

Muddling Along March 13

Quinsam River

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An easy 1 ½ hour drive from Nanaimo is one of the most productive rivers on the East Coast of Vancouver Island. The Quinsam River flows from a number of lakes, including Quinsam, Middle Quinsam, Wokas and Upper Quinsam. It has a large watershed extending right up into Strathcona Provincial Park. The Quinsam is open to fishing year round from its confluence with the Campbell River at Elk Falls Provincial Park up to the boundary signs 300 m downstream of the Quinsam Hatchery weir. It is also open from the power line crossing (25 m above Quinsam Hatchery weir) up to the falls below Middle Quinsam Lake for the period from July 1 to November 30. The closure from the hatchery to Middle Quinsam Lake from December 1 to June 30 is in effect to protect spawning steelhead in the upper Quinsam River. Other than the above mentioned closures, the Quinsam system is all open to sports fishing. (The closures are not in effect in the lakes in the system).

Provincial Regulations on the Quinsam System (copied and pasted)

No Fishing from signs at power line crossing (about 25 m upstream of Quinsam Hatchery weir) to boundary signs about 300 m downstream of weir.

No Fishing downstream of the falls downstream of Middle Quinsam Lake to signs at power line crossing (about 25 m upstream of Quinsam hatchery weir), Dec 1-June 30

This river is home at various times of the year to steelhead, rainbow trout, cutthroat trout as well as Pink, Chinook, Coho and Chum salmon. Fishing pressure is intense in the lower part of the river from the hatchery down, especially from August when the pinks start to show up right until November when the winter run steelhead appear in some numbers. Chinook begin entering the river in late summer with significant numbers showing up around the beginning of October. Coho can be found in good numbers from mid October to early December and a small number of chum are in the river during October.

The river provides one of the best chances to catch cutthroat and rainbow and keep 1 or 2 for the barbecue because significant numbers of hatchery marked fish are to be found mixed in with the wild populations of trout. The limit is 2 hatchery marked (healed adipose fin scar)

trout per day. Openings for salmon retention are dependent on numbers of fish returning to the river, water levels and temperatures and the timing of the arrival of the runs.

The Quinsam is small river with the “prime” pools well known by the locals and visitors, so expect serious competition for available fishing spots in the lower river during peak times for various runs of fish. Also be prepared to witness (more than you care to see) some pretty dreadful examples of un-sportsmanlike behaviour from fellow fishers on the river. (deliberate snagging, painful to see catch-and-release technique---“lets beat it to death on the rocks and see if it can still swim!”, use of illegal gear like bait, treble hooks and barbed hooks etc.) Trout are at their largest numbers when salmon and steelhead are spawning in the river, with trout beads or egg imitation flies being a good choice during that time. However, the trout are also open to taking dry flies when the hatches start in late spring and through to the fall. Wet flies and nymphs can be used any time of the year with some success. Rolled Muddlers and various kinds of caddis, stonefly and mayfly nymphs will work.

I have never tried the portion of the river above the hatchery, but salmon and steelhead travel many kilometres up the river (steelhead and coho go as far as above Quinsam Lake), so there should be good fishing to be found. There is a trail which goes upstream above the hatchery, but I can't speak from personal experience as to the condition of the trails.