

Outdoor Recreation

Remembering River Canyon



THE OUTDOOR COLUMN
By Steve Culley

I read with interest an article about exploring canyon country that appeared this month in two other newspapers. John Kirk Townsend was probably the first to mention this area in 1837 after the Wyeth expedition lost the Oregon Trail and wandered up the “River Canyon.” He mentioned it being so narrow in one spot that you could “throw a biscuit across it.” I know the place. It is near what we called Deer Mountain trail just upstream from where the river makes a big, “horse shoe bend.” It was probably in 1962 when my brother Dan and I followed the jeep roads into there to fish for “silver sides,” the native rainbows that were so bright they

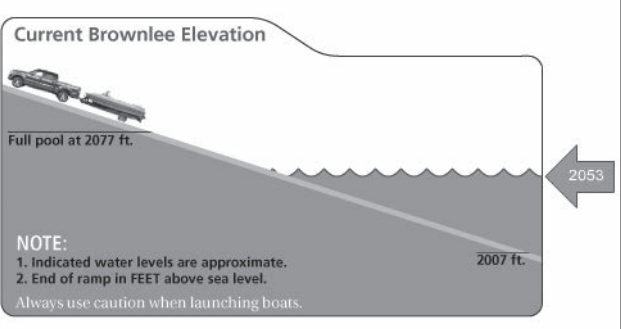
looked like silver mirrors. The name actually refereed to the steelhead run. I am fairly certain of the year because Grandpa Colton had given us his jeep pickup because he had decided he was too old to drive and

he died in December of 1963. I remember fishing 80 yards or so above my brother and he was hauling out a lot of trout. I was retrieving my double-bladed spinner with an angle worm trailing behind when all of a sudden a monster fish took it, made a fast run down stream and *Snap!* The line popped like a thread. I yelled at Dan trying to describe the big bright fish that took the bait. Dan was fixated on his fishing and didn’t pay that much attention, probably thinking I was exaggerating. I went back to fishing and maybe 10 minutes later another jet propelled mirror grabbed my worm

and made short work of the monofilament. I’m thinking Grandpa must have bought some of the first batch of monofilament ever manufactured and put it on the old Zebco reel. Not exactly steelhead gear. To complete the adventure we tried to get through the brush pile where the little water fall starts the run at horse shoe bend and it was here that I kept here a clicking sound and was sure my reel was snagged it the brush. I checked it and it and all was fine except for Dan aiming his pistol at me and shooting at my feet. Turns out the clicking was a very large rattle snake. He shot its eyes out and I thought it was dead, only to nearly get struck when I tried to cut the rattles off. Turns out it was a den and snakes were buzzing all around us. Around that time I hooked a steelhead in Big Creek where the little stream of Lick Creek comes in. I dragged it to the road but it broke the line and got back in. At that point in time we never paid a lot of attention to what was happening in Hells Canyon with the construction of private dams with no fish ladders.

We only knew that Eagle Creek was great fly fishing for trout, which it was but mostly it was the steelhead smolts that made it great. I joined the Marines in July of 1966 and went to Viet Nam and Okinawa in 1967. The last Hells Canyon Dam was completed in that year. I always have wondered how it came to pass that three private dams with no fish ladders got constructed instead of the one federal dam with passage. It is complicated having to do with sputnik, the cold war and the Red Scare and economist Milton Friedman and privatization and a five-year rapid tax write off, and it would be my guess that maybe a little political contribution here and there that allowed the three dam complex and the infamous “Rube Goldberg” fish passage system that all the biologists said would not work. It didn’t—and the fish runs were abandoned in 1963. The Powder River, the Payette, Weiser, Boise, Eagle Creek and main stem Snake River lost something that had been for millennia. Salmon and steelhead that reproduced for free are now raised in hatcheries and subsidized on our power bills.

Brownlee boat ramp data



Submitted Photo.

The snowpack conditions that have materialized thus far above Brownlee Reservoir are below normal. Therefore, the amount of space required by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) within Brownlee Reservoir for the purpose of system flood control is less than has been required in some recent years. This is great news for recreation within the reservoir this spring. Brownlee Reservoir elevation is currently 2,053 feet, or 24 feet below full pool. We anticipate that the reservoir elevation will decrease an additional 3-4 feet before the end of February to meet the end of month flood control target set by the USACE. At this target elevation, all boat ramps with the exception of Spring Recreation will remain accessible for launching boats. As we move through the flood control season, these planned operations may change. Updates will be made available as soon as possible. Please visit our Idaho Power website, <http://www.idahopower.com/OurEnvironment/WaterInformation> for current reservoir elevation information.

2014 annual wolf report

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) posted its annual wolf report for 2014 on Tuesday. Gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) in Oregon are listed statewide as endangered under the Oregon Endangered Species Act (ESA). Wolves occurring west of Oregon Highways 395/78/95 continued to be federally protected as endangered under the federal ESA. The 2014 Oregon minimum wolf population is 77 wolves. Nine packs were documented and eight of those packs met the criteria as breeding pairs. Known wolf packs occurred in parts of Baker, Jackson, Klamath, Umatilla, Union, and Wallowa Counties. In addition six new pairs of wolves were also confirmed in Oregon; five within the Eastern Wolf Management Zone and one within the Western Wolf Management Zone. 2014 marks the third year that the conservation population objective (four breeding pairs in eastern Oregon), as defined in the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Wolf Plan), was achieved. Six wolves were captured and radio-collared in 2014 and throughout the year as many as 18 GPS radio-collared wolves were monitored. At year-end 13 wolves (17% of the population) were radiocollared in Oregon. Three radio-collared wolves dispersed out of state. No adult mortality or incidental take was documented in Oregon during 2014. Confirmed depredation of livestock decreased; 11 incidents of wolf depredation were confirmed in five areas of Oregon in 2014. Per the Wolf Plan the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) and area producers implemented non-lethal measures to minimize depredation. The Oregon Department of Agriculture’s compensation program awarded \$150,830 in 8 counties in 2014. Most funds were used for preventative measures and secondarily for direct payment of confirmed depredations. Public interest in Oregon wolf management remained high in 2014. Members of the public can sign up to be automatically notified of new wolf information and in 2014 the number of subscribers increased by 31%. Currently, 4,496 people subscribe to the department’s wolf update web page. The Oregon State University/ODFW wolf-cougar research project in northeastern Oregon continued in 2014. The full report is available online or by contacting ODFW.

—ODFW RECREATION REPORT—

NE OREGON FISHING
BULL PRAIRIE RESERVOIR: rainbow and brook trout. Remains open to fishing all year. The reservoir is frozen but proceed with caution as the ice may be too thin to support anglers. Approximately 200 trophy rainbow trout were stocked last fall and should provide fishing all winter. Brook trout are also available.
GRANDE RONDE RIVER: steelhead. After a big influx in flow, the river has come back into shape. While the river is still a bit high, anglers should have good success. Fishermen have had a lot of success on the Grande Ronde this year and that success is expected to continue when flows subside. A healthy proportion of two salt fish has resulted in a large average size this year. So, expect a few larger fish and some screaming drags! Remember, only adipose-fin clipped rainbow trout may be retained and all bull trout must be released unharmed.
HOLLIDAY PARK POND: rainbow trout. Remains open all year. The pond is now free of ice. Carryover trout are being caught and should provide fair angling until stocking occurs in April.
IMNAHA RIVER: steelhead. Flows have stabilized and angling is good. Anglers are finding steelhead from the mouth all the way up to the town of Imnaha. Angers will find fish on anything from bait to flies. Fishing on the Imnaha in late winter and early spring is often in tee-shirt weather with plenty of action. Steelhead will be moving into Big Sheep Creek as they push toward the hatchery facility.
JOHN DAY RIVER: steelhead. River flows have dropped and water conditions are great. Steelhead are being caught with most of the fish between Service Creek and the town of John Day and in the North Fork up to Monument. Water temperatures are still cold and steelhead are holding in slack water along the edges.

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LONG CREEK POND, CAVENDER POND: trout. Remains open all year. Both ponds are now free of ice. Several trout stocked last year survived the winter and will provide good fishing until stocking occurs again in April.
MAGONE LAKE: rainbow and brook trout. Remains open all year. Portions of the upper lake are ice free so proceed with caution if attempting to ice fish. The ice may be too thin to support anglers.
MARR POND: surplus steelhead. Marr pond has been stocked with 100 surplus steelhead that returned to Wallowa Hatchery. Once these fish are placed in still water fisheries they are considered “trout” and do not need to be recorded on a harvest card. This is a great opportunity to get young anglers into some big fish. Try catching these fish by floating bait under a bobber mid water column. Brightly colored lures and spinners may also be productive.
PEACH POND (Ladd Marsh): rainbow trout. The pond was stocked with trophy-sized rainbow trout in late September. The pond has no ice cover.
ROULET POND: rainbow trout. The pond was stocked with trophy-sized rainbow trout in late September. The pond has no ice cover.
ROWE CREEK RESERVOIR: rainbow trout. Remains open all year. The pond is now free of ice. Fishing is fair for carryover trout but the water level is very low.
UMATILLA FOREST PONDS: trout. The forest ponds remain open to angling year around and can provide a good opportunity for ice fishing during the winter months.
UMATILLA RIVER: steelhead. Steelhead continue to enter the system in record numbers, anglers should be able to find fish scattered throughout the river. Steelhead fishing was good last weekend with upper river anglers averaging 4.6 hours per steelhead caught. During the three days creeled last

week, 73 anglers caught 35 native and 7 hatchery steelhead. Water conditions in the Pendleton area dropping quickly back into shape, flows are about 600cfs and water temperatures are in the low 40s. Steelhead are distributed though out the system. Anglers are find best success using bobbers and jigs and drift fishing for steelhead. Anglers should consult the synopsis for detailed regulations.
WALLOWA LAKE: rainbow trout, kokanee, lake trout. As spring approaches anglers will start to find some stocked trout that held over from last season’s stocking. These fish often range 15 to 20 inches and can be caught in multiple numbers. These fish are normally more common later in the spring; however with the warm weather and early spring anglers should start seeing these fish soon. Some experienced fishermen are picking up large lake trout trolling at depth with downriggers. While lake trout aren’t abundant in Wallowa Lake it’s not uncommon to find fish over 25 pounds. In 2014 the lake was stocked with tagged rainbow trout in an effort by ODFW to better understand the utilization of this fishery. Tagged fish have been caught at very high rates and over \$2,700 in rewards have been paid. Some of these fish have likely held over from last year and are available to anglers. If you catch one of these tagged fish, please report the number, location, date, where in the lake the fish was caught and the size to the ODFW office in Enterprise or online.
WALLOWA RIVER: steelhead, mountain whitefish. The steelhead season is in full swing on the Wallowa River. Catch rates dipped below 4 hours per fish last week! Fishing is good and there really is no good excuse to not be out there. Anglers are finding fish in good numbers and the ratio of two-salt fish to one-salt fish is high. This means there are a lot of larger fish available so, oil your reels and make sure that drag is working well.

Remember the Wallowa River is a whitefish factory. Whitefish can be a great way to keep kids interested while steelhead fishing and can be great table fair. Simply tie in a small bead-head nymph dropper while fishing under a bobber rig and let the fun begin. Also, steelhead will often take a bead head nymph hanging under a jig.
WILLOW CREEK RESERVOIR: trout. Anglers are reporting good catches of rainbow trout from 12 to 20-inches. Best catches are falling for PowerBait and night crawlers fished on the bottom.
BAKER COUNTY HUNTING
Cougars can be found throughout Baker County but hunters should target areas with high concentrations of deer and elk. Setting up on a fresh kill or using distress calls can all be productive techniques. Hunters are required to check in the hide of any cougar taken, with skull and proof of sex attached. Remember to pick up a 2015 tag. Coyote numbers are good throughout the district. Try calling in early morning and late afternoon. Remember to ask for permission before hunting on private properties.

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