

My thought process was on the greedy side. I thought I would go to the "Nush" (as it's affectionately referred to) on July 25, just 3 days before my clients would arrive in King Salmon. My plan was to hit both runs, the end of the kings and the beginning of the silvers and have the best of both worlds. I'm pretty sure that I fished the only 3 days that everyone in the lodge did NOT limit out and wear themselves out. We caught fish, just not as many as other visitors did the day before I arrived or the morning that I left. The few other guests and I hit it hard and had every reason to expect great results. All of the fisherman that left on the float plane we arrived on gave us the infamous "should have been here yesterday" greeting and I was sure it would continue. However for the next 3 days I would just catch a couple smaller kings, 2 to 3 silvers each day and a few pink salmon. Just the day before I arrived every fisherman at the lodge had caught at least 10 kings, but none of us limited those 3 days. As I flew back to King Salmon I was already thinking I needed to go back after my photo tour. That was good thinking. The day I left the 2 Norwegians I had been fishing with at the Nush boated 44 Silvers as over 12,000 pushed by the Alaska Fish and Game fish counting station. When Brad told me that, I immediately changed my flight home to get some of that action. It was great action indeed.

That brings up a point that I would like to make to those of you wanting that "Alaskan Fishing Trip of a Lifetime" but have not gone yet. From 13 years of fishing there every summer I would recommend booking as long a trip as possible. If you try to kill them over just a couple days you may be disappointed, but if you give it 5 to 7 days you greatly up your chances of having one of those days we've all watched with amazement on the

outdoor channel or read about in a magazine such as this. I've had many of those wonderful days but I've also had days that were just plain slow and did not live up to my earlier expectations. You need to realize that predicting salmon runs is an art, not a science. They are not predictable precisely and anything you read or are told about when to go for the species of your choice are generalizations and not exact dates. Fisheries biologist, fishing guides, or probably even the salmon themselves don't realize all the variables that go into the decision as the when they leave the ocean for their final trip up their original freshwater home. I suggest you plan your trip to the best of your ability and give it the time you will need to optimize your chances of hitting the big pushes of fish. If you can afford it, you may love the results and have plenty to brag about as you barbeque your fish with friends back home.

My clients and I had an excellent time "shooting" brown bears with our cameras and long lenses. We flew out every morning and returned to comfort each evening. Of course each evening I asked about the fishing report from the Nush and all I heard was good news. That along with fantastic bear photography and visiting new places each day just heightened my excitement for going back. When Brad figured out I was able to get on a float plane back to the Nush as soon as my guests were gone I was gone as well; going back with high hopes. I booked 4 days this time just in case the runs were intermittent. The good odds of catching multiple silvers in a day, both with spin cast and fly rod was worth it to me.

To get to the Nushagak River Lodge one needs to fly from King Salmon to the Nushagak in a float plane, there is no road access. Brad's packages

(fishthenush.com) include the flight on Pen Air from Anchorage to King Salmon which is a nice touch. The lodge is not a tent camp which is the "norm" on much of the Nushagak as Brad has one of the few operations on the river on private land. The wooden 2 story building has 9 rooms, and he likes to keep the number of guests around 15 or less. The accommodations are very comfortable but rustic to some. Each room is 10 by 17, has a nice size window, and 4 sturdy bunks built into the wall. The beds are comfortable with flannel linens and huge blankets that offer a cozy retreat after a day of fishing. There is a beautiful new dining area and I like that the guides and guests interact during meals. This is a fishing lodge however, and if you are looking for other activities such as kayaking, bear viewing, bird watching, or drinking wine out of fancy goblets Brad caters to those types of activities at Katmai Trophy Adventures out of King Salmon. Come here if want to go fishing!

On this trip I flew from King Salmon with a honeymooning couple that had caught big kings on the Naknek and were also enticed by the silver numbers we heard about. After landing we jumped in the boats and immediately headed down river and anchored at a spot known as Anna's hole (we'll get to Anna later). It took a few minutes for the guides to get the boats just how they wanted but soon the 3 boats were all anchored on a seam that only experienced guides would have noticed. Some of us drifted and bounced eggs just behind the boat, some drifted spinners, and others of us just let a large pink weighted

*Professional wildlife photographer and research biologist Stan Cunningham has captured numerous wildlife not only with rod or rifle but his trusty Canon EOS 7D.*

