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Sportsmen Anticipate Going After Record Number of Chinooks

Sportsmen whose idea of "anglers' paradise" is the explosive, line-tauting tug of a hefty adult spring Chinook salmon seldom had it so good as they did this year.

The reason: a record-breaking number of adult spring Chinooks returned to Idaho Power Company's Circle C hatchery near here during May, June and July, not only providing excitement for sportsmen in the present but also promising

them still more in the future. W. E. Smith, Idaho Power environmental affairs director, puts the total of this year's returning migrants at more than 17,300.

This record return, he notes, compares with the previous high of some 13,000 spring Chinook adults that "came home" in 1972 to the hatchery Idaho Power built on Rapid River and continues to finance for operation by the Idaho Fish

and Game Department.

Besides that, according to Smith, the 1973 returnees were more than six times the number Idaho Power must collect to carry out its program of transferring Hells Canyon-run spring Chinook salmon and steelhead to the Salmon River watershed.

A Federal Power Commission order directing the company to build and maintain hatcheries for the full-cycle program re-

quires it to hatch, rear and release the young from a minimum of 2,700 adult salmon every year.

Whatever the number of Circle C returnees this year, sportsmen couldn't have been happier.

For with the twice-expanded Idaho Power hatchery on Rapid River filled to its capacity of some 8,000 adults, the balance of the homecoming natives were released in other streams to provide what Smith sees as a "bonus" resource for anglers. Out of the total "surplus" of about 8,900 returnees, 5,500 were put into the Little Salmon River at several points upstream from Rapid River's mouth to Hazard Creek.

The Idaho Fish and Game Department promptly boosted the season limit on the Little Salmon to one adult salmon per day up to a top of 10.

Another 1,500 of the surplus adults were freed in the main Salmon River upstream from Riggins and the rest were trucked to North Idaho for release in the South Fork of the Clearwater River.

Recognizing a good thing when they saw it, sportsmen lined the river banks near the release points to try for the scrappy salmon. Harvest results from the releases are still incomplete, but estimates of the number of surplus adults caught by sportsmen run as high as 6,000.

This bonus resource, as Smith points out, was on top of the adults taken before they even turned into Rapid River and headed for Idaho Power's collection facility.



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