

Southwest Region Fisheries Report



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Greetings!

For fishermen and IDFG fisheries folks alike, winter is a time for reflection. As anglers, we reflect on big fish landed during 2015 and lament on the ones that got away. As fisheries folks, we reminisce by analyzing data collected during 2015 surveys to gain knowledge and to determine how and why these important resources might have changed and how they might be improved. Eventually, reminiscing turns into planning. As anglers, we look forward to trying a new species in a new location, learning a new method or presentation, and also returning to our favor-

ite haunts. Similarly, fisheries folks have annual requirements, but often add new ones to adjust to changing circumstances and priorities. In the following, we



A large Boise River wild rainbow trout

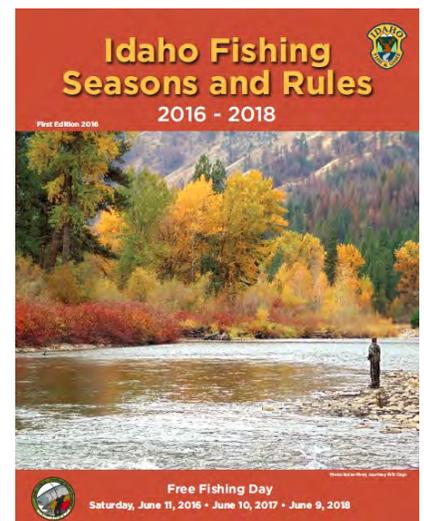
hope to provide you a review of some 2015 endeavors and provide some plans for 2016.

For more information on regional and statewide fisheries, please visit the IDFG website and our fisheries page at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/fish/>. The website holds a tremendous amount of information that can improve your fishing experiences. Please, sign up for this newsletter NOW by sending your email address to: joe.kozfkay@idfg.idaho.gov. Also, other news releases may be found on our SW Region facebook page.

New Fishing Rules!

Beginning January 1, 2016, some new fishing rules took effect. The new rule book looks much the same as the old with each region possessing its own general rules and a list of excepted waters with special rules. IDFG has continued to strive for simplicity by reducing the number of exceptions realizing that some complexity is needed to manage for diverse fisheries and expectations. There were two major statewide changes including adoption of a three-day possession limit and allowing anglers to fillet trout, Kokanee, bass, Tiger Muskie, steelhead or

salmon in the field as long as: 1) the angler is ashore and done fishing for the day, 2) the fish is processed or packaged with the skin naturally attached to the flesh, and 3) the fish must be processed or packaged in a manner that the number can be readily determined. Processed fish species listed above cannot be transported by boat. As far as SW regional changes go, there was one. The boundaries were moved to more-easily recognizable landmarks (East & West Parkcenter bridges) to improve clarity.



Don't forget to review the new fishing rules brochure!

Fishing and boating access



Sawyers Ponds ramp and dock improvements

Build it and they will come - anglers flocked to the new Riverside Pond dock almost immediately!

New construction and maintenance projects kept the fishing and boating access crew hopping during 2015 and into early 2016. Major construction projects were completed at Crane Falls Reservoir (near Bruneau) and Sawyers Ponds (Emmett). Both projects had boat ramp replacements and dock improvements in common. In addition, at Sawyers, two dykes were breached to allow more connectivity between ponds for fish and anglers and two dilapidated dock abutments were repaired. A similar project is being completed at Cove Arm (Bruneau) with an expected finish date of February 2016. All three of these waters are known to fish well in the early spring. Returning or first-time anglers will be pleasantly surprised during 2016.

A new fishing dock was added to Riverside Pond (Garden City) to give anglers better access to this popular water. Almost immediately, young and old alike were seen flocking to this beautiful new amenity!

Anglers, waterfowlers, and jet boaters use the Walters Ferry Ramp (south of Nampa) on a year-round basis. Unfortunately, some of the Snake River's fine sediment had settled onto the boat ramp making it difficult to use. After securing the necessary permits and funds, IDFG construction crews excavated and removed this sediment and restored full use. Unfortunately, this sort of maintenance

activity will be necessary in about 10 years.

CJ Strike is a very popular reservoir for fishing and boating alike. One of the access sites had fallen into a state of disrepair. Owyhee County, Black Sands Resort, USBLM, IDPR and IDFG are partnering to remedy this situation. Engineering plans, permits, and funding are in place and construction activities are scheduled to begin during spring 2016.

It's a rare day when the public gets access to a "new" fishing water. Formerly, anglers could access Redtop Pond (Notus) through a lease with ITD. However, ITD closed access temporarily to resume gravel mining operations. Recently, ITD finished mining and



The new L-shaped dock at Riverside Pond

offered a 99-year lease to IDFG to restore public fishing access. What a great present! Plans are being made and funds are being secured with an anticipated construction completion date of April 2016.

Several of these projects wouldn't have been possible without valuable partners including Boise Valley Fly Fishers, Trout Unlimited, Idaho Power Corporation, The Idaho Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Garden City, Owyhee County and others. Southwest Idaho's anglers thank you!



IDFG crews utilizing a long-reach excavator to remove sediment from Walters Ferry Boat Ramp

A not so new newbie

As often happens, we've had some turnover in our permanent staff. Martin Koenig transferred to the greener pastures of Boise. In September, Mike Peterson filled the vacancy. Mike's focus will be the southern and western portions of the region, especially places like CJ Strike, Brownlee Reservoir, Snake River, and Lake Lowell. Mike has spent most of

his career working as a research biologist on the Sockeye Salmon recovery program for the Stanley Basin lakes. He's an Idaho Boy, originally from Jerome, and in his free time enjoys steelheading and hunting.



Mike Peterson participating in sockeye salmon recovery

Aquatic plant management

Aquatic plants (aka weeds) are a catch 22 in many of our small waters. Too many plants create too many hiding places for young fish which can lead to over-abundance, stunting, and skinny predatory fish such as largemouth bass. Also, over-abundant plants can create oxygen sags during decomposition that under the worst sce-



A sterile grass carp. Note lateral eye and terminal mouth.



Nuisance levels of Eurasian watermilfoil and filamentous algae at Payette Greenbelt Pond require treatment to maintain fish and fishing opportunity.

narios can lead to fish kills. Plus, weeds can be flat out annoying for anglers. Who likes picking weeds off your line all day? In contrast, aquatic plants at the right proportions can be positives, by providing good hiding cover for young fish, ambush spots for predators, forage and hiding spots for aquatic insects, and by producing oxygen. IDFG tries to find a balance between providing adequate cover and open areas to fish. Some literature suggests that between 20-35% coverage is ideal. IDFG uses a variety of chemical, biological, and physical means to manage aquatic plants. Herbicides are a common

tool to reduce weed coverage. However, these treatments can get expensive and need to be repeated at frequent intervals. Sterile grass carp, an obligate herbivore, have been used in other situations with some success. Alternatively, deepening ponds via dredging can be effective, if depths exceed the photic zone.

IDFG treats weeds in several of our waters on a periodic basis including Payette Greenbelt, Beachs, Horseshoe Bend Mill, Lowman, and Sawyers ponds. Furthermore, our partners treat ponds in parks they manage.

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Large production raceways at Nampa Hatchery. Note: predator exclusion mesh and aeration.

Nampa Hatchery's primary goal is to efficiently raise fish and to ensure that stocked fish help meet fisheries objectives.

Nampa Fish Hatchery: at a glance

- Idaho has two types of fish hatcheries: "resident" and "anadromous". IDFG operates 19 hatcheries: 9 resident and 10 anadromous. Nampa is a resident hatchery.
- Nampa Hatchery is operated by 4 permanent and up to 6 temporary staff, including one statewide fish transport specialist.
- Nampa produces more biomass than any other IDFG resident hatchery and about 40% of the state's catchable-sized rainbow trout.
- Most fish are stocked in the Southwest Region, but nearly every region in the state receive some of Nampa Hatchery's fish.

What we do:

- Nampa raises rainbow trout predominantly, and lesser numbers of brown trout, Lahontan cutthroat trout, and fall chinook salmon in a series of 16 nursery and 13 production raceways.
- Fish are received as eyed eggs. Final incubation to hatch is about 10-14 days.
- Fish are "reared" for up to a year. Rearing includes hatching, feeding, raceway cleaning, protection from predators, and occasionally disease detection and treatment.
- Water temp is a critical factor in fish development and growth. Nampa is supplied entirely by pumped groundwater. Temperature is a constant 59° F, ideal for efficient growth (1"/month).
- Nampa rears and stocks about 700,000, 10-12" rainbow trout annually.
- Stocking requires over 200 truck trips. Also, statewide transport staff logged over 40,000 miles during 154 additional stocking and re-distribution trips.
- In the fall, Nampa hatchery operates the Deadwood River kokanee weir, fish trap, and egg collection station. During 2015, staff collected, fertilized and shipped 7.5 million kokanee eggs - a new record. Eggs were shipped to Cabinet Gorge and Mackay hatcheries for rearing.

Why?

- Not all waters can support robust fisheries through natural production. Stocking is one method to offset low natural production.
- Fish from Nampa Hatchery create fishing opportunities statewide and are a tremendous resource to Idaho's anglers.



Large reservoirs often require large release groups and large transport trucks. These trucks are also used to re-distribute fish among the state's hatcheries leading to improved efficiency.

Lower Weiser River: A Hidden Smallmouth Bass Gem?

Have you ever driven Highway 95 north of Weiser, ID and wondered; what lives in the river? Are there Rainbow Trout, Smallmouth Bass or something else lurking in its depths? Could the Weiser River provide a weekend fishing excursion close to the Treasure Valley? In early October 2015, we felt it was time to answer these questions. It had been 16 years since the last fish survey. More recent information was needed. Also, there is a proposal to build a new irrigation impoundment in the Lower Weiser River (hereafter LWR), so survey data could be useful for discussing potential impacts if a new dam is built.

We collected fish using electrofishing equipment attached to an aluminum canoe. The crew included 8-10 people. Stunned fish were identified to species, measured and weighed, then released back into the river. The biological data helps us learn about the different species found in the LWR. We surveyed a total of nine sites (ranging in length from 180 to 520 yards; 1.8 total river miles). We also tagged bass longer than 12" to improve understanding of movement and harvest rates.

We sampled a total of 4,372 fish including 18 different species. Na-



SMB was the most abundant species.

tive species included Bridgeliip Sucker, Chiselmouth, Longnose Dace, Largescale Sucker (LSS), Northern Pikeminnow, Redside Shiner, and Speckled Dace. These species made up 7% of the sample. Non-native species included Bullhead, Bluegill, Channel Catfish, Largemouth Bass, Oriental Weatherfish, Pumpkinseed (PKS), Smallmouth Bass (SMB), White Crappie, Warmouth, and Yellow Perch and made up the majority (93%) of the fish sampled.

SMB were the most abundant fish sampled (3,405 fish or 78%). SMB ranged in length from 2 to 18" (about 3 lbs). We collected an average of 377 SMB/hr of electrofishing effort. This number is similar to Brownlee Reservoir, which has

the highest density of SMB in southwestern Idaho. The size structure of SMB appeared similar to Brownlee Reservoir with approximately 2% of the SMB being longer than 12 inches. PKS (345 fish) and LSS (224 fish) were the second and third most common fish, respectively. 90% of the fish sampled were game fish.

SMB continue to expand within the region and LWR drainage. A 2.5- fold increase

in the proportion of SMB was observed since the last survey. There has also been a decline in the proportion of native fish sampled since the previous survey in 1999. The observed proportions may have been influenced by the low flows observed during the survey (near the lowest recorded). If the survey were conducted at

another time of year, different fish species may be observed as well as shifts in size structure.

The LWR provides a unique fishing opportunity close to the Treasure Valley. Access points can be found in the towns of Cambridge, Midvale and Weiser and off the Weiser River Trail (access point information; <http://weiserrivertrail.org/index.html>). The stretch between Midvale and Galloway Diversion (11.5 miles upstream of Weiser, ID) provides a unique opportunity to combine mountain biking and fishing in one trip. We would like to thank all property owners and the Friends of the Weiser Trail who allowed us to access the river and complete this survey.

SMB was highly abundant; many were 10-14", but a few stretched up to 18"



An electrofishing crew in action.



Oriental weatherfish was common. This species was illegally introduced to Idaho, likely from an aquarium.

Catch and Harvest in Lake Lowell



Bass were tagged during '14 and '15 to estimate harvest rates



A largemouth sampled near the upper dam

The proximity of Lake Lowell (LL) to the numerous anglers that live within the Treasure Valley provides many opportunities to fish close to home. Conservation officers contact hundreds of anglers each year, boat ramps are often full, and it's not uncommon to see other anglers plying the lake -- evidence of the popularity of this fishery. For fisheries managers, understanding how different species are used (caught, harvested, or released) and at what rates by anglers is important to maintaining and managing the fishery in the long term.

total use estimates over a one year time period. In simple terms, angler harvest is defined as what proportion of the population was harvested by anglers. Angler total use is the proportion of fish within the population that were captured and released or harvested. Both estimates provide us with important data to better understand and manage these populations.

Based on tag return data, we estimated that 18% of the LMB over 16 inches were harvested during a one year period. We view this as a sustainable harvest rate under current fisher-

much lower than for LMB. We estimated that harvest rates for CC were 7%. The estimate of total use was 14%, which indicates those fishermen are releasing a fair number (about 50%) of CC while fishing at LL. These moderate harvest rates partially explain why trophy-class CC are present.

Tagging these fishes also enables us to learn WHEN anglers are fishing for these species. Over 71% of the tag returns for LMB occurred prior to the July 1 catch-and-keep season opener. This data coupled with the harvest and total use estimate suggests that many anglers are participating during the catch-and-release season. On the other hand, the tag returns for CC were more concentrated in late summer when the fishing public may be less specialized (not targeting a specific species) and just out to catch fish. The CC population appears to be healthy within LL and could likely support additional harvest. It appears that both populations are currently healthy and that current bag limits, length limits, and stocking rates are helping meet current fisheries objectives.



A tagged Channel Catfish prepared for release back into Lake Lowell. Note yellow tag on dorsal fin.

LL supports a self-sustaining Largemouth Bass (hereafter LMB) population. Another popular species, Channel Catfish (hereafter CC), is maintained through stocking. During 2014, we tagged and released 281 LMB and 180 CC during 2014. Monitoring the tag returns enabled us to develop angler harvest and angler

ies management objectives. We also estimated that total use for LMB was 98%. In other words, almost every LMB over 16 inches in LL was caught and released or harvested during a one year period! LMB fishing in LL appears to be extremely popular.

The estimates for CC were

IDFG staff tagged additional fish during 2015 and will be analyzing tag return data after these fishes have been at large for a full year.

Trout In The City: Lower Boise River

The lower Boise River stretches 64 miles from Lucky Peak to its mouth (Snake River near Parma). Water temperatures increase heading downstream causing shifts in the fish community. Upstream, a cold-water community exists with Rainbow and Brown Trout, Mountain Whitefish, and Sculpin. Farther downstream, the community changes to species that are more tolerant of warmer waters such as Small-mouth Bass, Channel Catfish, and Common Carp.

Typically, IDFG monitors the lower Boise River with mark-recapture population surveys at fixed sites every three years. Fixed sites are located between West Parkcenter and Barber Dam (i.e. in Boise/only the upstream portion of

and harvest rates using IDFG’s “Tag, you’re it” hotline or website.

We surveyed almost 30 miles and sampled 90 wild Brown and 460 wild Rainbow Trout. To compare sections, we calculated trout catch per hour of electrofishing (catch rate). Wild Brown Trout averaged 13” and the longest Brown was 24”. Our highest catch rate for Browns was in the North Channel between Eagle and Star (20 fish/h). Wild Rainbows averaged 11” and the longest was 22”. Our highest catch rate for wild Rainbows was in the South Channel around Eagle Island (82 fish/h). During the survey, we tagged over 300 wild trout. Since July, only a handful of tags have been returned (4%). After a full year at large, catch and harvest rates will be calculated.

side-hannel habitats compared to mainstem sites. We also learned that most of the wild YOY Rainbow Trout were sampled upstream of Glenwood Bridge, whereas wild YOY Brown Trout were sampled farther downstream in the north and south channels of the Boise River near Eagle Island. These results should be viewed cautiously due to two major flow interruptions and probable negative impacts to YOY residing in the mainstem. Repeat sampling of these sites for YOY is planned for fall 2016 and hopefully will improve understanding of this valuable resource.

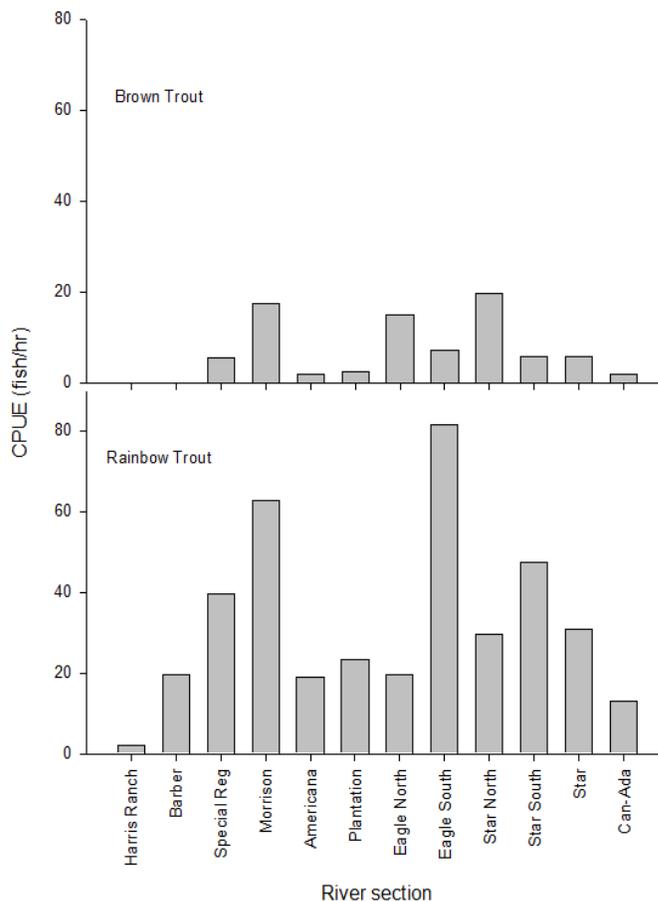
Hatchery Brown Trout haven’t been surviving well. All of the 150,000 fingerling Brown Trout stocked since 2009 have been adipose clipped. During 2015 surveys, only one adipose clipped Brown Trout was sampled. Furthermore, few clipped Brown Trout have been sampled during other surveys. Brown Trout stocking has been discontinued.

Preferred trout spawning and rearing locations in the Lower Boise River are poorly understood. To improve understanding, we conducted a comprehensive survey of YOY trout. Overall, YOY trout densities were low compared to the SFBR, despite similar adult abundances. During 2015, YOY trout densities were highest in tributary and



A wild rainbow trout tagged to estimate catch and harvest rates

this reach). Each is about a 1/2-mile long. In 2015, we wanted to improve understanding of this fishery by sampling more downstream sections, estimating catch and harvest rates for wild trout for a longer section, and evaluating the survival of hatchery Brown Trout. Brown Trout have been stocked annually since 2009. To accomplish this, we utilized electrofishing equipment mounted to two, 11’ whitewater rafts. We separated the river into 12 sections from Hwy 21 Bridge to Middleton. Starting in June, fish were collected by shocking each bank concurrently where possible. We netted all trout, recorded biological information, collected samples for estimating age, tagged, and released. Tags allow assessment of catch



Electrofishing catch per hour for the lower Boise River

Boise River Flow Interruption

Flows at Barber Dam were zero for about 7 hours on February 5, 2015.

For trout, especially young trout, late fall and winter can be a critical time. Declines in water temperature and reduction in flow cause young trout to seek complex habitat near stream margins. These areas offer protection from predators and reduce energy expenditures associated with feeding and maintaining position. Ideal wintering habitats for young trout often include over-hanging brush, downed wood, and large rock crevices along stream edges. In the Lower Boise River,

these habitats are rare, especially as flows decline to the usual winter minimum of around 240 cfs.

As we all know, the lower Boise is a managed or working river that provides irrigation, hydroelectric power, and flood control. During early February 2015, a series of events led to “winter” flows in the Boise being drastically reduced. Barber Dam is a relatively old dam that has been retrofitted with turbines that provide electrical power. The dam needed repair work necessitating the lowering of Barber Pool. During the repair work, an electrical glitch occurred causing flow through the turbines to cease. Because the pool was low, the spillway couldn’t function until the pool refilled almost 7 hours later. To top it off, this all happened at night when dam operators were at home. Ideally, a series of alarms would have notified operators, but these failed also.

By early afternoon, we were on the river looking for dead fish. Fortunately, we found very few dead adults. Subsequent surveys (page 7) seemed to indicate that adult fish and most non-

game fish survived this event fairly well. It is likely they retreated to pools that retained water. On the other hand, we suspected that young of the year rainbow trout and brown trout hatchlings were negatively impacted. Unfortunately, it was difficult for us to quantify the exact impact to young trout as no pre-event data on juvenile trout abundances was available.

Public outcry and media attention was substantial. Citizens were asking for compensation. Eventually, the dam owners (Ada County) and operators (Enel Green Power) with the counsel of an environmental advisory board donated a total of \$45,000 to a conservation project. The project is being designed with help of IDFG habitat engineers to improve fish habitat between Eckert Bridge and the float craft put-in at Barber Park. If all goes well, this habitat improvement project is scheduled for spring 2016.



Boise River near West Parkcenter Bridge with no flow

Catch a State Record - New Categories

Traditionally, anglers were only allowed to qualify for a state record if a potential record fish was killed (to allow legal transport), weighed on a certified scale, documented with a receipt, and then verified by IDFG. It came to our attention that not all anglers were thrilled at having to kill a trophy fish to qualify for a record. Hearing their desires, IDFG modified our state fish records program to include:

- 1) A length-based, Catch-and-Release (C & R) Record category for fish released alive.
- 2) Separate records for each sub species of cutthroat trout (traditional and C & R).
- 3) Separate records for unprotected non-game species harvested with Archery/Spearfishing equipment.

All potential state records must be caught from publicly-accessible waters with legal fishing methods during an open season. All applicants must have a valid Idaho fishing license at the time of catch. No records will be awarded for fish caught during salvage seasons or at private pay-to-fish facilities. Catch and Release Records are based on total length.

To apply for a record:

- Measure fish length from the tip of the snout to the end of the tail, with lobes of tail squeezed together.
- Photograph the fish directly next to a ruler/tape or an object of known verifiable length (such as a rule book).
- Photograph the fish next to the angler.
- Have at least one witness verify the length measurement and live release.
- Salmon, steelhead and White Sturgeon must be measured and photographed in the water.
- White Sturgeon records (C & R only) must be broken by a minimum of 2". Sturgeon should be measured upside down along the belly from the snout to tip of the upper lobe of the tail fin.
- C & R records for all other species must be broken by a minimum of 1/2".
- All applications must be submitted within 30 days of catch. A Record Fish Application Form may be completed online, or downloaded from the IDFG website.

Anglers may find more information and apply for records at the new record fish website (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/fish/records>). The site continues to be updated and will feature both online and print applications, and serve as a database to archive traditional and C & R records.



Potential C & R state records should be measured on a flat surface. Also, the mouth should be shut, tail squeezed, and the fish should be alive for release.

News & Notes

As always, we have a lot of other projects that require attention. We don't have the time or space to fully discuss all of these, but here, we provide a brief overview:

- A series of public meetings were held in Garden Valley to discuss fisheries in the South Fork Payette River. Anglers and local residents had expressed concern that this fishery had declined. IDFG staff plans to repeat historic surveys to gauge any changes. This information will guide future management of this fishery.
- The US Army Corps of Engineers and others continue to study the feasibility of additional water storage and flood risk reduction projects in the Weiser and Boise River basins. We are providing technical assistance regarding how fisheries and wildlife could be affected.
- IDFG is funding a graduate research assistantship through the University of Idaho to study smallmouth bass in the Snake River and larger tributaries in southwestern Idaho. This project will focus on movement, population dynamics, harvest rates, and modeling to assess possible responses to alternative harvest limits should they be deemed necessary.
- Research and hatchery staffs are working to develop and rear sterile Fall Chinook Salmon that will be stocked in some large reservoirs to provide trophy fishing opportunity. Full development will include an assessment of field performance (growth and survival). Lucky Peak Reservoir is scheduled to be one of the study waters stocked with Fall Chinook Salmon during 2016.



Development and evaluation of fertile and sterile Fall Chinook Salmon may provide more trophy opportunity in large southern Idaho reservoirs



Dozens of spider blocks were sunk in CJ Strike Reservoir by the Idaho Bass Federation to improve habitat.

- The Idaho Bass Federation along with a little help from regional staff added a "bunch" of habitat structures to CJ Strike Reservoir. These structures commonly known as spider blocks provide off-shore habitat to a variety of fishes. We commend club member for volunteering their time and working to improve fish habitat in this popular water.



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Our Mission

(Idaho Code Section 36-103)

All wildlife, including all wild animals, wild birds, and fish, within the state of Idaho, is hereby declared to be the property of the state of Idaho. It shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated, and managed. It shall only be captured or taken at such times or places, under such conditions, or by such means, or in such manner, as will preserve, protect, and perpetuate such wildlife, and provide for the citizens of this state and, as by law permitted to others, continued supplies of such wildlife for hunting, fishing and trapping.

Our Vision

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game shall work with the citizens of Idaho in providing abundant, diverse fish and wildlife and ensuring a rich outdoor heritage for all generations.

News & Notes Continued

- Continued control of spawning kokanee in Deadwood Reservoir has resulted in some very nice kokanee in angler creeks. By mid-summer 2015, age-3 kokanee exceeded 13". Better control and larger fish were achieved by consistently controlling escapement for the last several years and by ensuring that control occurred for the entire duration of spawning runs. We expect adult lengths at Deadwood Reservoir to be similar or better during 2016.
- Default kokanee stocking numbers for Arrowrock Reservoir were raised to 100,000 fingerlings annually. Fingerlings are planted in late May to early June. IDFG staff plans to hold stocking numbers at this level to monitor changes to catch rates and average fish lengths and weights. Also, about 10% of kokanee fingerlings stocked during 2015 were adipose clipped. The presence of a clip will allow biologist and anglers to discern origin (hatchery or wild).
- Free Fishing Day for 2016 scheduled for June 11th. IDFG and others hold a variety of events throughout the region. If you know a young angler or somebody looking to get into fishing, please encourage them to attend or better yet take them. Details may be found on IDFG's website.