

Triploids:
April 4, 2011

The following is some information that I think everyone should know. I would encourage you to please consider taking the steps at the end to help ourselves protect some very great fisheries. Some points are my opinions due to the fact it is very hard to get the factual information. I welcome any information that can be substantiated on this issue.

Some of you know we have had Triploids in the main stem Columbia for many years. Many of you know, but Triploids are farm raised sterilized rainbow trout. These fish were developed to eat and grow at an exponential rate to maximize income. Then after quite a few escapes from the net pens WDFW and the CCT (Colville Confederated Tribes) recognized the huge positive impact from a economic and recreational fishery they provided. The escaped triploids were initially thought to be in only water (Rufus Woods) where there were no ESA (Endangered Species Act) protected fish. The local population of Kokanee definitely was negatively affected by the non-native Triploids. I do not have enough information to cover this specifically, but there has been a huge decline in the Kokanee catch in Rufus Woods after Triploids started escaping. It only makes sense that something has to decline when you allow competition for the same food source. The new competition (Triploids) for this food is intentionally designed to eat and eat a lot only compounds the problem. The Rufus Woods Triploid fishery is a great thing, and I do not want to see it changed but it needs to stay in Rufus Woods. What I do want is that we can continue to fish for Salmon and Steelhead below Chief Joseph Dam, at the current or a higher level.

These Triploids are being washed down from Rufus Woods both over the spillway, and through the penstock/turbines of Chief Joseph Dam. Up until this year we could not keep any of them due to the concern of the ESA (Endangered Species Act) Salmon and Steelhead in this same "Protected" water. We could start keeping "Floy" tagged Triploids in 2011. Even at the first of the Steelhead season I did not know we could keep these tagged fish. I missed it in publications and notices, and I try real hard to keep on the new information. So, how many anglers were or are still not aware of this new regulation?

Regardless, Triploids have been being caught for many years in the Columbia below Chief Joe Dam, and were required to be put back. WDFW and the CCT is and has been aware these Triploids have been in this "protected" water for many years. The reason these latest fish were being released with tags was so that they could now monitor where the fish were going. The CCT and WDFW are totally relying on the belief fisherman would keep the tagged fish and voluntarily report the tag and catch information. I think it is one way to monitor....but what about the tens of thousands of Triploids without Tags that started in Rufus Woods? Where are they? They are being caught in the exact same water as the tagged Triploids in much larger numbers, but there is no data being reported on them by fisherman that I am aware of.

I caught one Triploid in the Okanogan river about two miles below Malott in 2010! I have heard rumors of them being caught below Wells dam also. I have not talked to anyone I know personally who has caught them below Wells though only rumors. I just want to remind everyone as I go into the next section I personally have caught Triploids in the Columbia below Chief Joseph Dam for the last eight years. Why only the last eight years? Because I have only been fishing this water for that long. I am sure there are many people who have caught Triploids below Chief Joseph Dam much earlier than me. The first big documented escape of triploids was in 1995 or earlier. I know it takes only months for these fish to get below the dam. The reality based on the tagged data currently being collected it is more probable than not there have been Triploids below Chief Joseph Dam since at least 1995.

I was trying to lay a little history to bring me to the real reason for this. The second week of March we caught three Triploids in one day. (See March 15 report). We noticed all three had huge full stomachs, and we kept the one tagged fish for eating. When we started cleaning the fish the stomach was absolutely stuffed with FERTILIZED STEELHEAD EGGS!!! (See photos in All Others) According to the tag this fish was released from the fish farm on Rufus woods eight months before. It was now confirmed what I suspected for years, and there was no way anyone could deny this. The non-native pen raised Triploids are sitting right on the spawning beds eating both Salmon and Steelhead eggs. During Salmon season I start catching more Triploids in certain areas the closer it gets to spawning time. I brought this to the attention of WDFW Bob Jateff. Bob acknowledges the issue but he needs anglers to help him. This is one of those areas different agencies are involved and as usual they cannot come to an agreement that works best for the fish and anglers. I don't know if it is politics or pride getting in the way, but we have to get involved and help protect/increase our ability to fish for Salmon and Steelhead. Just to clarify in case you were not aware of why we cannot keep untagged triploids.

1. They (WDFW, CCT, NOAA, etc.) don't want us catching or keeping ESA listed Spring Chinook or Steelhead.
2. There is no season for Triploids or Trout in this water because they don't want incidental catching of ESA Spring Chinook or Steelhead.

BUT....

THE AGENCIES INVOLVED WITH PROTECTING AND RE-ESTABLISHING THESE ESA FISH ARE KNOWINGLY ALLOWING A NON-NATIVE ARTIFICIALLY INTRODUCED SPECIES TO FEED ON THEIR SPAWING BEDS. THE TRIPLOIDS COMPETE FOR THE SAME FOOD SOURCES ALL YEAR ROUND!!

These same agencies will not allow us to fish for one (Spring Chinook) and had shut us down from fishing for the other (Steelhead) for many years. They can put the burden on us...those who pay for these fisheries...and cripple local economies when they shut down fisheries. When it is their turn it appears as if the rules don't apply to them. If it sounds like I am a little upset with this entire process you are correct. I will say that WDFW, and CCT has, does, and continues to work for us to have recreational fisheries. This is one area I feel WDFW has dropped the ball, and they need to pick it up and run with it

instead of just giving up. I am not paid as a full time job position to work on this issue 40-50 hours a week, and I can accept that I am just a lowly angler. Maybe I am not the wisest person out on the water I can accept that also. I am pretty confident allowing a non-native species to gorge itself on ESA species eggs and fry with nothing being done to remove or eliminate the non-native species is not in the best interest of the ESA species or the fishery. I continue to get visions of Lake Chelan, Priest and Pend Oreille Lakes after they had Lake Trout introduced. A non-native species introduced by agencies in charge of protecting and enhancing a fishery completely destroy it. Sorry, this is simply a matter of common sense not studies and wasting time. Something can and should be done about this immediately and it does not require more studies and years of arguing. I will list some common sense suggestions that could have an instant positive impact on this problem. If you have other suggestions or ideas please send them to Bob Jateff, I would like to hear them also.

- 1, Require all Triploids either farmed or released into Rufus Woods reservoir to be fin clipped/tagged in some manner. Yes there is a cost involved to those raising or releasing the triploids. How many 10's of millions have been spent by the citizens to try to bring back these ESA fish to a sustainable level.
- 2, Open a trout fishery in these waters when there are low levels of adult Steelhead present. The open areas could be narrowed down during the slightly higher Steelhead present times to waters with the highest amount of Triploids present.
- 3, Allow a certain amount of anglers to keep any Triploid caught in these waters. The anglers could receive training on identification of Triploids. Could narrow this and have WDFW staff or a few designated anglers target these fish to intentionally remove them all year round.

In talking with Bob Jateff he has expressed a need to know when and where Triploids are being caught. Bob has told me the more information that is available the faster and better a removal/control plan can be established. Bob asked that I provide him with any information on the who, what, where, when. So I am now sending Bob the details of when I catch Triploids. I am sending date/time, catch location, bait/lure used, the triploid specs, and what species I was targeting. Please spread the word as much as you can, and provide any information you have to Bob including any potential solutions you may have. I think even if you have previous information on these Triploids being caught by yourself or someone you know please pass it on.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this and I hope you help yourself protect some great fishing.

In no way do I want anything to change with the Triploid fishing on Rufus Woods, and would prefer more of them were released. A reasonably effective solution can be accomplished with absolutely no impact on the Rufus Woods fishery.

Ron