THE NATIONAL STEELHEAD COMMITTEE
by George Johnson, National Chairman

Are the returning steelhead to the Hethow being over-fished to the point that the natural reproductive capacity of the river is being reduced? Are hydroelectric-power-development systems in British Columbia seriously going to affect the steelhead runs? Is the loss of catch-and-release regulations in Oregon on the Grande Ronde going to affect flyfishing there? Is the new steelhead hatchery on the Clearwater in Idaho going to improve the fishing in that stream? Is it time for the FFF to take a strong national stand on the degradation of stream habitat or can we live with the disastrous loss of streams like Deer Creek? Should the Steelhead Committee support or oppose the out-planting of steelhead into new streams like the Delaware? What is the nature and the future of steelhead in the Great Lakes? This is a sampling of the kinds of problems that are relevant to the Steelhead Committee.

The Steelhead Committee is dedicated to working towards the resolution of these problems and the guardianship of the steelhead as a resource. The nature of the problems make them have a high regional profile. The Steelhead Committee is dedicated to broadening the base of support for the solution of these difficulties. The goal of the committee is to develop regional sub-committees like the Washington Steelhead Committee. We would like to see organized groups in Oregon, British Columbia, Idaho, and the Great Lakes. Also, anywhere else that steelhead are present and the resource is in need of support.

A significant problem is our inability to locate individuals who are interested in the steelhead resource. If you are interested in participating in the National Steelhead Committee, please feel free to write or call me: George Johnson, Route 2, Box 576, Pullman, WA 99163. (509) 334-3135.

OVERVIEW
by Bob Arnold, Northwest Regional Chairman

Response to the first issue of The Osprey was good. Letters came in from British Columbia and Oregon, as well as Washington, and there were some checks, too. The first issue cost $275, which was more than we had, but we've come up with some ideas for lowering costs without lowering quality. The Overlake Fly Club offered us the money from their May raffle, which brought in $850. The hope is for The Osprey to evolve, someday, into a quality steelhead magazine.

Dennis Voit from Maryhurst, Oregon, sends his congratulations and tells us to keep up our good work in making the Skagit and Sauk quality fisheries. Dennis, we've just learned that Gene (now Wildlife) is recommending March 15-31 be catch and release, selective fishery on the Skagit, in addition to the existing April 1-30 season. And the Stilly be open year round, with flyfishing beginning April 16 and wild fish release every month except when a hatchery-fish harvest is scheduled in December, January, and February.

Roy Glennie from the Comox Valley Chapter of the Steelhead Society of B.C. in Courtenay points out that the FFF Steelhead Committee seems to have "the same mandate as our Society." Yes, Roy, one of the first things we did after forming the committee was to take out a membership in the Society. Your newsletter, which we circulate, does indeed reflect the same environmental bent as our committee. We will welcome your input to our newsletter, Vancouver Island being one large area in which we are presently lacking information. It would be nice to fish your rivers, one day.

Most of us know them only through Roderick Haig-Brown's writings. I suppose they've grown crowded in recent years.

Which brings me to my topic. Over-crowding. It's not new, and it won't go away. It'll ruin a day's outing on a river more surely than a lack of fish. Marty Sherman writes from Oregon, "Joyce and I were out to fish the Sauk for three days in late April. Then I started to hear reports of heavy fishing pressure and fewer fish and I even heard that there was some fear from a few guides that we would do an article about the fishery and cause more pressure. So we just stayed here..." A host of problems are nutshelled in those three sentences — crowding, lack of fish, guides, long distances, publicity through article writing. All these problems are complex and, worse, are inter-related. Guides are part of the problem of over-crowding, guides and boats, yet guides complain about over-crowding, too. Bank fishers complain about guides — and rafts, driftboats, and powerboats. They don't like too many of each other, either.

Ken Harding-Rooney in his article on B.C.'s Dean River writes later in this issue about how the Branch has solved the problem. They've come up with a staggered series of user fees; the farther away you live, the more it's going to cost you. The idea is to limit the number of anglers on the river to no more than 50 on any given day. If you are a non-resident of Canada (read, American), you will have a lottery chance of being chosen for a seven-day permit at $150, non-renewable, in 1988. This year, Americans just have to pay the toll and there's no limit on numbers. However,
I doubt whether this is the solution. And there are problems about guide tenure on the upper river and helicopter hops from pool to pool that are disheartening.

I told Jack Whitley, in jest, that in 1988 it would cost him $150 to fish the Skagit for a week. For just a second there, he believed me. Every year guides go up to fish the Thompson in November; likewise, in April, Canadian friends come down to try for the Skagit's wild fish. And, generally, I am glad to see them. The Skagit is big and can accommodate a lot of anglers, even a lot of boats without motors. But when I walk into a favorite pool and find "foreigners" fishing it, I admit to a certain resentment. I'm sorry, but it's how it is. However, it helps me understand how you must feel, up North. We have a reciprocal relationship that seems threatened, I'd have to say. It's very sad.

I didn't say I had an answer to the problem. All I said was that it was my topic. As for article writing on rivers and the pros and cons of guides, well, they'll have to wait for another issue. Or -- better yet -- why don't some of you fly-fingers write in? If it's good enough, we'll print it.

STEELHEAD MANAGEMENT: REGIONAL VARIATIONS AND COMPARISONS
by Bill McMillan

British Columbia

In the mid-1970s, the B.C. Fish and Wildlife Branch began to wrestle with the problems of rapidly dwindling steelhead populations brought about by both sports and commercial fishing. In 1976, David Marver, B.C. Fisheries Branch Director, explained at the Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Symposium in Vancouver, Washington, that there were only three federal salmon hatcheries in B.C. which produced some steelhead, and that B.C.'s only realistic option at the time was to better understand, better protect, and slowly rebuild existing wild steelhead populations. Marver went on to relate four important benefits related to wild fish stocks (and inevitably to wild fish management): the philosophical experience; value to the angler; biological value to steelhead stocks; and the economic implications of the fishery. He quoted that U.S. steelhead anglers numbered 1,500-2,000 each year, contributing $700,000 to B.C.'s 1969 economy, with 552 of those anglers coming from the state of Washington.

Without the immediate availability of a provincially broad steelhead hatchery program, the branch set angling regulations designed to maximize wild steelhead escapement: emphasis on catch and release (initial mandatory release of steelhead on four streams), and reduced daily and possession limits. Over the next two years, catch and release of wild steelhead became a blanket regulation on Vancouver Island streams and was similarly implemented on some troubled mainland rivers, and hatchery programs were set into motion with a design toward using strictly wild broodstock on an annual basis wherever possible. Biologically sound, the courageous B.C. approach was a tremendous political gamble that alienated a large number of B.C. steelhead license purchasers.

Today, a full decade has passed since that initial "gamble" in B.C. steelhead management. David Marver is still the Fisheries Branch Director. (The directors of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho have turned over at least once, and in some instances several times.) The branch's steelhead programs are politically established and the 1984-85 steelhead sports catch was the greatest in B.C. record-keeping history: 148,000. While the number of steelhead angling licenses (23,236 in 84-85) is still down from the 1969-70 high (45,824), that only makes the record steelhead catch even more significant (obviously better fishing per angler) as 1984-85 steelhead anglers averaged nearly one (0.73) steelhead caught per day of fishing.

The top five steelhead rivers in B.C. in 84-85 were: Chilliwack/Yedder (16,522 wild, 8,085 hatchery; 26,597 total catch); Stamp (4,896 wild, 3,926 hatchery; 8,822 total catch); Dean (7,921 wild, 28 hatchery; 7,959 total catch); Thompson (7,277 wild, 164 hatchery; 7,441 total catch); and the Cowichan (6,300 wild, 925 hatchery; 7,225 total catch). Of the 148,000 steelhead caught in B.C. in 84-85, only 13 percent were kept by anglers, with the other 87 percent released. Each year since the mid-1970's, the number of steelhead kept in B.C. has dropped and the number of steelhead released has increased. While the B.C. Fish and Wildlife Branch initiated catch-and-release regulations on many B.C. rivers, the branch is quick to point out that the continuing increase in catch and release of steelhead in B.C. (even hatchery steelhead are being released 75 percent of the time) has been a voluntary phenomenon and that the record catch of 148,000 steelhead, up from a recorded 1976-79 low of 40,000, includes an undetermined number of steelhead that were caught more than just once.

What has occurred with B.C. steelhead over the past decade is an example of what fisheries management can accomplish when that management recognizes an offensive leadership that assumes the responsibility and reacts with decisiveness and the integrity of a long-term commitment, rather than assuming the role of defensive reaction to the fluctuating Ping-Pong ball of public and political whim. Thanks to the B.C. Fish and Wildlife Branch's courage, integrity, and tenacity, the Northwest's other steelhead managing agencies have a successful wild steelhead restoration program and biologically sound hatchery steelhead programs to emulate.

Idaho

As with British Columbia, Idaho steelhead management had its back to the wall in the mid-1970s. Poor downstream passage over hydroelectric projects, drought, commercial fishing, and sports fishing had all combined to reduce steelhead returns to the upper Columbia River system to the point that many biologists had publicly thrown in the towel by saying that upper Columbia River salmon and steelhead runs were already beyond restoration efforts. The seemingly unsolvable problem was the hydroelectric projects.

However, with Joe Drewsey Idaho's Fisheries Director, in 1975 catch-and-release regulations were tried on the steelhead returning to the Clearwater River after two to three years of steelhead catch-and-release studies. It was a short season, but with Snake River steelhead runs that had been decimated from 100,000 fish in 1962 to 12,000 in 1974, no other type of fishery could be justified. Although the catch-and-release fishery decisions that came to dominate Idaho steelhead management in the last half of the 1970s were not popular with many Idaho anglers, who were sometimes on the verge of armed violence, the Snake, Salmon, and Clearwater Rivers became increasingly used by fishermen from out of state, as well as a few local fly fishers and a very few other anglers and guides.

Because of extensive habitat losses that encompassed the entire upper Snake River system and the North Fork of the Clearwater, it was questioned by the most optimistic biologists whether Idaho's wild steelhead had any hope for a realistic future. Despite these reservations, seasons were set -- even catch and release -- to coincide with hatchery returns peaking after mid-October, thus providing September and early October wild returns the maximum protection.
Thanks to a number of changes that include transportation of smolts around Columbia River dams, hydroelectric by-pass mechanisms, normal to better-than-normal snowpack, catch-and-release steelhead sports fishing regulations (particularly for wild steelhead), improved ocean survival, and other measures, 1984, ’85, and ’86 saw the escapement of steelhead into the upper Columbia River and, particularly, the Snake River drainage leaping ahead each succeeding year, when compared to modern records dating to 1962 for the Snake River area. The passage of steelhead over Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River totaled over 117,000 steelhead for the 1985 fall return, and the 1986 escapement was considered to be even higher. Wild steelhead escapement to Idaho was estimated at 21,450 for the 1986 season, and again the 1986 escapement was predicted to be above that figure.

Considering the incredible adversity to restoration of Idaho steelhead, the past 10–12 years can only be considered to be something of a fishery miracle, although run-size predictions for 1987 are considerably below the past two or three years, as the Snake River steelhead returns have risen from a 1974 low of 12,000 to a 1985 return of 117,000, with 1986 even higher. Although much of the success has been outside of Idaho, Fish and Game’s direct management control, certainly rebuilding of the wild runs has only been possible due to Idaho’s concentrated efforts to protect them with steelhead season closures or wild catch-and-release regulations. Much of the available data on steelhead catch and release and its eventual effects on fertility (no adverse effects, that is) at spawning time have also come from Idaho Fish and Game through research conducted in the early to mid-1970s. Idaho has been the first of the three states to advocate the release of wild steelhead through examination of the dorsal fin, and it was the first to legally require anglers to release wild steelhead prior to the implementation of fin-clipping.

Oregon

In the latter 1970s, Oregon implemented catch-and-release regulations on the Deschutes River for much the same reasons as Idaho. In fact, research increasingly indicates that many “Deschutes” steelhead were actually Idaho-bound, and that Deschutes regulations should mesh with Idaho’s. Deschutes regulations gradually were modified to require only the catch and release of wild steelhead and hatchery steelhead that were not fin-clipped. (Deschutes hatchery steelhead were fin-clipped.)

In 1982, Oregon’s Department of Fish and Wildlife adopted an anadromous fish plan guided by four considerations: Wild fish, eggs, stock recruitment, and habitat. That plan has been slow to evolve into working implementation, although the guiding concepts are sound. In 1986, the Steelhead Plan for Oregon evolved out of the anadromous fish plan. This new plan is complex, and requires that streams be managed under one of three options: exclusively for wild fish, combined wild and hatchery fish, or with emphasis on hatchery fish and maximum harvest. The plan also insists on using wild fish in any hatchery program that takes place on a stream managed to support wild steelhead as well, and that hatchery steelhead programs will not replace wild fish. However, the Steelhead Plan is so broad in scope that full implementation is futuristic. Once it is set into motion, though, its sheer magnitude will be difficult to reverse, and Oregon seems to be diligently plodding along toward a steelhead management that has been applied in British Columbia for more than a decade with proven results. Hopefully we will all live long enough to sample the results of the Oregon planning process.

Washington

Without the Boldt Decision, Washington would likely remain entrenched within the hatchery steelhead management preoccupation of the 1960s and early 1970s under the misguided belief that wild steelhead populations could take care of themselves. However, due to court-forced allocation of the steelhead catch between the tribes and sportmen, Washington Department of Game has been dragged, kicking and screaming, into the necessary realities of assessing escapement goals for wild steelhead stocks — at least on Boldt-case rivers. As an outgrowth of the Boldt Decision, several Puget Sound and Olympics Peninsula streams now provide very fine catch-and-release fisheries for late-return stocks of wild winter-run steelhead.

In the late 1970s a sports group in Forks began to capture wild winter-run Sol Duc River steelhead for broodstock in a hatchery program that would offer an alternative to the usual dispersal of Chamber’s-Creek-origin hatchery winter-run steelhead throughout the rivers of Washington. Eventually it was a copy of the Giant Creek-Dam project released into the West Fork of the Hood by the French Creek project and of Canadian broodstock-capture technique. While begun on a small scale, the Sol Duc program provided important benefits to the Sol Duc system and as a vaguely cooperative example between sportmen, Indians, and the Department of Game. Similar broodstock-capture programs have occurred sporadically since on Puget Sound rivers and in S.W. Washington.

In 1982 the Department of Game designated the Wind River for strictly wild steelhead management with the cessation of hatchery steelhead plants. However, despite widespread public support, the Wind River did not have the strength of a broad management plan, and it suffered the isolated fate of being left “hanging and twisting in the wind.” In 1984, steelhead plants were resumed, although fin-clipped, and provisions were made for wild steelhead release. An outgrowth of the Wind River arguments was the realization that the public needed better opportunity for reviewing management information — the result was a series of spring informational meetings within each region of the state. Another outgrowth of the Wind River “failure” was the gathering of information in Region V that resulted in Best-steelhead-release regulations being set on 11 S.W. Washington streams during all, or part, of their steelhead season in 1986. In 1987, funding has finally been provided by the National Marine Fisheries Service for the clipping of fins of ALL hatchery-reared steelhead smolts in Region V, and year-long wild release will likely follow.

In haphazard manner, Washington steelhead streams little by little are being better managed — but there is not the binding strength of a formal plan or policy. Washington’s steelhead management policies are still vacillating because of public and political whims, not long-term biologically motivated direction. Today’s gains may well be gone tomorrow, without the institutional mass of a statewide biological plan that can effectively buffer unfounded public opinion and localized hysteria toward necessary management decisions. Washington has yet to make that needed commitment.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

by Bob McLaughlin

Although it was only two hours North of Seattle, the setting had a wilderness appearance. Nothing man-made was to be seen. The river, slightly tinged with green, flowed over large stones. It neither raged nor eddied but ran briskly. The summer, nearly cloudless day revealed snow-capped mountains not far away. High in a cottonwood an eagle, white markings glowing, surveyed the scene.
The angler had turned to a full-floating line. It was so much more pleasant to cast, seldom hung the fly, and presented a new challenge in winter steelhead fishing. To discipline himself he had left the sinking lines home.

He waded a few paces into a flat below a long riffle. The General Practitioner sailed out, quartering upstream on a ten double-tapered line. A mend was made, then the rod tip led the way across the flow until the line rested downstream. The angler moved two paces down, and, casting left-handed, brought the big double-hander up sharply, then changed direction and fired the next cast across the current.

After several casts he began to think that the water was too shallow to hold fish. It looked better below — slicks indicated larger obstructions and the depth appeared to be greater — but he decided to continue fishing on down just in case there was a deeper pocket he could not readily see. The run was unfamiliar to him and fishing all of the water was better than wading by a fish.

He made another cast, mended line, and watched intently as the line began to belly and swing. At the feel of a hard tug, he reactively set, and felt the weight of the steelhead working in the current:

"Fish on!" he cried, looking back at his wife.

The fish rolled, flashing silver, then ran and jumped. The remainder of the struggle was played out on the length of the flyline. When he could elevate the fish's head he rapidly drew it, thrashing, into the shallows among protruding stones. She laid there, mint-bright, iridescent rays streaming from her wrist onto her tail.

As the angler reached for the fly, he saw that it was already free. He clipped it from the leader and placed it back in the flybox, insuring that he would have it for his diary. He felt a warm glow of satisfaction. The setting, the technique, and the fish had made this a very special day.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
by John Sager

Washington's steelhead flyfishers have learned to keep a wary eye on the games-within-games in Olympia. The 1985-86 legislative sessions reflected disagreement and even some acrimony among sports fishermen as lawmakers wrangled over the so-called bait bills which would have prevented the state's Department of Game from imposing bait restrictions on many steelhead rivers. As with most political fights, this one was settled with compromise legislation which offered some solace to the bait industry, while still allowing the professional steelhead managers at Game to experiment with bait bans.

The 1987 legislature finally agreed, after listening to widely conflicting testimony from sports fishermen, to permit the Governor to appoint the Game Director in exchange for an infusion of badly needed money from the general fund. Since the 1930s, the department's policies and leadership have been determined by a relatively independent Game Commission, and its budget has been drawn from funds generated almost exclusively from license sales. Those sales have waned dramatically in recent years, while the department has had increasingly expensive duties imposed upon it, some by the legislature. Thus the financial crunch.

Many steelhead flyfishers generally approve the legislation, trusting that future governors will choose departmental directors on the basis of skill and experience, and not patronage. The new law makes $8 million immediately available, funds desperately needed to continue programs that are working to improve wild steelhead runs.

In Oregon, there are no fewer than 79 bills in the current legislature related to fish and wildlife. One of these, which would create a Deschutes River Recreation Commission, appears to be of most interest to steelhead flyfishers. The beloved Deschutes has become so popular with so many user groups that the specter of crowding and streamside landowner conflicts has become a tough issue for lawmakers. The burgeoning kayaking/rafting business, tribal rights, commercial interests (guides, shops), and the boater-pass system also are at issue, making for a legislative challenge worthy of Solomon’s Wisdom. Oregonian steelheaders also are watching legislative efforts to eliminate lower Columbia River gillnetting by nontribal commercial fishermen.

In British Columbia, steelhead flyfishers appear “not to worry” over the workings of their Parliament. Rather, the Fisheries Branch — the ministerial mechanism charged with game fish management — makes most of the important decisions and its biologists are staffed with interested user groups. The fabled Deschutes has become so popular with so many user groups that the specter of crowding and streamside landowner conflicts has become a tough issue for lawmakers. The burgeoning kayaking/rafting business, tribal rights, commercial interests (guides, shops), and the boater-pass system also are at issue, making for a legislative challenge worthy of Solomon’s Wisdom. Oregonian steelheaders also are watching legislative efforts to eliminate lower Columbia River gillnetting by nontribal commercial fishermen.

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THE DEAN RIVER
by Ken Harding-Rooney

The Dean River may well be the finest summer-run steelhead river in the world, certainly the best known. Upon meeting fellow anglers from other parts of the world, inevitably the first question asked is, "Do you fish the Dean?" Remotely located, it has consistently produced large fish that respond well to the fly. Unfortunately, in recent years it has seen increasing angling pressure, more than it can sustain without damage to the fishery. Therefore, it remains a limited-access destination.

Resident anglers once made up approximately 60 percent of the anglers on the river, the remaining 40 percent consisting of both non-resident Canadian and foreign anglers. Lately, however, there has been a dramatic increase in the non-resident angler, particularly from British Columbia, while resident numbers have remained static. Branch biologists would like to return to the earlier split, with a maximum of 50 anglers per day on the river.

In order to reduce angling pressure and maintain the quality experience on the river the Fisheries Branch is instituting a permit program for the Dean. A special Dean River permit will be required for all anglers fishing the river. For Canadian anglers this permit will be valid for the season. Non-resident permits will be valid for one calendar year. If demand for non-resident permits exceed the allotment for a specific time period, they will be broken down by a draw. In 1987 these permits will be unlimited, but in 1988 non-residents of Canada will be restricted.
STEAMBOATERS SALUTED
by Stan Young

The Steamboaters, dedicated to watching over and helping to protect the superlative steelhead flyfishing of Oregon's North Umpqua River, recently celebrated their 20th anniversary. Formed at a time when the North Umpqua was faced with declining runs, environmental degradation, dam threats, and the possible loss of its fly-only status, the club took the lead in efforts to perpetuate the quality of a resource many believe is unmatched anywhere. The success of these efforts was borne out in 1986 when 18,000 summer-run steelhead, the largest number on record, returned.

The Steamboaters now have more than 350 members, many from states other than Oregon and some even from foreign countries. Club members are working with the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to see that the watershed is properly managed. Club dues are paying for fisheries research and stream improvements. The Winchester Hydro Dam on the lower river was ordered shut down largely as a result of legal actions by club members.

Annual meetings are well attended, a newsletter, The Steamboat Whistle, is regularly issued, membership continues to grow, and the vitality of the club remains at a high level. With so many rivers of the West in fast decline, such as the North fork of the Stillaguamish and its race of wild summer steelhead, it is heartening to learn that the North Umpqua is recovering so well. The Steamboaters have played a leading role, and they are to be congratulated.

THREAT TO DEER CREEK FROM ROAD BUILDING AND TIMBER HARVEST CASES
by Alec Jackson

Preliminary indications are that the U.S. Forest Service will defer all new road construction and timber harvest in the Deer Creek watershed for at least ten years. Additionally, in 1987, the Forest Service will spend in excess of $50,000 in the drainage to check upslope sediment sources before they affect Deer Creek's tributaries. Washington's Department of Natural Resources has withdrawn one of three planned timber sales in the drainage and has modified the remaining two in an effort to minimize their impact on Deer Creek and its wild summer steelhead.

Georgia-Pacific has cut all of its harvestable timber in the watershed and will not reenter the basin in a clearcut mode for in excess of twenty years. Scott Paper Company still plans on proceeding with their Oso Flats timber sale at this writing, but has not informed us of details of its final plans. The sale fronts on Deer Creek, and more than six hundred feet of unstable streambank threatens Deer Creek. We will continue to insist on adequate protection for the stream and its fish.

The timber-harvest-review process established by the Deer Creek Group appears to be working satisfactorily for us as far as dealing with public timberland managers. We have doubts as to whether or not the process will work when we have to deal with corporations. Scott Paper, at the request of the Washington Environmental Council, delayed informing the Deer Creek Group of its final plans relative to Oso Flats so that funding for the T/F/W program by the State Legislature would not be jeopardized. Scott Paper has still not informed the group on how the adverse impacts of the harvest will be mitigated, as requested by Fisheries, Game, the tribes, and all of the environmental people in the group. We suspect that Scott Paper may continue to delay its decision until all public hearings on T/F/W have been completed.

In a large measure the T/F/W timber-harvest-review process is modeled on the one used by the Deer Creek Group for over two years. If the process developed on an experimental basis by the Deer Creek Group will not function efficiently and in a timely manner with corporate members, it probably won't work with T/F/W throughout the State of Washington. This is important, as Bob Arnold and I have been reconsidered and will not endorse T/F/W at this time and have adopted-a-wait-and-see attitude. Additionally, we have serious doubts as to whether the number of leave-trees (around 100 per 1,000 feet of streamfrontage, with a depth of 25 to 100 feet) is nearly enough, if everything else in this zone is cut. Our best judgement is that all our streams require a greenbelt of uncut trees. It is, however, an unrealizable goal today.

WILD STEELHEAD RETURN
by George Johnson

Does the catch-and-release program on wild steelhead really increase the returns? This question leads to some interesting information. This year of low water is an important example of the overall problem facing steelhead. The biologists I spoke with all felt that the most important variable that affects the returns of wild steelhead is the availability of water in the spring, when the smolts migrate to the ocean. Water flows in the Columbia and Snake are very much determined by the BPA and other utilities. The recent work by the Northwest Power Planning Council (NPPC) has resulted in a better plan to ensure the wash-out of the smolts. This water budget is coordinated with the rainfall and snow-melt and other factors to maximize the cut migration. The NPPC and Idaho Fish and Game Departments have gone so far as to propose a dam to supplement the natural water levels. This is one dam that has the support of all agencies and sportmen.

Other problems are faced by the wild steelhead strains. These include the degradation of the streams by man-made and natural factors. The Grande Ronde spawning gravels have largely been lost to a series of fish floods. The South Fork of the Clearwater has had a major slide, which muddies the lower river after short periods of rain. Another factor is the wild smolts stay in the spawning rivers for up to three years. This probably leads to large losses from sports anglers who fish these streams during the summer months.

The actual percent of a run's return varies from stream to stream. The Methow has a return of approximately 15 percent wild fish, while the Snake and Clearwater numbers are larger — about 25 percent. This would indicate that the wild fish count over Lower Granite Dam last fall was nearly 25,000 fish. The biologists responsible for the wild fish
indicate that the wild fish count over Lower Granite Dam last fall was nearly 25,000 fish. The biologists responsible for the wild fish are optimistic about the future of our wild steelhead runs. We should be encouraged about the success we have had this far and continue to work for the future improvement of wild steelhead.

QUALITY FISHING
by Steve Raymond

The word "quality" is used so much these days that it's in danger of wearing out, but for all its use it remains an elusive concept. Quality really is in the eye of the beholder, and nowhere is that more evident than it is in fishing. Ask an angler what he means by "quality fishing" and you'll get at least a slightly different answer each time. Perhaps that's one reason why we have so much difficulty having more waters set aside under quality regulations; we can't even agree among ourselves on exactly what we mean.

What, for example, is "quality steelhead fishing?" I can't speak for others, but I can tell you what it means to me. It means, first of all, having a reasonable chance of hooking a fish -- and not just any fish, but a wild fish, strong and bright and fresh from the sea. It also means hooking that fish in the best possible way, by having it come in a rush to a high-floating dry fly or in a long lunge to a ruffle-bitched floater skittering across the flat tailwater of a great pool. Ideally, it should happen in a river that is not too big but not too small, where the wading is easy but not so easy as to be unchallenging, where there is every variety of water a fly fisher could want, and where there are at least some opportunities to see individual fish and stalk them where they lie.

But that's not all. The river also should afford at least some chance for solitude, and there should be beauty and inspiration in its untouched forests of old-growth fir and cedar on its banks, and the open reaches would offer a glimpse of mountaintops with snow on their flanks all through the summer. There should be a chance to watch deer drinking in the shallows and to see fresh bear tracks on the sandbars, and most certainly there should be eagles, ospreys, herons, and kingfishers. If all these things are present, then the prospects of hooking a fish do not have to be so very great.

It would be good, too, if the river had its own traditions -- if it were a river where famous anglers had fished in the past, where methods had been tested until they were tried and true, where useful learning had taken place and colorful lore had evolved and all these things had been preserved carefully in the pages of angling books. Even the best of rivers sometimes flood, and when they do it is nice to be able to do one's fishing in books.

Of course there are no rivers like that, or at least I do not know of any. So instead I fish many rivers, each of which offers some of these things but never all of them together, and try to combine the memories of them to fulfill my own private definition of quality.

Perhaps that explains why quality is a term of such elusive meaning. It is, for each of us, an ideal of such perfection that it never can be fully attained, and we spend our fishing lives in a hopeless search for it. But there is so much pleasure in the search, and so many satisfactions in the experience we have along the way, that these things represent a kind of quality in themselves.

And maybe that is as close to the true meaning of quality as we shall ever come. If so, it is close enough for me.