

Dave Graybill

The Fishin' Magician

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While fall salmon season is ending in the Hanford Reach, anglers can still fish for them on the upper Columbia River. The steelhead season got off to a good start on the Methow and main stem Columbia, and with cooler weather and a bit of rain to raise the level of the Methow it will continue to be good.

My friend Jim Passage takes me along with him on the Methow River every year, and every year we fish the main stem Columbia the day before. Usually we try the fishing for salmon and steelhead in the Bridgeport area. This year I wanted to do something different. He indulged me and we spent the morning fishing just below the launch that is above Wells Dam. Someone had told me they released some steelhead there this summer and I wanted to check it out. We tried casting flies to the rip rap shore and Passage did get one hit. I then switched to plugs. It was very difficult as there were both large weed beds and floating weeds on the surface. We did get one good strike on a plug, but didn't hook up. However, while running the electric motor from the bow I spotted a steelhead and two triploids. I know there are fish here and I do want to go back and give this another try when the weeds aren't so bad, and maybe run flies and plugs shallow, as I did see the fish both right at the edge of weeds or cruising through them.

The following morning we met guide Jeff Brazda at 6 a.m. so we could get on the water as soon as we could see where we were going. We shoved the boat in a couple of miles above Gold Creek and stopped at a bar around the bend from our put in.



We stopped here so Passage could swing a fly and Brazda sent me about 50 yards up stream to fish some fast water where he knew fish were hiding. On my first cast I got a small steelhead of only 16 inches. A couple of cast later I got a small rainbow. I stuck with it and a few casts later hooked a small hatchery steelhead. I was off to a good start for the day. I joined Passage and Brazda on the bottom of the bar and continued casting while Passage switched to a center pin set up. He hooked three fish on this rig, landing one, releasing a wild fish and loosing one more. We left this spot and made our way down stream, casting from the boat. We hooked and released some wild fish. The river was certainly "skinny" and getting through some of the low water areas was a challenge. Brazda only had to get out and shove twice during the entire day, though. At one point Brazda said, "Have you ever found a hole that you knew should hold fish but never produced anything?" "Sure", I said. "I

have tried and tried to get a fish out of some good looking spots without success." "Well", said Brazda, "if you can catch a steelhead in this next drift I will pay you \$20.00. I have fished this run for twenty years and have never taken a fish out of it." Passage and I laughed and started casting as we entered the hole. We only got about a third of the way through it, and my indicator went down. I set the hook and a nice steelhead tore down stream with my bead in its jaw. Brazda's jaw dropped and I was really nervous. Here was a chance to take a fish from Brazda's "bad luck" hole, and there was \$20.00 riding on it. The fish, wasn't all that big, but was one of those that just refused to come to the net and made repeated runs. It finally came within Brazda's reach and slid the net under the bright wild fish. Passage and I laughed while he dug through his dry bag to get his wallet. "I have to pay up," said Brazda when I first refused to take his money, "It would be bad luck." We finished the day catching a few more fish and ended up landing nine steelhead. Passage was deadly with his center pin rig and managed well enough with my stone fly and bead set up, catching two on the stone fly. We both lost a couple as well. It was a beautiful day on the Methow, with a chilly morning and afternoon sunshine that warmed the day to the low 70s. There are plenty of steelhead in the Methow this year and the season is just getting started. It should be a good year.

There are some excellent videos on the Fishing TV Page of FishingMagician.com on steelhead fishing on the Methow, including one of a previous trip with Brazda and Passage.

Fishing for fall salmon is now open on the main stem Columbia River, all the way from above Priest Rapids Dam to 400 feet below Chief Joseph Dam. Anglers are allowed six Chinook a day, with or without an adipose fin, and three can be adults. Selective gear rules are in effect, except that bait is allowed. According to the news release over 60,000 fall Chinook have passed over Priest Rapids Dam and 25,000 have passed over Rock Island Dam. I looked at the counts over Wells Dam and over 10,000 have passed this dam, too. I love to have this open. It is a blast to fish for steelhead and kings on the same day. I hook a few kings on my steelhead rig, which can make things very interesting.

My wife Eileen has been patient. She is very eager to get to her favorite place to fish for steelhead, which is at Bridgeport. We will make a trip up there as soon as possible. She has taken some dandy fish in this stretch of the Columbia, and it is by far her favorite fishing of all the different kinds that we do.

I plan to hit the main stem Columbia for both kings and steelhead in the coming week, and hope to get up to the top end of Rufus Woods and Lake Roosevelt soon, too. I will be sure to let you know where I go and how I do. Gosh, there's some great fishing out there this fall!

Reach Dave at:
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