



TECH BULLETIN

OREGON

MID-WILLAMETTE SPRING CHINOOK

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

The Willamette River runs more than 255 miles through some of Oregon's more populous areas . . . from the Forest Grove Reservoir, through that city, northward to the Eugene/Springfield area, on to Corvallis - Albany - Salem - Oregon City/West Lynn - Portland and finally to St. Helens where it flows into the Columbia. Its entire length provides some excellent salmon and steelhead fishing . . . but none is any more productive than that between the falls at Oregon City, south past Salem to where both the Santiam and Luckiamute Rivers join the Willamette.

SPRING MIGRATION

Spring chinook enter the Northwest's river systems from February through June and remain in fresh water tributaries until spawning time. "Springers" return as four- or five-year olds. Four year-olds average 12 to 15 pounds and fives 18 to 28 pounds.

Springers can be found throughout the entire Willamette river and Willamette Slough (Multnomah Channel) during the spring migration period and can be caught by sports anglers who use the correct techniques and select the right lures.

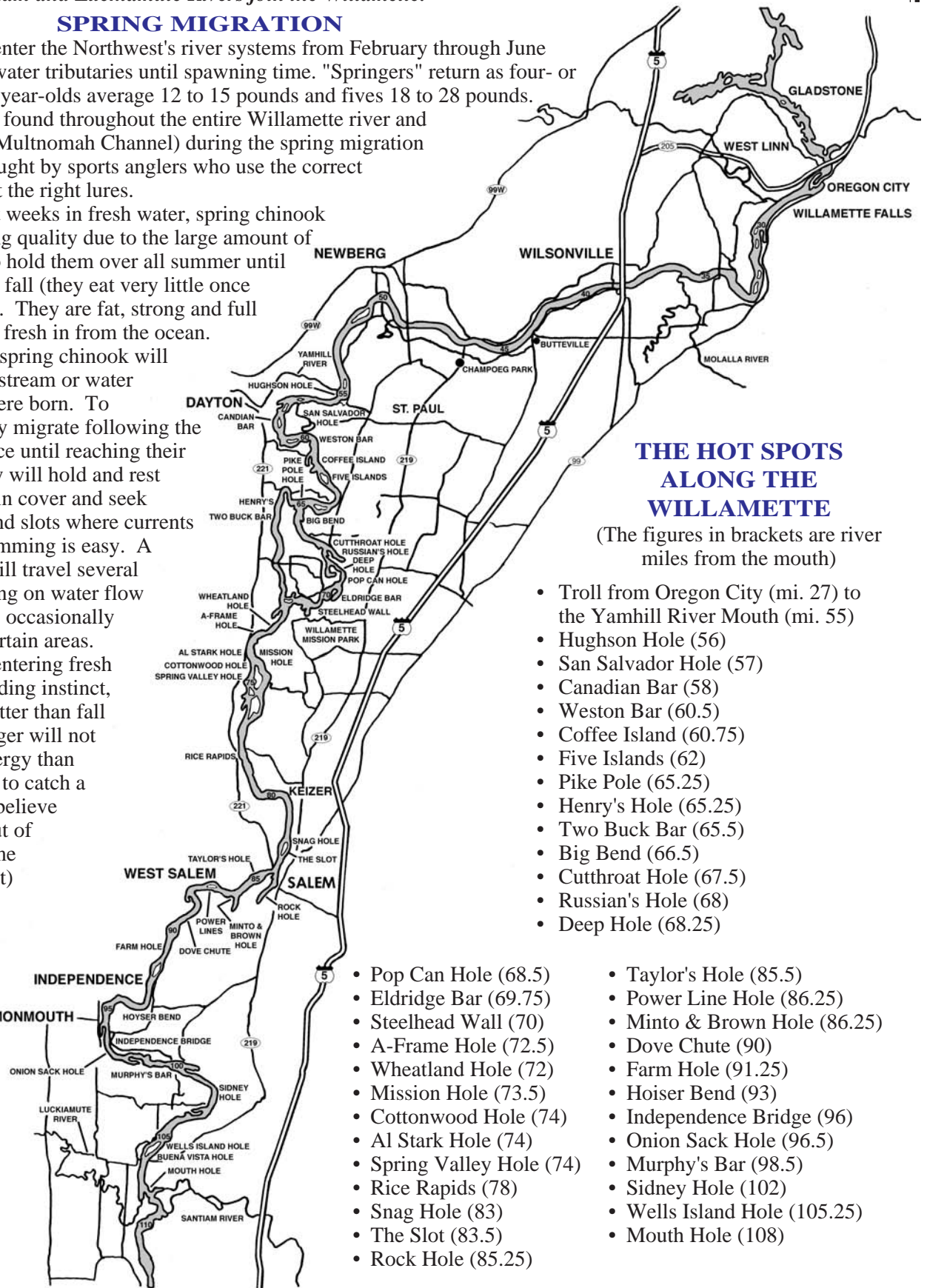
During their first weeks in fresh water, spring chinook are of the finest eating quality due to the large amount of body fat they need to hold them over all summer until spawning time in the fall (they eat very little once entering fresh water). They are fat, strong and full of fight when they're fresh in from the ocean.

Like all salmon, spring chinook will home in to the same stream or water source where they were born. To conserve energy, they migrate following the path of least resistance until reaching their spawning area. They will hold and rest in areas which contain cover and seek out those channels and slots where currents are minimal and swimming is easy. A migrating chinook will travel several miles a day, depending on water flow and other conditions, occasionally stopping to rest in certain areas.

Spring chinook entering fresh water still have a feeding instinct, and generally bite better than fall run salmon. A springer will not expend any more energy than absolutely necessary to catch a meal (many anglers believe that they bite only out of curiosity or from some latent feeding instinct) so a lure must be presented close to the fish and slowly enough so it is easy to catch.

ABOVE THE FALLS

The Willamette above the falls from Oregon City to its confluence with the Yamhill River, some 28 miles south, is reasonably slack water, best suited to trolling.



THE HOT SPOTS ALONG THE WILLAMETTE

(The figures in brackets are river miles from the mouth)

- Troll from Oregon City (mi. 27) to the Yamhill River Mouth (mi. 55)
- Hughson Hole (56)
- San Salvador Hole (57)
- Canadian Bar (58)
- Weston Bar (60.5)
- Coffee Island (60.75)
- Five Islands (62)
- Pike Pole (65.25)
- Henry's Hole (65.25)
- Two Buck Bar (65.5)
- Big Bend (66.5)
- Cutthroat Hole (67.5)
- Russian's Hole (68)
- Deep Hole (68.25)
- Pop Can Hole (68.5)
- Eldridge Bar (69.75)
- Steelhead Wall (70)
- A-Frame Hole (72.5)
- Wheatland Hole (72)
- Mission Hole (73.5)
- Cottonwood Hole (74)
- Al Stark Hole (74)
- Spring Valley Hole (74)
- Rice Rapids (78)
- Snag Hole (83)
- The Slot (83.5)
- Rock Hole (85.25)
- Taylor's Hole (85.5)
- Power Line Hole (86.25)
- Minto & Brown Hole (86.25)
- Dove Chute (90)
- Farm Hole (91.25)
- Hoiser Bend (93)
- Independence Bridge (96)
- Onion Sack Hole (96.5)
- Murphy's Bar (98.5)
- Sidney Hole (102)
- Wells Island Hole (105.25)
- Mouth Hole (108)

WILLAMETTE SPRING SALMON LURES



Although some anglers do anchor and fish at the mouth of the Mollala using spinners, most prefer to troll using spinners such as the *Clearwater Flash™* and bait-and-lure combinations like a bait-wrapped *Kwikfish®* or *Eric's Prawn Rig*.

Once you get to the mouth of the Yamhill, the river begins to have a strong current bank-to-bank and doesn't lend itself to effective trolling.

Backtrolling K13, K14 or K15 *Kwikfish* can be effective at times, but the large number of trash fish present practically rules out using straight bait such as prawns, shrimp or salmon eggs in this area of the river. That leaves anchor fishing as the best way to catch these mid-Willamette River spring salmon.

There's nothing mysterious or tricky about the technique used; you just anchor your boat, get your spreader, lure and lead rig out behind the boat and then let the current do the work. The prime places to anchor are usually close to the bank . . . in just four to six feet of water. However, it is possible to anchor out in the middle of the river alongside current edges or above dropoffs and catch fish.

In the places close to shore, use 17- to 21-inch weight dropper lines, and leader lines a couple of inches longer. In the deeper water, fish 21- to 29-inch weight dropper lines with the leader, once again, a couple of inches longer. The amount of lead you use depends on the current and the depth of the water. It can vary from one ounce to as much as eight, and requires some experimentation.

In the morning and evening, or during dark water conditions the most effective lures to use are #4 *Teespoon®* and a #7 or #8 *Clearwater Flash*.

Productive colors include *Copper*, *Genuine Gold Plate*, *Rainbow* and *Chartreuse-Green* combinations.

Some very potent plugs are Luhr Jensen's *Kwikfish* which can be fished on a flat (no lead) line. Try these in places where the current isn't too strong. Top colors include #0913 *Fluorescent Red (Fire)*, #0938 *Silver/Chartreuse Head*, #0734 *Trapper* which is Silver with Blue Tiger and a Chartreuse Tail.

THE ACTION STARTS IN LATE APRIL OR EARLY MAY

Usually the first 20 days in May are the most productive for mid-Willamette salmon. The fish have been lying below the falls waiting for the water to warm up. Then they pour over the falls and move through this stretch of river to get to the cooler waters of the tributaries. They are moving fast and can cover the distance from the falls at Oregon City to the river's confluence with the Yamhill in as few as seven days. A nice bonus is that summer run steelhead are also moving upstream at this time, right along with the salmon. These will take the same lures as the chinook, providing nearly 20% of the catch.

Because of hardpan gravel and the general shallowness of the river, you need to have a good rocking chair-type 25-lb. anchor tied to 200 feet of stout rope, complete with anchor buoy.

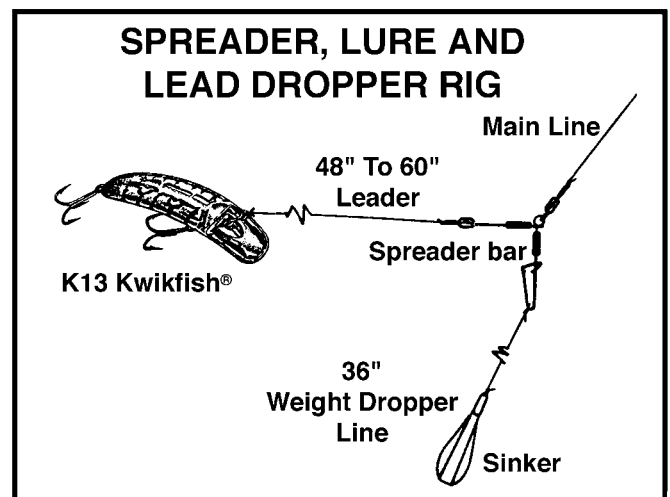
Because the water is swift, things can get pretty wild when a log or other heavy drift comes floating down-river toward your boat! Hence, it's wise to keep an eye peeled upriver and be rigged so you can *quickly* toss your anchor buoy overboard, should the need arise!

The weather can also be somewhat unpredictable in the spring, so a good canvas top on your boat will help keep you dry if it rains, as well as protect you from the sun on hot days.

This is virtually an untapped stretch of the river, so there are many holes that have never really been tried.

SHARP HOOKS PAY OFF!

One of the easiest, yet most important, things you can do to improve your fishing success is to maintain super-sharp hooks on your lures at all times. A fine-toothed file such as Luhr Jensen's *Sharp Hook File™* is the absolute best hook sharpening tool available. Hold



the file parallel to the hook point and with gentle, one-way strokes, remove a small amount of metal on at least two sides of the point to obtain a sticky-sharp point with a knife-like cutting edge.

BOAT ACCESS AREAS

The areas and ramps allowing boat access above the falls at Oregon City are:

- Bernert Landing in West Linn.
- Hebb Park - 1/2-mile north of Canby Ferry Road.
- Boones Ferry Marina - where I-5 crosses the river.
- Rodgers Landing just outside of Newberg.
- San Salvador Park two miles south of confluence with the Yamhill River.
- Willamette Mission State Park - Wheatland Ferry 8 miles north of Keiser/Salem.
- Wallace Marine Park in Salem
- Independence Riverview Park in Independence
- Buena Vista, two miles north of where the Santiam River enters.