

Don't run away from runoff: Fishing high water

When rivers are totally blown out, catching fish is a tough proposition, if not impossible, but if a river is just higher and cloudier than usual, don't let that stop you from fishing. The fish are still eating, and if you change the way you view the river and the way you fish it you can still be successful. You might even catch your biggest fish of the year, because a few of the problems runoff brings can be blessings in disguise.

For starters, there's a lot of food in the water right now. Strong currents dislodge an abundance of insects from the river bottom, and the high waters are picking up insects from shore like beetles and earthworms.

Since visibility is low and velocity is high, not all of that food is accessible to fish, but that can actually help the angler. The places a fish will be feeding during runoff are decreased, so



TAILGATE

Chris Lozier

if you find those places, you've probably found the fish.

Look for soft water bordering faster water, and fish the seam — and the soft side of the seam — that those merging currents create. Fish like to rest in slow water while keeping an eye on the conveyor-o-bugs speeding by them. They'll dart out to pick up food, then slip back to their holding water.

Small side channels you would ignore in the summer might hold fish now if they offer a relief from rapid water. And while you need to cover many different spots in the river during normal flows, during runoff fish often hug the

shores since it offers a consistent current break. That means you probably don't have to wade to get to the fish right now, and with stronger currents, more debris in the water, and limited visibility, wading this time of year is risky.

Even though murky water shortens a fish's field of vision, it does offer a couple advantages. You can get closer to the fish — even large fish — without spooking them, and they have less time to examine your offering and reject it. They have to react quickly.

Once you find the right water, you could try dry flies if bugs are hatching, but fishing subsurface with nymphs, streamers, spinners or bait — where allowed, be sure to check the regulations — will usually be more effective. Fish close to the bottom, using extra weight if needed, because the current near the bottom of the river is often slower than the current at the surface.

If you're nymph fishing, try drop shot or European techniques to get down and stay down, and consider using bright indicator tippet and/or keeping a tight line to tell you when you have a take. Floating indicators will still work, but they might pull your flies at surface speed rather than bottom speed, and if they're suspended too far off the bottom in murky water the fish may not see them. You can add weight to a floating indicator rig and move the indicator higher to make sure you have good contact with the bottom while still seeing strikes.

Rob Lamb at the Joseph Fly Shoppe says it's a good idea to increase your leader strength, too, since fish can pull much harder if they get out into the strong current. He also recommends taking salmon fly patterns since trout love to eat them before, during and after they crawl on shore to hatch.

Some folks say you need big-

ger, brighter lures to attract attention, and that may be an effective tactic, but the fish are keyed in on the same small insects and fish they eat every day, so as long as your offerings look like food and you put them in the right zone, fish will probably bite if they're in the mood. Their attitude has a lot to do with it, so if you can pick, fish during stable or falling flows, rather than rising water, which can stop the bite.

Finally, cover the water in small increments. You need to get your offering right in front of the fish, so move slowly across the fishable water with each cast and thoroughly cover your target. In fast murky water, fish might need a second chance to take your bait, so give them plenty of opportunities.

Chris is a guest contributor to the column "Tailgate". He has a degree in English from Whitworth University and lives with his wife in Enterprise.

LETTERS to the EDITOR

We should come together, not tear one another down

Regarding Joseph City Council decisions

I'm writing this response to Christina Knecht's recent letter to the editor — an ill-mannered attempt at discrediting Teresa Sajonia.

When it comes to the Farmer's Market, we all encourage this market as a place for us to come together to visit local vendors. We enjoy the environment that our local Farmer's Market provides. My question to Knecht is simple: Where did this information come from?

Some underlining motive to point the blame at one individual for reasons unknown. Moving the location of the Market is not one persons doing. The goal is to move it to a location that is safer and accessible to all locals, and those who are welcomed during their travels. We have an amazing opportunity to offer local vendors a place to sell their goods. All of the fees associated go back into the Farmer's Market.

I would love to see the community come together to decide on the best location for the market, instead of tearing down one of our own. My family has enjoyed the Farmer's Market and Ember's over the years.

The music is a wonderful treat. I question whether anyone one can say what Knecht said was accurate, or that even she heard those words come from Sajonia. I would like to break the gossip. How do we want to represent our community as a whole? Do we want to take one persons word as truth or push forward to keep our community the best that it already is?

Tiana Fough Joseph

Why the Planning Commission made the right decision

Joseph Branch Trail Consortium filed a CUP with the Wallowa County Planning Commission on Jan. 9. The permit was denied 5-1 by the Planning Commission. JBTC Appealed. JBTC wants to build a six mile trail from Joseph to Enterprise. Most of it is zoned for Exclusive Farm Use. Many of the farmers, ranchers and residents oppose due to harm they believe this will cause to their farming operations.

JBTC initially spoke to landowners about their concerns and objections. JBTC then moved forward with their project. In 2016 JBTC quit talking to landowners. Landowners wrongly assumed the silence meant the plan was abandoned.

The commission sent landowners notices and published the Permit on Feb. 6. In January JBTC asked members to send support letters to the commission by Feb. 8. Support letters were received by the commission early in the process. Opponents submitted their letters before the deadline but got an unfair late start. The commission wrote a "Staff Report" by Feb. 14 making its recommendation based on available material.

The commission is appointed by our County Commissioners. They are unpaid volunteers comprised of people with broad knowledge in real estate, agriculture, engineering; a former count assessor and a retired resident. The County Commissioners had enough faith in their expertise, dedication to their community and ability to understand the law as it applies to

land use to appoint these people to the commission.

The commission bases their decisions on the facts presented to them in both the application and additional materials submitted. Different types of letters are likely weighed differently. Letters expressing opinion such as "I hate the idea of a trail in MY backyard" or "I love the idea of a trail in THEIR backyard" may not be weighed as heavily as letters with specific statements or claims. Such as, letters detailing specific harm to farmers operations or citing the Application meets standards of "traffic calming."

The law states: "The purpose of the Exclusive Farm Use Zone is to provide areas for the continuation of existing commercial agricultural activities and permit the establishment of only those new uses which are compatible with agricultural activities. The intention of the Exclusive Farm Use Zone is to guarantee the preservation of the areas classified as farm use free from conflicting non-farm uses." The commission considered this and other laws when making their decision.

As a rancher in Wallowa County I sympathize with the farmers and ranchers along this section of the trail. I believe the commission made the right decision. It dismays me to see the verbal abuse heaped on the Planning Commission by members of the public who disagree with them. I am grateful to them for having the spine to make unpopular decisions, and wish to take this opportunity to thank them for their hard work.

Rob Taylor Enterprise

Spring prescribed burning projects to begin on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

Baker City, Ore. — As warmer, drier weather takes hold in Eastern Oregon, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is ready to begin spring prescribed burning to reduce hazardous fuels on up to 10,000 acres of the National Forest.

"By getting good fire back into the forest, we're protecting communities while restoring and sustaining the land," forest Fuels Program Manager Steve Hawkins said. "We appreciate the cooperation and understanding of our stakeholders as we work toward our shared goal of healthy landscapes in Eastern Oregon."

The National Forest prioritized the Wallowa and Union County areas listed below for prescribed burning this spring. To access maps of the burn units, please visit <https://inciweb.nwccg.gov/incident/maps/6289/>.

The Wallowa Fire Zone (WFZ) — (541) 426-4978 (Wallowa Valley Ranger District, Hells Canyon NRA and Eagle Cap Ranger District). The WFZ plans to conduct prescribed burning on up to 3,000 acres this spring, which may include:

Chesnimus Elk (1,000 acres) — 30 miles northeast of Enterprise, OR
B-Vine (1,000 acres) — 30 miles north/northeast of Enterprise, OR
Muddy Sled (1,000 acres)

— 20 miles north of Enterprise, OR

The Grande Ronde Fire Zone (GRFZ) — (541) 963-7186 (La Grande Ranger District). The GRFZ plans to conduct prescribed burning on up to 3,000 acres this spring, which may include:

Horse Fly (500 acres) — 13 miles southwest of La Grande, OR near Vey Meadows and Blue Springs

Trail (600 acres) — 8 miles northwest of La Grande, OR near Mount Emily

Rooster (200 acres) — 21 miles southwest of La Grande, OR near Vey Meadows

Birdtrack (1,200 acres) — 9 miles west of La Grande in the Spring Creek Area

Sandbox (500 acres) — 12 miles southeast of Union, OR near Catherine Creek Snow Park

Please note that actual acres within a project area may vary due to fuel conditions, smoke dispersion, wind patterns, and other variables. Acres may be higher or lower in some project areas than listed. Weather, fuel conditions, and smoke will determine where and when units are For further information, please contact:

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Supervisor's Office at (541) 523-6391

Lightning Creek Flood



Wallowa Commissioners issued a flood warning. Photographed: Lightning Creek

Ellen Morris Bishop