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# Blue Mountain NEWS

*Life in the Foothills*

## The Return *of* **KING** *Salmon*

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# The Return of King Salmon

Story by Ken Graham



For the first time in decades, fishermen on the Snake River are enjoying a two-month season for adult fall Chinook Salmon, otherwise known as King Salmon. The season opened September 1<sup>st</sup> and will close no later than October 31<sup>st</sup>. Fishermen are allowed to keep a limited number of hatchery-bred Chinook (with adipose fins clipped), but all native unclipped fish must be returned to the water unharmed.

As the chart below shows, in fifteen years, the annual adult Fall Chinook run (native and hatchery combined) has grown from less than a thousand fish counted at Little Goose Dam, to more than 43,000. According to Steve Martin, Director of the Snake River Salmon Recovery Board in Dayton, a number of remedial actions taken over the past ten years are paying off. Most importantly, new sport and commercial fishing regulations in the lower Columbia River are now limiting the harvest of fall Chinook. "In the 1990s, 70% of the adult Snake River fall Chinook swimming up the Columbia River to their home waters were intercepted by lower Columbia River fishermen," Martin says. He says that now these fish are protected through very conservative fishing regulations in the lower Columbia to ensure that the vast majority survive their journey back to the Snake.

Recent improvements to the federal hydropower system are also working. "A decade ago we lost at least 10% of the smolts (small fish on the way to the ocean) at each of the dams," Martin says. "Today that number is much smaller due to improvements at the dams." He says that spilling water in the spring, barging juvenile salmon around the dams and removal of pikeminnow have all contributed to greatly improving smolt survival rates.

Recent improvements in ocean and river corridor conditions have also increased salmon survival rates. And fish hatcheries constructed to mitigate losses of fall Chinook due to the hydropower system (including Lyon's Ferry and the Nez Perce tribal hatcheries in Idaho) have only recently reached full production, releasing approximately 4.5 million juvenile salmon into the Snake each year.

The decline of Chinook salmon runs in the Snake River began more than a century ago. "In the late 1800s, recreational and commercial fishermen targeted this prize fish and became so effective at catching them in the Columbia River that they nearly decimated the population in the early 1900s," Martin says. Next, the federal and private hydropower systems came on line in the Columbia and Snake Rivers. "That impeded migration of salmon and inundated their spawning grounds," Martin says that dams in Hell's Canyon with no fish ladders block access to about fifty percent of the salmon spawning grounds. "Throw in poor ocean conditions and continued high levels of harvest in the lower Columbia and in the ocean through much of the 1990s and the suite of pressures were too great for the salmon to overcome." No single factor is to blame for the decline.

In the early 1990s, all three runs of Chinook salmon (spring, summer and fall) were declared threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act. It was this listing that led to severe restrictions on fishing for Chinook on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. It also led to the creation of the organization Steve Martin heads, the Snake River Salmon Recovery Board, and its efforts to improve fish habitat conditions in rivers and streams in Southeast Washington. According to

Martin, a couple of conditions had to be favorable in order for fishing for Chinook to be reopened. "There have to be enough hatchery fish to allow some harvesting, and there also have to be enough native fish so that the fishing activity doesn't put them at too great a risk," he says. "The opening of Chinook fishing this fall shows that both conditions have been met."

Martin reports that independent assessments have concluded that fishing for steelhead (not salmon) in the Snake River generates \$30 to \$50 million annually for our local economy. "I'm interested in tracking the amount of time and money spent fishing for fall Chinook this year," he says, "A two-month salmon season probably won't add up to a seven-month steelhead season, but every little bit helps."

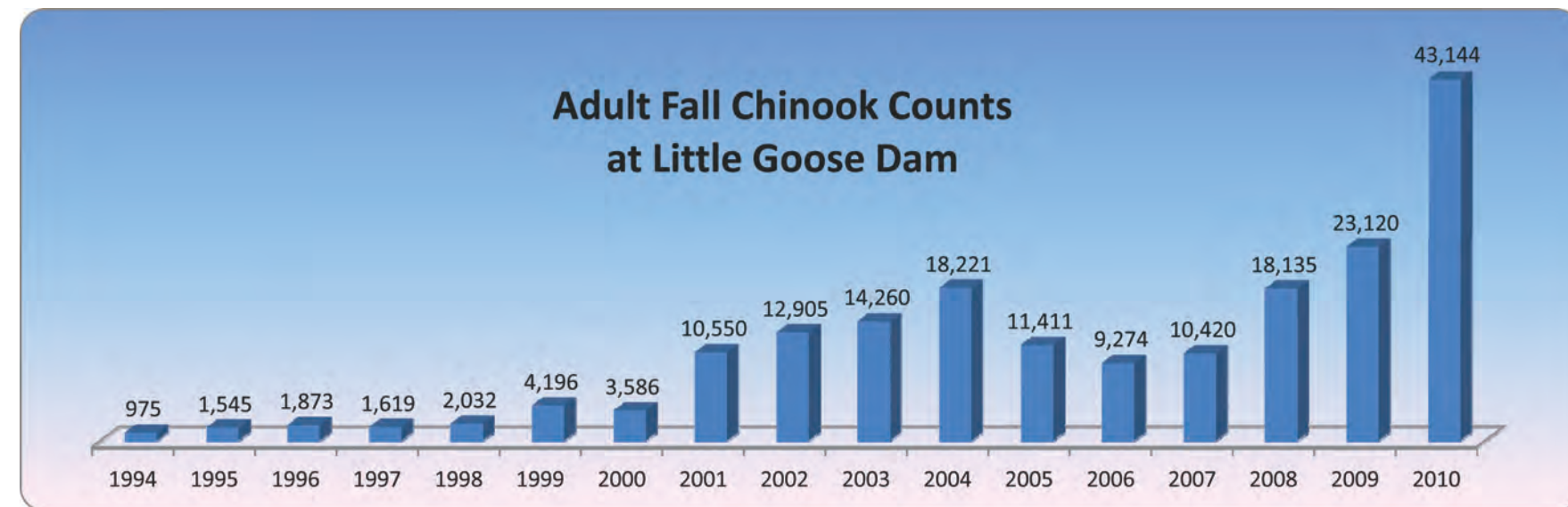
Martin says that the new fall Chinook season creates a wonderful new challenge for local fishermen. "You have to learn how to catch them," he says of the fall Chinook. "Catching salmon is something handed down generation to generation, and since it has been so long since we could catch these king salmon in the Snake River, there is a generation of fishermen who need to develop the technique without a mentor." □



Fishermen congregate near confluence of the Tucannon and Snake Rivers. (Photo courtesy of Snake River Salmon Recovery.)



Steve Martin outside his office in Dayton. (Photo by Ken Graham.)



# Chinook Salmon are Good for Business

*Story and photos by Ken Graham*

At Darver Tackle Shop in Starbuck, business is good. “Our business was off a little in the spring because of the poor weather,” says Darcy Linklater, who owns and operates the shop with his wife, Verna Foley. “But we expect our best fall ever.” Darcy credits excellent steelhead runs along with the first-ever (in his memory) full fall Chinook salmon season.

When we spoke with Darcy and Verna, they reported that they weren’t aware of very many Chinook being caught since the season opened September 1<sup>st</sup>. “The water temperatures have been a little too high,” Darcy says. He says that by mid-October, temperatures should have dropped enough in the Snake River that fishing should be much better. “I think that by the second week of October we’ll be seeing some excellent Chinook and steelhead being caught.”

Darcy says that the fall Chinook tend to be much larger than spring Chinook, which many area fishermen are used to catching. “They may run as high as 45 pounds,” he says. “We’re all going to have to learn how to catch them, since we have no experience with a fall Chinook season here.”

Besides offering a large selection of rods and reels, Darver sells many kinds of bait, including shrimp, herring, anchovies and sardines. Darcy and Verna opened Darver Tackle in 2001. Business has grown every year, and they say they are hoping to retire soon. “We have the store on the market,” says Verna. “For anyone with energy who loves to fish, this is a great way to make a living.”

When we visited Lyons Ferry Marina on a Friday afternoon in late September, it was very busy. We spoke with Jim MacArthur, who operates the KOA campground, store and restaurant there along with his wife, Angela. “Most of our business in the fall

is fishermen,” MacArthur says, adding that a few hunters stay there as well.

MacArthur says that, like Darver Tackle’s, their business was down some this past spring, due to cool, rainy weather, but since mid-summer they’ve been very busy. “We get a lot of recreational boaters here in the summer, but since the beginning of September, we’ve had lots of people fishing for not only



Above: Verna Foley and Darcy Linklater among their huge selection of fishing tackle at Darver Tackle in Starbuck (also shown at left). Below: The Lyon’s Ferry Bridge looms over the Snake River Grill and KOA Kampstore at Lyon’s Ferry Marina.

steelhead and salmon, but also sturgeon, trout and walleye.” In fact, on the weekend of October 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, Lyon’s Ferry is hosting the first annual Snake River Walleye Classic Tournament. □



## Where to Find Fishing Info

- Darver Tackle Shop: [www.darvertackle.com](http://www.darvertackle.com)
- Lyons Ferry KOA: [www.lyonsferrykoa.com](http://www.lyonsferrykoa.com)
- Snake River Salmon Recovery Board: [www.snakeriverboard.org](http://www.snakeriverboard.org)
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife: [www.wdfw.wa.gov](http://www.wdfw.wa.gov)
- Fish Passage Center: [www.fpc.org](http://www.fpc.org)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Fish Data:  
<http://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/environment/fishdata.asp>