

August 13, 2019

## Pelton Round Butte Fish and Wildlife Newsletter



Thank you to the presenters and all those who attended our 25th Annual Pelton Round Butte Fisheries Workshop, as well as our Water Quality Study open houses. It was great to see so many people and organizations devoted to the Deschutes Basin. Find presentations from the workshop on our [Fact Sheets](#) page, and email [Deschutes.Passage@pgn.com](mailto:Deschutes.Passage@pgn.com) with any questions.

Meanwhile, juvenile fish migration wrapped up and we welcomed adult sockeye back to the Pelton Trap. In addition, we are radio-tracking adult spring Chinook to observe their movement once released above our project. It's been a productive summer so far for our team, with much more exciting fieldwork still to come.

Past newsletters can be found on our [Deschutes Updates and Events](#) page. [Subscribe](#) to our mailing list.



### Join our Environmental Facebook Group

If you like this newsletter, check out our Environmental Community on Facebook — find daily updates on PGE's fish and wildlife work and post your own questions and experiences. [Join the group!](#)

### Featured Study: Adult Fish Tracking in Lake Billy Chinook

When we released this year's strong run of 47 upper basin spring Chinook above Round Butte Dam, we were eager to follow their next step in the journey home. Most of these fish were given radio tags so we can track their progress to spawning grounds upstream. Our biologists look for patterns in timing and distribution so restoration efforts can be targeted in areas where fish typically spawn.

However, Chinook are not the only species we monitor in our reservoir tracking studies, which began in 2012. Up to 100 steelhead and sockeye are also given a radio tag each year. Tagged fish of all three species are released as usual through our Adult Release Facility just upstream of Round Butte Dam.

#### How do we track fish?

A week after the first fish of each species is released, our scientists hit the water, trails, and even sky around the lake to track them. Once a week, PGE staff traverse each of the lake's arms in a boat equipped with an antenna and receiver. Once a tag is in range, the receiver displays the individual fish's identification number. This number is cross-referenced with our records to provide information on the fish's sex and species. In addition to finding fish by boat, our scientists regularly hike into remote areas where boat access is limited to download data from land-based radio stations. Fixed stations at the tributary mouths monitor if and when fish decide to leave the main channel. In the most rugged areas — typically further upstream in the tributaries — we use our helicopter to track tags from the air.



**PGE fish technician Elayne Barclay matches receiver codes to tagged fish as part of the tracking study.**



#### What questions can we answer using this study?

- **Migration timing:** when do the fish return to their natal streams?
- **Spawning distribution:** where are they going to spawn?
- **Spawning abundance:** are they finding each other and how many are together?
- **Competition:** are fish competing for the same resources?

To answer these questions, we track the fish as precisely as we can within the tributaries and the lake. "There can be movement between each arm by a particular fish on a weekly basis," said Becky Burchell, the PGE senior fisheries biologist in charge of the study. "We want to be able to catch those movements if possible."

For example, we found that five spring Chinook entered Whychus Creek in late spring, and one traveled upstream almost to Sisters. It has since come back downstream to find a mate. We look forward to seeing where these fish choose to end their long migration.

**LEFT: A fixed radio station monitors fish that swim by. The data is downloaded manually each week.**

## Juvenile Fish Update

Juvenile Species	June 2019	Yearly Total (through June 2019)
Chinook	4,386	33,683
Steelhead	1,040	11,126
Sockeye	1,523	91,964

- In June, we processed 17,243 fish from seven salmonid species at the Fish Transfer Facility.
- Juvenile numbers for June are typically lower as the migration season wraps up around this time.

## Adult Fish Update

Adult Species	July 2019	Yearly Total (hatchery, wild and upper basin)
Spring Chinook	39	451
Sockeye	8	8

- Sockeye returns are down across the region this year. Less than 64,000 fish have passed above Bonneville — the poorest run since 2007.

Complete daily fish counts can be [found online](#).

## Staff Feature: Elayne Barclay, fish technician



As a seasonal fish technician for PGE, Elayne Barclay's office is the gorgeous scenery of the Deschutes Basin. She spends most of her days in the field, working with fish. During smolt migration, she and other fish technicians monitor screw traps on the tributaries of Lake Billy Chinook, process smolts at the Selective Water Withdrawal, and track radio-tagged adult fish released above the dam. Elayne, who earned her BS in biology from Portland State, worked for 15 years as an animal keeper at the Oregon Zoo and even ran a small animal rescue for ferrets. When she decided to move away from the city in 2012, she found that working as a fish technician for PGE aligned with her interest in animal conservation. While her job does occasionally take her driving on rough roads to remote locations, she says it's rewarding to contribute to the "conservation of native wildlife."

## Announcements and News

- PGE completed much-needed repairs on Pelton Dam Road in late July. Access to Lake Simtustus via Belmont Lane and Elk Drive is back open.
- A seasonal blue-green algae advisory is in place for Lake Billy Chinook. While the notice is precautionary, visitors should stay aware. More in the [Madras Pioneer](#).
- Oregon Wildlife Foundation is fundraising with the Department of Fish and Wildlife to support Lower Deschutes fire restoration. More on [OWF's website](#).
- Contribute to scientific research on Whychus Creek during Stream Sampling Day, Aug. 24 in Sisters. RSVP with the [Upper Deschutes Watershed Council](#).
- The Lower Deschutes was featured among [Sunset Magazine's](#) best rivers for rafters of every level. It's a great place to begin your rafting career.
- The Deschutes River Conservancy recently completed a long-term restoration project on Whychus Creek. Watch a video on their [website](#).
- Officials recently raised Central Oregon's fire danger level. Details on staying fire-safe in the [Madras Pioneer](#).
  - ◊ First responders climbed down the Crooked River canyon to extinguish a wildfire in July. Details on [KTVZ](#).
- The Crooked River Watershed Council has expanded its footprint from humble beginnings, funding multiple important projects across the Deschutes Basin this year. More in the [Central Oregonian](#).
- The Upper Deschutes Watershed Council is holding its first summer camp for kids ages 8-12 to explore the Deschutes Basin. Learn more on [UDWC's website](#).

**Note:** Following this month's issue, we will begin publishing our newsletters on a bi-monthly basis. Look for the next newsletter in your inbox in October! Fish counts can be found on our [website](#), and our [Environmental Community on Facebook](#) publishes new content about our fish and wildlife work every weekday.

## Thank you for reading our August newsletter!

Visit our [website](#) to find more information about the Deschutes, including informative videos, fact sheets, and reports.

- ◊ Have suggestions for what you'd like to see in the next newsletter? Want to schedule a tour? Contact us at [deschutes.passage@pgn.com](mailto:deschutes.passage@pgn.com).
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