GETTING STARTED

A few simple practices and gear choices can greatly enhance your enjoyment of Central California’s year-round surfperch fishing. Anglers also enjoy seasonal opportunities for striped bass, California halibut, jacksmelt and surf smelt, among others.

WHEN TO GO FISHING …

You are more likely to catch fish:
- In the early morning or an hour before dusk
- On an incoming high tide. The rising water level dislodges small invertebrates in sand bars, stimulating fish to feed.
- During mild to moderate surf
- EXCEPTIONS: Surf smelt and night smelt fishing are best in the daytime and evening respectively, on a falling high tide. Both species usually spawn on coarse-grained sandy beaches when the surf is mild.

CASTING TIPS …

- When you are beach fishing, cast to the edges of sand bars and drop-offs and be on the lookout for fish “highways,” or channels with transiting fish in search of food.
- If you are surfperch fishing, try casting near sand crab beds.
- If you are striped bass or halibut fishing, look for signs of baitfish, such as feeding birds and marine mammals, and cast into these areas.

Species Peak Months
Surfperch October – June
Striped Bass April – September
California Halibut May – August
Jacksmelt April – August
Night/Surf Smelt February – August

Peak months for some favorite species in Central California.

ROD AND REEL TIPS

If you are heavy bait fishing or “plugging,” use a 10- to 12-ft rod rated for 2- to 8-oz casting, with spinning or conventional reels capable of holding 150 to 200 yds of 20- to 30-lb monofilament line.

If you are fly-fishing, try a 9- to 11-ft rod, rated for a 6- to 8-weight line, with matching reel and sink-tip or shooting head lines. Stripping baskets help manage line in the surf.

If you are light bait fishing or using Carolina-rigged grubs, try a 7- to 9-ft rod, with either a spinning or bait casting reel. Use a 6- to 12-lb test line that can comfortably cast a ½- to 1-oz egg sinker, depending on surf conditions.

NET FISHING

For surf smelt fishing along San Mateo County beaches, try cast or “throw” nets in the 6- to 8-ft range, with 1 to 1⅓ lbs of lead per foot and 3/8-in webbing.

For night smelt fishing, try “A-frame” nylon webbing nets constructed of two rigid poles and a cross-member.

EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

- Waders, hat, polarized sunglasses and sunblock. Besides protecting your eyes, polarized sunglasses will help you see fish in the shore break and run-up. Wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device if wading.
- Pack for fish, tackle, tape measure, and needle-nose pliers for removing hooks
- Bucket and scale to weigh catch, if fishing for night or surf smelt

Pack Out What You Pack In: Fishing Line, Hooks and Trash
To report lost fishing gear visit: www.lostfishinggear.org

TURN IN POACHERS AND POLLUTERS.
Cheaters ruin the resource and your sport.
To bust them, make an anonymous call to CalTIP: 1 (888) DFG-CalTIP (1 (888) 334-2258)
COMMONLY CAUGHT CENTRAL CALIFORNIA SURF SPECIES

Barred surfperch
Amphistichus argenteus

Calico surfperch
Amphistichus koelzi

Redtail surfperch
Amphistichus rhodoterus

Walleye surfperch
Hyperprosopon argenteum

Silver surfperch
Hyperprosopon ellipticum

Jacksmelt
Atherinopsis californiensis

Surf smelt
Hypomesus pretiosus

Night smelt
Spirinchus starksi

Striped bass
Morone saxatilis

California halibut
Paralichthys californicus

For fish consumption advisories visit www.oehha.ca.gov/fish.html

For more information and current fishing regulations, visit the California Department of Fish and Game Web site at: www.dfg.ca.gov/marine.