

Chinook salmon returns better than expected

Fishing season for Chinook remains closed

Ellen Morris Bishop
Wallowa County Chieftain



Ellen M Bishop

Nez Perce Tribal Fisheries technician Dominic Higheagle (right) and fisheries biologist Ryan Rumelhart wade down the Lostine River with radio gear in search of chinook salmon that they tagged at the Nez Perce weir a day earlier.

This year, returns of Chinook salmon into their natal Northwest streams have been dismally low. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife canceled recreational and commercial fishing in the lower Columbia River, many coastal streams, and in virtually all of the Snake River and eastern Oregon.

But although the return outlook remains guarded, and the season is still closed, more Chinook than expected have returned to the Lostine and Wallowa Rivers, said Nez Perce Fisheries biologist Ryan Rumelhart. Along with Nez Perce Fisheries technician Dominic Higheagle, he has been tagging the big fish and tracking their migration up the Lostine to locate their redds.

"There are about 300 fish in the Wallowa and Lostine Rivers now," Rumelhart said. "Not many are wild fish. But overall the returns here are good—better than we expected. And the fish are in good condition. Because the fishing season was closed downriver, they did not have to endure getting caught and injured, or dealing with nets." So far, the Chinook have not started to spawn. And that has seen no pre-spawning mortality.

The influx of late snow melt also means that local streams are running higher

and cooler than in the last few years, Rumelhart noted. That has also helped the fish migrate more easily and stay healthy.

Wallowa County's returning Chinook salmon usually appear in two distinct groups—one in late July to early August and another in late August. Rumelhart is concerned that this year the second wave may not be coming. "The fish just appeared suddenly, and the run is not tapering off like it usually does," he said. "It seems as though everybody is coming upstream while conditions are good, instead of holding lower down."

Chinook numbers in the Lostine River had been in a precipitous decline. In 1974, more than 140 redds were counted in the Los-

time. In 1995 there were only 11. With the help of the Nez Perce's Chinook supplementation program at Looking Glass Hatchery, which releases its smolts into the Lostine River, about 500 Chinook returned to the Lostine in 2009, and an estimated 3,000 Chinook made it back in 2010. Last year's returns were somewhat lower, according to Rumelhart.

Ocean conditions are a major reason for last year and this year's region-wide low returns of Chinook. NOAA Fisheries data indicate that deep water temperatures as well as food resources have led to poor survival rates for juvenile fish. Low stream flows and high temperatures exacerbated these problems last year, and in many locations

this season. Chinook numbers have been in precipitous decline since a spike in their numbers in 2012.

The 2019 returns may temporarily reverse this trend. Although the first Chinook to appear this season were relatively small—less than 700mm or a little more than 2 feet long—now larger fish, up to 3 feet in length, are migrating upstream. But don't get your fishing pole out. The Chinook season in the Lostine river and elsewhere is closed. "We actually had a season that allowed for catch of either three hatchery fish or just one wild fish," Rumelhart said. "A couple of days into the season, that one wild fish was caught. And so we just shut down fishing right then and there."

Costs of removing Snake River dams 'extremely uncertain'

Matthew Weaver
Capital Press

SPOKANE — More work needs to be done to determine the cost and impact on the region's power grid in the next 30 to 50 years if four dams on the Snake River are removed, experts say.

The Washington State Democrats Ag and Rural Caucus held a forum July 26 in Spokane about the effects of possible removal of the Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose and Lower Granite dams on the regional power grid.

Environmental groups have for years called for removal of the dams, citing their impacts on federally protected salmon. Lately orcas have been added to list of impacted species. Agriculture groups say removing the dams won't have the positive effects on fish the groups seek but will hurt the power grid and river transportation.

Ben Kujala, power planning division director for the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, said he has not seen a compelling study that looks far enough into the future at the "extremely uncertain" costs of removing or replacing the four dams.

"A lot of people point to studies about the Lower Snakes that are 10 years old," he said. "There's no way those studies have any relevance to what we're looking at today."

Even the value of the dams last year doesn't determine what their value will be in the next 20 years,

included in a draft environmental impact statement, slated to be released in February, said Rob Petty, power forecasting and planning manager at the Bonneville Power Administration. Costs will become clearer then, he said.

The agencies today are not necessarily studying the dams' impacts on the rest of the western power grid, Kujala said.

Five states, including California and Washington, are moving into 100% "clean" energy, not using natural gas.

California is slated to remove 45% of its natural gas power generation by 2045, Kujala said. Bonneville Power Administration buys power from California.

"They don't know if they're going to pay \$10 or \$1,500 for that power," he said. "That's a really big range of 'What does it cost to replace something like the lower Snake River dams?'"

Removing the dams would require more generation elsewhere on the grid.

"That replacement is more than likely going to come from thermal plants, unless you do something very intentional to make sure it's not," he said. "That means you're going to have more greenhouse gas emissions in the Western grid from removal."

It's possible to remove the dams and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Kujala said, but it would require a different approach and be more expensive.

"I think this would be a discouraging conversation to anyone who says, 'We've got to take the dams out,'" said caucus chairman Don Schwerin.

The caucus is willing to consider dam removal for political, biological or economic reasons, but wants to be sure mitigations are in place before it happens, Schwerin said.

Schwerin said some advocates of keeping the dams have protested even discussing their removal.

"It's irresponsible for this region not to talk about this, it's irresponsible to assume that we have some political super-armor that's going to insulate us," he said. "We have to look at these questions and try to anticipate what would happen and get that resolved."

The caucus previously discussed the impact of dam removal on fish passage in April.

The caucus will next discuss the impacts of removing the dams on barge and rail transportation. The meeting has not been scheduled. Schwerin said he hopes to hold it in the Colfax, Wash., area.

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CLUES ACROSS

1. "My ___ 1. Commands to Trigger
5. Play section
8. Urge on
12. Doorway out
13. "Isn't ___ Lovely?"
14. Fad
15. List of choices
16. Key lime ___
17. Blunders
18. Fire starter
20. Hide-and-___
21. Casual shoe
24. Derby or cap
26. Hole punch
27. Tire input
29. Plunders
33. Faced
34. Growl
36. ___ you kidding?
37. Love deeply
39. Sunday seat
40. Small number
41. Provoke
43. Diminish
45. Paper holder
48. Vexed
50. Circle
51. Hint
52. Tennis shots
56. Poker term
57. Tee preceder
58. Meadow bird
59. Interpret writing

60. Envision

61. Command to a dog

CLUES DOWN

1. Dress bottom
2. Lumberjack's implement
3. Come in first
4. Cram
5. Pain reliever
6. Lower jaw
7. Molars, e.g.
8. Immediately
9. Not fully cooked
10. Folklore giant
11. Roll-top, for one
19. Renter
21. Tibetan holy man
22. Had obligations to
23. Female voice
25. Wrong
28. Hip-hopper's music
30. Dunces
31. Maple or cedar
32. Machine-stitched
35. Fall back
38. Tore
42. Wind toys
44. Retailer
45. Blacken
46. The ___ Ranger
47. Little bit
49. Stand up
53. Cereal type
54. Swimsuit piece
55. Cloud's locale

Church Directory

Church of Christ
502 W. 2nd Street • Wallowa
541-398-2509
Worship at 11 a.m.
Mid-week Bible Study 7 p.m.

Grace Lutheran Church
409 West Main -Enterprise
SUNDAY WORSHIP at 9am
Mission Project: "Bag It for School"
School clothes for Foster Children
phone (message): 541-426-4633
web: gracelutheranenterprise.com

St. Katherine's Catholic Church
Fr. Thomas Puduppulliparamban
301 E. Garfield Enterprise
Mass Schedule
Sundays: St. Pius X, Wallowa - 8:00 am
St. Katherine of Siena, Enterprise 10:30am
Saturdays: St. Katherine of Siena, Enterprise 5:30pm
Weekday: St. Katherine of Siena, Enterprise - 8:00am (Monday - Thursday and First Friday)
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St. Patrick's Episcopal Church
100 NE 3rd St, Enterprise
NE 3rd & Main St
541-426-3439
Worship Service Sunday 9:30am

Joseph United Methodist Church
3rd & Lake St. • Joseph
Pastor Cherie Dearth
Phone: 541-432-3102
Sunday Worship Service 10:00 am
JosephUMC.org

Summit Church
Gospel Centered Community
Service time: 10:30 am
Cloverleaf Hall in Enterprise
541-426-2150
Interim Pastor: Rich Hagenbaugh
www.summitchurchoregon.org

Enterprise Christian Church
85035 Joseph Hwy • (541) 426-3449
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Sunday School at 10:30 a.m.
Evening Worship at 6 p.m. (nursery at A.M. services)
"Loving God & One Another"
David Bruce, Sr. - Minister

Christ Covenant Church
Pastor Terry Tollefson
Church Office: 541-263-0505
Family Prayer: 9:30 am
Worship Service: 10:00 am
723 College Street
Lostine

Lostine Presbyterian Church
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541.398.0597
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Stephen Kliever, Minister

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