

Fishing season in Lake Tahoe lures locals and tourists

By Susan Wood

With a whale of a fish already caught in Emerald Bay this spring, the 2011 fishing season may turn out to be a memorable one for Lake Tahoe enthusiasts and guides.

The little tykes and younger set have received a boost from the state and the El Dorado County community because Sawmill Pond will be stocked with plenty of fish. The formal season for the popular family fishing hole where Lake Tahoe Boulevard and Sawmill Road intersect starts April 30, though people were out there April 10.

Last year, California was unable to contribute to stocking the pond, sending the community scrambling to secure private funds for the venture.



Fishing is free and only for those 14 and younger at Sawmill Pond on the South Shore.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

This spring, the California Department of Fish & Game intends to supply the pond with 250 pounds of Lahontan cutthroat trout – the native fish that is mandated, but was unavailable to the state in great numbers from hatcheries last year.

Private groups already came through this winter with their donations – including two Tahoe rotary clubs contributing \$8,500 for the effort. About \$15,000 is needed to get the pond up to par for the annual Sawmill Pond Kid's Fishing Derby put on by the Optimist Club on June 11, El Dorado County Fish and Game Commissioner Victor Babbitt indicated. The derby is open to children ages 14 and younger.

Babbitt, who runs Tahoe Fly Fishing Outfitters in South Lake Tahoe, predicts 2011 to be a good year for fishing in the rivers and lakes.

During drought years, it's tougher for fish to survive with less flow in the waterways. They won't have that problem with the high flows and phenomenal runoff expected this year. Whitewater blankets the American River.

However, it may be harder early on for those who fish to negotiate their spots.

"We'll still have high flows right up to the opener," Babbitt said.

Even ice fishing may last longer with the big winter in the Sierra Nevada.

Among other places, Babbitt sends fishing enthusiasts to Indian Creek Reservoir and Cave Rock if they're venturing onto Lake Tahoe. The limit on the lake is five, with no more than two Mackinaw trout, according to California Fish & Game regulations.

On the Carson River, the East Fork is always closed to fishing above Carson Falls. Below them, it is allowed all year.

All the tributaries leading into the lake remain closed until July 1. For the season opener, one may fish 1,000 feet below the Lake Tahoe outlet dam on the Truckee River. The minimum size requirement is 14 inches. Only artificial lures with barbless hooks may be used.

Winter is fair game on the lake



Gene St. Denis holds an 11-pound, 4-ounce German brown trout caught in Lake Tahoe. Photo/Provided

Chuck Lane got a jump on the fishing season by braving 29-degree, blustery weather a few weeks ago to catch a mega German brown trout in Emerald Bay with his Lake Tahoe guide Gene St. Denis of Blue Ribbon Fishing.

“We were the only boat out there. Emerald Bay was howling,” said St. Denis, who logs at least 200 days on the water. The trout they hauled in St. Denis considered “rare.”

The fish weighing 11 pounds, 4 ounces and measuring 32 inches took a lot of fishing line from the Morgan Hill man, but he expected a longer fight.

“He didn’t fight that much in the cold. If I had caught him in the summertime, I don’t how long it would have taken,” Lane said. He agreed with his wife, Barbara, who called it a

“bucket list” venture.

“I’ve always had a big desire to catch a German brown. I’ve become enamored with it. It’s a beautiful fish, and it tastes really good,” Lane said while at Harrah’s Reno for a bowling tournament. The fish meat is considered rich.

Lane took the fish to the casino kitchen to cook it. He got one serving and treated the cooking staff to the rest.

As a decade-long ritual, Lane comes up to Tahoe from the Bay Area to fish and ski. With his luck, some may wonder if he should hit the tables.