

**FISHWATCH 2023 MONTHLY REPORT  
JULY 2023  
by Edward Kikumoto**

*COVID19 STATUS - The Big Bend Pool is open to the public this year until further notice to the contrary.*

*Compliance with CDC guidelines are recommended, especially for those who are unvaccinated and have underlying health concerns.*

*The FishWatch Caretaker is no longer "social distancing," so please let me know if you are, so I can make sure not to compromise your health.*

**DISCLAIMER**

*The opinions in this report are strictly my own, and do not reflect the views and opinions of the U.S. Forest Service, the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, or The North Umpqua Foundation.*

Greetings from the Big Bend Pool,

**LOW RETURNS FORECAST**



On July 31, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) closed all of the North Umpqua River to fishing because of the likelihood of a low return of wild summer steelhead and "hot" water temperatures.

ODFW News Release  
July 28, 2023

**All angling on North Umpqua River and tributaries closed July 31 – Nov. 30.**

Roseburg, Ore – All angling on the North Umpqua River and its tributaries is closed at 12:01 a.m. July 31 through Nov. 30, 2023. Low numbers of returning wild summer steelhead prompted state fishery managers to enact the angling closure from the mouth to the marker below Soda Springs Dam.

ODFW biologists project the run will not meet the 1,200 returning wild fish "critical abundance level" – the point where conserving the population could be in jeopardy if a downward trend continues. This threshold is defined in the CMP (Coastal Multispecies Conservation and Management Plan).

**Current counts of wild summer steelhead passing Winchester Dam are just under half the amount needed to expect meeting critical abundance for the year.** Low water flows and water temperatures approaching 80 degrees in the lower North Umpqua and mainstem Umpqua rivers also play a role in this emergency angling closure.

Similar conditions and low returns also closed fishing in this area in 2021. Last year, returns were slightly over critical abundance level.

Several factors affecting the low wild summer steelhead returns are at play.

A primary factor is ocean conditions, which play a major role in fish survival and ultimately run size. Once entering the Umpqua River, returning summer steelhead often face less than ideal conditions with very warm water.

Predation from non-native smallmouth bass and striped bass also has potentially increased, likely contributing to lowered runs. Lastly, habitat conditions in many areas of the Umpqua Basin must be improved to help cool water and provide better conditions for native fish.

District Biologist Greg Huchko says he's seeing issues across species in the Umpqua with fish populations not performing as well as many other coastal basins, but particularly with coho and summer steelhead.

While ocean conditions are a global challenge, Huchko says ODFW and partners are focusing state and federal funds to improve riparian and in-stream habitat to benefit native fish.

Wild summer steelhead counts are determined from Winchester Dam video of migrating fish.

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(**BOLD** type added for emphasis.)

**"Current counts of wild summer steelhead passing Winchester Dam are just under half the amount needed to expect meeting critical abundance for the year."**

"Half" is 600 wild summer steelhead.

*During the summer 60% to 70% of the wild summer steelhead that will return to the North Umpqua River will cross Winchester Dam in June and July. The remainder will return in August thru November.*

*The return last year of wild summer steelhead was 1,346, just above the Critical Abundance Level of 1,200.*

*Most of the wild summer steelhead in the Big Bend Pool over the summer are June and July returning steelhead.*

*I haven't heard anything about the return of hatchery steelhead this year. The hatchery steelhead returning this year would have been the smolts released in 2020 – the year the Archie Fire destroyed the hatchery. Were the hatchery smolts released before the hatchery burned or were they destroyed by the fire?*

Here is what the returns MIGHT have looked like over the summer, this year.

200 wild summer steelhead return in June.

200 wild summer steelhead return in July.

The remainder, if they survived the warm water temperatures in the lower river, will return in August through November.

The number of steelhead I have been seeing in the Pool reflect the low count forecast.

On July 1, I counted 35 steelhead.

On July 30, I counted 90 steelhead.

*On July 27, 2022 I was looking at 170 steelhead.*

*Counting steelhead in the Pool in July has been difficult. The water is murky green from algae, and the steelhead have been holding near the bottom and in the deeper parts of the Pool for the most part – on the front edge of the "Tailout," in the "Bucket" (deepest part of the Pool near the top of the Pool), and on the "Dropoff" at the very front of the Pool. It is very likely that what I am seeing is not all of the steelhead, so my counts are probably low.*

**On August 3, the ODFW diver counted 123 steelhead in the Pool.**

*The ODFW diver checks the Pool and other locations where steelhead may hold at least once a month during the summer (June thru September).*

*Of the total number of wild summer steelhead that return to the North Umpqua River system, 37% return to the Steamboat Creek Basin (Canton Creek and Steamboat Creek) to spawn.*

*If 400 wild summer steelhead have crossed Winchester Dam in June and July, 37% would be 148 steelhead in Steamboat Creek Basin.*

## **OVERVIEW**

### Bad Behavior

I have not observed any illegal, unlawful or unacceptable behavior at the Pool during this period.

### Visitors

There were 31 days in July.

I was away from the Pool on 14 days during daylight hours (9-5).

On the 17 days I was present at the Pool during daylight hours I had 165 visitors, for an average of 9.7 visitors/day. On two of the 17 days I had no visitors – one Saturday, and a Thursday.

Over the long July 4 weekend (July 1 thru July 4, which was a Tuesday) I had 53 visitors.

On the 10 weekend days out of the 17 days I was present at the Pool, I had

115 visitors for a weekend day average of 11.5 visitors/day.  
On the 5 weekdays I was present at the Pool (not including the 2 days included in the July 4 Holiday, July 1 thru July 4), I had 26 visitors, for an average of 5.2 visitors/day.

July started with a long 4-day July 4 weekend. Steamboat Creek Basin was the busiest (campers and day trippers) I've seen it since before COVID. The visitor traffic continued through the second week of July, then slowed down. Weekends have been busy, especially during the heat waves, when folks come up to jump in the creeks.

### Wild Summer Steelhead

On July 1, I counted 35 steelhead in the Big Bend Pool.  
On July 12, there were 65 steelhead in the Pool.  
On July 18, I counted 85 steelhead in the Pool.  
On July 30, I counted 90 steelhead in the Pool.  
On August 3, the ODFW diver counted 123 steelhead in the Big Bend Pool.

*I guess 33 steelhead were hiding from me.*

In June the active steelhead in the Pool were rolling to the surface and tail slapping. This month they began leaping. At the end of the month they are mostly leaping – *a treat for visitors to the Pool.*

### Weather

Clear skies predominated and temperatures fluctuated between normal highs in the 80s to above normal temperatures in the high 90s to 100. The clear skies also brought cooler nighttime temperatures in the 50s, which made the hot daytime temperatures tolerable.

July started out hot with daytime temperatures in the high 90s, and reaching 100°F on July 4th.  
On July 3, the Fire Danger Level was raised to High, IFPL 2, with no Public Use Restricts (PURS).  
July 7 thru 13, high 80s.  
July 14 thru 16, high 90s.  
July 17 thru 31, mid 80s to low 90s.

On July 11, Pacific Power issued a Wildfire Safety Precautions Announcement that informed electrical power users that if conditions warranted – hot dry forest conditions and sustained high winds – the power would be shut off due to the potential for downed power lines to cause forest fires.

On July 14 the Fire Danger Level was raised to High, IFPL 2, PURS Level 1 (open fires restricted to campfires in Forest Service constructed rings and fireplaces in designated sites).

*The USFS uses three fire danger categories West of the Cascades:*

- *A general description: No Fire Danger, Low, Moderate, High, Very High, Extreme.*
- *IFPL (Industrial Fire Precaution Levels, primarily for logging) 1 to 4 – Fire Season, Limited Shutdown, Restricted Shutdown, Complete Shutdown.*
- *Public Use Restrictions – No Restrictions, Levels 1 thru 3 for campfires, stoves, smoking, generators and motorized vehicles.*

**I didn't hear of any reports of thunderstorms in the area in July.**

### Stream Flow

On July 1 the USGS Canton Creek Gage recorded 69.1 cfs (cubic feet per second) at 13:00. The flow dropped steadily through the month and measured 34.3 cfs on July 31.

*Normal mid to late summer flows are between 30 and 50 cfs.*

### Water Temperatures

I've begun to take water temperatures every week on Sunday, once in the morning around 10:00 and just before dusk, to show the fluctuation in temperature throughout the day. Sometimes I take water temperatures again during the week.

*Generally speaking (for the Pacific Northwest) steelhead begin stressing over 64° Fahrenheit. Any additional stress between 64 and 68°, e.g., being caught and released, may lead to more fatalities. Temperatures above 74° are lethal due to a lack of oxygen in the water.*

*The reason the wild summer steelhead hold in the Big Bend Pool all through the summer is because of the cold water in the pool – the result of cold spring water that enters the pool from Big Bend Creek, which is just upstream of the Big Bend Pool. I've been told that the spring that flows into Big Bend Creek comes out of the ground at 43°F (5°C). The water that flows out of Big Bend Creek into the Big Bend Pool is around 55°F in the summer. In the summer (once the spring runoff has ended), about 75% of Big Bend Creek flowing into Steamboat Creek is spring water.*

*The water flowing through the Pool is striated both vertically and horizontally. The water from Steamboat Creek and Big Bend Creek don't completely mix as they flow through the Pool. For the most part, as the Big Bend Creek and Steamboat Creek water passes downstream, the colder Big Bend Creek water will be beneath the warmer Steamboat Creek water until it mixes toward the back of the pool. However, flow turbulence will also create pockets of warm and cold water.*

*The steelhead find the coldest water flows to hold in, and in which they also feel "safe" – with sufficient water depth beneath them to allow for escape from predators. The coldest spot in the Pool is at the top of the pool where 100% Big Bend Creek water flows in.*

DATE	AIR	<b>BBC</b>	SC	BBP	CRK	LBP
07.02 PM	93	<b>64.6</b>	71.3	67.8	58.4	67.7
07.04 PM	100	<b>62.5</b>	71.1	65.9		
07.09 PM	86	<b>62.8</b>	72.0	66.4	58.4	
07.12 AM	52	<b>54.2</b>	64.9	58.3	55.2	
07.12 PM	89	<b>62.3</b>	71.4	65.9	58.1	
07.16 AM	57	<b>56.9</b>	68.6	60.9	58.1	
07.16 PM	95	<b>64.3</b>	74.8	68.0	60.6	
07.18 PM	90	<b>63.6</b>	73.3	67.0	59.7	
07.23 AM		<b>56.8</b>	68.4	60.3	58.1	61.0
07.23 PM	91	<b>64.8</b>	74.3	68.1	61.0	68.5
07.30 AM	52	<b>55.4</b>	65.8	58.7	56.5	59.0
07.30 PM	83	<b>62.4</b>	71.4	65.4	58.8	66.0

*Low air temperature (**AIR**) taken approximately 05:00.  
**AM** water temperature taken at approximately 10:00.*

*High air temperature (AIR) taken approximately 13:00.  
PM water temperature taken before dusk.*

*The Big Bend Creek (BBC) water temperature is taken just above its confluence with Steamboat Creek.*

*The Steamboat Creek (SC) temperature is taken above Big Bend Creek.*

*The Big Bend Pool (BBP) water temperature is taken at the bottom of the Pool where it flows out mixed (Steamboat Creek and Big Bend Creek).*

*A small unnamed [spring?] creek (CRK) that flows into Steamboat Creek just downstream from the Big Bend Pool, all year.*

*The Little Bend Pool (LBP) a quarter mile downstream from the Big Bend Pool.*

*Water temperature readings are being taken on a ThermoWorks ThermaCheck Plus digital thermometer.*

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

### Airstream

All the Airstream's necessary bells and whistles are working for FishWatch purposes.

I have not seen or heard any mice in the Airstream so I'm assuming that all the holes in the exterior continue to be sealed.

### Propane

The 250 gallons propane tank has 73% (182.5 gallons) remaining as of July 26. The only use of propane at the moment is for the refrigerator.

### Generators

I am only using the Honda EU1000i (gas) and not the Honda EU2200i in the evening, primarily to maintain the charge on the batteries. In conjunction with the solar panels charging during the day, a couple of hours



(2-3 hours) of generator charging in the evening will do a good job of maintaining the batteries in good condition.

The charger I'm using for the batteries is a NOCO 10 amp (and not the Airstream's built in charger, which is a trickle charger). The NOCO draws less than 2 amps while charging. This is well within the amp draw capacity of the EU1000i (7.5 amps), and makes it possible to use the generator in ECO mode (longer running time on a tank of gas).

*It is recommended to run the generator on "regular" mode if the amperage draw is over 50% of the maximum amperage draw of the generator.*

The generator also runs the 110 AC lights in the evening, a light strip to recharge my electronic peripherals, and a fan, if I need it, after a hot day.

*In the Fall when the solar panels are not helping maintain battery charge, and it gets darker much earlier, I will be using the bigger EU2200i (on propane) in the evenings, for lighting and to charge the batteries, with a running time of 4-5 hours.*

### Portable Toilets

The toilets were cleaned on schedule on the second Friday of the month. The toilets were used pretty frequently during the first two weeks of July – over the long July 4 weekend and the following week, which saw lots of campers in the Steamboat Creek Basin. The last two weeks of July saw moderate use of the toilets. I cleaned and maintained the toilets as necessary.

### Road Conditions

3.5 Mile Post "SLOW CREEP" – This section of Steamboat Creek Road continues to slowly fall apart. The useable part of the road is getting narrower and is down to one lane on the upstream side of the curve. Forest Service road maintenance crews were inspecting and surveying the Creep during the last two weeks of July. I was told that a temporary fix was to fill some of the cracks in the road in the near future.

With the heavy equipment and logging trucks using the road through the end of the year, I expect that road conditions here are going to get worse

sooner than later. PLEASE BE CAREFUL DRIVING THIS SECTION ESPECIALLY ON WEEK DAYS DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS, WHEN HEAVY EQUIPMENT WILL ALSO BE ON THE ROAD – **IT'S A BLIND CURVE.**

### Logging

Beginning in early August, two sections upstream of the Big Bend Pool will be opened to commercial logging. I believe this is the continued removal of salvaged trees from the 2021 wildfires in Steamboat Creek Basin.

### Tracking Wildfires

I finally got around to buying myself a radio receiver to monitor the firefighting activity in Steamboat Creek Basin. Something I should have done long ago. It's a Uniden Bearcat BC125AT and was the least expensive of the recommended receivers. It's good enough to cover the Steamboat Creek Basin from the Big Bend Pool. Not good at all from home at Steamboat. What is really nice is getting a Fire Weather Forecast twice a day at 10:00 and 16:00 from Roseburg Dispatch, which includes fire danger levels. All of the Umpqua National Forest is covered on a single frequency, so all I have to do is lock into that frequency to keep track of all fire fighting activity going on in the Steamboat Creek Basin. The relay transmitters in Steamboat Creek Basin are at Fairview Peak and Chilcoot Mountain.

## **WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS & BEHAVIOR**

FlyBys – Kingfishers chattering, bald eagle, osprey, and a blue heron.

One day sightings of 3 mergansers, 11 geese (goslings almost full grown), and an adult otter with its two pups hunting crayfish.

Occasional sightings of ruffed grouse and blacktail deer (mostly does and fawns) while driving back and forth from the Pool to Steamboat.

### Beavers

I saw a beaver on only three separate occasions in the Pool, at dusk – July 16, 18 and 20. I'm assuming it was the same beaver each time, and that it was the female that had nested at the Pool earlier in the summer. On the

16th, I saw it swim to the bottom of the Pool and begin foraging – eating vine maple leaves, and then cut down a willow branch and take it back to its den. On the other two occasions it was swimming downstream just at dark. After these three sightings I have not seen a beaver again in the Pool. I have not seen any kits (baby beavers) this year.

### Deer and Elk

On July 9, Sunday, I saw 3 young blacktail bucks (visible horns) with a doe (mom?) cross the road to Steamboat Creek, just downstream from the Airstream.

### Osprey

On July 8, I spotted a large nest atop a live Douglas Fir that has lost its top, on the far side of Steamboat Creek. I just so happened to be looking for osprey and bald eagles flying or perching in the vicinity.

It can be best seen from the road just where a very small unnamed creek crosses the road into Steamboat Creek, about an eighth mile downstream from the Pool. There is a "big" Douglas Fir there. If you stand just to its upstream side and look up at the top of the tree line on the far side of Steamboat Creek, you can see the nest.

My first knee jerk conclusion was it must be a bald eagle's nest...just because of its size. I started checking it out whenever I took a walk down the road. Often, there was a white head looking out of the nest, but I couldn't tell whether it was a bald eagle or osprey until I saw it fly away. It took until July 20 to identify the bird on the nest as an osprey. And on July 30, I saw two adult osprey on the nest. I now know what the short and long calls of an osprey sound like.

I don't know where the bald eagle(s) I see occasionally are nesting. I think the very big blue heron is nesting nearby as well.

### Flying Insects and Yellowjackets

There have been fewer mosquitos, gnats and no-see-ums than I thought should be around this month. But there is an ever-increasing number of

yellow jackets. One day I got too close to a ground nest. Luckily I only got stung twice. OUCH! I've decided to put out traps.

END OF JULY 2023 REPORT

Respectfully submitted,

Ed Kikumoto  
FishWatch 2023 Caretaker