



Stand up and Fish

A bold new way to fish Alaska

BY JAYME MOYE

KEN HOEVE WAS HAVING THE greatest fly-fishing day of his life. Standing over the clear-to-the-bottom waters of Alaska's

Crescent Lake, he'd hooked a rainbow trout on his fourth cast. And the fish kept coming. Against the rugged backdrop of the snow-capped Chugach Mountains, Hoeve pulled out one silvery trout after another. After the first half-dozen, he stopped calling, "Got one!" to his friend and fellow fisherman Jesse Horton. It seemed redundant.

But Hoeve couldn't help but shout after his next cast. There were two rainbows tugging on the line, one on the top fly and one on the dropper. "I've got two," Hoeve hollered across the otherwise still mountain lake. The men were absolutely giddy. Within a half hour, Hoeve had another double. "It was one of the best experiences of my life," says Hoeve. "We caught so many fish that we

actually got tired of catching them."

While Hoeve was not the only person catching fish at Crescent Lake that day, he had a distinct advantage. He'd hiked the three miles to the lake with an inflatable stand up paddleboard in his backpack. While the rest of the fisherman on the shore watched, Hoeve pulled out his pump, inflated his board, and paddled out onto the water.

The SUP Advantage

Stand up paddleboarding originated in the ocean waves of Hawaii as an alternative to surfing. Standing makes it easier to scout waves, and using a paddle makes it easier to catch them. The sport expanded to flat water—to paddling and racing on lakes and reservoirs, where its popularity surged. Most recently, it spread to the rivers and mountains, where intrepid stand up paddlers began running whitewater rapids. In 2012, more than 1.5 million people in the U.S. tried stand up paddleboarding, also known as SUP.

Anchorage and Homer are the epicenters of SUP in Alaska, offering board rentals, lessons, and guided tours from outfitters like Surf Alaska and Liquid Adventures. The

Ken Hoeve holds a trout on his stand up paddleboard, fishing on Alaska's Crescent Lake.

cruise ship company Un-Cruise recently made stand up paddle boards available as part of their Alaska expeditions.

SUP is surprisingly easy to master; Anyone from children to their grandparents can get on a board and start paddling. Compared to rafts and kayaks, inflatable stand up paddleboards are a breeze to transport: They weigh 20 pounds and fold down into a backpack. It was only a matter of time before someone got the idea to fish off one.

It's hard to say if Hoeve—who began fishing six years ago from his stand up paddleboard in Colorado—was the first SUP fisherman, but he's been pivotal in promoting it. He helped create one of the first fishing-specific boards, the Super-Fishal by Jackson Kayak, and does demonstrations at major national events like Idaho's Payette River Games.

In Alaska, it's still rare to see a fisherman "walking on water," as Hoeve likes to call it. But it's starting to catch on. Seward residents Pam and Chris Mautino, the owners of Liquid Adventures, have been fishing the Kenai for years and recently began using stand up boards for access. "Fishing on a SUP is an almost magical experience," says Chris Mautino.

Part of the thrill of fishing on a stand up paddleboard is the ease of access. The boards literally go anywhere, from water too shallow to navigate by boat, to locations too remote to get a boat into. Another boon is the visibility. Standing over the fish offers more of a bird's-eye view, which can be a significant advantage in fly-fishing.

"Just like the sport of SUP itself, there's unlimited potential to where you can go when fishing off a stand up board," says editor of *SUP* magazine, Joe Carberry. "And it's not even close to being tapped." Carberry predicts that the activity will take off in places like the saltwater flats of the Caribbean, and in lakes. SUP fishing in a river will be a more advanced application, due to the variability of the current.

For Hoeve, the biggest challenge is convincing fellow fisherman that they're not going to fall in. "I'd love to get a fish so powerful it pulled me off the board, but in reality, that's just not going to happen," Hoeve says. As for learning to balance, he says that with minimal practice, a stand up paddleboard will soon feel as sturdy as a boat dock.



Jesse Horton inflates his stand up paddleboard on the banks of Crescent Lake.

Alaska Dreaming

Alaska had always seemed like a dream adventure destination to Hoeve. A lifelong fisherman and experienced kayaker, he was drawn to the state's remote rivers. In 2013, he began to do some basic travel research, and was inspired to go. "I read that Alaska has more water—between its lakes, rivers and ocean—than all the rest of the states combined," he says. "Once I knew that, I had to get there."

He decided on the Kenai Peninsula as a place where he could access the maximum amount of water in a one-week trip. He brought camping gear, an inflatable stand up paddleboard, a paddle, and a pistol to scare off bears. "It was definitely the first time I brought a gun on a SUP trip," he says.

After landing in Anchorage, Hoeve and his buddy Horton drove to Cooper Landing. They tested their gear at Kenai Lake and paddled out to the river, which Hoeve calls the most gorgeous place he's ever paddled. They were hoping to hook a king salmon, but the fish had other ideas. "We were literally dropping flies on their noses but they wouldn't bite because it was spawning season," says Hoeve.

The two moved on to Crescent Lake, which is stocked with rainbow trout, where Hoeve would catch his first double. He attributes his success there to the stand up board. "I could paddle right up to the mountain side, where only grizzly bears go," he says. "The fish at that location weren't used to being fished and hadn't yet learned how to outsmart guys like me."

They finished the trip in Seward, on the Resurrection River. Once again, the salmon were too busy spawning to bite. Hoeve vowed to return with his SUP next summer, instead of late fall, to coincide with peak season for king salmon. He also plans to return to Crescent Lake and nearby Carter Lake to try catching grayling, a notoriously challenging fish to hook. "Mark my word," says Hoeve. "I'm going back to Alaska with a SUP every year until I die." 🐟

Learn to SUP in Alaska

➡ **Liquid Adventures** was one of the first companies in Alaska to offer guided SUP trips. Their two-hour Introduction to Stand Up Paddleboarding class takes place at Bear Lake just north of Seward, or on Resurrection Bay, conditions permitting. Participants learn basic paddling skills, equipment, and safety. \$85; includes board, paddle, drysuit, and personal floatation device.

➡ **Blue Nose Surf** in Juneau offers SUP lessons and leads group tours in the summer. Cost is \$80 for a 2-3 hour guided tour with lesson. Includes board, paddle, wet/drysuit, personal floatation device, and transportation. They also rent and sell stand up paddleboards.