

## METOLIUS: Regulatory change could make enforcement easier

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keeps anglers from catching spawning trout and eliminates the potential for trampling their nests, called redds, while wading in the river. Fly fishing and spin fishing with lures and barbed hooks are allowed from Bridge 99 downstream to the river's mouth. The upper river was first designated catch-and-release only in 1983.

In addition to designating the Metolius River all fly fishing only, other proposed regulation changes include catch-and-release for all species, which would eliminate harvesting mountain whitefish that can now be taken; single, barbless hooks below Allingham Bridge, specifying that no bait fishing is allowed; and changing the reference to Lower Bridge from Bridge 99 in the fishing regulations booklet to be consistent with signs on the river.

One of the things these potential changes would do is simplify the regulations for fishing on the Metolius River. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, which manages the fisheries and fishing on Oregon's waters, develops rules that attempt to accommodate a broad range of anglers who may be interested in catching different species of fish using a variety of fishing gear and methods. However, this

can also result in complicated or confusing regulations and some anglers may find themselves inadvertently fishing illegally. More understandable rules would minimize that as well as making it easier for Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division troopers to determine if an angler is breaking the law.

Jeff Perin, owner of The Fly Fisher's Place in Sisters, is all for the regulation changes.

"I think it's a real good idea for a number of reasons," he said, noting that he recently saw some kids rigging up spinning outfits above the Camp Sherman Bridge, well upstream from where spin fishing is allowed. "It would simplify the regulations. A lot of people don't know where the Camp Sherman, Allingham and Bridge 99 are," which are used as reference points for sections of the river with different fishing rules.

Perin is also concerned about bull trout poaching, which is an ongoing problem on the remote stretch of the river below Bridge 99.

"It's not the fly fishers that are fishing illegally," he said. "It's the bait and rapala crowd" — referencing a kind of spin fishing lure that resembles a minnow and is especially effective for catching large bull trout. He has also spotted people sneaking into Candle Creek Campground below Bridge 99 with bait. Eliminating spin fishing from the river would make it easier for law enforcement officers



PHOTO BY JIM YUSKAVITCH

Anglers fly fish the upper reach of the Metolius River above the Camp Sherman Bridge.

to identify poachers. Bull trout are designated as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Two Oregon State Police officers patrol the Metolius River, Senior Trooper Scott Sogge who patrols the river from Candle Creek Campground upstream and Senior Trooper Chuck Lindberg out of Madras who keeps an eye on the lower reach to the mouth. This spring, troopers seized 15 illegally caught bull trout on the lower river and arrested the suspected poachers.

To get the regulations on the Metolius River changed, proponents will have to convince ODFW that it's a good idea. Despite support from anglers locally and around the state, ODFW fisheries biologists are not enthusiastic about the proposal.

ODFW District Fisheries biologist Brett Hodgson, in Bend, is reluctant to take spin fishing off the menu for Metolius River anglers as that would reduce angling opportunities. He's also skeptical that an all-fly-fishing-only designation would help with the bull trout poaching problem, which he views as a law enforcement issue rather than a conservation issue. "We don't want to limit angling opportunities for people who

want to spin fish because of a few bad eggs," said Hodgson.

ODFW is working closely with the Oregon State Police to ratchet up the law enforcement presence on the river and have been seeing some positive results. According to Hodgson, poaching on the reach around Bridge 99 has fallen off considerably, although it is still a problem on the lower, more remote stretches that are harder to patrol.

Hodgson isn't concerned about the overall impact poaching is having on fish

populations.

"The redband population on the Metolius is robust and the bull trout population is probably the healthiest in the state," said Hodgson.

But proponents are pressing ahead, and ODFW has received around 300 emails from anglers in support of the regulation changes. Nevertheless, to be successful, advocates will ultimately need to show fisheries managers that their proposal will benefit the fish enough to justify eliminating spin fishing from the river.



PHOTO BY JIM YUSKAVITCH

Bull trout poaching remains a persistent problem on the Metolius River downstream of Bridge 99.

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