

Here at Pelton Round Butte, we always do our best to adapt to unexpected challenges. When the first few months of 2019 brought record-breaking snow to Central Oregon, some of our fieldwork was delayed and some events were cut short. Despite the circumstances, we continued to meet all license requirements while ensuring the safety of our staff. The same is true of our current situation with COVID-19.

Many of our field operations, like passing fish around our dams and conducting springtime fisheries studies, are essential to maintaining the health of our rivers and fish. Our staff are taking the right precautions as they maintain these vital services. They are working in staggered shifts and smaller groups, and are maintaining distance while they work to help slow the spread of the virus.

Unfortunately, the 25th Annual Eagle Watch was canceled. Other events, like our July fisheries workshop, remain on the schedule for now. We will continue to assess the situation as the season unfolds, and will be sure to keep our environmental stakeholders, including all of you, in the loop. In spite of the tough times, much of our usual fieldwork continues, including screw trap studies, smolt acclimation, terrestrial surveys and more. We look forward to healthier times ahead. Please stay safe out there!

Smolt Acclimation: a gentle entry to the Deschutes Basin

Anadromous fish like salmon and steelhead use their sense of smell to find their way home from the ocean. But what happens if they can't remember what home smells like? In recent years, fisheries managers in the Deschutes Basin have started using a strategy called **smolt acclimation** to give fish a leg up. In this process, juvenile Chinook and steelhead are held in-stream for one to two weeks in net pens, tanks or wire cages called live cars.

Forcing fish to spend more time within the tributary prior to migration helps them become accustomed to water conditions and develop the olfactory cues needed to find that same stream when returning as adults. Studies have shown that acclimated smolts are more likely to undergo the complete process of smoltification – the biological/physiological changes that prepare fish to outmigrate to the ocean – and are more successful at finding their home stream when it comes time to spawn.

In 2019, only a small number of steelhead had a chance to acclimate due to snowy disruptions during the early part of the season. This year, we may be acclimating as many as 100,000 Chinook and 100,000 steelhead in several Deschutes tributaries using a variety of methods.

Thanks to the help of staff and volunteers from ODFW, PGE, CTWS and other community partners, Chinook were placed in their acclimation pens in early March and steelhead made their Deschutes Basin debut in early April. Most batches of Chinook have already been released after spending 10-18 days in the water, while steelhead will be allowed to continue their migration in April or May.





Social distancing measures have changed our operations somewhat. PGE and ODFW are no longer taking assistance from volunteers – a decision we know may disappoint some of the eager helpers who signed up to participate. In this fieldwork, as in all our ongoing operations, we have reduced the number of staff working at a time and are ensuring that employees keep a safe distance from one another.

In spite of the changing circumstances, we're hopeful that this year's process will provide helpful data and result in stronger adult returns. Many of the acclimated smolts are being given PIT-tags so that we can evaluate differences between various species, acclimation sites and acclimation strategies. Moving forward, this information will allow us to fine-tune the whole process and help us reach our long-term goal: sustainable, harvestable fish runs in the Deschutes Basin.

Juvenile & Adult Fish Passage Updates

Juvenile Species	Feb. 2020	March 2020	Yearly Total (Jan. - March)
Chinook	27	2,043	2,148
Sockeye	104	3,109	3,213
Steelhead	0	27	27

- Juvenile numbers have been fairly low so far this year. We are hoping for higher flows soon to help with collection.
- The SWW continues to be staffed every day, despite the COVID-19 crisis. Fewer employees are working at a time in the fish transfer facility, but fish are being passed downstream regularly.

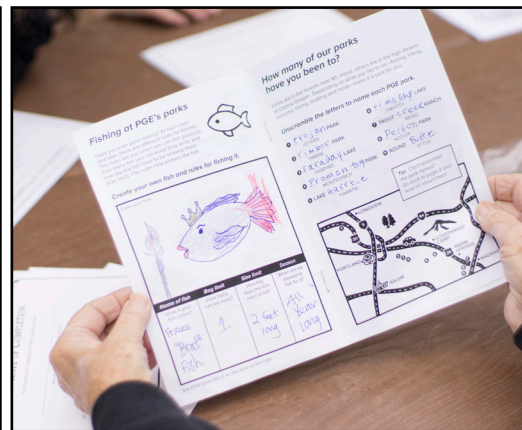
Adult Species	Feb. 2020	March 2020	Yearly/Run Total
Steelhead	134	87	1,018 (Aug. 2019 - March 2020)
Fall Chinook	1	0	20 (Jan. - March 2020)

- Steelhead returns are typically slow in February and March. 10 steelhead collected at the trap during these months were given radio tags and released into Lake Billy Chinook. We are currently tracking 57 steelhead in the upper basin.
- Steelhead, unlike salmon, can spawn more than one time. A kelt (an adult steelhead that already spawned) was recently collected at the SWW on its way back to the ocean. It was transported and released downstream.

Check out daily adult fish counts on [our website](#).

Discover PGE Parks

The safety of park visitors, employees, volunteers and partners is very important to us. To ensure their safety, **we have temporarily closed the 14 parks and recreation areas we operate.** Parks will be closed until at least May 8th (with some opening later in the month) to support social distancing, but we will continue to make preparations for parks to open for the summer recreation season. Find the latest updates on our [website](#).



PGE's Junior Ranger program is now online, so young Oregonians can explore the outdoors and earn awards from home. Download the activity books from our [Junior Rangers page](#). Other fun activities are available on our [Kids at Home page](#).

Meet Sidney Minnick

Associate Parks Operations Specialist for PGE



If you've ever spent a comfortable evening under the stars at Pelton Park or spotted an eagle from the interpretive center at Round Butte Overlook Park, you can credit the hard work of our PGE Parks team, and especially Sidney Minnick. As the lead parks specialist for PGE recreation areas east of Mt. Hood, Sidney oversees seasonal staff and helps keep parks running smoothly all summer long. In the fall and winter, Sidney works on park maintenance projects and prepares our sites (and staff) for the busy months ahead. Sidney came to PGE several years ago from the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs gaming commission. An outdoor enthusiast and lifelong resident of Warm Springs, Sidney was eager to join PGE's team to provide fun and safe recreation opportunities for Central Oregonians. Over the course of Sidney's time at PGE, the parks department has grown from only a few full-time employees to a team of nine regular workers and 50+ seasonal staff. Sidney has enjoyed watching and aiding this transition, and particularly loves leading our dedicated seasonal crew.

Announcements & News

1. **PGE and CTWS recently awarded \$4.5 million to restoration, water quality and fish passage projects throughout the Deschutes Basin.**
 - [Spilyay Tymoo](#)
 - [Bend Bulletin](#)
 - [KTVZ](#)
 - [Columbia Basin Bulletin](#)
2. **A new online library with over 9,000 publications on bull trout is now available to the public, thanks to a multi-agency partnership which includes PGE.**
 - [Western Division American Fisheries Society Bull Trout Library](#)
3. **Read about one angler's efforts to go fishing while maintaining social distancing and complying with access restrictions during the ever-changing COVID-19 crisis.**
 - [Statesman's Journal](#)
4. **The Crooked River Watershed Council is restoring Marks Creek, a tributary to Ochoco Creek, along private and U.S. Forest Service land. Learn about the effort to improve fish passage and habitat.**
 - [Central Oregonian](#)
5. **Despite the cancellation of Eagle Watch 2020, this year's popular raptor art contest drew dozens of impressive submissions.**
 - [Bend Bulletin](#)
6. **Ochoco National Forest was recently awarded \$4.78 million by the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership for upcoming forest restoration efforts.**
 - [Central Oregonian](#)
7. **Save the date for our 26th annual Fisheries Workshop: July 22-23 in Bend.**



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