

# Miller

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Plenty of time; they'd only put in "two or three hours."

Fishing may be slow now, but if you've been at it long enough, it stacks up to some pretty impressive numbers, he said.

"I'd probably put it at 700, 800 salmon and steelhead, mostly steelhead," O'Day said about his totals over the years and decades at Marx-Strange. "I think that the best (annual total) I've ever done out here on salmon was 12. And the best I've ever done out here combined is like 28, 30.

"But you take that over 60 years and it adds up to quite a few fish."

So far this year, O'Day said he's hooked and landed five steelhead, but just one hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin that he kept.

"A nice 14-pound summer steelhead around the 20th of (March), a 33-inch fish," he said. "I smoked it and gave it to all of my friends."

Avid anglers both, O'Day hits the Willamette River in his small boat to fish for largemouth and smallmouth bass three to four days a week.

And Kitchin has really gotten into fishing for kokanee, a landlocked variety of sockeye salmon, at Detroit Lake.

And both head for the coast when halibut and coho "silver" salmon seasons open in May.

O'Day said that nostalgia was a big factor for him at the Emil Marx-Lloyd Strange Fishing Hole.

He was there at the beginning, and it's quite a fish tale.

## In the beginning

"It was just a field. I mean my wife didn't even know about this place it was so secret," O'Day said. "Emil would let maybe six, eight of us fish out here."

That ended abruptly in 1988, O'Day recalled.

When a fisherman, apparently drunk, blasted down Hall's Ferry Road to the river doing about 60 mph, the wife of a mechanic who lived on the road went down and told him,

"I'd appreciate it if you'd slow down because I've got some little kids," O'Day said. "And he told her to go F herself.

"And the next day the farmer came down here and said, 'You're out of here.'

"So for two years, you could go all the way to the end of Hall's Ferry Road," work your way down to the bank and walk along the gravel to the fishing hole.

Getting down the steep slope to get to the bank was no problem for the younger, more spry regulars such as O'Day.

But the senior members of the fraternity such as Strange couldn't make the climb, and converted their efforts into lobbying the Polk County Commission, and its chairman, Bill Harland.

Even former Oregon Gov. Bob Straub got involved, O'Day said.

"He was the one who helped get the ball rolling on the Social Security Hole. We parked up on the road up there, and he said, 'If any of you guys don't mind trespassing, we're going to walk down and see what this looks like.'

"So about a half-dozen of us walked down right here to see what it looked like."

The efforts paid off. The county purchased the section of the bluff and christened it.

"And in 1990 it became the Lloyd Strange-Emil Marx Fishing Hole," said O'Day.

It was a big deal, he added. "I was here for the dedication," O'Day said. Straub also showed up, as did one of Marx's sons after Emil had died.

## Excess of success

During the now-official park's early years, it was a tad too successful for the small band of original anglers who were given permission to fish from the field next to the Willamette that became the park.

"Back when Emil had it, there was a half-dozen of us who would come out and fish it anytime and get a spot to fish.

"A lot of us didn't (cheer the park designation). We kind of liked it the way it was, because after it became (announced), a lot of people knew about it.

"You had to get out here at 9, 10 o'clock at night to get a place to fish. I'm serious. Of course, fishing was a lot better back then."

There were epic steelhead runs during the 1980s when state hatcheries pumped out millions of summer-run fish.

"In 1988 we had 43,000 summer steelhead come across (Willamette Falls) in Oregon City," O'Day.

Several things man-made and natural have caused declines in fish numbers.

Changes in both state and federal policies to protect non-hatchery wild runs of salmon and steelhead shifted the emphasis from production to conservation.

Other factors such as changes in patterns of rain and snowfall, as well as temperature fluctuations in ocean cur-



Longtime fishing buddies Gene O'Day and Leon Kitchin swap lies and BS during a day on the Willamette River at the Emil Marx-Lloyd Strange Fishing Hole near Independence. HENRY MILLER / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

## Getting there

What: The Lloyd Strange-Emil Marx Fishing Hole, a Polk County Park.

Getting there: From Salem, take Highway 22 west to the Independence Highway (Highway 51) turn on the left. Go just more than 5 miles and watch for Hall's Ferry Road on the left (Green Villa Barn is on the right). Take Hall's Ferry 2 miles to the park gate.

Fee: None

Hours: Sunrise to a half-hour after sunset.

On-site: Fishing, picnic tables, ADA restroom (no running water), trash cans, gravel parking lot.

rents caused by climate change also affected runs.

But for the Social Security Hole, one of the biggest hits came with the century flood of February 1996.

The water got so high that it washed the pea gravel off the parking lot, and bank sloughing led to changes in where the holes, drifts and eddies are now, O'Day said.

The anglers who regularly fish at the Emil Marx-Lloyd Strange Fishing Hole figure that the honey hole fishing slot for salmon and steelhead is now on the other side of the river.

Still, the run of spring Chinook up the Willamette hits the area around the end of April, and holds until the moss build-up makes it unfishable.

And hope springs eternal in the

hearts of anglers.

There are, after all, a lot worse places to spend your time.

"I love this place," O'Day said after checking his line and re-casting. "I think it keeps me alive."

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