

STEELHEAD

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Yanke said the Grande Ronde and Wallowa rivers would likely see that 3:1 ratio of wild to hatchery steelhead, while the Imnaha River was likely to see roughly even numbers of each.

Wild steelhead cannot be kept by anglers and, when caught, must be released to spawn and die in their home rivers, thus completing their salmonid life cycle and depositing nutrients into the local ecosystem. Yanke said those nutrients are important for local plant and animal life.

Water from the Grande Ronde and Wallowa rivers is also used to irrigate farmland throughout the region.

Yanke said that a driving factor for the low steelhead returns were poor ocean

conditions, which he described as being so complex that it “would be a days-long phone conversation to explain.” But he did note that warm ocean temperatures and a persistent El Nino weather pattern had contributed to poor survival rates for Pacific steelhead.

“It’s good to talk about,” said Yanke. “If Northeast Oregon steelhead were the only steelhead population in the Columbia Basin that was doing poorly, you’d expect that there were some localized things going on here. But it kind of paints a picture across the Columbia Basin of what’s going on with anadromous fish stocks.”

While hatchery fish might prove scarce for Northeastern Oregon anglers this year, Yanke said there would still be plenty of opportunity for steelhead enthusiasts to land

one of the beauties, provided as being so complex that it they were willing to be flexible.

“The great thing about the Grande Ronde fishery is that those fish will take anything, from nymphs, to swung flies, to spinners, to jigs under a bobber, to bait under a bobber,” Yanke said. “There’s so many ways you can catch steelhead, don’t get too engrained in using one method. If you can, throw a variety of things at them, increase your odds that way. Move around a bunch, and just be willing to put your time in. I think that’s the most important thing.”

Ever the challenge for the angler, patience and determination might well prove to be the difference between success and failure for Northeastern Oregon steelheaders this winter.



Jeff Yanke/Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife fish biologist Jeff Yanke and his son, Brandon, pose with a native-born steelhead that Jeff caught on the Grande Ronde River.

GROUSE

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The success of the SGI equates to uplanders like me continuing to have opportunities to hunt sage grouse where their remaining populations are strong. But wildfire and invasive species like cheatgrass continue to threaten sage grouse habitat. As fire

danger and smokey air from the Cascades region settled over eastern Washington and Oregon this past September, I canceled my bucket list hunt for which I had drawn an Oregon permit.

Smoke settled thick, oozing through the window cracks on the homestead like pancake batter late on Sept. 11. Burning tear ducts awakened me,

urging me to tape off windows and doors.

Burns, Oregon, was slated for the same air quality. I can only imagine how uncomfortably stuffy a camper, sealed tight, encapsulating myself and two setters might have been.

Historic sagebrush-steppe fires burned slow and cool, beneficial to the ecosystem. But cheatgrass encroachments

have changed fire cycles to more frequent and hotter, roasting mature plants and damaging sagebrush regeneration. Additionally, sagebrush communities are slow-growing, requiring invasive species management and possibly replanting to reestablish decimated communities.

Fortunately, wildlife is resilient and persistent. Habitat

and hunting opportunity to be restored through the efforts of dedicated partnerships like the SGI. And the 2021 prospects are looking good. I can see the covey nestled among the buttery autumn grasses and milky sage. A setter tail wafts gently in the auburn glow of the sun

peeking over the Owyhee; the location of the covey betrayed.

Circling in for the flush, the covey materializes from the sagebrush sea. Heavy wingbeats trigger a swift mount. The bead aligns with my right eye as double barrels swing through. Next year ...

TURKEY

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So this year we will go back to me smoking the turkey. If you’ve never smoked your own turkey don’t panic. It is super easy and will turn out delicious.

Most likely you will run to the store to purchase your turkey but if you’re lucky, you may be smoking a wild turkey that you killed this spring. If so, realize that you will need to baby it a little bit more than if you’re cooking a farm-raised fat Butterball turkey. A wild gobbler won’t have as much fat as its farm-raised cousin so it won’t be as juicy.

I learned how easy it was to smoke turkeys over 40 years ago. A buddy at work, her family raised turkeys and she knew that I smoked deer meat, sausage

etc. and asked me to smoke a turkey for her. I told her I didn’t know how. She told me all that she needed was for me to put it on my smoker for 3 to 4 hours and then she’d come by that night and grab it and take it home and finish cooking it. I was apprehensive but she told me to just smoke it and quit worrying. (At the time I had a wood smoker. Now I use my Camp Chef pellet smoker)

The next day she brought me a sample. Oh my gosh, it was the best turkey I’d ever had. I have since cooked them as she instructed. Here’s how you do it. If you have a regular smoker throw it on the smoker at low heat for 4 hours. Then put it in a black turkey-roasting pan in the oven all night at about 190-200 degrees.

Put a couple of cups of water in it to

keep it moist. You don’t want it to dry out. In the middle of the night check it out. If all of the liquid has evaporated add a couple of more cups of water. When you wake up, if it pretty much falls apart with a fork, it’s done. If not, turn up the heat to 325 and cook until done.

When you put it in the oven sprinkle with spices. I’ve cooked it like this for the past 40 years. But this year, I’m going to deviate and use this recipe that I found on Hi Mountain Seasonings’ website: <https://himtnjerky.com/bourbon-glazed-holiday-turkey/>

It looks good.

I’ve ordered their Game Bird and Poultry Brine Mix and their Poultry Rub Blend to use. I can’t wait!

Happy Thanksgiving from the Claycomb house to yours!

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CROSSWORD PUZZLER

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45 Max — Sydow

46 Actress — Longoria

47 Pinch

48 — Kippur

Answer to Previous Puzzle

ARK ZULU SAFE
KIN OMIT KHAN
ICE RAPACIOUS
NEWER ONYX
COG MON
AMBO NEE YOYO
YOU ARM DAB
NERD SRO KEPI
ICH SAL
MUTE OMAHA
ROCHESTER POI
IDLE RUST SOD
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