

Lower Deschutes River Smallmouth Bass 2016

ODFW creel surveyors at the mouth of the Deschutes, along with individual angler reports to the district office, identified smallmouth bass being caught relatively frequently by Lower Deschutes steelhead anglers during summer 2016. Numbers of bass reported caught in 2016 have been substantially higher than a typical year, where generally only small numbers of bass have been encountered previously during steelhead season.

Part of Portland General Electric's (PGE) Pelton Round Butte Hydro Complex FERC license requirement is to operate a Selective Water Withdrawal (SWW) structure, which is designed to restore water quality below the projects, and aid in upstream fish reintroduction efforts. One of the many components of the SWW's, is its ability to reduce the projects thermal signature on water released from the project. This change creates an earlier spring and summer warming, and earlier fall cooling of river temperatures below the project than what occurred during the prior to operation of the project. This change has concerned many Deschutes River anglers, and it is believed to potentially negatively affect angling.

In order to monitor potential effects of the change in water releases on Lower Deschutes fish assemblages, ODFW Field staff have been conducting annual snorkel, and electrofishing surveys on the Lower Deschutes since operation of the SWW began in 2010. The primary objective of the surveys have been to determine the presence of smallmouth in the lower river, as a result of the warmer spring and summer temperatures. Surveys conducted from 2010-2015 did not capture, or observe, any bass. Two surveys were conducted on August 17th and the 24th this year, where 18 and 29 adult smallmouth bass were captured, respectively. Highest densities of adult bass were captured in the lower 12 miles of river. No young of the year, or juvenile bass were encountered in either survey, indicating that no successful spawning has occurred last spring. Stomach samples revealed crayfish as the primary food item, and no salmonids were recovered.

Future sampling efforts include annual electrofishing and angler catch surveys to track bass abundance, placing radio tags in smallmouth bass captured in the lower Deschutes to track their movement in the river as well as removing catch limits on smallmouth bass in the lower Deschutes by temporary rule in 2017 and permanent rule in 2018.

Reasons why bass entered the Lower Deschutes this summer remain unknown, although the temperatures in the Lower Deschutes were warmer earlier this spring than any previous year, possibly making conditions more habitable. It also is unknown if bass will remain in the Deschutes over winter attempting to spawn in the spring, or if bass are foraging in the Deschutes and leave as temperatures cool.