

Contribute to wild-salmon recovery by taking home six hatchery coho

Local News

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VANCOUVER, Wash. - Anglers planning to fish for salmon on any of the eight tributaries that flow into the Columbia River below Bonneville Dam can expect good fishing for hatchery coho. Starting Aug. 1, when fall salmon fishing opens in the Columbia River Basin, anglers fishing those rivers will be allowed to catch and keep up to six adult salmon per day, provided that at least four of them are hatchery-reared coho. No wild coho may be retained. The six-fish daily limit - up from two salmon in recent years - may also include up to two chinook salmon, subject to rules in effect on each river.

The increased daily limit was prompted largely by a projected return of 700,000 coho salmon to the Columbia River Basin this year, said Pat Frazier, regional fish manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The impending run of coho, the majority of which were reared in hatcheries, promises to be the largest since 2001. "The main reason for producing salmon in hatcheries is to give people a chance to catch them," Frazier said. "Beyond that, we want anglers to help remove those hatchery fish to prevent them from interfering with wild salmon on the spawning grounds." The six-fish limit will be in effect on the Cowlitz, Elochoman, Grays (including the West Fork), Kalama, Lewis (including the North Fork), Toutle (including the Green and North Fork) and Washougal rivers, plus the Klickitat River which spills into the Columbia above Bonneville Dam. Last year, only the Cowlitz River had a six-salmon daily limit. The daily limit on the mainstem Columbia River, which opens for salmon fishing Aug. 1 upstream to Pasco, remains the same - two adult salmon (but only one chinook), or two steelhead, or one of each - to conserve fish listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. As in past years, anglers must release any wild coho they intercept in all waters up to the Hood River Bridge. Hatchery fish can be identified by a clipped adipose or ventral fin and a healed scar. Similar rules will require the release of wild chinook salmon returning to a number of Columbia River tributaries, where WDFW is engaged in a multi-year effort to mass-mark all hatchery fish. For example, anglers fishing the Elochoman and Kalama rivers will be required for the first time to release any wild chinook - adults or jacks - they intercept. In addition, unmarked jack salmon must be released on the Cowlitz, Toutle (including the North Fork and Green River), Washougal, Wind and White Salmon rivers, plus Drano Lake. The retention rules adopted for those rivers reflect staggered implementation of mass-marking hatchery chinook salmon in the lower Columbia River Basin, said Heather Bartlett, WDFW salmon and steelhead division manager. All hatchery salmon reared in state-operated facilities in the region were marked this year, she said. "Our objective for these fisheries is to provide protection for wild salmon, while maximizing fishing opportunities for hatchery fish wherever possible," Bartlett said. "The new rules in effect for Columbia River tributaries this year are a clear example of our efforts to achieve our conservation goals while still providing great fishing opportunities." Earlier this year, WDFW also took action to realign hatchery production on the lower Columbia River to reduce risks posed by hatchery fish to the recovery of wild salmon and steelhead populations. Those actions, which included closing the Elochoman Hatchery, were designed to meet recovery goals established by Lower Columbia Basin Salmon Recovery Plan and standards set by the Hatchery Scientific Review Group. But maintaining viable fisheries in the region was also a major consideration in that initiative, Bartlett said. Under the department's Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries Plan, 95 percent of fall chinook

production, 91 percent of early-returning coho production and 94 percent of late-returning coho production will be maintained. "Of course, it will take a few years before we see the effect of the changes in production, and returns will always be affected by ocean and fresh-water conditions," Bartlett said. "For now, anglers can help us meet recovery goals for wild salmon by taking home a bunch of hatchery coho and releasing all wild coho." This year's fishing rules for the Columbia River, its tributaries and other waters in Washington state are described in WDFW's Fishing in Washington rule pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).