

Steelhead and Salmon Fishing

Of all the fishing opportunities in Idaho, perhaps the most exciting is the yearly surge of anadromous (sea-run) fish to our rivers and streams. Wild steelhead and Chinook salmon, though much reduced from historic numbers, return from the Pacific Ocean every year by the thousands, swimming upstream as much as 900 miles to spawning grounds in the Snake, Salmon and Clearwater drainages. Hatchery-raised steelhead and salmon boost the overall runs and provide first rate fishing and harvest opportunity for big, hard-fighting fish.

Steelhead: Some consider steelhead to be the premiere freshwater sportfish and for good reason; few gamefish can match the steelhead's combination of beauty and fighting ability, as well as their excellent qualities on the dinner plate.



Martin Koenig

Run size varies from year to year, but Idaho averages more than 150,000 steelhead returning each season. Fish can range from five pounds to more than 20 pounds. They enter Idaho in late summer or fall, spend the winter in larger rivers, and make the final push to spawning grounds in the spring. With large numbers of fish, long seasons and more than 650 river miles of the Snake, Salmon and Clearwater rivers to choose from, Idaho offers one of the finest steelhead fisheries on the continent.

Salmon: Chinook salmon runs – and fishing opportunity for them – have been less consistent than for steelhead, but what salmon lack in numbers they make up for in brute strength. Most fish range from 12 to 20 pounds, but fish over 30 pounds are caught each year. Chinook salmon are classified



Carson Jeffries

into three groups – spring, summer and fall Chinook – based on the timing of their run and where they spawn.



Brett Bowersox

Spring and summer Chinook generally migrate earlier, travel farther to headwater streams and spawn in late summer. Fall Chinook migrate later and typically spawn in larger mainstem rivers in October. Chinook salmon fishing seasons are often very restrictive and limited to specific stretches of rivers.

Fishing Rules: Steelhead and Salmon seasons and limits can change each year depending on the strength of the run, so check the regulations carefully, use the Fish and Game website (<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>) or call your local Fish and Game office when planning a trip. Note that all fishing for steelhead and salmon requires a special permit, barbless hooks are required, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin may be harvested, and you must record any harvested fish on your permit immediately.