

# Local steelhead fishing rebounding

By Rocky Wilson  
Wallowa County Chieftain

ODFW Assistant District Fish Biologist Kyle Bratcher says steelhead harvest success commonly is calculated in 10-hour-per-fish increments. During much of this steelhead season, however — and especially since December — whenever the Grande Ronde and Wallowa rivers have been fishable, the harvest rate regularly has hovered below five hours fishing for each steelhead caught.

Reports of steelhead fishing success have also come on the Imnaha River, but to date that's been of the word-of-mouth and not physical creel-count variety. The first official ODFW creel counter did not get sent to Imnaha until after rain and warm weather "blew out" the river last weekend, a factor that skyrockets catch rates. Verbal reports prior to the "blow-out" had been favorable as well.

Bratcher says catch rates are the best locally since 2010 when the ODFW in-

flated allowable harvest numbers.

Although not so in the Imnaha River where smaller 1-salt fish, as expected, are making up 70 percent of the anticipated run of 3,000 steelhead, fish returning to the Grande Ronde and Wallowa rivers, as a whole, are of the larger 2-salt variety. For some unknown reason, says Bratcher, the estimated 9,000 steelhead returning to those two rivers are split equally between 1-salt and 2-salt fish.

And the difference in size, for sports fishermen, is significant. On average, says Bratcher, 2-salt fish (meaning they spent two years in the ocean before returning upstream) are between 25 and 30 inches in length. In contrast, most 1-salt fish are in the 22- to 25-inch range.

Although he's heard unconfirmed stories of larger fish this year, Bratcher says the largest he's seen and measured was a 32-inch wild steelhead caught and released from the Grande Ronde River, just downstream from Troy.

According to the assistant fish biologist, the 2014-2015 fishing season has been atypical in that fishers have been landing steelhead on a relatively consistent basis throughout the season. Although success rates did slow as normal during the winter months, he says, that dip was less significant than normal this season in the Wallowa and Grande Ronde rivers.

"People are catching steelhead on flies, bait, jigs, and spinners," Bratcher says.

Until the recent high waters, the Wallowa River — with peak fishing normally in the months of February and March — had experienced great fishing, he notes. He expects that to continue for a season that ends April 15.

As will be done one or two additional times this season, the ODFW dumped 60 surplus hatchery fish into Marr Pond last week. When that happens, says Bratcher, those fish, by regulation, no longer are considered to be steelhead. If caught, no harvest tags need to be punched. In that instance the fish is considered to be one in excess of 20 inches in length and only one fish per person per day can be harvested.



Rich Rautenstrauch/Chieftain

Joseph Eagle Satori Albee tries to shoot over Wallowa's Calli Miller during a Feb. 10 makeup game in Joseph. The E-Gals put the skids on the Cougars, who entered with an eight-game winning streak.

## E-Gals drop two of three

By S.F. Tool  
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — A hefty three-game schedule for the week proved a bit much for the E-Gals as they ended the week 1-2. The schedule included games against Wallowa, Helix and Nixyaawii.

On Feb. 10, the Joseph girls

squeaked by a tough Wallowa team, 42-40, that was riding an eight-game winning streak. Despite shooting only .370 from the floor, the E-Gals spread their scoring within the ranks with Satori Albee scoring 11, Lindsay Kemp 10, and Alexis Sykora seven. Sykora tore down 17 rebounds while Albee followed with 10.

Joseph's Feb. 13 game against Helix proved a tough one for the E-Gals as they lost a heartbreaker, 66-59, despite scoring 21 in the fourth quarter.

"I don't know what happened. We didn't shoot the best from the free throw line. The Helix coach told me it was the most points they've scored since he'd been coaching. It must have been their night," said Joseph coach Travis Huffman.

Shooting .390 from the floor, the E-Gals again spread out the scoring with Sykora chalking up 23, Albee following with 15 and Kemp with 13.

Valentine's day proved anything but loving as Nixyaawii stomped the E-Gals' hearts 52-34. The team shot only .297 from the floor, while serving up more turnovers than an Amish breakfast with 30. No E-Gal scored in double digits. Sykora and Natalie Williams led the scoring with eight apiece.

"Nixyaawii moved the ball and shot the ball real well against us. I only played Alexis 10 or 12 minutes because she'd turned her ankle in practice. We need her for the Pine Eagle playoff game at home on Tuesday for district," Huffman said.



### Pet of the Week



Rowdy is a fun little boy, about four months old. He arrived with four sisters, but now is alone. He is loveable and curious and playful and needs a home. He doesn't even mind a dog. He has had shots and de-worming, and a \$35 Adoption Fee covers his neuter when he is older. He is a Wallowa County Humane Society kitty, call Karen in Joseph if interested in an interview:

541-432-7310

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