

Hunting Season - Be Prepared, Be Safe

Staff Article

The 2007 hunting season is now upon us. The nights are getting shorter and the crisp morning air is following close behind. Many archery hunters have polished and cleaned their bows to retire them for the following months. Rifle season is at hand. Hunters are thinking of large bucks and mammoth bulls; from reports of several archery hunters who have been out in the field, we can expect to see many of both. Late September brought vocal elk, teasing the pursuing hunters. Bucks were spotted in deep ravines, sometimes alone, other times in small groups of three to five. The numbers seem good.



Preparing for the hunt is something that shouldn't be taken lightly. Proper gear such as warm clothing, good hiking boots, and communication devices are a must. Before going out into the field, then go prepared – and always let someone

remember to sight in the weapons to ensure an ethical kill. Many factors can contribute to a great season, or a foul one. Stop and think,

know where you will be hunting. Thankfully many landowners allow hunters to use their land without many rules or regulations. Please be respectful of them to ensure continued use for many years ahead. Closed gates and fences properly posted are that way for a reason -- crossing them only creates unwanted frustration and tension. There are many places to hunt – please respect the wishes of private property owners.

Dry conditions through October mean there's still potential for a fire hazard. Properly extinguishing smoking material and campfires is a must -- a little spark can go along way.

Enjoy the hunt and remember to put safety at the top of your hunting list.

The Return of the Salmon

By Scott Laird

October marks the time in Vernonia when we celebrate the return of our native Salmon to local waters. Every autumn we marvel at the phenomenon of our returning friends – the Coho, the Chinook, the Chum, the Steelhead and the Cutthroat Trout, and on special occasions the Sockeye to the Nehalem Watershed. Often we stand on the Bridge over Rock Creek and admire their struggles, their strength and their determination to reach their home waters. It is an event each year that reminds us of our connection to the natural world and what a special place in which we live.

Recently I sat down with Maggie Peyton, Director of the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council (UNWC) to learn more about the life cycle of the Salmon and about their place in our community.

“They're opportunists,” Peyton mentioned a number of times during our conversation. “They take advantage of the conditions they are given and make the most of them. It depends on how fresh the water is, the amount of rain fall, how long they've been waiting for the flow, the number of fish in the run. Lots of factors determine when and how far upstream the salmon will come in any given year. It's all about the quality and quantity of the water.”

According to a US Fish and Wildlife brochure, the Salmon life cycle differs slightly for each species. The Salmon live in the ocean for one to seven years before heading for the fresh water of their home stream. While traveling upstream to spawn they undergo physical changes. They stop feeding, change color, and begin the slow process of dying. When the females reach their home stream they choose a nesting site. The males fight for access to nest building females. The eggs are released and the dominant male fertilizes them. The eggs are covered and both the female and male die soon afterwards.

The eggs lie through the winter and hatch in the spring, which allows the fry, as the young are called, to begin the new cycle. The fry spend a year or more in their home stream, although pink and chum

will head down stream as soon as they emerge. Once they start downstream smolting occurs – physical changes that ready them for larger waters. When they reach the estuary they will stay and adjust to the salt water and feed. The larger a salmon gets, the more likely it is to survive during it's time in the ocean. Finally, they head to sea, returning to their home waters years later.

“The different species will inhabit different parts of the river,” explained Peyton. “The Chinook will mostly stay in the main streams where there is better flow, because they are bigger. The Coho will head up the smaller streams. The Steelhead and cutthroats will go even higher up the smaller streams.”

“We have three runs of Chinook, in the spring, summer and fall. The spring run comes into the river in May. They stay in deep holes and wait for the flow of water that comes from the rain in fall, then start moving upstream to spawn. The summer run joins them in the deep holes. The fall run joins the group heading upstream during spawning. The Coho follow the Chinook in the fall,” said Peyton.

“They are an essential part of the food chain,” Peyton told me. “Their flesh after they die feeds other predators and offers nutrition that helps the growth of vegetation in riparian areas. That vegetation offers them shelter, habitat and shade during their upstream migration and young life. It is a complete cycle.”

Next month: The Recovery of the Salmon

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