

**FISHWATCH 2023 MONTHLY REPORT
SEPTEMBER 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,

THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE 2023 WILDFIRE SEASON

The beginning of seasonally normal Fall weather conditions is lessening the wildfire threat by reducing the possibility that new wildfires will occur as well as reducing the possibility that the on-going fires will jump existing fire lines and become bigger – fewer periods of hot and dry conditions, cooler temperatures, higher humidity, and most importantly, rain.

Industrial Fire Precaution Level (IFPL), primarily for commercial logging activities

- *IFPL 4 – Complete Shutdown.*
- *IFPL 3 – Restricted Shutdown.*
- *IFPL 2 – Limited Shutdown.*
- *IFPL 1 – Fire Season.*

Generally speaking, no logging activity, or very limited logging activity occurs at levels 4 and 3, and logs are not being hauled out of the forest. At IFPL 2, logs are once again being removed from the forest.

On September 2, the IFPL was reduced from IFPL 3 to IFPL 2.

On September 23 the IFPL was reduced from IFPL 2 to IFPL 1.

USFS Fire Danger Level

09.01 – Extreme.

09.02 – Very High.

09.07 – High.

09.23 – Moderate.

The Weather

The first week of September was showery and cooler, with daytime temperatures in the 70s and nights in the 50s.

Mid-month saw a four days (09.14 thru 09.17) hot spell with daytime temperatures in the 90s, which was followed by consecutive rainy days through the end of the month (09.24 thru 26, 09.29).

By the end of the month daytime temperatures were in the 50s - 60s and nighttime lows in the 40s - 50s.

The Fires

Beginning mid-month fire fighting activity was shifting to monitoring and clean up.

The status of the five fires in and around Steamboat Creek Basin as of September 18:

- Chilcoot – Chilcoot Mountain near the entrance into Steamboat Creek Basin and within the Basin, 1,769 acres, 60% contained.
- Ridge Fire – Bear Camp, northern ridgeline edge of Boulder Creek Wilderness, 214 acres, 95% contained.
- Dinner Fire – Dinner Creek, north of Steamboat Creek Basin, in the Willamette National Forest, 304 acres, 95% contained.
- Brice Fire – Brice Creek, north of Steamboat Creek Basin, in the Willamette National Forest, 588 acres, 55% contained.
- Grizzly Fire – Grizzly Mountain (near Fairview Peak Lookout), northern edge of Steamboat Creek Basin, 237 acres, 0% contained. *The Grizzly Fire is the only fire that hand crews are not working to contain the fire due to hazardous conditions having mostly to do with the steep terrain. Fire suppression is being conducted using water drops.*

The Chilcoot Fire is the only fire threatening private forest lands, the other fires are in the wilderness and far from human habitation.

Emergency Fire Closure

On August 28, the Umpqua National Forest ordered an Emergency Fire Closure for the northern part of the Forest, which included all of the Steamboat Creek Basin, i.e., closed to public access. Steamboat Creek Basin was closed so that firefighting crews and equipment could use Steamboat Creek Road (FSR 38), and the logging roads in the Basin to get close to the Chilcoot Fire and the Ridge Fire. In addition, the first five miles of Steamboat Creek Road was part of the contingency (containment) line around the Chilcoot Fire. Crews and equipment were also using Steamboat Creek Road to get to the Ridge Fire by way of Washboard Road (FSR 3817) to FSR 3850 and FSR 3810, up on Reynolds Ridge. Washboard Road begins a half-mile downstream from the Big Bend Pool, which is to say that there is a significant amount of firefighting traffic at times on the 11 miles of Steamboat Creek Road from its junction with Highway 138 up to the Big Bend Pool.

On September 1, FishWatch received an access waiver to the Fire Emergency Closure from the District Ranger, which allows me to drive to and from the Big Bend Pool, and to remain at the Pool overnight and during the day.

I returned to the Pool to stay overnight for the first time on September 4. The reason for the delay was a thunder and lightning storm that passed over Steamboat and the entrance into Steamboat Creek Basin in the early evening of September 2. My lightning tracker app showed numerous instances of lightning along the first five miles of Steamboat Creek Road (estimated 75 to 100). I was sure that some of them would hit the ground and were going to start fires, and decided to wait at home and monitor the situation for a couple of days. The next day I drove over to the entrance into the Basin to talk to the fire fighters there, and found out that there were no new fires as a result of the previous night's thunderstorm. They were as surprised as I was.

On September 20 the total closure of Steamboat Creek Basin was lifted, and replaced with a "limited" closure – within the contingency containment lines around the Chilcoot, Brice, Dinner and Grizzly Fires. As of September 30, the "limited" closure remains in effect.

OVERVIEW

Bad Behavior

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

However, there was one curious interaction that I had at the Big Bend Pool that I thought warranted a report to the proper authorities. No action on their part was necessary.

Visitors

There were 30 days in September.

I was away from the Pool on 13 days during daylight hours (10-5). Three of the 13 days were due to the Emergency Fire Closure of Steamboat Creek

Basin (beginning August 28) – September 1, 2 and 3.

On 3 days that I was away from the Pool during the daylight hours I had 7 visitors to the Pool before I left in the morning. These early morning visitors were firefighting personnel at the beginning of their shifts.

On the 17 days I was present at the Pool during daylight hours I had 68 visitors, for an average of 4 visitors/day. On two of the 17 days I had no visitors – 09.14 and 09.19.

On the 7 weekend days out of the 17 days I was present at the Pool, I had 32 visitors for a weekend day average of 4.6 visitors/day.

On the 10 weekdays I was present at the Pool, I had 36 visitors, for an average of 3.6 visitors/day.

The total number of visitors to the Pool while I was present was 75.

All the visitors to the Pool from September 5 through September 20 were working on the wildfires – 48 visitors.

From September 21 through the 30th, I had 27 visitors, of which 10 were civilians.

Wild Summer Steelhead

09.05 – 35 steelhead in the lower pool.

09.09 – 180 steelhead in the Big Bend Pool.

09.10 – 40 steelhead in the lower pool.

09.14 – 185 steelhead in the Big Bend Pool, and 40 steelhead in the lower pool.

09.23 – 175-185 steelhead in the Big Bend Pool, and 50 steelhead in the lower pool.

09.28 – 230-240 steelhead in the Big Bend Pool, and 25 steelhead in the lower pool – SEASON'S HIGH COUNT.

The water temperatures appear to be within the steelhead's comfort zone. For the most part, they are spread (not bunching up), holding from the tailout to mid-pool, in and off the main current, and within 1 to 2 feet of the surface – lining up where the current flow and water temperature is the most comfortable. As the month progressed they were jumping less often and being more still.

09.25 and 09.27 – Little Falls.

On the 25th and 27th I stopped at Little Falls on my way home. It was around 11:00. I thought I might see steelhead trying to jump the falls, after the first significant amounts of rain of the season started to raise the water level. During the short time I was there I saw about 20 attempts over 25 minutes on the 25th, and 12 attempts over 20 minutes on the 27th. What was special was seeing a big steelhead make it over the falls on both days. Both steelhead were able to jump three quarters of the way up and swim up the solid water flowing over the top. On the 25th the Canton gage was 40.3 cfs at 11:00 on the 25th, and 92.2 cfs at 11:00 on the 27th.

Weather

See above – THE BEGINNING OF THE END...

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.*

Stream Flow

09.01 – USGS Gage at Canton Creek Campground, measured 37.9 cubic feet per second (cfs) as the summer dry ground conditions continue to absorb any rainfall.

The water level trended down over the next three weeks.

09.18 thru 09.21 – 24.8 cfs – September's low.

09.26 – 84.7 cfs. FIRST DIRTY RUNOFF OF THE FALL. The ground is bone dry but there was sufficient rainfall to scour the ground surface of light debris and dust, which raised the water level and made the flow dirtier than one might expect – much like a flash flood in a dry river bed but not as violent or dangerous.

09.26 @ 20:00 102 cfs, HIGH PEAK FLOW.



Big Bend Pool on 09.26.23 @ 13:45, 84.7 cfs.

Despite the rainfall, Steamboat Creek remained at relatively low flows. This is because the ground is "bone dry." When the ground is bone dry and dirt and debris has accumulated on the surface, it acts as a barrier to rainfall percolating into the ground. The rain doesn't start soaking into the ground until this layer of soil and debris is pushed into the streams and creeks or is soaked through. A day's heavy rainfall will cause runoff into the

streams and creeks, which will momentarily cause the water levels to rise and the accumulated summer debris to dirty the water, but this will be of very short duration and within a day to two, water levels will return to summer lows.

Once it starts raining in the late summer or early fall it can take a month or two of rain to saturate the ground. When the ground is saturated, streams and creeks will begin rising very shortly after it starts raining, and will remain high for three or four days thereafter.

In a densely treed forest, as the Umpqua National Forest is, the tree canopy acts as an umbrella and a sponge, and very little of the early rainfall, which is normally of short duration, actually reaches the ground. This is very important when fighting wildfires.

Water Temperatures

Overall, water temperatures are remaining within the steelhead's comfort zone, below 60°F. Water temperatures nearing 64°F will stress steelhead.

DATE	AIR	BBC	SC	BBP	CRK	LBP
09.05 AM	47	52.1	60.1	54.5	54.4	54.8
09.05 PM	71	57.6	64.5	59.7	56.6	60.0
09.10 AM	50	53.3	61.7	55.6	55.8	55.8
09.10 PM	83	58.8	65.9	60.8	57.7	61.4
09.17 AM	50	52.6	61.5	54.7	55.4	54.9
09.17 PM	89	58.1	65.3	60.0	58.1	60.5
09.30 AM	51	50.7	55.8	53.1	52.6	53.6

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

***AM** water temperature taken at approximately 10:00.*

*High air temperature (**AIR**) taken at 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 very small all-year creek (CRK) that flows into Steamboat Creek just downstream from the Big Bend Pool @ 10.1 MP.

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

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

INFRASTRUCTURE

Airstream

The Airstream is in good working condition for FishWatch purposes.

Propane

The 250 gallons propane tank has 52% (130 gallons) remaining as of the end of September. The only use of propane at the moment is for the refrigerator.

Generators

I continue to use the Honda EU1000i, which runs on non-ethanol gas, as my primary source of generator power.

Portable Toilets

The toilets were cleaned on schedule on the second Friday of the month. The toilets were used less frequently this month because of the wildfire closure to the public through September 20. There were very few visitors to Steamboat Creek Basin even after it was reopened to the public. I cleaned and maintained the toilets as necessary.

Road Conditions

3.5 Mile Post "SLOW CREEP" – One lane due to the pavement slowly sliding off of the hillside. This was supposed to be temporarily patched, however it has not, and instead there are red warning cones where it is unsafe to drive.

With the heavy equipment and logging trucks using the road through the summer, 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

Two sections remain open to logging upstream from the Big Bend Pool. Logging activity was restarted in early September, with the Industrial Fire Precaution Level (IFPL) lowered from IFPL-3 (Restricted Shutdown) to IFPL 2 (Limited Shutdown) on September 2.

WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS & BEHAVIOR

Striped Whip Snake? (Yellow stripe, red X on its head), and Ringneck Snake on the road.

Young osprey on the other side of the Pool hunting the cutthroat.

Quail covey walked through camp!

Kingfishers flying by and chittering.

Hummingbirds during the warmer and sunnier days.

Blue Heron's distinctive loud squawk as it flies by.

I think I found a Rubber Boa underneath a rock.



Ringneck Snake



Rubber Boa

Flushing quail and the occasional grouse, and seeing Blacktail does, often with fawns on my wanderings – walking and driving.

The firefighters said they were seeing a lot of grouse high up near the fires in early September. I think they are seeing the birds that had to leave the burn areas, and were stacking up on the edges of the fires. Later on in September, as the fires were contained and dampened by rain, they said they weren't seeing as many grouse as earlier.

On September 7, a Thursday, at 15:29, I was sitting at the table in the Airstream working on my computer. The door was open. It was 78°F, clear skies, light haze and smoke, a cooling breeze. I initially heard some rustling, then what I thought was lots of close by chirping, which I thought was odd. Out of the side of my left eye I saw movement, and when I glanced over there was an adult California Quail framed in the doorway. She moved left out of the frame, and wanting to see where she went I got up and looked

out the door as a troop of juveniles went scurrying by, following their mom down the embankment into the heavy brush creekside. There were at least a dozen birds. I was stunned. Amazed. Gratified.

On September 17, 3 otters entered the Pool at dusk hunting crayfish. Rather than keep to the edges of the Pool, where they normally hunt for crayfish, they decided to swim through the deepest parts of the Pool, which seemed to really disturb the steelhead. It resulted in more than the usual jumping and splashing by the steelhead until the otters left.

It looks like the osprey pair have left the nest downstream from the Big Bend Pool. I frequently hear an osprey's call nearby.

I've come to recognize the chipmunk's single repeated call.

No beavers.

Flying Insects and Yellowjackets

I was told by a visitor, that as it gets colder the yellowjackets get angrier. That appears to be the case because I was stung twice within 2 hours as I was talking to visitors, while standing near the big Douglas Fir overlooking the viewing area. YEOW!

With the rain and still relatively warm weather I'm seeing more gnats, especially in the evening.

END OF SEPTEMBER 2023 REPORT

Respectfully submitted,

Ed Kikumoto
FishWatch 2023 Caretaker