

To Mike Finley, Chair—Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission

In order to protect spawning Chinook and Coho salmon in the Illinois River, I'm asking the commission to consider a closure of trout fishing from October 1 through December 31. The reach closed would be from Pomeroy Dam down river to Indigo Creek, above Oak Flat.

Over the past 16 years as an unofficial counter for ODFW, I have observed numerous incidents of salmon snagging in the Kerby area. This ¼ mile section has had as many as 14 redds from Chinook salmon in October and November and has been targeted day and night, because of limited access in an area with illegal camping and drug use. By the time I call the state police, snaggers quickly leave. They know my white head, even if I disguise myself; I have seen some with guns. Two-ton boulders have been placed at Finch Bridge to limit access, and even they have been removed. Four-wheel drive trucks and even bicycles find a way in and a quick way out.

As I walk downstream under Finch Bridge, two snaggers are sitting and waiting for salmon. The salmon have a narrow 15 foot slot 5 to 7 feet deep to swim through right in front of the snaggers. They may or may not make it. By observation, the same route is travelled, moving upstream along willows in 3 to 5 feet of water in pods of 5-9 fish, finning and meandering, then pausing under the shade of Finch Bridge, milling and then passing through the 15 foot slot. These are wild Chinook. And then in November snaggers are still there waiting for even larger pods of Coho salmon. With low water this past year (69 cfs at Kirby on Nov. 15); I didn't observe any Chinook in the East Fork of the Illinois River. At the request of an ODFW fish biologist, I extended my count there to November 15 and still no sign of redds. Low water also in the Rogue caused some salmon to spawn in the lower 25 miles of the Rogue River like Cole Rifle. Hopefully some of these were destined for the East Fork.

Oregon State Police have a very tough job with limited access to this site, and find the snaggers gone by the time they arrive. If the river is closed to trout fishing October through December, anyone fishing or snagging can be seen or photographed by a drone. State Police can approach and apprehend anyone who is fishing.

Salmon counts in the Illinois River continue to decline and numbers of Coho fry in Grayback Creek also declined this year from my observation. In 2020 or 2021 I hope to stand on Finch Bridge as I have done for the past 16 years and excitedly call an ODFW fish biologist and describe pods of black, submarine like Chinook and Coho moving safely upstream and beyond Finch Bridge to dig redds and complete their life cycle.

For Salmon, thanks for your time,

Jim Hutchins

Illinois River Counts

Year	Totals
2003	400
2004	373
2005	136
2006	135
2007	77
2008	63
2009	136
2010	156
2011	254
2012	344
2013	431
2014	161
2015	190
2016	104
2017	135
2018	145