

# Record-setting Chinook salmon season drawing to a close soon

Columbia Basin Bulletin

COLUMBIA RIVER — Some 953,706 fall Chinook passed Bonneville Dam as of Nov. 12, the most fall Chinook passing the dam since it was built 77 years ago. The previous record was set in 2013 when 953,222 fish passed the dam.

Upriver the number of fall Chinook spawning at Hanford Reach is also breaking records and passage of fall Chinook into the Snake River is the second best year since the four lower Snake River dams were built in the 1970s.

The estimated 2015 fall Chinook run at the Columbia River mouth, however, still stands at 1,224,310 fish, the second largest run since the construction of Bonneville Dam and 132 percent of the preseason forecast.

That's just short of the record-breaking 2013 run of fall Chinook (1,268,400) at the river's mouth and slightly more than last year's count (1,159,100).

The run estimate of fall Chinook was set in mid-October by the U.S. v. Oregon Technical Advisory Committee which updates salmon and steelhead run estimates every couple of weeks while commercial and tribal fishing is taking place on the Columbia River. The advisory committee quit doing run size estimates as the fall treaty and non-treaty Chinook fisheries wound down. The committee will finalize run sizes at the end of season.

"Breaking this record today is truly something to celebrate," Paul Lumley, executive director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, said of the Bonneville Dam record. "The success of this fall Chinook run reflects the region's commitment to healthy salmon runs and the collaborative spirit that has made it possible."

## Protection work to continue

As they celebrate the return of the fall Chinook, Lumley pledged "to continue our protection and restoration work that helped make it possible. The lessons the region has learned in achieving the success we've seen so far will help us address upcoming impacts such as the predicted El Niño this winter and the long-term effects of climate change."

The fish commission said that this year's fall Chinook "enjoyed excellent ocean conditions and, unlike the fish migrating during the summer, they enjoyed good migrating conditions. The fall Chinook also benefited from tribal efforts using hatcheries to rebuild naturally spawning populations throughout the Columbia River Basin, harvest management actions on the Pacific Ocean and mainstem Columbia, and strong collaborative efforts to improve habitat."

Farther upstream at Hanford Reach near Washington's Tri-Cities, fall Chinook salmon are spawning in record numbers. Biologists estimate as many as 200,000 of the fish are spawning at Hanford Reach alongside the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, and 50,000 of those are confined to a one-mile stretch of river known as Vernita Bar.

Nearly 500,000 fall Chinook (498,969) crossed McNary Dam, the southern boundary of the 51-mile long Hanford Reach, to get to the Reach.

This represents the most spawning fall Chinook at Hanford Reach since the 1930s, according to the Bonneville Power Administration.

There is also good news for the fall Chinook run into the Snake River in Idaho, which is the second largest run on record, according to the fish commission.

## Threatened species

Some 59,059 of the salmon have passed Lower Granite Dam, the most upstream dam on the lower Snake River, as of Thursday. The fish commission gives credit to the run



Shannon Dininny/AP Photo File

The Columbia River flows through the Hanford Reach National Monument, Wash., in this 2007 photo. The federal government says fall Chinook salmon are returning to the Hanford Reach section of the river in record-setting numbers.

of fall Chinook, listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as threatened in 1992, "to intensive restoration efforts by the Nez Perce Tribe," according to a commission news release.

As planned, Idaho closed all fall Chinook fishing on Nov. 17 on the Snake River.

The season ended Oct. 31 in the Clearwater and Salmon rivers and in the Snake River, except the reach from Cliff Mountain Rapids to Hells Canyon Dam. That section closed Nov. 17.

As of Nov. 1, anglers had caught and kept 150 marked adults and 22 jack fall Chinook, and caught and released 460 unmarked fish in the lower Clearwater River. They caught and kept 540 marked adults and 133 marked jacks, and released 57 marked fish in the Snake River. Anglers also caught and released 2,889 unmarked fish in the Snake River, according to information provided by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

## Disappointing run of coho

The announcements were made as tribal, commercial and recreational fisheries are winding down a late summer and fall that saw record-breaking runs of fall Chinook, a smaller than average run of steelhead and a disappointing run of coho salmon that, as

of Thursday, amounts to just 35,980 fish.

The coho run is so dismal that the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife closed recreational coho salmon fishing on Eagle Creek, effective Nov. 8. The closure was at the request of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service which operates the Eagle Creek National Fish Hatchery near Estacada.

"Based on reports through this week, returns to the hatchery are well below their production goals," said Chris Kern, deputy administrator of ODFW's fish division. "Unfortunately, this action is necessary to aid the situation."

Steelhead fishing in Eagle Creek remains open. Fishing in the Clackamas River is not affected by the rule change.

Lower Columbia River tributaries in Washington have been restricted for nearly two weeks due to the poor run of coho salmon.

Finally, the two-state Columbia River compact approved an extension of treaty steelhead fishing in the Bonneville and The Dalles reservoirs. Harvest by tribal fishers this fall included an 11.5 day period in late October in the The Dalles pool, where 119 sturgeon were harvested, and 11.5 days in the Bonneville pool, where 26 fish were harvested.

Some 404 sturgeon were

harvested throughout 2015 by tribal fishers in the Bonneville pool, leaving an allotment of 696 fish. In The Dalles pool, tribal fishers have caught 212, leaving an allotment of 113. They have caught 884 sturgeon in the John Day pool, leaving an allotment of 116, but have chosen not to fish that pool with setlines. Fishing will be allowed to the end of 2015 in the Bonneville pool and to Wednesday in The Dalles pool.

# Historically strong El Niño may only last a season, forecasters say

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Forecasters still expect historically strong El Niño conditions to usher in a parade of storm clouds this winter, but the phenomenon may fizzle by springtime.

The federal Climate Prediction Center still expects that this winter's El Niño could rank among the three strongest since 1950 and that the typical pattern of southern storms will materialize, officials said.

Warming sea-surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean nearly match those in the fall of 1997 and exceed those in 1972 and 1982, all big rainfall years, the center notes.

But after peaking this winter, the El Niño pattern may recede quickly, returning to the neutral sea-surface and atmospheric conditions that have prevailed through much of California's four-year drought.

"There is an approximately 95 percent chance that El Niño will continue through Northern Hemisphere 2015-16, gradually weakening through spring 2016," the CPC concluded in a written update.

## California needs more than one wet winter

Water experts have said California would need more than one wet and snowy winter to emerge from its historic drought.

The last El Niño in California in the winter of 2009-2010 interrupted a three-year drought. But before this year's recurrence, sea surface temperatures across the equatorial Pacific have mostly been near average since spring of 2012, meaning neither El Niño or La Nina influenced weather patterns. During much of that time, a strong ridge of high pressure off California's coast blocked storms from entering, causing the current drought.

The latest outlook comes

as rain- and snow-producing systems have been passing through California every few days, and that pattern is expected to continue through November. However, the storms have so far been brought by a polar jet stream pushing cold systems down from the north, said Michelle Mead, a National Weather Service warning coordinator in Sacramento.

"Therefore, the recent storms are not associated with El Niño," Mead said in an email. "Rather, this is a more 'typical' Northern California weather pattern for this time of year. It's just that we haven't seen a typical fall/winter season over the past four years, so these systems seem more unusual to folks."

## Warmer storms with higher snow levels

El Niño storms tend to be warmer with higher snow levels, so when the sub-tropical jet stream storm track kicks in, the potential for warmer storms will increase, she said.

Even so, many areas in Central California are off to a fast start in terms of rainfall, exceeding their normal seasonal totals, while many northern areas are still lagging behind their normal precipitation levels for this time of year, according to the National Weather Service.

For instance, Salinas had recorded 2.21 inches of rainfall for the water year as of Nov. 12, well above its average of 1.03 inches, while the 2.35 inches that had fallen on Eureka as of Nov. 12 was well below its seasonal average of 4.11 inches, according to the weather service. The water year begins Oct. 1.

El Niño's storm track may take hold by the first week of December, when California's Central Valley could see thunderstorms with afternoon temperatures in the mid-60s.

## THANKSGIVING NIGHT

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