

Pikeminnow season opens: anglers invited to earn cash, save salmon

Local News

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Heading into the first weekend of the 2013 Pikeminnow Sport-Reward Program, early reports indicate a potential banner year for Northern Pikeminnow fishing and payouts for participating anglers.

"We expected things to start off good as the river, condition-wise, is pretty good," said Eric Winther of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. "Typically, lower water years are better for us as the river is not high and muddy."

Reports from across the lower Columbia River through the Snake River are indicating Northern Pikeminnow are striking hard and early.

"The Dalles has been the red-hot spot for the last few years, and that was certainly the case on Wednesday — a lot of anglers, and a lot of fish," Winther said. "And the Tri-Cities station at Columbia Point Park in Richland reported that they've had their best day in recent memory."

Pikeminnow consume millions of young salmon and steelhead each year in the Columbia River and Snake River systems. Although Pikeminnow are native to the Northwest, the construction of dams created conditions that increased their numbers and allowed them to prey more on fish headed downstream. The predator accounts for roughly 80 percent of all fish that kill young salmon.

"Reducing the number of Pikeminnow is an important tool in our effort to reduce predation on juvenile salmon and steelhead headed to the ocean," said John Skidmore, a policy analyst for the Bonneville Power Administration. "That's where the Pikeminnow Sport-Reward Program and the public come in."

Anglers who catch the fish earn rewards ranging from \$4 to \$8 per Pikeminnow that measure at least nine inches. Special tagged fish are worth \$500. The tagged fish help biologists measure the harvest rate plus gather data on growth, movement and other factors.

One such \$500 fish was caught on Wednesday at the Interstate 5 Bridge between Vancouver, Wash., and Portland, Ore.

"Money is a motivating factor for some anglers," Winther said. "A lot of them, though, are interested in feeling like they're giving back and helping Northwest salmon and steelhead runs. Anglers are pretty invested in the river."

Last year saw 3,302 participants in the Sport-Reward Program with 157,846 Pikeminnow caught. Since 1990, more than 4 million Northern Pikeminnow have been removed by the program, cutting predation on juvenile salmon and steelhead by an estimated 40 percent.

The program runs from May through the end of September. Participants must have a current fishing license and sign up each day they fish at a registration station prior to dropping a line in the water.

Bonneville Power Administration funds the program that is administered by the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission with assistance from the Oregon and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife.

“Our peak — our best fishing — is usually about the third week of June for Northern Pikeminnow,” Winther said. “With things lining up with the river conditions, the fishing should just keep getting better between now and then.”

For more information about the program, visit www.pikeminnow.org or call 800-858-9015.