

STEELHEAD SEASON OFF TO SLOW START



Steelhead fishing

Steelhead fishing slow on area rivers

Bag limits have been reduced, but dedicated steelhead anglers are finding limited success on Northeast Oregon rivers such as the Grande Ronde.

Steelhead fishing has been difficult this year due to the low numbers of returning fish and low flows, according to the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife. The few anglers that have recently been on the Grande Ronde are finding some success and respectable catch rates. The warmer weather and rain has caused the river to thaw and will be fishable over the holidays.

Fishing has been slow on the Imnaha River, and a few steelhead have been caught in the Wallowa, though ODFW says success rates will be low until fish have more time to move into the system.

Anglers are reminded that through Dec. 31, the daily bag limit is one hatchery steelhead in the following creeks and rivers: Grande Ronde River upstream to Meadow Creek; Imnaha River downstream of Big Sheep Creek; Wallowa River from the mouth upstream to Trout Creek; Big Sheep Creek downstream of Little Sheep Creek; Wenaha River down-

stream of Crooked Creek and Catherine Creek from the mouth to the Hwy 203 bridge above Catherine Creek State Park.

Bag limits were reduced to protect limited numbers of wild fish returning to the Snake River Basin and to ensure hatchery programs meet production goals.

Fishing on Wallowa Lake typically slows during the fall and winter. However, for the angler that is willing to tough it out, some large fish can be available. Stocked fish have now been in the lake long enough that they have keyed in on natural foods. Try fishing live worms, grubs, or flies that imitate midges, mayflies and crawdads.

Kokanee fishing has improved recently and large fish are being caught. A reduction in the population size has allowed for fish to grow larger and anglers are catching fish up to 20-inches with the average around 13-inches.

Ice fishing on Kinney lake should be good once the surface is frozen solid, and anglers should consider Marr Pond, which has been stocked with legal and trophy trout and where repairs have been completed.

'Flexible spills' could help salmon survive

Dams on Columbia, Snake rivers will be affected

Oregon Public Broadcasting

A new agreement aims to help more young salmon make their way past dams along the Columbia and Snake rivers.

The agreement, released Tuesday, spells out new strategies for spilling more water over the dams — and sending less water through power-generating turbines — each spring. It signals a reprieve to the yearslong legal skirmishes that have been playing out in federal courts over how best to save salmon and steelhead from extinction.

The fish face a number of challenges because of the hydroelectric dams built on the two rivers throughout the 20th century. Those threats include miles of slackwater behind dams, forcing juvenile fish to swim down rivers where currents previously carried them along. Dams also have created more opportunities for predators like sea lions and cormorants to prey on young salmon. And getting past the dams and their turbine blades presents dangers of its own.

Government and tribal leaders announced the new agreement, describing it as a way to strike a balance between fish survival and continued hydropower generation from eight dams on the lower Columbia and Snake rivers.

Spilling water has been ordered by the courts in the past, as recently as last spring.

But those orders have created friction between salmon recovery advocates and groups that say curbing the flow of water means less electricity — and that means higher rates for

customers.

This latest approach calls for "flexible spill," according to a joint statement released by the agreement's parties. In other words, dam operators would control the volume of water that gets released to help move fish downriver; more water when electricity demand is lower, less water when there's high demand for electricity. During those high-demand periods, more

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Jim Litchfield, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners

water would be sent through power-generating turbines.

These new strategies for spilling water past the dams would be in place for three years on eight dams on the lower Columbia and Snake rivers. The agreement "avoids litigation" during that three-year period.

"I don't think this piece would be the solution, but it might be the start of a move toward a solution, and that's what I think we're all hopeful for," said Jim Litchfield, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners, a group that has opposed increased spill in the past.

"At the same time, we are concerned about the

unprecedented and scientifically unproven levels of new spill being contemplated by the agreement," said Litchfield, whose group represents utilities, ports, farms and other operations that support dams.

Fishing and environmental advocacy groups characterized the agreement an important incremental step in the right direction.

"The urgency for strong action remains, while Columbia Basin salmon remain on life support," said Glen Spain, Northwest regional director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations.

The parties that agreed to the new spill strategy include the Washington, Oregon and the Nez Perce Tribe in Idaho. Other parties include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation, which operate the dams, and the Bonneville Power Administration, which markets hydropower to utilities and other customers.

Bonneville Power Administration spokesman Dave Wilson said the plan could keep everyone out of court for the next three years.

"The new approach is collaboration rather than litigation, working together the states, tribes, federal agencies," he said. "We're going to try to do it all."

Some, including the federal judge who previously presided over the case, and more recently, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, have called for research or consideration for the removal of dams on the lower Snake River. It's an idea that's been discussed as way to save salmon and ensure they are plentiful enough for orca survival in the Northwest — especially if more incremental steps don't work.

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