

ODFW biologist gives updates on steelhead, salmon

Optimistic outlook for this year's steelhead run

By **KYLE BRATCHER**
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Kyle Bratcher of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife with a coho salmon trapped at the Lostine weir in 2018.
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/
Contributed Photo, File

As we move toward the opening of steelhead season I thought I'd provide an update on the ongoing run and provide some thoughts on current fishing opportunities along with some hot water topics.

Additionally, there are some cool upcoming opportunities to help with some fisheries management and important land acquisitions.

Steelhead

While it's still early in the steelhead run, enough steelhead have passed Bonneville Dam to start looking at the crystal ball of fisheries management to see what our upcoming fishery might look like.

First, I can tell you it's looking a fair bit better than the last few years. In the steelhead fisheries plan, we provided a framework for how we would manage the steelhead fisheries in Northeast Oregon based on passage at the mainstem dams. The primary metric we provided to determine if fisheries might be curtailed was passage of 2,724 wild steelhead at Ice Harbor Dam (ICE) between June 15 and Sept. 24. On average, by Aug. 4 about 8% of the run has passed ICE.

With a month and 20 days to go, we've surpassed the needed count outlined in the above framework with 2,758 wild steelhead. Since the vast majority of the run is still to come, my projections suggest we're going to see the run exceed the minimum abundance threshold

(MAT), or the level we consider the population healthy for the Imnaha and Grande Ronde basins.

While I'm expecting a healthy wild run, it's not what I would consider exciting. However, the increase is certainly good news and the run is good enough that I have no concerns with fisheries progressing as normal. I am not planning any modifications of the steelhead fishing season from the permanent rules in the book.

For hatchery steelhead, I'm encouraged by the PIT tag data from Bonneville Dam. We are seeing quite a few fish from the Wallowa and Imnaha programs making their way up the Columbia. While it's a bit early to have a lot of confidence in my projections, current data suggests we'll have a pretty robust return of hatchery steelhead for harvest. Even if the hatchery component of the run falls short of current projections, we'll still likely see the most fish since the 2016-17 run year. I'll provide everyone with more information here when the projections are more reliable.

One last positive point: It appears that two-salt fish are making up a substantial proportion of the hatchery returns. This

means hookups with larger fish will be more common. Expect to find a good proportion of fish in the 25- to 28-inch range.

For anyone planning trips or guide seasons, I wouldn't hesitate one bit to book accommodations or trips. Unless we see some very abnormal circumstance, I will not be implementing any emergency closures or curtailments for the 2022-23 season.

Hatchery Steelhead Collection - Hook and Line

With a better return of hatchery fish we're tentatively planning to have a hook and line broodstock collection get-together in Troy on the Grande Ronde this year. We've just recently started planning so I don't have all the details, but if you would like to attend please send me a quick email — Kyle.W.Bratcher@odfw.oregon.gov — stating interest and pencil it in on your calendar for Oct. 13-16. We'll likely have some presentations at night, maybe a beginning steelhead fishing class, and of course good conversations. I'll reach out with more details when we have a better set of plans.

Additionally on the hatchery broodstock collection front, I'll need

some experienced anglers who will spend a fair bit of time fishing near Troy this year to collect broodstock. This is something you do on your own time from mid-September to the end of October. We'll set up a collection station with live wells and everything folks need to safely collect any hatchery fish they might catch. I'd like folks that will spend at least five total days (outside the Oct. 13-16 event) on the water. Again, please send me an email with your interest.

Chinook Salmon

All the Northeast Oregon Chinook seasons have closed with Hells Canyon being the last closure July 31. After 5 years of only the Hells Canyon fishery being open, it was nice to provide the opportunities on the Wallowa and Imnaha this year.

While we did have an uptick in the chinook run that was enough to provide a fishery this year, it still wasn't great by overall standards. We were somewhat borderline on opening the Imnaha and I know fishing was by no means off the charts. Hopefully we'll see some improving runs over the next few years.

Given what we saw this year we're expecting an increase next year and

hopefully some better fishing. I'd love to hear from any of you that may have participated in the fishery to see what your experience was. Fish pics are always welcome.

We either have, or are very close to obtaining our broodstock for the hatchery programs in the Grande Ronde and Imnaha basins. Additionally, we'll see chinook start to spawn in some to the tributaries in the next few weeks. Great places to check out some spawning salmon are near the Imnaha Weir and Catherine Creek state park.

Drought

While Northeast Oregon certainly benefited from the wet spring, much of Oregon is still in a drought. We are doing far better in terms of flow and water temperatures over last year and our fish will certainly fare better because of it.

While we're in these periods of hot weather, keep in mind the impact you may be having when you're out fishing in Northeast Oregon waters. Use best handling practices and consider fisheries where you're impact will be lessened. There are some tips available at myodfw.com/articles/5-tips-fishing-hot-water.

Minam River Property

Lastly, ODFW and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has been working to acquire a large tract of ground in the bottom end of the Minam River. Overall it's around 15,000 acres of important winter range for deer and elk, but also includes about 7 miles of the river itself.

The Minam is an important river for salmon, steelhead and bull trout. This project has the potential to lead to better habitat in the lower Minam that could benefit all those fishes. The first phase of the acquisition has finished and fund raising for the second and larger phase 2 is ongoing. For more information you can check out the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADMmzy9bpSM.

As always, feel free to contact me if you have questions or would just like to chat about fish. I'm always looking for topics that I can address to the group so feel free to send suggestions my way. Also, if you know anyone who would like to be included in these distributions let me know and I'll get them added.

■ *Kyle Bratcher is the district fish biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Enterprise office.*

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SATURDAY, AUGUST 13, 2022

CROSSWORD PUZZLER

ACROSS

- 1 Have a snack
- 4 Outer space
- 9 Garden-pond fish
- 12 Sense of self
- 13 Roulette color
- 14 Checkout ID
- 15 Kind of lettuce
- 17 AAA or EEE
- 19 Travel on powder
- 20 Wolf, to Pedro
- 21 Of that kind
- 24 Personal appeal
- 28 Potter's materials
- 30 Comes to a halt
- 31 Lb. fraction
- 32 PIN prompter
- 33 Confused fight
- 35 Figured out
- 36 Masc. honorific
- 37 "Ouch!"
- 38 Vacuum tube
- 40 Rose Bowl site
- 43 Pear variety

DOWN

- 44 Encourage strongly
- 45 Sault — Marie
- 47 Vanity
- 49 Glues
- 53 Woosnam of golf
- 54 More friendly
- 56 Arbitrary degree
- 57 Golf tee
- 58 Pebble
- 59 Notch's shape
- 1 Always, to the bard
- 2 Historian's word
- 3 Smothers or Landry
- 4 Kramer or Satie
- 5 Bar mixer
- 6 Shade
- 7 For example (abbr.)

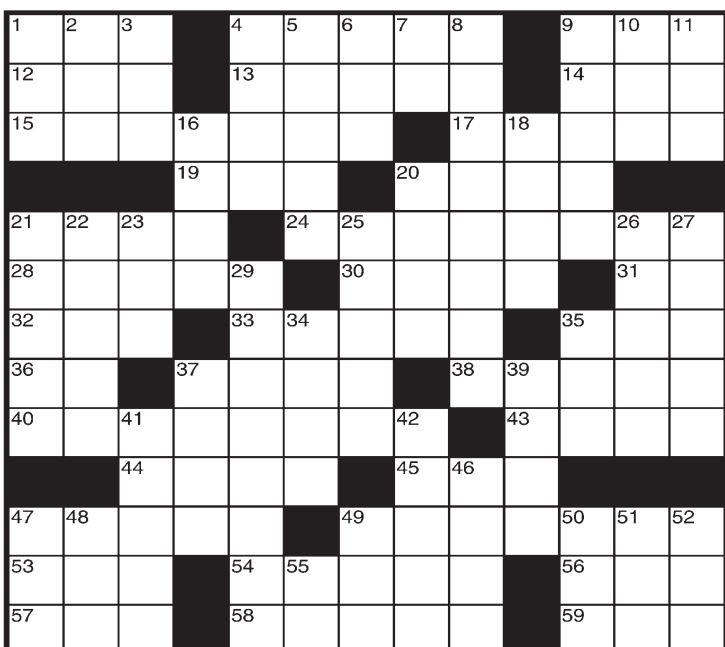
Answer to Previous Puzzle

J	A	G		P	I	G	S		F	A	I	L
U	M	A		A	N	N	O		L	U	N	A
S	A	V		A	N	N	A	H	I	F	S	O
T	H	E	M	E		W	O	R	N			
			E	S	A				U	T	T	E
S	L	O	B			S	H	U	N		O	B
H	E	R	A		S	O	N		P	L	O	D
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C	P	A	S			E	S	T	I	M	A	T
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N	E	S				D	I	N	S		L	P

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- 8 Said another way
- 9 Acclaim
- 10 Choose
- 11 Innsbruck "I"
- 16 Wan

- 18 White wader
- 20 "Superman" reporter Lois
- 21 Rascal
- 22 Beyond the limit
- 23 Engine part
- 25 Hunt or Reddy
- 26 Emotional tones
- 27 Cortés foe
- 29 Iotas
- 34 Dueler's weapon
- 35 Baby's babble
- 37 Long spar
- 39 Alpine goat
- 41 Seeking damages
- 42 Colorado tree
- 46 Split
- 47 Spot on a playing card
- 48 Funny Charlotte —
- 49 Italian writer
- 50 Packing slip
- 51 Bastille Day season
- 52 The lady
- 55 That thing



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