

A FISHERMAN'S GUIDE TO WEST HARBOR POND

Part I: Open-Water Fishing in West Harbor Pond

Captain Barry Gibson

West Harbor Pond offers some fine open-water angling opportunities from early spring through late fall. The most prevalent game fish are largemouth and smallmouth bass and white perch, although rainbow trout were privately stocked a number of years back and once in a great while someone will catch one while fishing for bass.

Largemouth are the most numerous of the two bass species, and over the years we've found that

we'll catch six or seven of them for each smallmouth we hook. Largemouths in WHP run from 8" - 10" long (and there are plenty that size!) to about six pounds, with one- to three-pounders quite common. Smallmouths run a bit smaller, from about 6" to upwards of four pounds. The most reliable way to tell the difference is to examine the fish's jaw from the side, with the mouth closed. A largemouth's jaw hinge will extend rearward from the back of the eyeball, whereas a smallmouth's jaw hinge will not extend past the eyeball. In addition, the smallmouth will be more of a coppery or bronze color, and have dark, somewhat blurry vertical barring down its sides, and will almost always jump clear of the water when hooked. The largemouth will have a more greenish hue, along with a darker horizontal marking that runs from the gills to the tail, and seldom jumps.



*Barry Gibson with largemouth bass.
Photograph courtesy of Steve Rubicam*

Both species can easily be caught with a six- to eight-pound spinning outfit and a few simple lures. A shiny gold Als' Goldfish in either 3/16 or 1/4 oz. is a tried-and-true choice, and during the past several seasons we've had good luck with a gold, 1/5 oz. Thomas Rough Rider. Other productive spoons include the 3" gold Fiord, and a gold or copper 1/4-oz. Super Duper. We believe the small gold spoons represent juvenile golden shiners, one of the primary forage species in WHP.

The best technique when casting spoons, either from shore or boat, is to let the lure sink down near the bottom before retrieving it at a moderate pace with sharp twitches of the rod tip. If you're bumping bottom once in a while or picking up bits of weed, you know you're down in the strike zone.



*Steve Rubicam with smallmouth bass.
Photograph courtesy of Barry Gibson.*

Other productive WHP bass lures include small diving Rapalas, plastic worms, and even spinnerbaits (a gold blade and chartreuse skirt is a good color combo). Although both species can be caught nearly anywhere in the pond, if you want to specifically target smallmouths try the deeper, ledge drop-off of the western shoreline. Smallies love rocky areas and will feed voraciously on the crawfish found there, so a soft-plastic or diving lure designed to imitate a crawfish or “crawdad” is the ticket.

Live bait is permitted in WHP, and a shiner or night crawler fished a couple of feet under a bobber can be deadly on bass, especially in the shallower reaches of the eastern shore. Be sure to bring a pair of long-

nose pliers to remove the hook from fish that swallow it deep, or better yet, use circle hooks (there are lots available for fresh water) that will almost always catch in the fish’s jaw hinge, making for easy release.

White perch are also available in WHP, and are great in the frying pan. They are not particularly plentiful, but your best chance to hook a couple is by trolling a small spoon, spinner, or tiny Rapala or Yo-Zuri Pin Minnow out in the middle of the pond. White perch are a schooling fish that move about in open water rather than stick close to structure as the bass do. They also spend time near the surface, so it’s not necessary to always fish deep. Trolling will help you cover more ground than you can by casting.

Other species that are reported to be in WHP are yellow perch, eels, white suckers, and pumpkinseed sunfish, although we have not caught any of these ourselves in recent years, but that may be because we primarily use lures intended for bass, which have larger mouths. You may well catch some of these other species with worms.

Finally, the fishway at the culvert at the south end of the pond allows alewives (river herring) the opportunity to come in from salt water in order to spawn in fresh water in the spring. Alewives, which run around 10” long, won’t take a bait or lure but are important forage fish for the larger bass in the pond as well as birds of prey and mammals such as minks.

All in all, WHP offers some better-than-average light-tackle angling close to Boothbay Harbor, yet receives surprisingly little fishing pressure compared to many other nearby ponds and lakes.

Capt. Barry Gibson has been charter saltwater fishing and guiding out of Boothbay Harbor since 1971. He is also an avid freshwater fisherman, a member of the Board of Directors of the Boothbay Region Fish & Game Club, and a registered Maine Guide. Moreover, he is an accomplished fishing writer and lecturer who has contributed features to many outdoor magazines. A list of his many accomplishments can be found at <https://www.saltwatermaine.com/Capt.html>.