

## Uniting community around steelhead and salmon at World Fish Migration Day Festival

Unblocked rivers and streams throughout the world are critical to maintaining our migratory fish populations. Here in the Rogue Basin, thriving migratory fish populations (upstream of the Rogue Canyon we are talking primarily about Pacific lamprey, chinook and coho salmon, and steelhead) are an important part of our local economy, ecology and culture.

Access to hundreds of miles of habitat is limited by barriers such as dams and road culverts. Over the past decade, many large barriers have been removed. But thousands of smaller barriers that impede or completely block salmon from accessing spawning and rearing habitat remain. By allowing salmon and steelhead to access smaller creeks and tributaries, we are improving the odds that more salmon will make the journey from their freshwater stream to the ocean and back to freshwater to spawn. If more salmon make this journey successfully, our Rogue Basin community can only benefit.

Our local migratory fish are exciting, athletic, complex marvels. From chinook salmon that routinely grow to 30-pound giants to steelhead that can easily leap over 8-foot-high falls to Pacific lamprey that can "crawl" (as long as the surface is moist and there are no right angles) over vertical rock surfaces using their mouths in place of hands and feet, these long-distance travelers are inspiring and have long played an important role in the culture of the region.

In the past, these animals were a staple source of food for the people of the region. Today, the salmon and steelhead draw anglers from all over world. From Shady Cove to the mouth of the Rogue River in Gold Beach, fishing guides offer a chance to hook a chinook or steelhead to locals and



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Guest opinion

tourists alike. For those that forego a guided experience, numerous parks and other public lands along the Rogue offer a chance to cast for a salmon or trout, watch these fish spawn, or play in the water comforted by sharing the stream with a host of migrating fish. This service fans out to the community in the form of hotel and vacation rentals, coffee before the morning cast, or a souvenir to remember the trip by, all of which tie into our regional economy based on tourism and outdoor recreation.

Beyond fishing, outdoor recreation opportunities abound in the Rogue Basin and wouldn't be possible without the stunning, diverse landscapes that surround us. From the snow on Mount Ashland to the old-growth trees in our forests, much of our surrounding environment is linked to salmon. For example, as you're hiking along the Rogue River to Rainie Falls to see the steelhead and chinook salmon jumping, you may stop for a break in the shade of a big leaf maple tree. This tree and others that grow along the river are partially fertilized with marine-derived nutrients from salmon carcasses that are taken out of the river by

bears, birds and other animals searching for a quick meal. Salmon are a food source for all sizes of organisms from the bears in the forest to the microorganisms in the soil to the growing cedar sapling along the river.

With a long history of cultural significance as a staple source of food for all the peoples living in the region and an important recreational draw, beckoning anglers from around the world to Grants Pass and the region, these different species of fish have formed strong connections with humans in the Rogue Basin. The Rogue Valley celebrates its local salmon populations by playing host to multiple fish-related events including the Salmon Ceremony at Ti'lomikh Falls near Gold Hill and See Our Salmon at Valley of the Rogue State Park. Added to the mix for 2018 is the inaugural World Fish Migration Day hosted by the Rogue River Watershed Council in Grants Pass on April 7. Events and programs like these that target younger generations can leave lasting impressions and instill a sense of stewardship for one's local environment.

The World Fish Migration Day Festival is a chance to unite a community around our migratory fish and connect fish, rivers and people in a meaningful and lasting way. Join the Rogue River Watershed Council on April 7 at North Middle School in Grants Pass for a 5K migratory race, costumed kids' dash, nature walks, live fish and hands-on fishing demonstrations.

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