



# TECH BULLETIN

## OREGON

# WALLOWA LAKE

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.

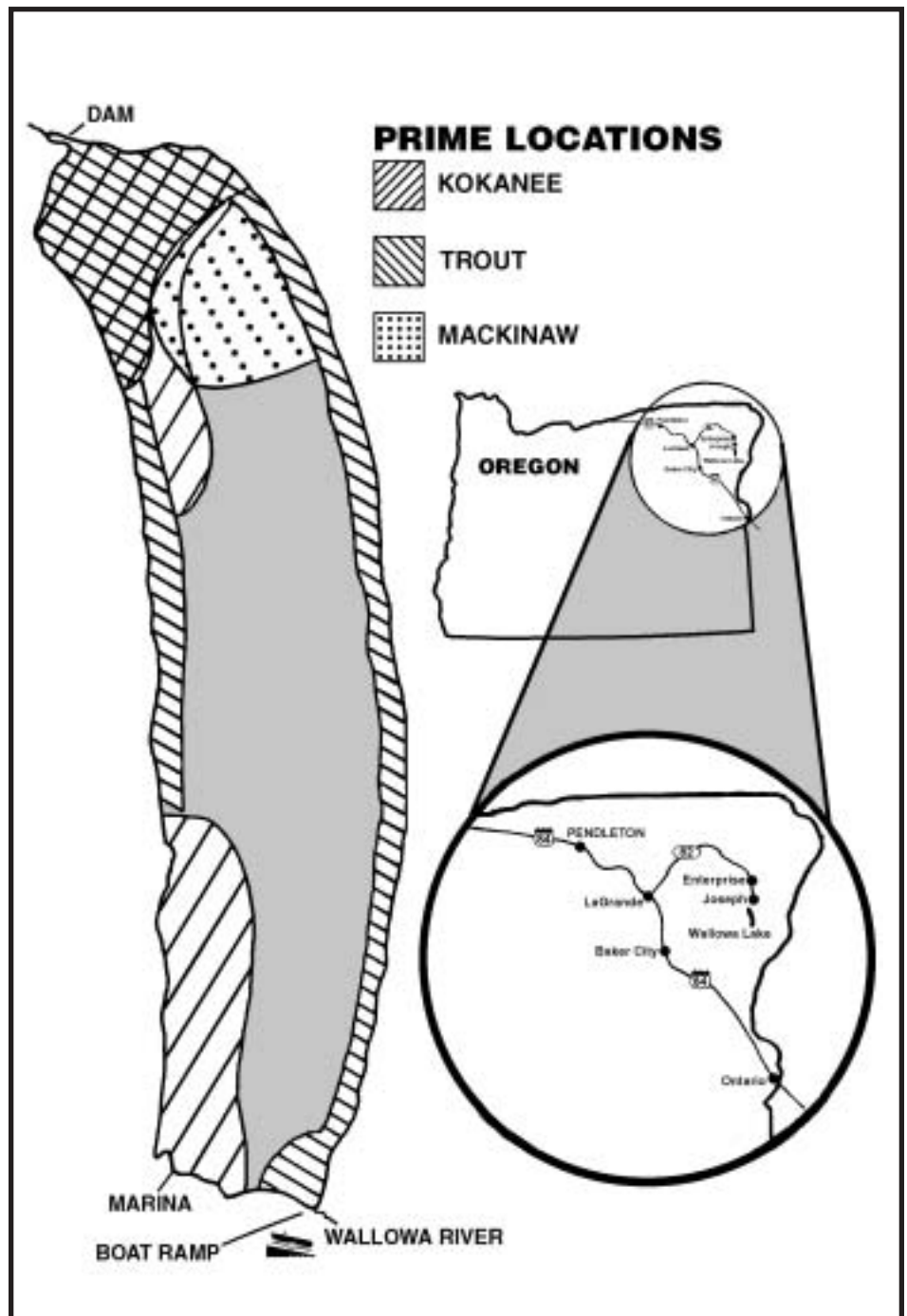
### By Mac Huff

Wallowa Lake is located in northeast Oregon, one mile south of Joseph at the base of the Wallowa Mountains and Eagle Cap Wilderness. Rainbow trout, kokanee, salmon and lake trout provide excellent angling opportunities from March through December each year.

This 4,383-foot altitude lake rests in a glacier moraine basin, is approximately 3 1/2 miles long by 3/4 mile wide and has a surface area of 1,508 acres. It is a natural lake resulting from extensive glaciation in the Wallowa Mountains. The outlet was first dammed with a primitive wood structure in 1884 with the present concrete irrigation dam constructed in 1916.

Water levels in the lake fluctuate about 49 feet from spring to fall because of reservoir filling and irrigation drawdown. The lake's major water sources are the east and west forks of the Wallowa River which join about a mile above the head of the lake. These streams drain a northeast portion of high-elevation terrain in the Wallowa Mountains providing clear, cold flows into the lake.

The moraines are steep-sided slopes bounding three sides of the lake and the shoreline generally reflects the terrain above, diving steeply to depths below the algae-growing region (littoral zone). The deepest part of the lake is at the southern third where the depth is listed at 299 feet at high pool. The alluvial fan at the south end provides seasonal shallow fishing areas in the spring at high water. However, it is nearly always exposed by late August and becomes a popular swimming beach.



Wallowa Lake offers excellent fishing for rainbow trout which are generally easily caught from shore or from boats and a wide variety of trout tackle works. The barrage of new hi-tech baits as well as simple eggs and worms are good starting points. A variety of spinners and spoons also work well, once the water begins warming up in the spring. Nickels and golds are good colors to start out with.

### FROM THE BANK

Bank anglers can access the lake anywhere along the east shore from the road between Joseph and Wallowa Lake State Park or at the north and south ends from the boat launch areas. The west side of the lake is private property with no public access.

Shore fishing is good from the east bank in the deeper water, near the marina at the south end and in the

outlet channel at the north end of the lake. Move every few minutes until you find an active school.

## TROLLING CAN BE EFFECTIVE

Boat anglers will find trout by trolling near shore around the entire circumference of the lake and occasionally in deeper water in the middle. The mouth of the river is a popular fishing site for boat anglers that anchor on the sandy alluvial delta and fish near the bottom in the eroded channels. Here the full gamut of baits and spinners are excellent. The lake is stocked annually with some 50,000 legal-size rainbows so plenty are available.

Wallowa Lake also offers some fly fishing opportunities. It is primarily a midge lake and midge pupa wet flies and midge dry flies are effective during the summer in addition to caddis and May fly patterns. Trolling woolly buggers and muddler minnows from boats and float tubes has potential from April through November.

## KOKANEE ANGLING IS OUTSTANDING

Kokanee provide the other popular fishery and the catch is excellent from mid-May through mid-June, with this time frame usually offering both outstanding kokanee and trout fishing. Kokes follow the thermocline, moving up from deep water in the spring and reaching the surface in May and June. That's when the best fishing is available. Then as the water warms, the fish again go back to deeper, colder water through the rest of summer and winter.

Kokanee will bite throughout the summer when anglers get their tackle to the depth they are holding (usually 60 to 100 feet). This fishery has changed during the last 40 years. Decades ago the only way they could be caught was with a single egg, fished at the mouth of the Wallowa River. Now the most productive method is trolling, and fish are caught throughout the lake.

Typical kokanee rigs include gang trolls such as the **Ford Fender**® with a snubber and a **Needlefish**® spoon trolled slowly with lead-core line or 1- to 3-oz. spinners. Other



effective outfits are size 70 **Hot Shots**® in **Fluorescent Red**, **Silver** or **Frog** colors. An occasional koke is caught by a bank angler using spinners or bobbers and worms. Mature fish enter the Wallowa River at the south end of the lake in late August to spawn and remain there through September.

Note that the Wallowa River above the lake is accessible for trout and whitefish angling, but the river from the mouth to the falls closes to angling on September 1 from the lake upstream about 1.5 miles to the falls to protect spawning kokanee.

## SOME MACKINAW ARE AVAILABLE

The lake has a small population of Mackinaw which are occasionally caught in the spring by kokanee trollers. A few are also caught when jigging large spoons near the bottom. The most productive mackinaw fishing method is trolling a K13 **Kwikfish**® dead-slow just off the bottom with lead-core line. The two top plug colors to use are **Silver** and **Silver/Blue Scale**.

The west fork of the Wallowa River holds rainbow, brook and bull trout. The smaller east fork is generally ignored for fishing except for the meadows below Aneroid Lake where small brook trout are plentiful.

## SHARP HOOKS PAY!

Another of the easiest, yet most im-

portant, things you can do to improve your fishing success, is to maintain super-sharp hooks on your lures at all times. A fine-toothed file such as Luhr Jensen's **Sharp Hook File**™ is the absolute best sharpening tool available. Hold the file parallel to the hook point and with gentle, one-way strokes, remove a small amount of metal on at least two sides of the point to obtain a sticky-sharp point with a knife-like cutting edge.

## FACILITIES

Boat rentals and tackle are available at the Wallowa Lake Marina. Fishing tackle is available at Wallowa Outdoors in Enterprise and shops in Joseph. Wallowa Lake State Park offers camping facilities at the south end of the lake and other accommodations are available at the lake and in Joseph, Enterprise and Wallowa.

Remember that fishing rules and regulations can change. So be sure to check them out before you hit the water.

