

## Salmon, steelhead dominate August and September fishing on the Columbia River

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Trey Carskadon of Tualatin boated a fat hatchery steelhead Friday, one of more than a million salmon and steelhead heading up the Columbia River this summer and fall.

ST. HELENS -- Trey Carskadon's rod tip dove toward the water, pumped violently three times and went limp.

"Well, I saw it ... you had a bite," I said consolingly, but Trey didn't respond. Poor fellow ... must be mourning his loss.

Suddenly he yanked the rod from the holder and reeled like a madman. The line cut through the water --upriver, diagonally to the boat, coming tight just as a very angry summer steelhead exploded through the surface in a burst of spray off the starboard beam.

Trey's instincts had told him the rod tip hadn't resumed vibrating with the plug on the end of the line; it was still limp, line moving sideways. The steelhead had hit and run toward the boat.

Within a few minutes, a fat hatchery fish was in the net, on its way to bed on a layer of ice in the cooler.

Friday's scene is repeated daily along the lower Columbia River up to Bonneville Dam. Action will intensify over the next few weeks as more than a million salmon and steelhead make their late summer and fall surge to inland hatcheries and spawning grounds.

The river reopens Monday to Chinook salmon, from Buoy 10 at the river's mouth up to the Oregon-Washington border above McNary Dam.

With only 73,000 of nearly 400,000 summer steelhead crossing Bonneville thus far, the lower river is already full of fish. For more information about summer steelhead, check out [steelheadsummer.com](http://steelheadsummer.com).

Biologists predict 766,000 fall Chinook will return to the Columbia, the largest run since 2004 (800,000). Most, nearly 500,000, are upriver bright fall Chinook, headed far upriver and prized for their size, fiery battle on rod and reel and high oil content on the table.

A bonus is the continued presence of late summer Chinook salmon throughout the river. Monday, though, Chinook will not have to be missing an adipose fin to be kept by anglers (although the limit is a single Chinook per day up to Bonneville).

Also opening Monday is the popular Buoy 10 fishery, which typically starts slow, but will be in full swing by the middle of the month. Chinook fishing will close Aug. 28 from Tongue Point downriver, with the best fishing in the preceding week.

Coho fishing will remain open in the estuary, but the run this year is predicted to be lower than normal. Most of the attention will shift from Tongue Point upriver, following the Chinook run.

An unusual caveat this year is the Columbia's cooler-than-normal water. Typically 70 or more, Friday's temperature hovered between 65 and 66. Salmon and steelhead are far more prone to bite lures in cooler water.

"It will be interesting to see what happens if there isn't that thermal barrier hitting them (down in the estuary)," said Chris Kern, a biologist on the Columbia River management team for the [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife](http://Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife). "They may shoot right on through Buoy 10 with cooler water. I would guess they'll be a little snappier."

Oregon and Washington have set a commercial gill-net season Thursday night to Friday morning throughout the lower river, but there is no way the nets can clean out the Chinook, and the mesh is large enough to allow most steelhead to swim through.

**Ocean Coho slow:** Salmon fishing has been slow in the ocean out of most ports, although there have been a few stellar days, mostly out of Depoe Bay.

High numbers of wild fish have been released.

As of a week ago (biologists announce figures from Monday through Sunday), only a quarter of the Coho salmon quota had been caught from Cape Falcon, near Manzanita, south to the California border.

From Cape Falcon north to Leadbetter Point, only 13 percent of the Coho quota had been caught.

**Groundfish restriction:** Offshore bottomfish angling is restricted to 20 fathoms or less for the remainder of the year.

Anglers also may not keep yelloweye rockfish or cabezon, but may continue to fish for popular black rockfish, lingcod and greenling.

**Good waterfowl season looms:** The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission meets Friday in Salem to set fall bird-hunting seasons.

The [news for duck hunters](#) is no change from last year's liberal seasons and bag limits.

A good season seems more possible this year than last, with an even-better nesting season across most of Canada and lingering wet summer conditions throughout Oregon. Passing birds are more likely to stop on their way south this fall if they find plenty of water -- and there is PLENTY of water out there.

Goose hunters will find relaxed restrictions on taking cackling and Aleutian Canada geese, with up to three allowed in Northwest Oregon this fall -- both in and outside the special permit zone.

**Sauvie showdown?** Hunting dog trainers, conservationists and biologists will meet in August and September to draft a new management plan for the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area.

The department and conservation community are looking to expand habitat for ground-nesting songbirds (meadowlarks, etc.), some of it potentially in areas traditionally used to train hunting dogs in the spring and summer.

On Friday, the commission will be briefed on the process, which should result in a draft plan sometime this fall to be approved at the December commission meeting.

-- [Bill Monroe](#)