



TECH BULLETIN

OREGON

Lower-Columbia Summer Steelhead

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team. www.luhrjensen.com

Aerial, hard-fighting and aggressive, summer steelhead are a signature northwest fish species that delivers uncommon excitement and reward. With hundreds of thousands of summer steelhead returning to the Columbia River annually the fishing can be exceptional. These wonderful fish can be intercepted from bank or boat making this fishery highly accessible and productive. The lower-Columbia, the section of river from Bonneville Dam downriver to Astoria, offers considerable opportunity.

Summer steelhead begin to show in May. By mid-June the Columbia is peaking for "A" run steelhead and will continue to produce through July followed by a second peak, the "B" run that peaks at the end of August and through September.

"A" run summer steelhead are generally smaller, 5 to 7 pound fish, that have spent one to two years in the ocean. The later returning "B" run steelhead range from 8 to 20 pounds or more and are bound for either the Clearwater or Salmon River in Idaho.

This Tech Bulletin will detail how, when and where to catch lower-Columbia summer steelhead. The advice provided in this bulletin is all you need to catch these marvelous fish. Lower-Columbia River summer steelhead are surprisingly easy-to-catch with literally hundreds of spots peppered along this 146 mile section of river.

Where & When

The tidal influence is strong in the lower river, especially from the Portland-area downriver. The further downriver on the Columbia from Portland the stronger the tides. Tides play an important role in how, when and where you'll be fishing.

Fish can be caught during any incoming or outgoing tide. However, seasoned lower-Columbia River summer steelhead anglers generally prefer fishing the outgoing tide. That's because they can either anchor from a boat or plunk from the bank and let the outgoing tidal current work plugs, spinners or bait presentations near the bottom. This gives you about 5 hours of prime fishing time.

Generally, trips are timed to begin at the very end of the high (incoming) tide.

Boaters will use this time to find a spot to anchor and wait for the tide to turn and begin to run out. Bank anglers can cast spinners or cast and retrieve plugs until the turn of the tide.

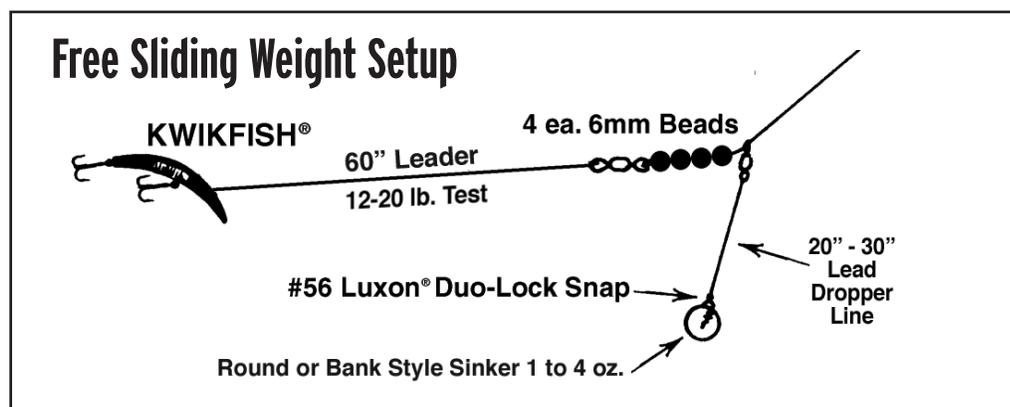
There are loads of resources for finding tides. You'll also be well-served to check the river level forecast a day or two before your trip. The river level forecast will give you a more precise idea of when the river will be rising or dropping (because of the tides) during the day. You can find river level information through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration website at:

<http://water.weather.gov/ahps2/index.php?wfo=pqr>

What To Use

The most popular and productive technique used for lower-Columbia summer steelhead is to plunk Kwikfish®, unweighted spinners or bait. Whether anchored in a boat or casting from shore the rigging is the same.

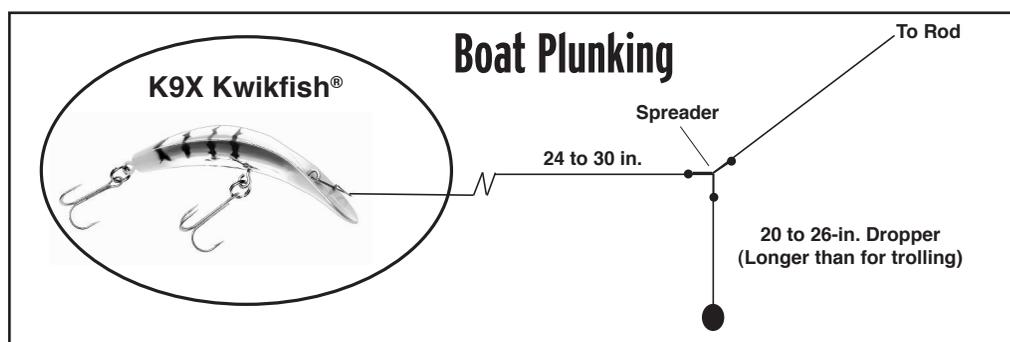
The ideal combo features an 8 1/2' to 9' rod capable of handling up to 3 ounces of lead, an appropriate



Water temperature is another critical element in this fishery. When the surface temperature approaches 70° fish move into deeper, cooler water. Early in the season during the spring runoff and through June, water temperatures moderate moving steelhead close to shore. Warmer water later in the summer dulls the bite of summer steelhead who become lethargic as the temperature climbs.

casting or spinning reel with a line capacity of 125 yards or more of Sufix 10 lb. to 20 lb. test monofilament line; 15lb. – 30lb. Sufix 832 Braid and Sufix Invisiline fluorocarbon leaders.

Kwikfish® are particularly effective in the lower-river because they require so little current to work well. This means you're fishing effectively from



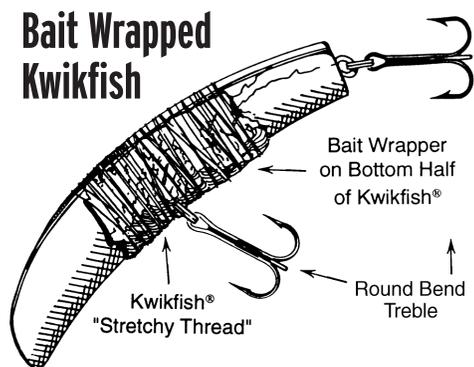
It's common early in the season to find fish in 8' to 10' of water. Steelhead favor the cool, high water and move close to shore. From the bank it's important to find that water depth, which may be just a few feet from shore, to catch fish. From a boat you're well-advised to use your depth finder as a guide in anchoring or trolling.

As summer draws on and the temperature climbs steelhead move into deeper water favoring the cooler water these areas provide. "Deep water" may range from 30' to 50'. Cooler water can also be found at the mouth of the many tributaries that drain into the Columbia. These provide excellent holding areas as they draw fish into their cool plume.

the start of the outgoing tide until it slows and goes slack before the incoming tide. For Kwikfish® a 24" to 30" lead (dropper) line and 5' to 6' leader is ideal. Some anglers prefer a sliding weight rigging others a Luhr Jensen Wire Trolling Spreader. The amount of lead you'll be using is determined by the strength of the current and what's needed to hold your rig in place.

Preferred Kwikfish® sizes are the K7X, K9X, K11X and K13. The new UV Bright colors are tailored to this fishery. Other popular colors include: Fluorescent Red Fire, Gold, Gold Green Pirate, Silver Blue Pirate, Black w/ Glitter, Grinch and Gold Digger.

You'll enhance the effectiveness of these plugs considerably by placing a small "wrap" on them. A small chunk of prawn is best, though some prefer herring or sardine. You won't need much because these plugs are relatively small but those in-the-know rely on wraps as an essential ingredient to their success. Especially on K7X and K9X Kwikfish all that's needed is a small piece tied to the underside of the plug and a few wraps to hold it in place. Too large a piece of bait and too many wraps may upset the action of the plug.



Bait is equally as popular and it's fished a number of ways. Prawns tails and coon shrimp top the list but cured eggs and sand shrimp are also widely used. In many cases several small beads are used followed by a spinning drift bobber or small spinner blade. The exact same rigging used for Kwikfish® is used for bait. The key in fishing bait is having enough current to keep the bait off the bottom. The same is true of spinners.

Performance Tip: Scent products enhance the effectiveness of your lure or bait presentations. Sand shrimp scents are most popular but there are several products available that will add appeal to your presentation.

Spinners, even unweighted versions, require good current to work properly. Luhr Jensen's Clearwater Flash is an excellent choice for plunking.

In faster water below Bonneville Dam, plugs like Luhr Jensen's Hot Shot or Storm's Wiggle Wart are also excellent choices. They're built for fast water applications and extremely effective under those conditions. Metallic finishes are best with pink, gold, red, blue and purple topping the list. Spinners, like Blue Fox Classic Vibrax® also produce well. The new Bleeding colors that feature a metallic red blade are perfect for this fishery.

Performance Tip: Proper tuning of your plugs is essential to their performance. Make sure your plugs are running straight. If they're running to the right or left bend the eye of the plug the opposite direction slightly. This is true of all plugs. It doesn't take much, so just make small adjustments.

Trolling and backtrolling can also be effective even though 95% of the fishing effort is on the outgoing tide. Boaters can troll plugs, bait or spinners on an incoming or slack tide, trolling the same direction as the tide. Flatline trolling Wiggle Warts in 8' to 10' of water early in the season will produce. Be sure to pay out anywhere from 80' to 100' of line so you're away from the boat and in the strike zone. Later in the summer you'll need to move into deeper, cooler water. In late July and August that can be as deep as 40' or 50'. A Wire

Trolling Spreader with a 24" to 30" lead/dropper line and 6' leader is ideal. This also works well with Blue Fox Vibrax® spinners.

Bank anglers cast spoons, spinners and plugs. This is particularly effective early in the season when the fish are close to shore and favoring shallow water. Later in the summer when steelhead move into deeper water they become very difficult to reach from shore. You are better off plunking through the outgoing tide where there's bank access close to the main river channel.

Where To Go

Surprisingly, this is the easy part. There is so much bank and boat access on both sides of the Columbia River that finding a great area to fish is easy.

The Oregon State Marine Board publishes a free guide to the lower Willamette and Columbia Rivers. It's available online through their website, boatoregon.com and is found under the "Publications/Library/Forms" section of the website. When you enter that area of boatoregon.com scroll down to "Listing By Publication Title" where you'll find a link to the "Boating Guide to the Lower Willamette & Columbia Rivers". You can also contact the Marine Board and they'll send you a free copy. This publication shares a wealth of information including maps, detailed location and launch information, attractions, historic points of interest and scads of useful boating tips intent on making your trip safe and fun-filled.

For bank anglers, Jones Beach just upriver of Westport provides excellent access to the river. Dibblee Beach, downriver of Rainier, Oregon, is an outstanding area for casting and catching summer steelhead. Upriver of Rainier are Laurel Beach and Prescott Beach County parks, both bank fishing hot spots. Walton Beach and Willow Bar on Sauvie's Island both provide ample access to premium water as well. These areas year-in and year-out receive the lion's share of attention from shore casters. There's plenty more spots upriver that you're welcome to explore but these lower-river access points are reliable areas that produce consistently.

Boaters have unlimited opportunities. The key is to find water that's 8' to 12' deep and anchor on the outgoing tide. There are several main-channel islands that make ideal ambush spots to intercept migrating fish. The lower end of Puget Island and upriver to Sand Island Marine Park across from St. Helens are two ideal spots but there are dozens more peppered up and down the lower Columbia River.

As indicated earlier, as river temperatures climb you'll want to anchor in deeper, cooler water. Be mindful that you may be in the shipping lane and in the path of ocean-going freighters and barges.

These boats require considerable distances to stop and have the right of way. You're well-advised to stay clear of these areas and out of harm's way.

Resources

Evergreen Pacific Publishing's, River Cruising Atlas, for the Columbia, Lower-Willamette and Snake Rivers is an outstanding resource. It was last revised in 2007 and is scheduled for another update in the summer of 2010. If you boat the lower-Columbia you are advised to have a navigation chart aboard. There are several channels and hazards throughout the river you'll want to be aware of. A GPS with a detailed map feature of the river is another excellent tool. In a fog or inclement weather knowing where you are and where to go are important details to command.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has launched a website, www.steelheadsummer.com, that is loaded with valuable information and tips for this fishery.

The Oregon State Marine Board has a wealth of information available related to boat launches, navigation, Columbia and Willamette River boating and boating safety. Visit www.boatoregon.com.

Conservation

The Columbia is a mixed stock fishery. That means in addition to lots of different fish species that call the Columbia home, there are wild steelhead mixed with steelhead of hatchery origin. Wild, unmarked steelhead must be released immediately and unharmed. This practice of selective fishing is one of the reasons this fishery enjoys long and robust seasons. Because anglers are able to differentiate between wild and hatchery fish because the adipose fin is removed is why we have the seasons we have. It's critically important that wild, unmarked steelhead are handled as little as possible, are not removed from the water and released as quickly and gently as possible. Properly resuscitating tired fish is important. Be sure they are able to swim easily and quickly before releasing them.

Etc.

Thanks to reciprocity agreements between Washington and Oregon, anglers are able to fish the Columbia River with either state's licenses. Thankfully, both Oregon and Washington have struck an agreement that allows the states to share this wonderful river. This sharing agreement enables anglers from either state to enjoy it freely just so long as they have the proper fishing license and harvest tag. Reciprocity does not apply to any of the tributary fisheries. If you elect to fish in the Willamette, any creek, or other river you must hold a valid license for the state you are fishing in.



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