

# Chinook salmon thriving through wet weather

**W**eather came to Oregon last week. It brought rain to every part of Lane County and dropped a few inches of snow on the Lane County Cascades. Initially, last week's series of unusually strong early fall storms slowed most fisheries across the county and state. But as I assemble this report we are looking at the return of much milder weather that looks to extend into at least mid-October.

There was a "silver lining" while most other fisheries took a pummeling: the bad weather is good news to many and the fuel that gets anglers looking west this time every year, as the chinook salmon fishing along the Lane County coast and the other counties that border the eastern Pacific Ocean continue to be the premier angling opportunity in our state and region. I'll get back to salmon fishing in a bit, but let's do a quick flyover of the county — starting in the Cascades.

The cold weather fronts that rolled through and the snow that fell ushered in some much colder temperatures. Many west slope Cascade locations are now seeing nighttime tempera-



FRANK ARMENDARIZ ANGLER'S LOG

tures below freezing, though the daytime temperatures remain mild. The combination has turned many Cascade lakes "over," with the cooling water temperatures bringing active fish up to the surface.

Of course, when most people think lake fishing, the first thing that comes to mind is a boat. But bank anglers do pretty well this time of year too, as fish move into the shallow bays and nearshore flats to feed before being iced in for the year. Fly fishing, casting spinners or bobber and bait fishing are all effective in the fall. Brook trout, rainbow and cutthroat trout are among the species most casual anglers will encounter in natural lakes.

The storms put a little color into many of the west Cascade rivers and streams, but the event was short-lived as quality conditions quickly returned, though the numbers of anglers working the water has dropped off. There are still plenty of hatchery trout in the McKenzie; the wild trout are up on the surface and fishing, including fly fishing, remains solid. A few summer steelhead are still being caught in both the McKenzie around Leaburg and the Middle Fork Willamette below Dexter. It wasn't a particularly great

steelhead season, but steelhead continue to trickle into the system, ensuring that the fishery will last through the fall or until an extended rain event shuts it down for the year.

About this time every year, the Army Corps of Engineers that manages our local flood control reservoirs begins to draw down the pool behind them in anticipation of winter rains. Most will drop below boat ramp levels and rivers below the dams will rise for a time. On the McKenzie, Blue River and Cougar were drawn down early in the summer to accomplish a number of repairs, so the drawdown on the McKenzie will be modest.

Not so on the Willamette. Hills Creek and Lookout still have plenty of water and once the drawdown begins will likely affect conditions downstream until early winter, negatively affecting the steelhead fishery for a time. The drawdowns are generally accomplished by mid-November.

Further west, the last couple of storms brought some of the highest rainfall totals in the state to western Lane County — about three times the average for this time of year. The Siuslaw River was floatable from Linslaw for a few days and the river levels have held at



FRANK ARMENDARIZ/THE CHRONICLE

Fall weather has come to Oregon and Fall fish can be rewarding on a number of levels.

about 3.5 feet on the gauge near Mapleton.

Salmon are now spread from the lower estuary past the deadline at Lake Creek. Tiernan Landing and C & D Dock have been among the busiest as most powerboating anglers have moved up the bay, fishing the bay water all the way to Mapleton.

Up in the river, the holes at Davis Slide and Rain Rock have had fresh fish on just

about every high tide for the last couple weeks.

A lot of chinook have now gone upriver, but by no means is the chinook run over for the fall. The forecasted milder and drier weather will likely slow the upriver migration, stacking fish in the lower bay again until the next big rain.

The storm made ocean conditions pretty rough for a few days too, forcing

this reporter to reschedule a bottom-fishing and halibut trip. Hopefully, conditions dependent, I will have updated information in the next report.

Now go fishing. Take your kids or a friend with you. Those will become some of the best memories of your life.

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PHOTOS BY FRANK ARMENDARIZ/THE CHRONICLE

LEFT: Cutthroat trout are indigenous and naturally reproduce in just about every lake, creek and river in Lane County. Aside from the McKenzie River, where all wild fish must be released, wild cutthroats can be retained in many locations. Check the regulations first because the number you can keep is specific to some bodies of water.

MIDDLE: My good friend John Landau and I spent last Saturday trolling a tributary of the lower Siuslaw River for chinook salmon. We hooked one fish that day but were unable to bring it to the net.

RIGHT: We went 0-for-1 on chinook salmon this bright, sunny day, but the blueback cutthroats were thick in this lower Siuslaw River tributary. It was hard to keep them off the hook. Everyone should have that problem!



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