points and drop-offs.

TIP #5: CHANGE ATTITUDE

One of the fundamental things that guides understand is the old axiom "Some days the fish win." While these days may be few and far between for the dedicated professional, they still can and do occur. Fish are independent, dynamic organisms, and some days no amount of tricks can bring one to hand. When this happens, the only thing an angler can do is tip their hat to their quarry. After all, how much fun would it be if you caught all the fish you wanted, every time? Most rivers and lakes that we fish on are surrounded by some of the finest natural scenery in the world, so the next time you have a slow day fishing, remember to look up, take it all in, and appreciate it with the same respect we give our finny friends.

So the next time you are out on the water and things aren't going so well, remember these 5 tips to fishing when the going gets tough. They just might make the difference between a mediocre time spent casting, and a memorable day on the water.