

Significant impact of seals and sea lions



Wherever groups of steelheaders get together, sooner or later the conversation turns to seals and sea lions.

Despite what fish biologists theorize, these fishermen believe seals and sea lions have an impact on the number of returning fish.

When fishing is slow, and the weather miserable, it becomes easy to visualize a colony of hungry seals or sea lions, lurking around the head of tidewater, gorging themselves on fish that never find their way upstream to some anxious fishermen's offering.

Most fishermen working streams near the ocean have seen, or heard, stories of seals and sea lions miles upriver catching fish.

These fishermen have caught, or have seen others catch, fish with ugly gashes caused by some hungry predator.

A few years back TV and newspapers showed pictures of an infamous sea lion in the Puget Sound area, gulping down steelhead, confirmed the steelheaders' suspicions.

It was a typical December day on Oregon's Nestucca River.

Some five miles from the ocean, the ever present "Oregon mist" was working its

way down the sleeves and collars of the half dozen steelheaders.

These "Bailey Drift Regulars" had been here since early light. There had only been the sound of fast flowing water, gurgling past insulated hip boots, and tiny "splats" as drift lures and lead weight explored the far reaches of the drift.

A bored angler broke the silence, "Did you read the report by that Fish and Wildlife Biologist who said after studying seal feces for two years he had concluded seals don't catch enough steelhead to have a significant impact on the run?"

Well, during the next few minutes the air warmed considerably as several fishless steelheaders described that particular biologist's ancestry, while comparing his intellect to that of some hapless fisherman who apparently had experienced some difficulty in pouring an "uncontrolled substance" out of his boot with directions on the heel.

My partner, Ger, who had been experiencing a rare unproductive season, added "If that biologist had done a study of my feces this season, he would have concluded I sure as hell haven't had an

impact on the run either."

THE BOTTOM LINE

Today, we are looking at the extinction of the historic Willamette and Santiam Rivers steelhead run. Only a few years back the run was in the thousands.

Pinaped numbers have mushroomed along the coastline. In a relatively short period of time, sea lion numbers have jumped from 25,000 to over 300,000.

Pause for a few seconds and try to think about how many tons of fish it takes to feed them.

Our Willamette River and its run of salmon and steelhead are being targeted by these voracious critters.

The falls at Oregon City have become a feeding haven. Fish are restricted to a small area and become "sitting ducks."

Frustrated anglers watch as these endangered species are ripped apart by powerful canine teeth.

Pat Hogland, editor of *Salmon Trout Journal*, in *Tide Magazine* summed up the crisis on the Willamette River:

The situation has become so dire on the Willamette that experts predict several runs of wild, winter steelhead will become extinct if nothing is done.

Biologists and scientists for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) estimate that 25 percent of these wild, Endangered Spe-



A sea lion gulps down a steelhead.

Submitted/Donald Koskela

cies Act (ESA) listed winter steelhead, were consumed by California and stellar sea lions at the Willamette River Falls in 2017. According to counts at the falls, only 512 wild steelhead returned to upper Willamette, the lowest on record.

ODFW officials say there is a 90 percent chance that at least one wild steelhead population will go extinct as a direct result of sea lion predation.

We know what the problem is and have seen this coming for about a decade, we just couldn't take action to prevent it," explains Dr. Shaun Clements from the ODFW.

Clements is talking about the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) which took away individual state's rights to manage marine mammals. It was passed to protect whales and harbor seals.

Pinaped problems have

been well documented. A congresswoman from Washington State has been valiantly attempting to change the MMPA to protect salmon and steelhead.

Our Oregon contingency has been silent on the issue.

Of course, this comes as no great surprise to the angling and hunting community, since they have consistently represented the Portland Metro dollar vs. scientific fish and wildlife management.

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Leading 49-19, Alfaro and four freshmen started the fourth quarter. With four points by Alfaro, six from Proctor, four by Kennedy Buss and two each from Leah Doult and Annie-Leigh Besa, the Lady Celts outscored North Salem in the period 18-15.

Two players, Dana Romero and Aaliyah Fitzke scored all of North Salem's points. Romero led all scorers with 24 points and Fitzke added 10.

McNary's boys (13-4, 8-1) also won big on Tuesday, defeating the Vikings 85-51.

The Celtics led just 35-29 at intermission before outscoring North Salem 50-22 in the second half.

Chandler Cavell finished with 18 points and six rebounds.

Andrew Jones had 12 points. Boston Smith added 11 points and six rebounds.

McNary hosts Sprague on Friday, Jan. 26 beginning with



KEIZERTIMES/Derek Wiley

McNary junior Sabella Alfaro had 10 points and six rebounds on Tuesday, Jan. 23 against North Salem.

the girls game at 5:45 p.m.

The Sprague boys are 14-2 overall, 9-0 in league play and No. 1 in the OSAA power rankings. The Celtics are

ranked fifth.

The Olympians defeated McNary at Sprague 70-62 on Dec. 15.

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