

# SEASON: Run second largest in five years

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Without sharing estimated, but lower percentages, Yanke says hatcheries at Big Canyon, also on the Wallowa River nearer to Minam, and at the Little Sheep facility just off the Imnaha River have evidenced an upswing in steelhead returnees within the past couple weeks.

With the exception of the Wallowa Hatchery — where ownership is shared between ODFW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — the three hatchery facilities in Wallowa County are owned by the federal agency and operated by ODFW, says Yanke.

Still, the steelhead fisheries programs conducted for the Wallowa River and that for the Imnaha River are totally different, says Yanke, suggesting that counts and overall trends are not studied the same.

A certain percentage of



Rich Rautenstauch/Chieftain

**Cow Creek village as it is being called locally was pretty busy last weekend of spring break. Although it may look a little crowded there were plenty of holes to fish downstream. The week of weather on the river was beautiful with temperatures reaching into the 80s on Thursday.**

potential broodstock that arrive at the Wallowa Hatchery during a particular week during steelhead season are

set aside for that purpose, while any beyond that number either are stocked in ponds or shipped to food banks. Only if the desired percentage of broodstock does not arrive at Wallowa Hatchery on a given week, not a common occurrence, will steelhead returning to the Big Canyon facility be used for broodstock, Yanke says. Other than that, ODFW's primary objective for steelhead returning to Big Canyon is to be available for sport fishermen to catch.

This year has been especially good along those lines, says Yanke, because waters in Deer Creek (where the Big Canyon facility sits) have remained low, causing many of those anadromous fish to remain in Wallowa River's waters just below Deer Creek's

confluence there for lengthy periods of time.

"There will come a time when instinct will overcome environmental variables," says Yanke, indicating that the innate need to spawn will prevail if fishermen have not already caught the large fish.

Although variables reign, says Yanke, he suggests that bright, warm weather can prove detrimental to steelhead fishing. "If fish don't have cover and are more exposed, they are not as ready to bite," Yanke says. He adds that it's shortly after a major "flow event" when steelhead fishing success seems to be more likely.

Creel counts for the Wallowa River, a less than ideal indicator of overall success, according to Yanke, indicated that during March 25, 26, 28, and 29 the average time it took to catch one steelhead was 7.9 hours.

## GIVEAWAY: Excess captured fish distributed

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And that's only the tip of the iceberg, says Wallowa Hatchery Manager Ron Harrod, who estimates a total of between 1,500 and 2,000 steelhead from the Wallowa Hatchery and Big Canyon Hatchery along the Wallowa River, plus from Little Sheep Hatchery near the Imnaha River will be distributed or stocked in area ponds to maximize benefits from the 2015 spring steelhead run on those two rivers.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), in conjunction with the Joseph office of Nez Perce Tribe Fisheries, and Community Connection for the steelhead giveaway in Wallowa County, is spearheading an overall effort that's sharing excess steelhead with food banks in Baker City, North Powder, Union, La Grande, and Elgin as well as with the local Community Connection. Additionally, ODFW stocks steelhead in Marr and Weaver ponds in Wallowa County plus Roulet Pond in Union County east of Elgin.

Jeanette Johnson, assistant manager of Community Connection's Enterprise office, said as of March 23 a total of 308 steelhead in three batches had been distributed from either the Community Connection office in Enterprise or the Wallowa Senior Center.

Giveaways on Feb. 25 (75 fish) and March 23 (65 fish)

were of excess steelhead captured in traps at the Little Sheep Fish Hatchery, while 168 steelhead captured at the Wallowa Hatchery were distributed at the two distribution sites on March 18.

Depending on the physical condition of the fish that have returned from the Pacific Ocean to complete their life cycles, one or possibly two additional giveaways could be in the offing.

News about future steelhead giveaways in Wallowa County, says Johnson, will be aired over KWVR Radio or may be obtained by phoning Community Connection at 541-426-3840. Normally given away on Mondays or even Wednesdays, the availability of fish to give away often is not known in advance.

Harrod says, among steelhead returning to hatcheries in the county, enough are set aside to use for broodstock with the remainder either killed, iced, and distributed to food banks or planted in any of the three aforementioned ponds for sport fishing.

To prevent hatchery fish from negatively impacting wild steelhead counts, hatchery fish are not returned to open water and allowed to spawn, he says.

Compared with high-count years when as many as 4,000 excess hatchery steelhead in Wallowa County are distributed or stocked in ponds, Harrod describes the 2015 spring steelhead run as "average."

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## RIBICH: EHS grad wins 1500

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Alternating between 1500-meter and 5000-meter races in the early season, Ribich's goal is to run under 3:45 at the 1500-meter distance, an accomplishment that would allow him, as a

freshman, to qualify for the NCAA Division II Championships to be held May 21-23 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

His next attempt to crack the 3:45 barrier at that roughly one-mile distance will come this weekend while competing at 1500

meters in a track meet to be held in San Francisco.

While in high school, Ribich won individual state titles in cross country and, in the sport of track, won state championships in the 1500 and 3000 meter runs.

## TRACK: This year's roster breaks participation record

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On the boys' side, Ent/Wal of course benefits from the return of the five state qualifiers mentioned earlier (six if Christoffersen is added), and Moody is hoping this will be the year the Outlaw boys fi-

nally beat out Central Linn to finish first at state. The Outlaws have finished second to Central Linn the past four years. "We'd like to break that," Moody said.

Outlaws 2015 track and field roster:  
Girls: Andrea Butterfield,

Autumn Landowski, Breanna Phelps, Dawn Mist Movich-Fields, Eliza Irish, Ellie Van Doozer, Emma Emilsdottir, Georgia Falk, Gwen Nohr, Heidi Niezen, Jolene Ginther, Kari Rose, Kathi Rudzio, Kimberly McQuown, Madison Falk, Morgan Anderson, Nodya Papineau, Reagan Bedard, Reanna Royle, Riley Gray, Sarah Abdeldayem, Sarah Madsen, Sofia Putruele, Stacey Douglass, Taylor Jenkins, Victoria Lattin, Zoe Sallada.

Boys: Aaron Schaafsma, Adrian Widener, Andrew Curtis, Blaze Lepper, Brandon Frolander, Chance Goebel, Chandler Burns, Daniel Kohlhepp, Ermano Laici, Ethan Birkmaier, Ethan Burns, Grant Jones, Jacob Everts, Jacob Strampe, James Madsen, Kaden Lathrop, Kurt Norton, Micah Fuller, Nathaniel Perren, Nikolai Christoffersen, Paul Stangel, Rocky Davidson, Sebastian Hobbs, Tanner Koski, Trent Bales.

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