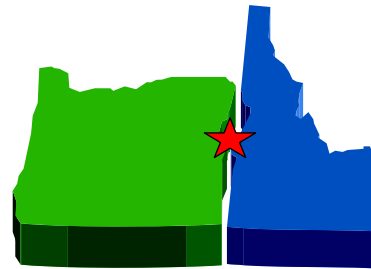




www.FishingCoaches.org



Fishing Scenario ID #52

©GAMEPLAN

BROWNLEE C & R CRAPPIE

First, let's make this clear: Fishing Coaches strongly urges you to fish Brownlee catch and release, because of mercury and other contaminants found in the flesh of fish there.

While C & R is not the law, and some locals insist the fish are safe to eat, we just don't buy it. In fact, we had reservations about creating this Gameplan, but two things led us forward: C & R crappie fishing is great fun for kids, and reports like this one:

"I have personally caught 211 crappie in one day. I probably caught 75 smallies as well. Before you plan on heading over, I gotta tell you that I would never eat a fish out of that lake again. They have an extremely high level of mercury in them."

So there it is.

About Brownlee: this 52-mile long reservoir is the oldest of the impoundments along Hell's Canyon. It's narrow, steep-sided and deep, but with water well-nourished by rich tributaries also filled with toxins. As mentioned in the quote above, and in our own springtime smallmouth bass scenario here (ID #54), expect to catch a slew of bronzebacks along with slabsides. (Downstream in the Snake River, FC Founder Dale Dorcas and his dad combined for around 106 hookups on smallmouths the very first day they fished it.) And should you want to target them, you can also catch three species catfish ranging from a few pounds to almost 60.*



In other words, Brownlee's just a heck of a place to catch fish, often considered one of the most productive crappie fisheries in the northwestern US. Hot fishing's on tap from early season spring through fall, by the way; but early on, the weather's better. In fact, summers are so hot that, with all the mercury in their flesh, we wonder if many of these fish can't take their own temperatures...

One more word: the Oregon record for black crappie came out of Brownlee, a fish of 3 pounds 8.96 ounces. There's some indication, however, that the size of average fish is declining, though 12-inchers are still common.

*We haven't heard of mercury warnings about catfish, but given what and where they eat—mercury collectors like crayfish, aquatic worms and mollusks—also how old they get, we suspect they pose higher risks than crappie or bass.





BROWNLEE CRAPPIE

Timing Details

- 1. **DATES WE RECOMMEND: MAY 5 – MAY 16**
- 2. Fishing and boat launching conditions at Brownlee are critically dependent on water releases from Idaho Power Company. For a recorded report, call 1-800-422-3143, or click through options at www.idahopower.com.
- 3. For more information and fishing reports, call Thorny at the Hitching Post Motel, in Richland, Oregon (also a tackle store), at 541-893-6176. Or click into either <http://www.brownleereservoir.com/> or <http://www.trimbleoutdoors.com/ViewTrip.aspx?mode=TripDetails&tripID=33037>
- 4. Parts of Brownlee form the Idaho – Oregon border, and the two States offer partial **but not complete** reciprocity vis-à-vis fishing licenses and legal techniques. (Idaho licensed anglers may use two rods in Idaho sections of the lake. In Oregon, fishing with two rod will lands an angler a hefty ticket.) This means it is extremely important to check with the appropriate state departments for regulation pertaining to the area you fish. For Oregon, call 503-947-6002 or try <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/>. For Idaho, 208-334-3700 and <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/fish/>
- 5. 59 degrees is typically considered the magic minimum temp for greatest activity, 60 to 70 degrees ideal. See <http://www.weather.com/outlook/recreation/outdoors/fishing/9774:21>.
- 6. Unlike trout, springtime crappie often bite *best* around a full moon.

Special Regulations/Considerations

- 1. Spring draw-downs by Idaho Power may lower water levels enough to make launching impossible or hazardous. High flows at this time of year may push the crappie well down the lake. Check at 1-800-422-3143, or click through options at www.idahopower.com.
- 2. MERCURY: the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has issued mercury advisories for fish from Brownlee. Children under 6 should eat no more than 4 ounces per month; women of child-bearing age, 8 ounces every two weeks; other healthy adults, 8 ounces per week. **FC suggests you eat none.**
- 3. When in a boat, keep a sharp eye out for gathering thunderstorms. Watch for threatening clouds moving over the canyon rim.

- 4. On shore, watch for rattlesnakes and poison ivy. In the spring, the former will likely be sluggish, but still dangerous; the latter virulent and painful.




BROWNLEE CRAPPIE

Boat/Equipment



www.anglerguide.com/Idaho/brownlee.html

- 1. While small boats, prams and even float tubes have applications on Brownlee, by far the safest and most versatile option is a bass boat or skiff of at least 16 ft, with enough power to move longer distances, sometimes against wind coming through steep canyons. NOTE AGAIN: because of extreme draw downs by Idaho Power and Light, anglers must check in advance at this time of year about launch conditions at ramps! Call Idaho Power Company at 1-800-422-3143, or check at www.idahopower.com

- 2. An electronic fish finder is a valuable asset here, for locating schools of fish around structure, rubble, rocky shelves and gravel bars not visible from the surface.

Tackle

- 1. Long, light, limber spinning rods are best, but any flexible rod from six to 12 feet will do. (Crappie have soft mouths. A limber road is less likely to tear tissue, so helps prevents losing and injuring fish. A long rod works best when a jig hangs six feet or more below a bobber, also for jigging straight down near the boat.)
- 2. Spinning reels spooled with two- to four-pound test line (or slender diameter six-pound test super-thin lines like Spectra®). For the two-jig rig,
- 3. 1/32 to 1/8 ounce jig heads, and a selection of 1" to 2.5" long plastic grubs and tubes in at least five colors w/without sparkle flakes: red/white, chartreuse and white, translucent white or pearl (w/without red), white/chartreuse/yellow, and pumpkinseed.
- 4. Cork, plastic or Styrofoam bobbers; in medium to **small** sizes.
- 5. Yum, Eagle Claw Nitro, or Berkeley Power Bait™ scents, bites, nibbles, trailers etc.)

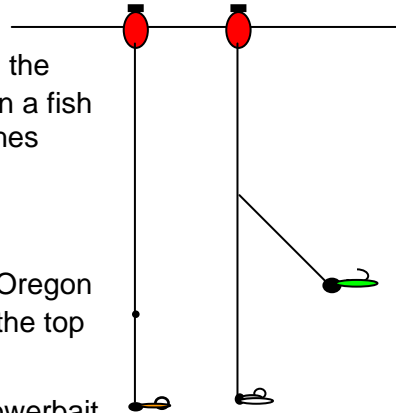


- 6. A long handled net; also a hook-disgorger or needle-nosed pliers.
- 7. If you wish to keep fish, a suitable ice chest or bucket.

www.landbigfish.com/tacklestore , www.cabelas.com, or <http://www.catsncrappie.com/>

BROWNLEE CRAPPIE Rigging

- 1. Affix the bobber according to type and instructions (see 2. below).
- 2. Tie the jig to the end of your line so that it hangs between 18" and nine feet below the bobber.
- 3. Make sure the bobber sits straight up, and low in the water to provide the minimum of resistance when a fish tugs down! If necessary, add split shot eight inches above the jig.
- 4. Tip jigs with scented crappie baits.
- 5. A two jig rig provides an advantage legal on the Oregon State parts of the lake. Use a 1/16 ounce jig on the top (dropper) and a 1/32 ounce jig below.
- 6. Scent the lure, or tip hook with all or part of a Powerbait Crappie Nibble or Eagle Claw Nitro Trailer, Yum etc.



Note: with a two-jig-rig be extremely careful when landing an unhooking fish. One mistake and you will find yourself impaled by the wisdom of de-barbing hooks. This is critical when fishing with kids, or kids in the boat.



Idaho Fish and Game

Techniques

- 1. This is staging and spawning time for Brownlee crappie, when they move close to shore, typically into 8 to 15 feet of water.
- 2. Prospect coves, bays, points, bars and sloping shorelines—especially with gravel—and any rocky structure.
- 3. During the day, fish will typically be near or on the bottom. Move slowly along the bank, marking fish on your depth finder. When you find a concentration, make short casts to these fish, with or without a bobber.
- 4. Work slowly. Don't be afraid to hang a jig just off the boat—another reason to use a long rod. With cooler water, work slower still.
- 5. If you do not have a depth/fish finder, slip quietly (and safely) along near the shoreline, making short casts to slowly bump the bottom with your jig.
- 6. When you are confident you have determined the depth at which you're finding most fish, add a bobber to keep one or both jigs in the high density zone. At times, the mere chop of a breeze will agitate a jig enough to provoke strikes.
- 7. Keep changing colors until you find the best combination. As a general rule, use translucent, light colored bodies with sparkles when the water is clear, darker solids when it's murkier and in low light conditions.
- 8. Increase your chances by adding crappie scents, or Nitro, Yum or Berkeley crappie bites, nibbles, etc. Crappie often bite lightly, and will hang on to scented or tasty lures longer.
- 9. Renew scents or reapply nibbles bits etc. on baits often. **Each time you do, check the sharpness of your hook(s)!**
- 10. Three Hour Rule: Even on great days, the "bite" is sometimes off for up to two hours. If you only fished during that period, you might mistakenly think the fishing is no good. So, fish for 3+ hours at least, and you're more likely to sample the day's great potential.
- 11. If you find a large concentration of fish, but cannot tempt them, *experiment*. Change lure color, size, depths fished and retrieve. If you are certain they are crappie, don't give up on them too soon.
- 12. Remember: crappie don't *chase*. Slow...down.
- 13. Have a question? Feel free to call us at (360) 733-3353, ext. 118, or email seth@fishingcoaches.org. And we'd like to know how you did!

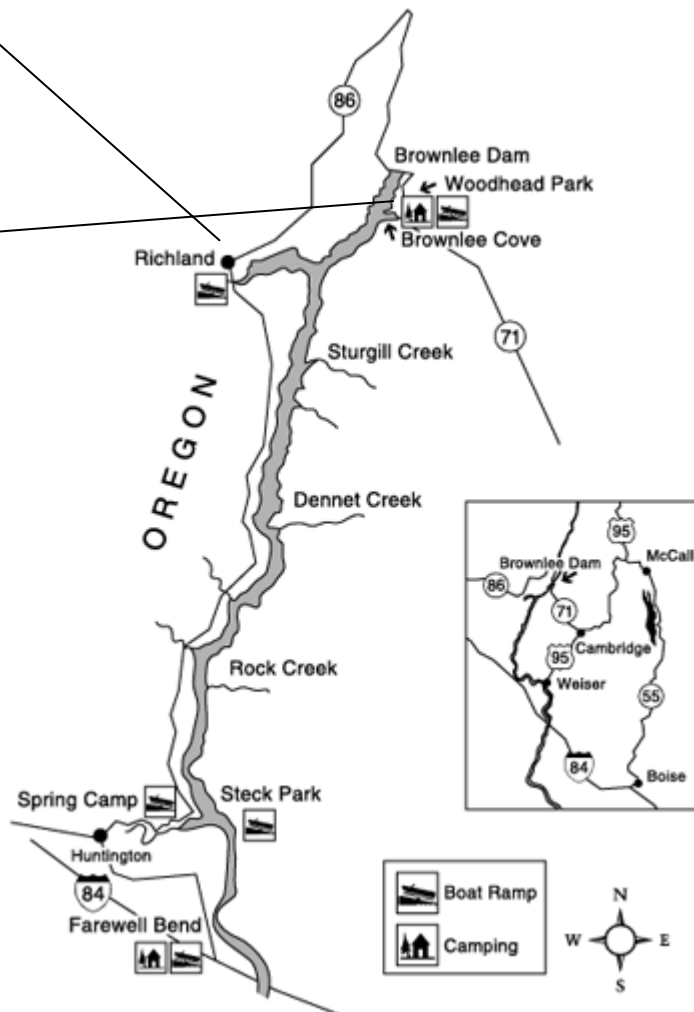


Location Details

- 1. While crappie fishing can be excellent in many parts of Brownlee, Fishing Coaches suggests you focus on the Powder River Arm, where the lake often warms a little earlier in the season, and where you are less likely to find turbid condition due to run-off. The launch is located at **Hewitt Park, where the Facility Contact is 541-893-6147**. Or see: <http://159.121.106.106/osmb/index.cfm?fuseaction=facilityDisplay&BoatingFacilityUID=033601045>

The Powder River arm is located entirely in Oregon. Anglers must carry an Oregon License, and Oregon laws apply. For information about necessary licenses and laws, contact Oregon Department of Game and Fish, La Grande Office, 541 963 2138, or Idaho Fisheries 208 465-8465

- 2. Another possibility is [Woodhead Park*](#).
- 3. For the most current and reliable information on conditions, contact: Hitching Post Motel 541-893-6176 www.idahopower.com or Oregon Department of Game and Fish, La Grande Office, 541 963 2138 Idaho Fisheries 208 465-8465
- 4. Resources at Richland Oregon <http://www.hellscanyonchamber.com/>



Tackle:

Hitching Post Motel
100 Main Street, Richland, OR 97870,
phone: 541-893-6176

Lodging:

Hitching Post Motel
100 Main Street, Richland, OR 97870,
phone: 541-893-6176
Daly Creek Retreat & Guest Ranch
44890 Snake River Road, Richland, OR
97870, phone: 541-893-6158

Restaurants

Shorthorn Restaurant and Tavern
201 Main Street, Richland, OR, phone: (541) 893-6122

RV Parks and Campgrounds

Eagle Valley RV Mobile Home
Highway 86 E, Richland, OR 97870, phone: 541-893-6161
Hewitt Park
Hewitt Park Highway, Richland, OR 97870, phone: 541-893-6147

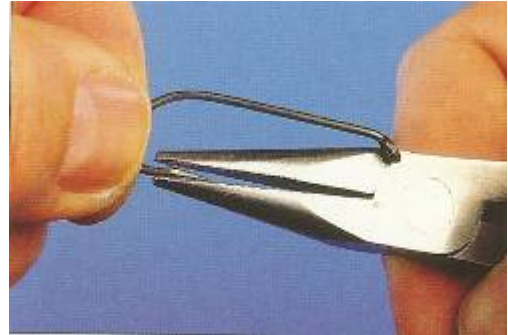
- 5. There is also a large campground and handicap accessible fishing pier at Farewell Bend— see <http://www.oregonstateparkstrust.org/OurWork/EasternOR/farewellbendsp>

*<http://www.swita.org/tclodging.aspx/lodgingid/43953/woodheadpark>

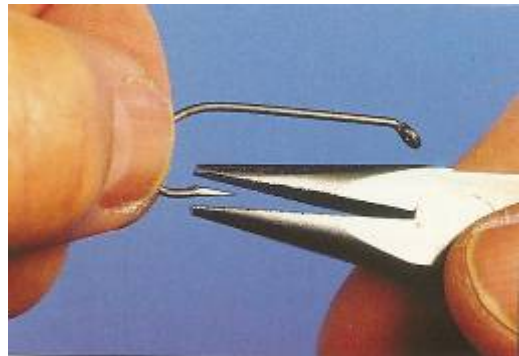
Responsible Catching

While opinions vary as to whether you'll land more fish with crimped barbs, or less, no one argues that improved *catching* makes it critical for anglers to practice the most responsible *releasing* techniques for fish they do not keep. This begins by pinching down the barb of hooks you use in nearly all Fishing Coaches Scenarios, and finishes with the proper landing and reviving of tired fish.

Step 1. Hold the hook by the bend and position the jaws of a pair of flat needle-nosed pliers over the barb. Only the flat hook spear should make contact with the jaw face. (Do not insert pliers far enough to press or scrape against the bend.)



Step 2. Squeeze the pliers to bend the barb down. Use the lightest pressure that will still do the job. Most barbs will not bend completely flat, and some may require touch-up with a file.



Text and illustrations from *Fly Tier's Benchside Reference*, courtesy of Ted Leeson, Jim Shollmeyer, and amatobooks.com

Catch and Release Tips

Adapted from the British Columbia Federation of Drift Fishers www.bcfdf.com

- **Play** the fish as quickly as possible.
- **Leave** the fish in the water.
- **Never** poke a finger in the fish's gills, or lift it by the gills.
- **A**fter removing the hook from an exhausted fish, maintain a gentle grip. In moving water, hold it facing slow current. In still water, rock the fish back and forth to flush its gills. When the fish is able to swim away on its own, release it to swim out of your hands.
- **I**f a photo is desired, quickly lift fish up (not longer than 5 seconds out of the water) holding it under the pectoral fins, and with the other hand supporting the wrist of the tail.
- **Fish kept out of the water for more than 30 seconds will almost certainly suffer brain damage, and may not survive.**



www.oregonstateparks.org/.../farewell-sunset.jpg