

Thoughts From Your Trooper: Low river levels impacting migration of coho, Chinook and steelhead



Baimbridge

This year started out to be a strange weather year due to a lack of rain.

It will be interesting to see how the year progresses and how the weather will continue to affect our hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation.

At the beginning of the year, I was working in the Scott Creek Boat ramp area and came across a very unusual circumstance. I talked to anglers who reported catching steelhead, Chinook and even coho. I have never heard of all three being caught in late December and early January. I can only assume it is because of the extremely low water levels we are experiencing. The coho didn't get a chance until the early January rains to go up the tributaries and spawn as they normally would in November.

Unfortunately, because of this phenomenon, seeing the coho still in the main Umpqua tempted some people. Thanks to a tip from a honest angler, we were able to make a case on suspects that illegally took three wild coho from the main Umpqua. The fish were waiting to go up a tributary to spawn. We also made cases this January on people keeping non-fin clipped steelhead. This is a recurring annual problem.

With the lack of rain, the steelhead population was low in the rivers. When some rain finally came in early January the angling success picked up, but now the river is dropping back down again, with no substantial amount of rains in the forecast. Last week's rain wasn't enough to increase river levels. It is continuing to be a strange year. On the positive side, guides have been reporting a higher percentage of hatchery steelhead caught compared to last year.

These last couple of days, Fish and Wildlife troopers were involved in the annual Umpqua Fishery Enhancement Derby. This catch-and-release event includes about 45 guides taking out teams of four anglers from sponsoring businesses that pay for their spots in the guide boats. They fished and competed to catch the most inches of steelhead while fishing the North, South and main Umpqua rivers Friday and Saturday.

The proceeds go to stream restoration projects, hatchery programs and education.

Kicking off the derby activities were Student Day at the Rock Creek Hatchery on Wednesday and Kids Day at Cooper Creek Reservoir near Sutherlin on Thursday. At Cooper Creek, troopers and guides helped fifth-graders from Eastwood Elementary School fish for trout that were released just before the kids started angling. It is a great way for the kids to finish up their lessons on the life cycle of steelhead.

The next local outdoors event is the Sportsman's Show, taking place Feb. 14-16 at the Douglas County Fairgrounds. The Oregon State Police proudly have a display and will be there every day to answer questions and share stories. Make sure you come over and say "Hi." We are normally in the Exhibit Building.

It will be interesting to see what challenges or successes the weather brings us this year. Hopefully the river levels maintain a constant level for more productive angling days. Yes, this means I am hoping for rain.

I am also hoping to see a lot of people come by our display at the Sportsman's Show. Until next time, we hope your month is filled with hunting, fishing and outdoor recreating success.

You can reach the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Troopers in Douglas County at 541-440-3333. If you have a question you would like addressed in future columns, you can also email me at aaron.baimbridge@state.or.us.

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