

SURPLUS STEELHEAD

■ ‘Recycled’ ocean-going rainbows breathe big fish bounty into small lakes and ponds

I didn’t want to tell a lie in front of the pastor. But I had a 10-pound hatchery steelhead and I didn’t feel like blabbing to this guy about where it came from.

My pastor wanted to go steelhead fishing and we picked a Monday morning. To get to one of my favorite pieces of river, I had to walk past a trout lake.

This lake was stocked a half a dozen times in spring and summer and sometimes the Department of Fish and Wildlife would put surplus summer-runs in it.

Coming back from the river, I carried my 10-pound spinner-caught prize past the end of the lake. At that moment, a fisherman, spinning rod and worm carton in hand, appeared in our path.

“That’s a huge trout,” the angler gaped. “Did you get THAT in the lake?”

“Yep.”



ON THE TRAIL
GARY LEWIS

Bald-faced lie.
“Where did you catch it?”
“Right there at the end of the lake,” I said.

Bald-faced lie number two.
We walked on, the pastor and I, and after a suitable space had been put between us and the fisherman, he said, “I guess sometimes you have to lie.”

Truth.
In fact, I could have caught that steelhead in the lake because that lake was, and still is, one of the spots where the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) deposits surplus fish they don’t need for spawning purposes. On any given day a trout fisherman with a jar



Ron Harrod/Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Colored-up summer-run steelhead in the ladder at the Wallowa Hatchery.

of bait or a worm could luck into a steelhead.

Wherever fish and wildlife agencies artificially spawn steelhead, there is likely to be a surplus of sea-run rainbows. And when that happens, the fish have to go somewhere.

In some cases, steelhead are picked up and trucked back downriver for another trip past the fishermen. Another option are local food banks. Sometimes surplus fish end up going into a big hole in the ground to feed the worms. The highest use might be to give anglers one more chance. That’s why ocean-going steelhead (and sometimes salmon) end up in lakes and ponds.

WHERE AND WHEN FOR RECYCLED STEELHEAD

East of the Cascades, summer run steelhead show up in big numbers starting in October. When there is a large run, there can be a lot of surplus fish.

Ron Harrod, the manager at ODFW’s Wallowa fish hatchery, said there is usually a fair number of excess fish for the wild stock program.

“We’ll get 1,500 to 4,000 back and we only need a couple hundred pair,” Harrod said. “We try to give the local folks another angling opportunity.”

To distinguish between river-caught and pond-caught steelhead,



Ron Harrod/Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

When the hatchery has enough pairs, steelhead, like this returning fish, could be transported to a nearby lake or pond to give anglers another chance.

Harrod directs staff to sort the fish for wire codes (won’t be recycled) and double-punch the gills to mark the recycles, which allows a game enforcement officer to quickly tell the difference.

Harrod said at first the steelhead roam the pond, seeking inlets and deeper water. Anglers do best, Harrod said, on flies, spinners and bobber and jig.

Justin Herold, a fisheries technician in Enterprise, said that fish from the Big Canyon facility often end up in Roulet Pond near Elgin

and also in Weaver Pond (aka Wallowa Wildlife Pond). Surplus steelhead that return back to Enterprise are recycled to Marr Pond.

Peach Pond in Ladd Marsh is another potential steelhead fishery if surplus numbers are high. March and April are the best timing for these Eastern Oregon waters.

Gary Lewis is the author of Fishing Central Oregon and Oregon Lake Maps and Fishing Guide and other titles. To contact Gary, visit www.garylewisoutdoors.com



Ron Harrod/Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Hank Ray releases a summer steelhead into Marr Pond in Enterprise.

A hunt he’ll never forget

■ Jerry Yencopal of Baker City recounts his once-in-a-lifetime bighorn sheep hunt

By Jayson Jacoby
Baker City Herald

Jerry Yencopal’s once-in-a-lifetime bighorn sheep hunt was very nearly stopped by a black widow spider.

As if the hunt weren’t challenging enough.

Basalt cliffs to clamber over.

Late summer skies sullied by smoke from distant wildfires, making it difficult

to pinpoint sheep herds even with the aid of powerful binoculars.

The anxiety of knowing that he’d never get another chance to bag a ram in Oregon.

And now an arachnid injecting itself, so to speak, into the proceedings.

Jerry, 71, of Baker City, can chuckle about the episode now, after almost three



Contributed

Jerry Yencopal (front, center) with his bighorn sheep ram, flanked by his sons, Rob, right, and Jason, left. The Yencopals (pronounced “YENCH-uh-paul) were guided by Sheep Mountain Outfitters, including, back center, Dan Blankenship, and far left, Josh Graham.

months have elapsed.

Everything turned out fine.

Better, even, than Jerry could have imagined.

He downed a trophy ram. No venom was transferred.

“It was just the best experience I’ve had in a long time, hunting,” Jerry said.

More than anything else, he relished sharing that experience with his two sons, who he’s hunted with since they were boys.

Rob is a battalion chief with the Albany (Oregon) Fire Department.

Jason, who also lives in Baker City, is Baker County’s emergency management director.

“To be with them ... that’s what your heart desires with family,” Jerry said.

Rob was instrumental not only in making his dad’s hunt possible, but also in thwarting a potentially painful encounter with that spider.

A few years ago Rob happened on a new Christmas gift for his dad — applications for bighorn sheep and mountain goat hunts.

Those are highly sought after tags in Oregon, since a hunter can draw only one of each in a lifetime.

See Bighorn/Page 2B