



JOSHLANTZ

Southern Lake Michigan fishing for salmon and steelhead has been outstanding this summer. I'll go ahead and say it has been about as good as I can remember.

Indiana's Skamania strain steelhead typically enter the Saint Joseph River, Trail Creek and the Little Calumet River beginning in June. But his year's low stream flows and hot weather have combined to keep our summer steelies stationed in inshore areas around the river mouths for most of the summer. Up until the drenching we got in late July, the rivers and streams were just too low and warm for the fish to enter. This kept the chrome torpedoes within easy reach of pier fishermen and small boat anglers.

Farther offshore, king salmon have been large and plentiful too. I caught kings all July long -- and much closer to shore than usual for this time of year. Instead of 120-140 feet of water, consistent catches of kings came in the 55-90 foot range -- a big bonus for anyone watching their fuel bill.

With many summer run steelhead still in the lake and the kings moving in even closer to shore in preparation for their fall run, August is looking to be another banner month for Lake Michigan salmon and steelhead trollers.

I typically fish with a buddy from my 19' center console. In Indiana waters, this means employing a spread of six or fewer rods. Yes, I use downriggers and Dipsey Divers (directional trolling sinkers), and these two lure delivery systems are tried and true methods for putting flies and spoons in the faces of Lake Michigan trout

When fished in place of Dipsey Divers and downriggers, Torpedo Divers get spoons, plugs and dodger/fly combos down where they need to be and add an increased degree of stealth to your small boat spread. Photo by author.

and salmon. Lately, however, I've embraced my small boat / small spread status and have looked to increase my stealth to catch more fish in clear, shallower waters. You might consider doing the same.

Here's the overview of a basic, six-rod stealth-spread you can use or modify to catch August and September's staging steelhead and salmon. Instead of downriggers and Dipsey Divers, it is based on the highly effective but little-known Torpedo Diver.

What's a Torpedo Diver?

Torpedo Divers are torpedo shaped weights that snap directly on your mainline using a pinch release and short wire lead. They are available in four sizes and can easily reach depths of over 100 feet. Directional stabilizing fins can be adjusted to pull to either side or track true. When compared to downrigger weights and Dipsey Divers, a Torpedo Diver has a small, unassuming and stealthy profile.

Six Rod Torpedo Diver Spread

Whether they are inshore or offshore, steelhead are typically found and caught in the top half of the water column -- often right on the surface. Many trollers run shallow diving orange or red crankbaits or spoons on flatlines trailed 40-100 feet behind planer boards to target steelhead with good success. I do the same, but I use the smallest size Torpedo Diver (called the Snapper) between my planer boards and spoons. When setting these rods -- which are my outside rods,

placed furthest forward on either side of the boat -- I tie on an orange flutter spoon and let out 50-100 feet of line. Then I clip on the Snapper Torpedo Diver with fins set to track true. Then I let out another six feet of line and attach my planer board. Depending on boat traffic, I let the planer boards out 50-100 feet. Trolling at 2-2.4 mph, this puts my steelhead spoons 30-80 feet out to the side of the boat, 60-150 feet back and 5 feet down -- right in the zone for surface blitzing steelies.

Unlike steelhead, king salmon are usually located in the lower half of the water column. And as they stage in shallow water, they are often found right over the bottom. My remaining 4 rods are dedicated to fooling these bruisers. In place of Dipsey Divers, I run the heaviest (called the Cuda) Torpedo Divers on each side of the boat, right behind the planer board rods. Keeping with the stealth theme, I run small (size 030 or 020) dodgers in glow green/white with tinsel flies trailed 12-15" behind. I let the dodger and fly out about 25 feet, then clip on the Cuda Torpedo Diver, which has the directional fins adjusted to pull as far away from the boat as possible. Depending on the depth I'm fishing, I usually want these dodgers and flies to run at a midwater or slightly below. Therefore, if I'm fishing in 40 feet of water, I'll let out another 30 feet of line after I snap on the Torpedo. If I'm fishing in 90 feet I may let out another 50-60 feet of line. At trolling speed,

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Increased Stealth for Your Small Boat Spread



Big king salmon have provided consistent catches on Lake Michigan waters off Indiana's coast this year. The author caught this 22-pounder in July on a Moonshine spoon fished 40 feet down behind a Torpedo Diver in just 57 feet of water. Photo by Jay Anglin.

Stealth -- From Pg. 2

this setup results in my dodgers and flies running at midwater depth, 10-20 feet to either side of the boat and 30-40 feet back. There are times when I'll substitute another spoon or a Jplug for the dodger and fly.

My final two rods are the deepest, fished off the stern of the boat in place of downriggers. I typically use spoons or Jplugs on these rods. Specifically, my best-producing king spoon this season has been a green glow/black, white glow ladder back pattern called the "Smitty" from Moonshine Lures (see photo on page 2). I typically let the spoon or plug back just 15-25 feet, then snap on a Cuda Torpedo Diver with fins adjusted to track true. I drop the rig until I feel the Torpedo hit bottom, then place the rod pointed straight back in the corner rod holder. In relatively shallow water, this results in the two deep rods holding their spoons or plugs within 5-10 feet of the bottom, 20-30 feet behind the boat.

Downriggers and Dipsey Divers are proven delivery systems for Great lakes trolling, but when fish are shallow or the water is exceptionally clear, Torpedo Divers afford an increased degree of stealth that can help you to hook more fish. What happens after that is up to you and your fishing buddies.

Torpedo Divers sell for about \$17-\$21 apiece -- a fraction of the cost of downriggers. For more information on available Torpedo Diver models, applications, rigging tips, depth charts and where to get 'em, go to www.torpedodivers.com.

