

To Catch A Steelhead

Part I of II Parts

By MILT GUYMON
Oregon State Game Commission

Rain, squalls, winds and sometimes snow and cold herald the winter months along the Oregon coast. And once again it's steelhead fishing time, the time of year these great game fish come in from the sea on their annual spawning migrations.

Many steelhead will be marked by the absence of one or more fins indicating hatchery origin. If anglers should catch one of these marked fish, the game commission would like to hear about it if it is possible for the angler to make such a report. Hatchery plants have been made in almost all coastal streams and many inland rivers, and these fish will be returning this winter as tackle-busting adults.

Reports indicate good runs of steelhead are already in the Wilson, Alsea, Nestucca, Nehalem, Siletz and many other coastal streams. Farther inland, steelhead have invaded the Sandy as far upstream as Marmot Dam. From the number of fish in the stream at this early date, it appears it could be a banner year on this fine river.

Anglers shouldn't overlook the many small coastal streams and creeks, as well as Columbia tributaries. Many of these have also been stocked with steelhead and anglers can expect a good return of adults this winter. Some of these include Gnat Creek, Seappoose Creek, Milton Creek and others. The Lewis & Clark should be a good bet this winter along with the Necanicum.

Along the central coast the Siuslaw is expected to produce many steelhead. Here again, many hatchery steelhead should be returning this winter. Fine rivers along the south coast will include the popular Rogue and Umpqua, and the Millicoma, Sixes, Elk and Chetco.

Each winter we receive many inquiries on how to catch steelhead. To explain this to the novice is about as difficult as trying to teach a person to handle a shotgun with accuracy, or perhaps make him an expert fly fisherman in one easy lesson. Nevertheless, we will try to pass along a few principles of winter steelheading in an effort to start the novice off in the right direction.

The angler should remember that you just don't go out and catch steelhead. It's tough, rugged fishing under the best conditions. Even the experts return empty handed on numerous occasions. However, a knowledge of steelhead habits is invaluable toward a successful trip.

In addition, water conditions more often than not influence success or failure so it behooves the angler to keep informed on winter stream levels and turbidity, then do his fishing when the rivers are "right." Generally, the best steelheading takes place following storms or freshets during the time the rivers are dropping and clearing.

The plunker has few problems to contend with other than determining the proper place to fish. All he has to do is cast out, anchor his lure or bait on the bottom, then sit and wait. His main objective is to place his offering smack in the middle of a steelhead travel route and wait for the fish to come along.

Generally, these plunking areas are the large, deep holes in the river. The most productive portion will be from about mid-point in the hole on downstream to where the hole shallows and breaks into rapids below. Steelhead travel upstream through these rapids, and upon reaching the slack or apron will shear off to one side or the other into the quieter

water. Usually, they rest a bit here before continuing their journey upstream. Plunkers recognize this characteristic of steelhead and attempt to anchor their bait just to one side of the heavy water.

The plunker can also fish under more adverse water conditions than can the drift fisherman. In fact, most plunkers prefer water that is a bit off color. The best steelhead action for the plunker usually takes place immediately following a heavy storm when the river is still up and so clearer than a deep green. As the water continues to drop and clear the big ironheads move from the deeper holes into the faster-flowing portions. Plunking action usually slows down from then on through the clear water period.

The drift fisherman has a few more problems to consider. First, steelhead have definite travel routes that they use consistently on their journey upstream. These routes will vary depending on water stages, and if the angler is to be successful he must be able to recognize these routes at all water levels. Once he learns to recognize "steelhead runs" he can be pretty sure he will be casting bait or lure into and through these travel lanes.

Second, steelhead will not remain long in the deeper holes, nor will you find them often in the eddies or quiet pools. These big fish prefer a strong, even flow of water and will follow such flows throughout the river.

Third, water depths are extremely important for the plunker as well as the drift fisherman. In this respect, steelhead prefer to travel and hold in water depths ranging from about four to around eight or nine feet. Deep holes and riffles are preferred only when water temperature is high or oxygen content lower than normal.

And the fourth point is that steelhead will hold at certain locations along these travel lanes. These "slots" may be immediately ahead of or behind a sunken boulder, below a slight drop-off, near the tail of a pool just ahead of the apron, in a slight bend of the river where a change in water velocity occurs, alongside an underwater ledge or channel cut bank, and other locations of similar nature. Recognizing steelhead slots is an art in itself, but once learned the angler can return to the same spot time after time and be reasonably sure Mr. Ironhead will be there.

And with this we have a starter to successful steelhead fishing — the recognition of steelhead water. Ideally, a steelhead run would consist of a stretch of river perhaps 50 to 100 feet or more in length, with a strong, even flow of water from head to apron, and water depths within the boundaries described.

Although steelhead may be found throughout such an area, usually one or more hot spots or "slots" will be present where steelhead will consistently move into and rest. Some expert anglers are strictly slot fishermen, casting only to these areas, then moving on. Other expert anglers may fish the entire run hitting the slots as well as any other possible holding water within the travel lanes.

Next week we will talk a bit about steelhead tackle, and some of the techniques used to find and entice Mr. Steelhead to hit.

Mrs. L. D. Neill has returned from a stay over the Christmas holidays with her daughter, Mrs. Neal Knighten and family in Kennewick. Mrs. Knighten returned with Mrs. Neill on Monday.

Livestock Men Meet to Program Weed Controls

By EUGENE WINTERS
Morrow County Agent

Thirteen Heppner district livestock operators met Monday afternoon, December 12, in the court house to organize a control program for branching knapweed in the Upper Willow Creek, Balm Fork, Upper Rhea Creek and Hinton Creek watersheds.

The meeting was arranged by Gail McCarty, county extension agent, in cooperation with the Morrow County Livestock Growers Association and the Morrow County Court.

Meeting chairman, Judge Paul Jones, opened the meeting with the observation that ranchers working together can usually solve their problems. He said the high cost of weed control was the concern of everyone in the county and that the reduced forage production from weed infested range affects the economy of the county.

McCarty pointed out that for the past 18 months a number of livestock operators had voiced their concern with the amount of this number one range weed in Morrow county. He explained that previously cost sharing under the Agriculture Conservation Program weed practice for the control of branching knapweed was not possible. The new ACP weed practice offers some promise for the inclusion of this pest. The possibility of having the area infested placed under a special weed control district was also suggested for review.

Joe Balfe, assistant district attorney, reviewed the Oregon statutes relative to compulsory weed control in counties and special weed control districts. A special weed control district can be established for the eradication or control of certain specified weeds by petition to the county court, the attorney said. Several ranchers reported on the extent of the problem with branching knapweed which is now invading the vigorous perennial bunch grass stands. Terry Thompson, Heppner, observed that much of the weed source was in the steep canyon areas which would require spray application by helicopter.

Branching knapweed seed has been spread by motor vehicles, birds, wind, water, livestock and game animals, Dick Wilkinson, Willow Creek rancher said.

One rancher felt that many ranch people weren't aware of the spread onto their land. Don Bennett, Hinton Creek, said in his area there were small patch-

FARM

es now that would be solid stands in a few years.

Luke Bibby, Balm Fork, said that this weed had been in the county for quite a few years and that he had sprayed patches on his and neighbors lands more than 10 years ago.

The high cost of chemical control on rangeland was given by Ken Cutsforth, Upper Willow Creek, for the lack of control in the area. He cited the chemical and airplane application costs at about \$3.50 per acre.

David McLeod, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation County office manager, reported the 1967 ACP Handbook had been submitted to the State Committee for approval. Branching Knapweed had been included as recommended by the ACP Planning and Development Group in October. He said this practice is applicable only in areas where weed control measures will be carried out on an organized basis which will minimize reinfestations. McLeod suggested interested growers assemble pertinent information about the area to be controlled and the control plan for consideration by the County ASCS Committee.

Gene Winters, county agent, reported that an extensive research screening trial in Morrow County during 1962 by Dr. Arnold Appleby, then at the Pendleton Experiment Station, had showed good control with two pounds 2,4-D ester applied when the first buds show. A second application may be necessary for seedling control in those years with summer showers. Winters said other materials than the 19 tested in 1962 will be tried next spring in the county.

Interested growers are meeting Friday to assess the area infested and prepare a control program for the ASCS office.

The County extension office sent meeting notices and reminder cards to over 60 land owners thought to have branching knapweed problems in Morrow county.

L. E. Bisbee was host to his son and daughter over the Christmas holidays. Son Orin Bisbee, San Francisco, came December 24, and will leave Friday. Miss Kay Bisbee came from Waldport for Christmas and will return on Friday also. Mr. Bisbee will go with his daughter to Waldport and plans to make a visit of about three months.

North 4-H Clubs Receive Awards For Achievement

(Held over from last week)
By DONNA EPPENBACH

IRRIGON — Thursday night, December 8, the 4-H clubs held their annual achievement party at the A. C. Houghton Cafeteria.

The program consisted of the Pledge to the Flags, U. S. and 4-H, "My Oregon" led by Mrs. Floyd Hobbs, group singing of Christmas carols, "What I liked about 4-H summer camp" introduced by Lynda Early, a report on summer school at Corvallis by Leon Wilson, two numbers by the Boardman 4-H club, and instrumental trio by Frances McDonald, Ricky and Tammy Snyder.

Presentation of Awards was by Gail McCarty and Marjorie Wilcoxon, county agents.

Mrs. Don Leighton is being treated at the Portland Orthopedic clinic for back injuries, due to a fall at a store in early September.

Mr. and Mrs. Warren McCoy went to Portland for the weekend. While there they attended the Ice Follies.

The Assembly of God church held a special service Wednesday night with the guest speaker being Evangelist and Mrs. John Nichol of Osoyoos, B. C. Canada. They also presented a musical program.

The A. C. Houghton school held a Christmas party and dance for the 7th and 8th grades Friday evening.

Mrs. Mary Adams returned Monday to Portland, for further treatment on her eyes.

Mrs. Ellen Reeder is in Portland visiting her son and daughter-in-law and family, Mr. and Mrs. Duane Reeder.

Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Williams had visits from their sons Warren, an aviation structural mechanic in the Navy Air Force, and Butch, a sophomore at EOC over the Christmas holidays.

Mrs. A. E. Loyd of La Grande was in Heppner from Saturday until Monday for a Christmas visit with her son and family, the Jack Loyds.

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