



The **STEELHEADER**

Official Newsletter of Tri-State Steelheaders Salmon Enhancement Group

SALMON IN SCHOOL GRADUATING THIS SPRING

Salmon from two of the six *Salmon in School* classrooms have been released into a local stream to begin their voyage to the Pacific Ocean. The spring Chinook salmon that survived the classroom rearing environment were planted in Mill Creek just upstream of the bridge at Tausick Way.

At this stage in development the young salmon have brown stripes which help them hide as they migrate out

to larger bodies of water. Their natural camouflage was evident as the students gently released the fish one or two at a time from small clear cups and watched them

“disappear” into the grass along the edge of the creek.

Walla Walla High School’s special education classroom said goodbye to their fish on March 25th. Sager Middle School 7th graders and their parents released their fish on March



26th, just before spring break.

The remainder of fish in local classrooms, as well as the fish living at the Water and Environmental Center on the Walla Walla Community College campus, will be released over the next few weeks. Teachers are trying to keep the salmon as long as possible while also considering optimal release times based on temperature and flow conditions.

Want to join a salmon release event? Contact our office, or follow our Facebook page (facebook.com/tristate.steelheaders) for dates and times.



Sager School students prepare to transfer salmon fry into cups for release into Mill Creek (right). A Sager 7th grader displays a cup full of salmon that were released right after the photo was taken (above). The event was exciting to all the students, who had many good questions about their salmon (above right).



NEW LICENSE RULES FOR YOUTH FISHING IN OREGON

As families venture to the outdoors this spring, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reminds parents that youths between the ages of 12 and 17 need a license if they plan to hunt, fish or shellfish.

Although fishing now requires a license two years earlier than in the past – at age 12 instead of age 14 – the cost of the license is significantly less than it was in years past. Now a combination youth hunting/fishing/shellfishing license costs just \$10. For just \$5 more, youngsters can also purchase a tag that will allow them to catch salmon, steelhead, sturgeon and halibut. The \$15 combined cost of a youth license and tag in 2016 compares to a cost of \$41.75 last year, a cost reduction of 64 percent.

The youth license was developed to simplify the youth license requirements for hunting and fishing. “There was way too much complexity involved for parents to get hunting and fishing licenses for their kids,” said Rick Hargrave, administrator of ODFW’s Information and Education Division. “We removed those barriers and came up with a single, significantly discounted, youth combination license for kids 12-17.

Under the new fee structure, a single license permits youthlicense holders to take part in all three activities – hunting, fishing and shellfishing. Previously, a separate license was required for each of these activities.

“We believe this an amazing value and a meaningful investment in getting kids and families out and connected with nature,” said Hargrave.

There is no distinction in the fee structure between resident and nonresident youths – they pay the same for hunting/fishing licenses and tags.

*Source: Oregon Dep of Fish & Wildlife
http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2016/03_march/030116b.asp*

OREGON’S TROPHY TROUT PROGRAM IS GROWING

Thousands of extra-large rainbow trout will be released in several Oregon fishing holes this spring as the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife rolls out an enhanced “Trophy Trout” program created under a 2015 legislative directive.

More than 10,000 rainbow trout ranging in size from one to three pounds will be released at five locations starting in March and continuing through June.

The trophy trout program isn’t new. ODFW has been releasing large trout for years into many lakes around the state. However, during the 2015 legislative session, Representative Greg Smith (R-Heppner) and ODFW came together to discuss the creation of a Trophy Trout Pilot Program that would select a handful of reservoirs to stock with trout in the one to three-pound range. The goal is to help boost economic development opportunities for regions that rely heavily on hunting and fishing tourism.

For 2016, ODFW raised an additional 10,500 large

trout that will be released in the following five locations: Phillips Reservoir in Baker County, Willow

OREGON TROPHY TROUT RELEASE LOCATIONS AND DATES					
	March	April	May	June	Total
Garrison Lake	600	400			1000
Trojan Pond		1500			1500
Willow Creek Reservoir		750	750		1500
Timothy Lake			2500		2500
Phillips Reservoir			2000	2000	4000

Creek Reservoir in Morrow County, Timothy Lake in Clackamas County, Trojan Pond in Columbia County, and Garrison Lake in Curry County. Releases will started in March and continue until June. ODFW plans to further expand trophy trout fishing opportunities next year by producing 25,000 of the larger trout and releasing them in more locations (not yet determined).

“This is a great project that is not only perfect for the Willow Creek Reservoir, but the other locations as well,” said Rep. Smith. “I appreciate ODFW’s leadership and willingness to think outside the box in creating and sustaining economic opportunities in rural Oregon.”

“Fishing has been and continues to be a favorite recreational activity for many Oregonians,” said Curt Melcher, Director of ODFW. “The Trophy Trout Pilot Program will allow us to support the industry, support

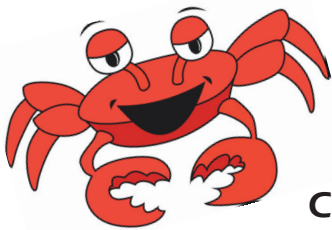
rural economies, and provide something new and exciting to generate enthusiasm.”

Trophy trout, which ODFW defines as those weighing one pound or more, comprise a small portion of the 2 million catchable trout that ODFW releases in more than 300 locations around the state every year. The vast majority of these are referred to in the agency’s trout stocking schedules as “legals” – which are released as soon as they are 8 inches long and meet the legal minimum size for retention in Oregon. Fishery managers believe that shifting hatchery production to a higher percentage of larger fish may help spur interest in trout fishing in Oregon, which ODFW is promoting as a family-friendly outdoor activity through its Trout 365 campaign and 36 family fishing events.

Source: Oregon Dept of Fish and Wildlife

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2016/03_march/030416.asp

Last Call for Tickets!!! Crab Feed Fundraiser



**May 12th
5 p.m.**

**Walla Walla
County Fairgrounds**

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JUMBO TROUT STOCKING BEGINS IN AREA LAKES

If you’ve been wondering if the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has stocked your local lake, here’s how to find out. Go to <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/plants/weekly/> and search by county.

A recent stocking report shows that 500 jumbo trout were stocked in Bennington Lake, as part of a total of 7,500 rainbow trout stocked in mid-April.

These jumbos are made possible by your donations to the Jumbo Trout Fund, and proceeds from the Crab Feed Fundraiser. Each year, the Steelheaders pay for the food to raise about 4,000 jumbo trout for stocking in area lakes and ponds.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE TUCANNON STEELHEAD GONE? AND WHAT IS WDFW DOING TO FIX IT?

By Todd Miller, Joe Bumgarner, and Jeremy Trump
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

These are two common questions that we (WDFW) have heard lately, and one we hope to provide some answers to here. But in order to answer them, a brief history of steelhead in the Tucannon River is needed.

Historical wild-origin steelhead abundance in the Tucannon River is relatively unknown, but thought to have been as high as 2,000-3,000 adults in the 1950’s. By the mid-70’s, sport harvest in the Tucannon River (which was solely supported by wild-origin steelhead) was rapidly declining (Figure 1), and steelhead seasons in the Tucannon were limited or closed all together. The Lower Snake River Compensation Plan (LSRCP; hatchery program initiated to compensate for fish losses from the four lower Snake River dams) program started releasing hatchery origin steelhead (Lyons Ferry (LF) stock – out-of-basin origin from Wells Hatchery in the upper Columbia River) in the Tucannon River in 1983 for sport harvest. Shortly after hatchery releases started, harvest in the Tucannon River was quickly re-established (Figure 1). Estimating steelhead spawners in the Tucannon started in the mid-80’s as part of the monitoring and evaluation program funded by the LSRCP. The average number of wild and LF hatchery origin spawners from 1987-1999 were estimated at 238 and 404, respectively, with wild origin fish continuing to decline over that period (Figure 2).

In 1997, all Snake River Basin steelhead populations were listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Following the ESA listing, and due to the apparent low number of wild origin steelhead in the Tucannon River, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) questioned WDFW about the continued use of the out-of-basin LF stock steelhead in the Tucannon River. Specifically, they asked WDFW if developing a new stock from “localized” (i.e. wild origin returns that could have either wild or LF hatchery parents) adult steelhead was feasible, with the potential goal of replacing the LF stock steelhead from the basin. In 2000, with agreement from co-managers, WDFW began a 5-year “test” program to see if adequate

numbers of wild origin fish could be collected for broodstock, and if those fish could be successfully reared at the hatchery and return as adults to support harvest, and if needed, conservation needs.

The new “test” program produced 50,000 smolts, but because they were derived from wild origin fish they couldn’t be marked for harvest at that time. Concurrently, the LF stock releases were reduced by 60,000 (down to 100,000 total smolt release) to offset the additional hatchery production in the river. Some drop off in harvest in the Tucannon was expected, but was deemed acceptable by the managers as returns to the Tucannon River were exceeding the LSRCP mitigation goals. During this initial “test” phase, we also collected genetic samples from returning wild origin adults to determine if there was still a genetic difference in the Tucannon wild origin steelhead.

After 5-years, due to a variety of reasons, and genetic results which were still pending, there wasn’t enough information to determine if the “test” program would be successful in replacing the LF stock fish. As such, WDFW and the co-managers agreed to the “test” program for another five years before a determination was made. We continued to release 50,000 Tucannon stock, and 100,000 LF stock steelhead until 2010.

In 2009, WDFW was requested by NMFS to update and re-submit the Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans (HGMP - a required ESA document that allows hatchery programs where listed species are involved) for both the LF and Tucannon River stocks. Over the next year, WDFW updated these documents with the current information. However, just prior to submittal of these plans, NMFS indicated they would not issue an ESA Permit for the continued propagation/release

of any LF stock steelhead into the Tucannon River. Luckily, by 2010, we had enough information to determine that the “test” program was successful in returning adults to support not only the sport fishery, but also to maintain a conservation component of the program to help support the depressed wild origin population (Figure 3). So...concurrent with the decision to implement the Tucannon stock program, releases of LF stock steelhead in the Tucannon River were ceased (last release in 2010).

However, a key component to the Tucannon stock implementation plan (50,000 smolts for conservation, 100,000 smolts for sport harvest) was the need for additional rearing space at LF Hatchery. The LF Hatchery was designed for production of a few separate stocks of fish, with large rearing vessels that can hold multiple release locations. Therefore, elimination of the LF stock releases did not free up additional rearing space for the Tucannon stock. When the initial decision was reached to proceed with the Tucannon stock, WDFW and the co-managers were promised by the LSRCP program that additional rearing space would be in place within a year (ready for rearing in 2011), with no gap in overall smolts released into the river.

The additional rearing space at LF Hatchery has not yet been realized. As a result, there were no harvestable steelhead (adipose fin clipped) released into the Tucannon River from 2011-2013, reflected in the harvest estimates for 2013 and 2014 (Figure 4).

Due to continued rearing limitations, the current steelhead program is limited to 100,000 total smolts (50,000 conservation, 50,000 harvest), and we’ve been close to those targets for the last three years (Figure

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5). As such, we had harvestable 1-salt returns in the fall of 2015, and will have 1 and 2-salt returns this coming fall. However, because of no harvestable releases from 2011-2013, and that word spread that “no” hatchery fish were being released anymore, the angling pressure was almost non-existent this past fall/winter – something we would like to see changed.

Talks continue with the funding agency to acquire the additional rearing space needed for this program, but nothing will likely happen in the next few years because of uncertainties in future hatchery production of spring and fall Chinook and other summer steelhead programs at LF Hatchery which are currently being discussed in the US vs Oregon re-negotiations (Columbia River Fish Management Plan).

While the immediate future doesn’t look so bright, we would still like to encourage anglers to get the word out that steelhead fishing in the Tucannon in the next few years will still be a worthwhile trip, and should continue to improve in the future. But, we have to admit, that recommendation comes with a few caveats:

1. For the fall of 2016, 1-salt and 2-salt fish will be available, from a marked fish release of only 50,000/year, half of what was marked released from 2001-2010, and only 1/3 of the marked released from the 80’s-90’s. Based on survival estimates, about 300-400 adults will return to the Tucannon River.

2. Through the use of PIT Tags and instream PIT Tag Arrays on the Tucannon River, we estimated 400-600 hatchery steelhead from other programs annually return to the Tucannon River as strays (Figure 6). Because they are not Tucannon origin steelhead, there is much desire to remove those fish prior to spawning in the Tucannon River, and harvest is the only effective way of doing that at this time.

3. Run timing into the Tucannon River of the new Tucannon steelhead stock, and of unwanted hatchery origin strays is much different compared to the run timing of the historical LF stock steelhead that were used for harvest (Figure 7). Most of the past harvest on the LF stock steelhead occurred during the fall as most of them were in the river, but the new Tucannon stock and hatchery strays don’t generally enter the river until mid-Winter or early-Spring months (Figure 7).

4. A few years ago, NMFS required that WDFW close the fishery one-month earlier in the spring to provide a greater protection to wild fish from any catch-release mortality associated with the fishery

(Figure 7). With the new PIT Tag information on run timing, WDFW is re-engaging with NMFS to extend the fishery back to historical closing (mid-April) so the marked (ad clipped) hatchery fish can be harvested per their purpose.

5. WDFW implemented mandatory retention of hatchery steelhead in the Tucannon River to remove as many of the harvestable hatchery fish as possible. The majority of the scientific literature available to date indicates that too many hatchery fish on the spawning grounds can have deleterious effects on the wild population (reduced fitness), leading to lower productivity (Theriault 2004, Akari et al. 2007). While fish captured later in the season may not be as highly prized by anglers, we would still like them removed from the river to help address the potential deleterious effects the hatchery program may have on natural production.

All of these changes to the steelhead fishery on the Tucannon were unexpected and we realize it may take some time before our efforts are successful, but ultimately we would like to see the steelhead fishery on the Tucannon return to previous levels, with lots of angler effort and harvest....but we can’t do that without your help.

How can you help?

- 1) Get out there and fish – specifically on the Tucannon.

- 2) Keep all hatchery fish (ad clipped) regardless of its condition.

- 3) Spread the word to your fellow anglers that there are harvestable hatchery fish returning to the Tucannon.

- 4) Lastly, WDFW can use all information we can get on harvested fish. If we can get the fishery extended further into the spring (March and April), NMFS will still be very interested in documenting impacts to the wild population from the hatchery fish. In order to do that, we need creel information from anglers. But, conducting creel surveys on the Tucannon River is difficult, so we are asking for volunteers to collect harvest (catch and release) information for us. It’s easy, and doesn’t require that much, especially if you’re out there anyway. If you’re interested, please contact Hatchery Steelhead Evaluation Biologist Todd Miller at (509) 382-1710, and he’ll get you set up to help before or during the next fishing season.



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May 12, 2016

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