



# TECH BULLETIN

## OREGON

# WILLAMETTE RIVER SPRING CHINOOK

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

### BY BUZZ RAMSEY



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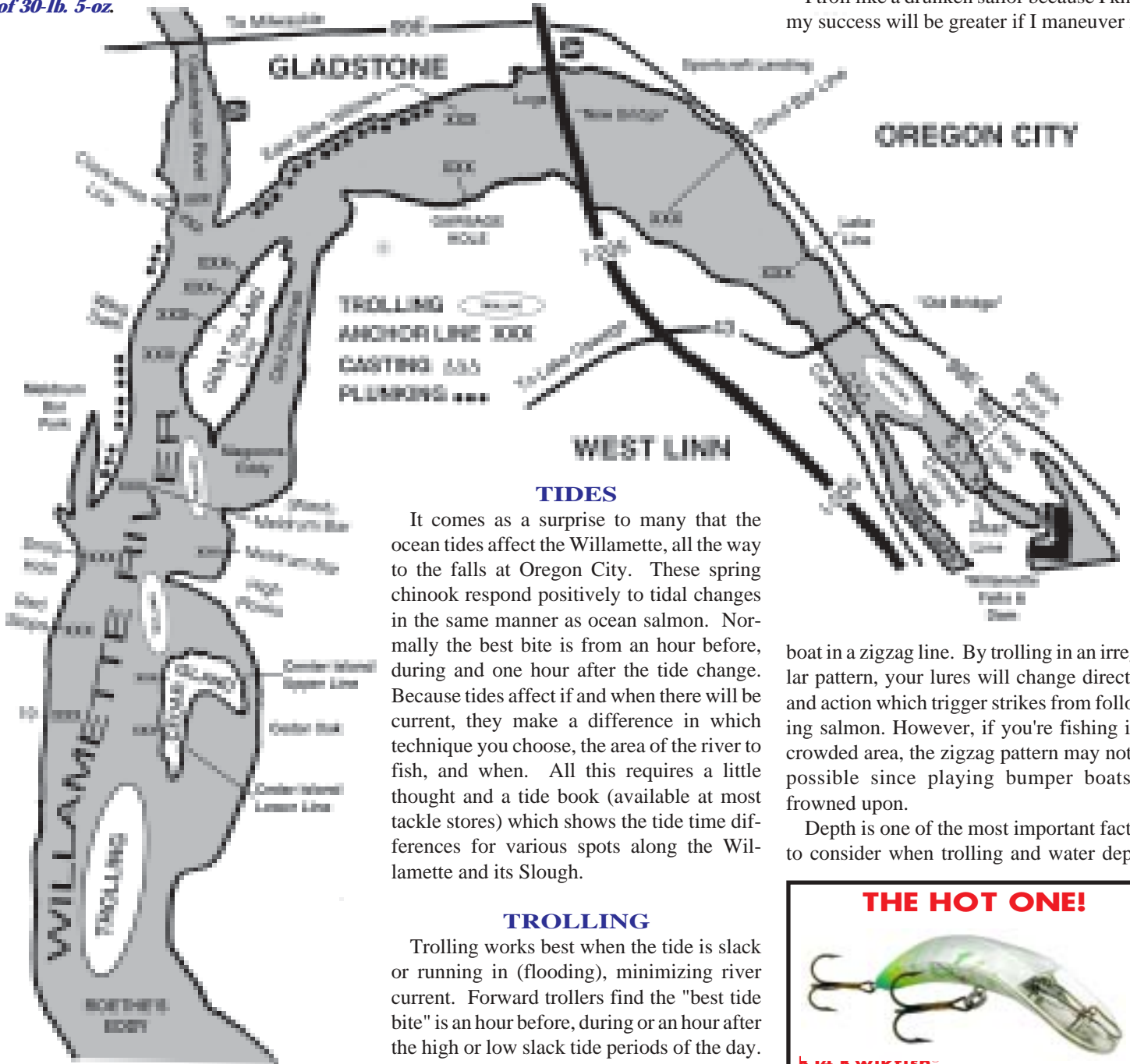
**college and is nationally recognized for his knowledge of cold-water sport fisheries. Now inducted into the National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame as a "Legendary Angler", for several years he held a world steelhead record of 30-lb. 5-oz.**

If you think a run of 40,000 to 100,000 spring chinook is worth your time and trouble, the lower Willamette River is the place. This metro fishery runs from February through May, peaking during late March and April, and has a lot to offer both bank and boat anglers. Fish are big, averaging 12 to 18 pounds, some reaching 30 pounds or more and are prized, more than any other, for their eating quality. The Willamette below Oregon City Falls is a big river which intimidates many with its size, leaving them wondering how to best fish it. Like most rivers, there are some basic rules which, if followed, will increase your chances of success.

month are when low slack tide occurs within an hour or two of daylight. This means that by starting at light you can troll through the early morning best tide bite period, through the flood tide and into the high slack best tide bite. Once the tide starts to run out hard (which usually means plunking works better than trolling) you can either anchor up or call it a day. If you're a troller, there is no need to start at daylight in an area where the tide will be running out all morning. Knowing this, you may choose another area where the tide will be right, anchor up and plunk, or simply start later in the day.

### TROLLING TIPS

I troll like a drunken sailor because I know my success will be greater if I maneuver my



### TIDES

It comes as a surprise to many that the ocean tides affect the Willamette, all the way to the falls at Oregon City. These spring chinook respond positively to tidal changes in the same manner as ocean salmon. Normally the best bite is from an hour before, during and one hour after the tide change. Because tides affect if and when there will be current, they make a difference in which technique you choose, the area of the river to fish, and when. All this requires a little thought and a tide book (available at most tackle stores) which shows the tide time differences for various spots along the Willamette and its Slough.

### TROLLING

Trolling works best when the tide is slack or running in (flooding), minimizing river current. Forward trollers find the "best tide bite" is an hour before, during or an hour after the high or low slack tide periods of the day. For most areas, the best trolling times of the

boat in a zigzag line. By trolling in an irregular pattern, your lures will change direction and action which trigger strikes from following salmon. However, if you're fishing in a crowded area, the zigzag pattern may not be possible since playing bumper boats is frowned upon.

Depth is one of the most important factors to consider when trolling and water depths



vary a lot in the Willamette. The general rule is if the water is 20 feet deep or less, fish will usually be close to the bottom, so troll your outfit on or just off the bottom. If the water is deeper, or when fish are moving, they will suspend. Most anglers find success in deep water (over 25 feet) by trolling their outfits 10 to 16 feet below the surface. There are exceptions to these basic rules. For example in early morning or when the river is turbid, moving fish can be closer to the surface - within 6 or 8 feet. If the river is clear and the mid-day sun bright, they may be deeper, or you'll find them in shaded areas or hiding out under log rafts. The other exception is at Oregon City where fish may hold in deep water while waiting for the right conditions before passing the falls.

### PLUNKING

Plunking works best when the tide is running out, providing current resulting in action to lures or bait rigs. The best plunking areas for boaters are where the depth is 20 feet or less. Since the Portland harbor has been dredged, the best plunking spots are near Oregon City and in the Willamette Slough. I've had the best success anchoring in 10 to 20 feet of water just upstream from deep water areas or at the head end of natural leads. Along side of, or at the downstream end of log rafts can also be an excellent place to try. Anchoring at the upstream end of a deep water trough which narrows and shallows to 20 feet or less can be an ideal ambush spot.

### LURES AND BAIT

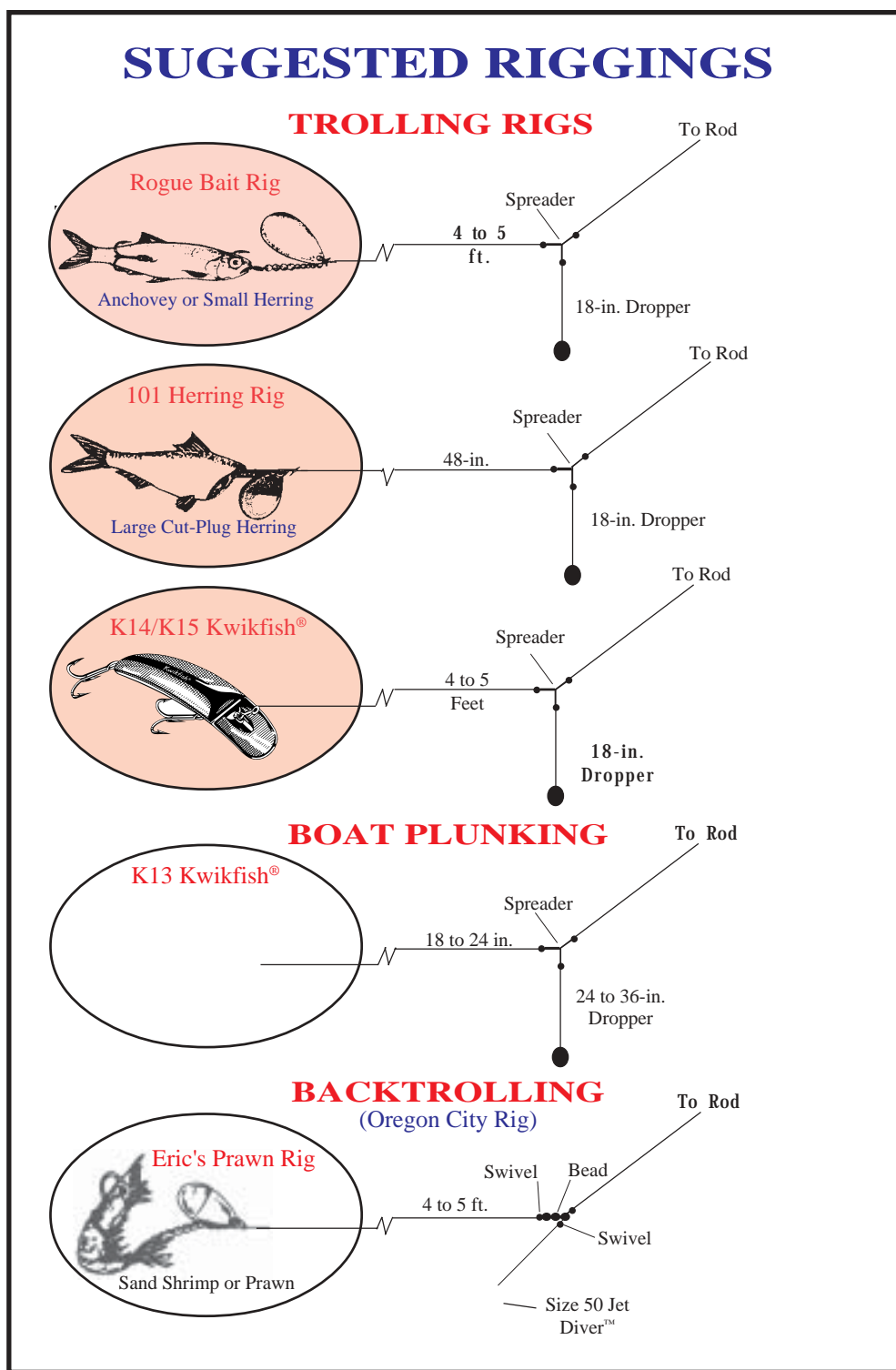
A variety of lures and bait are used for spring chinook. The *Kwikfish*® in the K10, K12 or K14 size is a popular lure. Plunkers use the smaller two Kwikfish sizes, while the bait-wrapped K14 is popular with plunkers, trollers and backtrollers. Spinners such as the *Clearwater Flash*™ can be trolled or plunked. Best sizes are the #7 or #8. The most popular spinner finish is *Rainbow*, however *Copper*, *50/50* and *Genuine Gold Plate* also work.

Adding spinner blade action and vibration to baits like sand shrimp, prawns or herring is gaining in popularity. The *101 Herring Rig* is designed to be used with large cut-plug herring, the *Rogue Bait Rig* works best with a small whole herring or anchovy, and the *Eric's Prawn Rig* is designed to be fished with a prawn or sand shrimp. See the illustrations on this page for guidance. Each bait actionizer rig works best if your bait is rigged to spin as it's pulled through the water.

Kwikfish and herring are usually rigged with a 4 to 5-ft. leader. Prawns and spinners with a 3- to 4-ft. one. Trollers usually rig an 18-inch weight dropper and sometimes use *Jet Divers*™ to hold their outfit down. Boat plunkers rig 24- to 30-inch weight droppers and usually rig shorter leaders to ensure their lure is positioned off the bottom, not digging into it.

### OREGON CITY

Although equipped with fish ladders, the Oregon City Falls represents a major obstacle to migration. It's the most popular spot on the Willamette for fishing because anglers know that's where the fish are. The area from the falls downstream for several miles is fished differently from the river below and is shared by trollers, backtrollers and plunkers in boats and on shore. Because fish will hold for



extended periods, they can be found in deeper water (up to 35 feet) but may also suspend. Although the tide does affect the Willamette all the way to Oregon City, it has less influence here.

The recent "hot set up" for many Oregon City guides is to backtroll a sand shrimp or prawn 4 to 5 feet behind a size #50 *Jumbo Jet Diver*™. Prawns can be rigged several ways. Thread your leader (using a threader) through the prawn (head down) above a 4/0 single hook such as a Wright & McGill #182. For slow water, trolling or plunking, rig him head down with two size 1/0 single hooks (snelled like a mooching leader) then place a half hitch of the line around the tail. This will give the prawn action, causing him to twirl in the water. Rig your sand shrimp on a double hook set up consisting of a 1/0 single and trailing #4 treble, rigged one inch apart. When using a Jumbo Jet Diver, the longer you let a salmon take the bait, the better he'll have it, so wait until Mr. Salmon pulls the rod down several times before setting the hook.

"Hog-lines" is the term used to describe rows of anchored boats which line the Willamette at Oregon City. To best enjoy anchor fishing in these areas, you should have a 26- to 30-lb. "rocking chair" anchor and a 200-ft. anchor rope. A good buoy is necessary so you

can cast loose in a hurry should the need arise to land a fish or get away from floating debris.

If you're not used to anchoring, it is best to start out by doing so on either end of a line up until you develop confidence in handling your outfit. A good bow pulley will make it easier to pull out of the line when you want to change positions or quit fishing. Always tie your rope off no more than 3 to 5 feet back from your bow eye. This is a safety measure, just in case your rope slips off the bow of your boat.

Plunkers use a variety of lures to entice action. A K14 Kwikfish rigged with a 24- to 30-in. weight dropper line and 18- to 24-in. leader are popular producers. In clear water, the smaller K13 in *Fire* or *Cerise* color can be the best. This rig is usually cast out, downstream from the anchored boat. *Rainbow* spinners are rigged the same way, but usually tipped with a prawn tail on the hook.

**BOAT LAUNCHING SITES**  
 Cedar Oaks  
 Clackamette Park  
 Sports Craft Landing