



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE FEATURE RELEASE

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GOOD FISHING PREDICTED, GENERALLY, IN 1982

For the 54 million Americans who will fish for sport in 1982, there's good news--generally--according to the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Field reports generally point toward improved fishing for most species," Bill Daugherty, Chief of the Service's Division of Hatcheries and Fishery Resource Management, said recently. He warned, however, that there are some exceptions.

The Service's prediction is based on studies of hatchery plantings, fishing pressure, predation, pollution, snowpacks in the mountains, potential floods or droughts, and numerous other conditions. "When they add up on the positive side as most did this year," Daugherty said, "that's good news for people who fish."

Daugherty also noted that fishermen aren't the only ones who will enjoy a bountiful fishery this year. "There is a small but growing number of people who don't try to catch fish but only watch for them," he said. "They seem to take keen delight in witnessing the return of anadromous fish to coastal rivers, particularly the newly reestablished salmon runs in now-clear New England rivers. They become adept at knowing where to look for particular species just as do birdwatchers. And those that saw the big chinooks running the Toutle River in Washington before the Mount Saint Helens eruption know they've watched a drama they'll not likely see again in their lives."

The Fish and Wildlife Service keeps a close watch on America's vast fisheries on major rivers, within national forests, parks, refuges, military and Indian reservations, and on international waters such as the Great Lakes. However, the State wildlife agencies are responsible for managing and regulating their own fisheries just as they are with their resident wildlife.

Sport fishing is a huge business. In 1980 Americans devoted 858 million days to sport fishing trips, and spent over \$10 billion for transportation, food, lodging, and on State licenses and fees. The same effort will likely be expended during the coming season.

"But predicting what those fishermen will catch is a bit more difficult," Daugherty said. "We're dealing with a lot of factors. It's different from predicting duck-hunting opportunity where fully half the birds bagged are hatched the previous spring. By contrast, most of the fish caught this year will be from 2 to 6 years old."

Thus, fish are subjected to more hazards, many of which are potentially catastrophic. For instance, a 1978 drought still affects Atlantic salmon runs in some northeastern rivers; and the Mount Saint Helens eruptions going back to 1980 have just begun affecting the numbers of steelhead returning to the Cowlitz River after their long sojourn in the Pacific. Great Lakes lake trout, which don't reproduce until they are 6 years old, are often caught before reaching that age.

"It's impossible for us to predict specific fishing opportunities at the local level. Fishermen should contact their local State fisheries agencies--many of which issue excellent weekly fishing reports throughout the season," Daugherty advises. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's field reports provided the following general information on trout, salmon, bass, walleye, and shad prospects for 1982:

- o TROUT - Lake trout fishing on the Great Lakes will continue to be good due to generous hatchery stockings during the last several years, successful control of the sea lamprey parasite of the trout, and improving water quality. Steelhead fishing will continue at a high level on the Great Lakes as well as in rivers of the Pacific Northwest.

Deep snowpacks in the Rockies and Cascades promise adequate stream flows through the summer for other trout species. But the warm spring weather could cause a quick, high, runoff that could spoil fishing, at least during the early part of the season. The trout would be there but, being sight feeders, would not see lures or bait in the turbid waters. At such times, fishermen should try other waters where there are likely to be sturgeon, bullheads, and channel cats which can locate bait by smell alone.

- o SALMON - The recovery of Atlantic salmon in the Connecticut and Merrimack rivers is still in its early stages, and only 4,000 to 5,000 are expected to run the Penobscot River in Maine this summer because of the drought 4 years ago.

In the Great Lakes, coho and chinook salmon show every indication of continuing as extremely popular and reliable game fish. But in the Pacific Northwest, the news is grim. The great salmon runs on the Columbia are in real trouble. Among the negative factors influencing salmon numbers are the failure of both ocean-bound and returning migrants to pass the power dams and heavy offshore fishing pressure. The runs above Bonneville Dam near Portland, Oregon, in fact, are expected to drop to an all time low.

- o BASS - Spawning stocks of striped bass on both East and West Coast estuaries and rivers are declining due to several suspected causes which include ingestion of the young into large water pumps and perhaps contaminants that are destroying their food chains. The Hudson River striped bass fishery, however, is holding up well.

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But the good news concerning these fish is that they are thriving better than ever on inland rivers and reservoirs. The Colorado River from the Rockies to Lake Havasu on the Arizona-California border shows particular promise.

During the last 2 years of drought in the South, largemouth bass concentrated in the deeper waters providing very good catches for experienced fishermen. The current high water has scattered the big fish and catches will probably be reduced for that reason.

- o WALLEYE - In parts of the Great Lakes, walleye populations have been rebuilt to historic numbers. The species is thriving elsewhere in the Lower 48 States east of the Rockies. In recent years, it has mysteriously appeared in the Columbia River where it has created a growing fishery in the backwaters of the lower dams.
- o SHAD - Shad runs are at or past their peak in the Southeast and are just reaching the Mid-Atlantic States. The news is not good on the Chesapeake and its tributaries where though there are still adult fish making the runs, reproduction has failed for several years.

As the spawning runs move progressively northward through June in New England rivers, however, the news is far better. Daugherty expressed optimism on these newly reestablished game fish, saying that where one shad ran the Merrimack River in 1975, there should be a thousand this year. The new fish lift at Essex Dam in Massachusetts will be in operation for the first time and will carry as many as 50,000 shad (and some Atlantic salmon) up over the Essex Dam into its backwaters. Last year, for the first time in 150 years, shad spawned on the Susquehanna River above Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Shad on the West Coast, however, are not as popular. After they were introduced in the last century, heavy runs developed on several major rivers. On the Columbia, unfortunately, they crowd the fish ladders hindering the passage of the highly-prized salmon on their way to traditional spawning grounds.

"Pollution is the biggest negative factor affecting fish in the Lower 48 States," Daugherty said. "It can be as devastating as a toxic chemical spill in a river, or as subtle as an acid rain that destroys only one organism in a food chain. The result is the same. Fish populations decline. Greater demands are made on the Federal and State fish hatcheries in order to maintain the sport."

Federal hatcheries currently stock 6.2 million pounds--about 335 million fish and fry--into the nation's waters each year. The combined State hatcheries stock several times that amount in local waters.

"But fish hatcheries," Daugherty said, "can only do so much. What are needed are cleaner waters, better fish passages at power dams, and better protection of breeding-aged fish offshore, on rivers, and on lakes. Our goal and that of the State agencies with whom we work is to restore self-sustaining fisheries wherever possible for people who catch fish, eat them, or just like to watch them swim by."