

Spring Chinook Conservation Plan Comments

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From Denny Hughson

50 years as a Rogue River Fishing Guide

I attended joint ODFW and Corps of Engineers meetings in the 1970's concerning the completion of Lost Creek Dam (now known as William Jess Dam) in relation to Spring Salmon populations. The new dam was going to affect Rogue River Spring Salmon more than other species as the lake behind the dam would inundate, 30% of the Spring Chinooks spawning was done above the dam site. ODFW and Corps of Engineers promised to maintain a viable healthy fishery at those meeting in exchange for project support.

- 13,000 Spring Chinook spawned in the area blocked by the dam.
- Mitigation from the effects of the dam require 13,000 Spring Chinook back to the hatchery to replace those lost to the dam.
- Today the 5 year average back to the hatchery is under 8,000 Spring Chinook and many of these 8,000 are wild stock not the mitigated hatchery fish promised.
- Below the dam Wild Spring Chinook returns are down by 60% in a 5 year average.
- The 60% decline in Wild Spring Chinook are with a complete closure on harvest of Wild Spring Chinook in March – April and May the last 8 years.
- The return of Wild Spring Chinook below the dam has crashed. The last 5 years has averaged around 11,500 Wild Spring Chinook. The Pre-Dam Wild Spring Chinook return was 26,000 below the dam.
- That is 14,500 wild Spring Chinook below Pre-Dam Averages.
- The dam has had big effects downstream on Spring Chinook both Wild and Hatchery.
- From lack of spawning gravels on the Upper Rogue to huge increase in predation by Northern Pike Minnow and Cormorants. Both are basically non-native predatory populations and are still growing and expanding while spawning gravel continues to deplete.
- Less floods and warmer water in winter allow a once non-existent population of Northern Pike Minnow to explode in the Rogue River. Historic migrations of smolt's headed to the ocean now face a wall of Pike Minnows in the middle and Lower Rogue.

I would like to ask the House Ag and Natural Resource Committee to help balance the books for the Rogue River fisheries and direct ODFW to comply with there promise of viable healthy Spring Chinook fishery in the Rogue River. No Salmon fishery is viable with an all Wild Fish release during peak fishing months.

We would like to see ODFW and the Corps of Engineers required to meet the mitigation promises made prior to the dams construction. The Spring Salmon Conservation Plan does not address hatchery mitigation levels as it is only a Wild Fish management plan.

- Hatchery fish found on the spawning beds are below a 5% average the past 5 years, the conservation plan allows 15%, so additional hatchery stocking to meet mitigation promises is unlikely to impact wild spawning.
- ODFW should also add spawning gravel for wild spawning and expand spawning habitat at all cost or the Wild Spring Chinook will continue decline.

Thank You

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