Cooler water poured into Snake to aid sockeye

Lethally hot water killed most of the run in 2015

By KEITH RIDLER
Associated Press

Roger Phillips/Idaho Statesman via AP

A fisherman stands on his boat looking across the Snake River near Homedale, Idaho. Water managers have started releasing more cold water from a reservoir in northern Idaho for endangered Snake River sockeye salmon following a year where 99 percent of the run died due to lethally hot water.

BOISE, Idaho — Water managers have started releasing more cold water from a reservoir in northern Idaho for endangered Snake River sockeye salmon following a year where 99 percent of the run died due to lethally hot water.

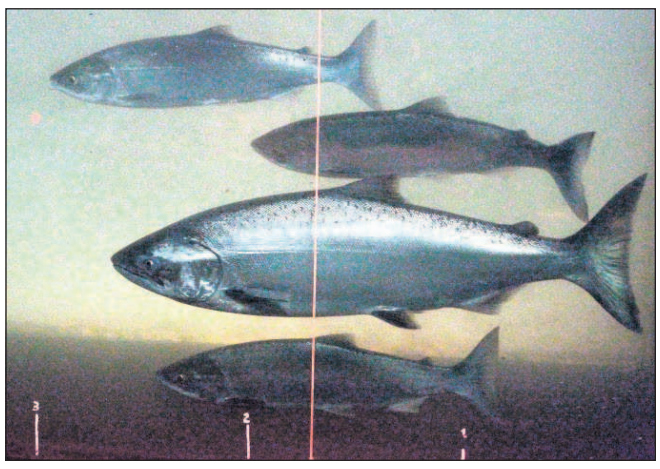
The decision in late July week to bump up the amount of 43-degree water released from Dworshak Reservoir on the North Fork Clearwater River should keep water temperature at Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River under 68 degrees through the summer, fisheries managers say.

The increase to about 10,000 cubic feet per second is slightly earlier than average as fisheries managers and reservoir operators seek to avoid a repeat of last year. An estimated 4,000 Snake River sockeye had entered the Columbia River in what managers expected would be one of the best-ever returns to high mountain lakes in central Idaho. But only about 1 percent survived the 900-mile journey.

"Last year wasn't any fun, and we don't want to do that again if we can avoid it," said Ritchie Graves of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Overall, about 90 percent of the 510,000 sockeye salmon that entered the Columbia River last year died when an unusual combination of low water and an extended heat wave pushed water temperatures past 70 degrees. Those conditions had not occurred in the basin since at least the 1950s and are lethal for cold-water sockeye.

Water managers say they have little ability to influence water temperature in the Columbia River but that Dworshak can supply enough water to make a difference in the Snake River.



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File

A chinook salmon, second from the bottom, swims with sockeye salmon at the Bonneville Dam fish-counting window near North Bonneville, Wash., on the Columbia River.

Also, the Columbia Basin is cooler this year and much more hospitable for salmon and steelhead, Graves said. About 285,000 sockeye have entered the Columbia River so far, 40,000 more than the 10-year average. The run is now looking like it will be about three times larger than the pre-season estimate of 100,000, Graves said.

The pre-season estimate for Snake River sockeye was about 1,000, but it appears now significantly more fish will return. A handful of those sockeye — specially marked so their progress can be tracked through the system — have already arrived at Lower Granite Dam and did so in about 10 days after entering the Columbia. That's about half the time it took the few fish that survived that far last year.

Despite the good outlook, officials appear ready to respond quickly after last year's massive die-off. Afterward, a report concluded that Northwest fisheries managers needed to recognize warm-water events sooner and respond faster.

The report also noted faulty temperature readings last year caused managers to reduce cold-water releases from Dworshak Dam just when Snake River sockeye needed it most, a miscue that managers are seeking to avoid this year.

"With such hot weather forecasted to continue, water temperature at Lower Granite could soon exceed 68 degrees if not regulated, creating conditions in the reservoir system that are unhealthy for ESA-listed fish," Steve Hall of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said in a statement. It announced the increased flows and referred to salmon and steelhead protected under the Endangered Species Act.

In addition, the Columbia River Technical Management Team recommended last week releasing colder water from deeper in Lower Granite Dam to help keep the Snake River cooler. The Army Corps of Engineers, which controls releases at the dam, quickly approved.

"This one was discussed for weeks and weeks last year," Graves said. "This year everybody decided to give it a try."

BLOOMIN' BLUES

Photo courtesy Bruce Barnes

Douglas' knotweed

By BRUCE BARNES
For The East Oregonian

Name: Douglas' knotweed

Scientific name: *Polygonum douglasii*

This little plant is a very common annual that is found throughout North America, though it is a little more common in the West and in dry locations. It probably deserves some recognition here simply because there is really nothing about it to catch one's eye, and is more like to get stepped on and ignored than noticed. At the same time, a close, in-your-face examination reveals a rather delicate, thread-like, attractive plant with tiny flowers.

The plant is in the knotweed family, Polygonaceae. The *Polygonum* genus is the "type genus" for the family, meaning the plants of the genus are considered typical of the family. The name comes from the Greek "poly" meaning many, and "gonu" for knee. Most of the plant species in this genus, including this one, have stem nodes that appear somewhat jointed as in a knee. The species name *douglasii* is coincidentally the same as in the *Chaenactis douglasii* featured in last week's article, referring to David Douglas.

Douglas' knotweed is not an aggressive weed by most standards. The name "knotweed" is used for nearly all members of the genus, referring to the tangled stems of some species looking like tough, knotted twine.

The plant can grow to about two feet in height with several branches. The leaves are narrowly linear and average about an inch in length in larger plants. The small flowers can vary from white to pink or even greenish, and are only about an eighth of an inch long with 5 petals.

Several tribes in the northwest made use of this plant. One tribe collected the tiny seeds and ground or parched them for food. Others prepared the plant and used it to snuff for treating nose problems.

Where to find: This plant is easiest to spot in fairly open, dry, sandy or rocky ground at about any elevation. The trick is to actually look for it and not be distracted by bigger and more showy plants nearby.

Survival tips for bear country

By RACHEL D'ORO
Associated Press

AP file photos

In this Wednesday, July 6, 2011, file photo, a grizzly bear roams near Beaver Lake in Yellowstone National Park, Wy. Federal officials have reported a dramatic increase in bear numbers in recent decades and estimate more than 700 now live in and around Yellowstone National Park.

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — A basic rule on what to do when encountering a bear in the wilderness is so common, it's long been a mantra: "If it's brown, you lie down. If it's black, you fight back."

But there's a caveat for run-ins with brown — or grizzly — bears. The idea is to play dead only after a brown bear has struck or is about to, not before, wildlife biologist Pat Owen said Tuesday, following an attack on a female hiker last week at Alaska's Denali National Park.

"The right thing to do is not drop until that bear is practically on top of you," said Owen, who teaches bear safety training at the park.

The woman survived, but the Friday bear attack was among the latest in the U.S. Just days before, a man was killed by a grizzly bear while mountain biking near Montana's Glacier National Park last week. At least three others have been reported this year.

Bear attacks are rare, although the chances of being injured by one multiply in the backcountry. For example, 45 people were injured by bears at Yellowstone National Park between 1980 and 2014 out of the nearly 100 million visitors to the park during that time.

Some tips to keep in mind when enjoying the outdoors in Bear Country this summer:

GRIZZLY GRAY AREA

The 28-year-old woman attacked at Denali was hiking a trail with two friends Friday evening when they saw the bear. Park officials said the bear charged and the three immediately played dead. The bear bit and scratched the woman before walking away. The animal returned a few minutes later and one of the hikers threw rocks at it. Park officials said later playing dead is appropriate when physical contact has happened or is imminent. But done prematurely, Owen said, the bear can grow curious.

The problem, Owen said, is the definition of imminent. "Your perception of imminent contact and my perception of imminent contact might be vastly different," she said.

MAKE YOURSELF BIGGER

Before the Friday attack at Denali, a large group of park visitors there encountered the same young grizzly. Instead of playing dead, they bunched together, shouting and waving their arms until they scared it off. Park officials say that's exactly what to do.

THE NOISER, THE BETTER

It's a good idea to make a lot of noise when traveling through bear territory to avoid the element of surprise, which is behind a good number of bear maulings. Around Alaska, in fact, it's not unusual to hear hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts repeatedly calling out, "Hey bear!" Some people clap their hands. Some wear bear bells. The idea is to alert bears and avoid creeping up on them.

WATCH OUT FOR MAMA BEARS

Sows with cubs are especially sensitive to the presence of humans, so make sure you're never between a mama bear and her young, experts said. Brown bears can be especially dangerous in protecting their young, according to Alaska Department of Fish and Game spokesman Ken Marsh. "Brown bears are particularly aggressive," he said.

BE ALERT

Most of the time, nothing is going to happen if people take common precautions, such as traveling in groups, keeping dogs on leashes, carrying bear spray and being aware of their surroundings, notes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks spokesman Ron Aasheim.

"Gosh, 99.999 percent of the time, nothing is going to happen," he said Friday. "Most bears want to avoid you."