

Salmon Fishing

Idaho's First Natural Resource Industry

Salmon, the fish of legend.

The fish of cultural foundation.

The fish of economic potential.



Sockeye Salmon, Redfish Lake, Idaho, 1954

Any Pacific Northwest angler lucky enough to remember, or to have been reminded by a fleeting three-day Idaho season in 1997, will attest to the rare thrill of hooking a salmon – a thrill of intense value.

Historically, river management decisions in the region have been centered on the high cost of fish recovery programs to industry and electrical power generation. The Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation recognized the incompleteness of that perspective. To anglers, it only makes sense to determine the value a salmon fishery holds in the economy. That is the job the Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation commissioned the national economic consulting firm Ben Johnson Associates to carry out.

What if the salmon were restored to fishable populations? Would a return of the salmon runs of legend lure anglers from all over the world to the banks of Idaho's river reaches for salmon?



What is the true value the salmon holds for Idaho?

The Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation's goal is to contribute this important economic information to the body of knowledge as federal salmon recovery alternatives are being considered.



Salmon In Idaho

A Finding of Positive Economic Impact

Not since the 1970s has Idaho held a general salmon fishing season. It is well known that the salmon – one of Idaho's most prized and prestigious fish – holds great value to anglers on cultural, spiritual and psychological levels. But until now, the high economic value of salmon to Idahoans was not credibly accounted for in real terms.

In 1997, Idaho authorized a limited salmon fishing season – three days in July. Salmon were caught by anglers. River communities hummed for a weekend. All the activity moved the Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation to determine the economic value that Idaho's first natural resource industry, salmon fishing, actually holds.

The result: The return of salmon silver will provide a clear financial return to Idaho's river communities.

While strict methodologies keep findings in this in-depth study by Don Reading, Ph.D., conservative, it is abundantly clear that a full salmon fishing season would trigger major activity in the Idaho economy:

- *More than \$72 million in direct annual revenues*
- *More than 2,100 Idaho jobs*
- *700 jobs in rural riverside communities such as Riggins, Orofino, Salmon, and Challis*

These findings are significantly higher than the impact projected in 1997, when The Idaho Fish & Wildlife

Foundation issued findings of a comparable study on Idaho's steelhead fishery. In fact, the number of jobs that would be supported by salmon in riverside communities is 274 percent greater than was originally estimated.

Continued, low salmon populations or extinction could turn this economic potential for rural riverside communities into the one that got away.

Idaho's First Natural Resource Industry Under Environmental Threat

Idaho and the Northwest are at a historic point. The actions taken from this day forward determine whether Idaho's economy can rely on dependable returns of salmon and steelhead.

- The Idaho Statesman, 7/20/97

Study findings demonstrate that salmon preservation is clearly in Idaho's economic interest. As natural resource



extraction industries decline, the fierce, ocean-going fish of Indian legend offers a high-value opportunity to small riverside communities of Idaho and the Pacific Northwest.

"The economic value found in this study clearly places salmon fishing among Idaho's most precious natural resource industries. This fish has the potential of making Idaho an even more popular destination than it is today. The Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation is pleased to add this important economic information to the body of knowledge about salmon as recovery decisions are about to be made and implemented. Restoring Idaho's salmon runs to historic levels on a consistent basis is clearly the right thing to do."

- Sandy Emerson

President, Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation

According to the study's findings, of the \$72 million salmon could bring to Idaho, \$23 million would remain in Idaho's riverside communities. These are the same small towns that must find economic activities to replace lost mining and logging jobs at the dawn of a new century. The salmon infusion would provide new life-blood to these communities. According to the study:

"The economies of small Northwest communities are in transition. In order to remain viable, many of these small communities need to find replacement economic activities. Steelhead and salmon fishing can be one of those activities. Should the fisheries be lost, then one important economic option for these communities will be lost."

In fact, compared with the estimated \$9 million impact steelhead bring to riverside communities, Dr.

Reading estimates salmon would bring \$23 million to those same communities. Placed side by side, direct and indirect impacts of steelhead and salmon fishing in Idaho would amount to more than \$170 million in expenditures and 5,000 jobs.

In addition to the cash flow salmon would bring into Idaho, restoring the fish would also guard against money leaving the state. The study calculates between \$5 million and \$8 million currently is lost by Idaho each year, as resident and non-resident anglers look to fish for salmon elsewhere. This finding squares with Idaho Department of Commerce marketing information that demonstrates Idahoans themselves are critically important customers for Idaho recreation and tourism.

One particular finding from the study's conservative methodology indicates the study may err on the low side for economic impact in Idaho. The overwhelming majority of survey respondents - 76 percent - said they would be inclined to spend more money, especially on high cost items such as boats and trailers, if Idaho salmon fishing were possible. Only their actual expenditures were measured in the survey.



Return on Salmon Fishing Industry Assets Depends Upon Available Product for Consumers

At the turn of the century, federal actions establish a process for restoring salmon populations in the region. In order to survive and reproduce, salmon must be able to migrate to and from the Pacific Ocean. To do this, the salmon and steelhead must have cold, clear water and seasonal peaks of flow.

Many potential solutions, from pipelines to flushing to dam breaching, have been placed on the table and studied. Each has its consequences.

Ensuring and protecting the salmon as a viable natural resource in Idaho will take strong, confident political leadership committed to consensus building. Shortly before he left the U.S. Senate to return home, Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne made this clear during an oversight hearing he called on science and engineering issues in salmon recovery:

"We will not save salmon by ignoring the legitimate interests of the states, tribes, communities, families and businesses that depend on the resources of the Snake and Columbia Rivers. Each sector will have to make concessions and each state will have to do its part."

- U.S. Sen. Dirk Kempthorne (R-ID)
Senate Hearing on Salmon Issues, 10/8/98

The salmon study sheds important new light on just what is in Idaho's interest. The Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation strongly believes its role is to make certain the salmon's value is broadly recognized. This study clearly shows the wildlife, cultural and economic contribution of salmon is indisputable.

"It is a matter of protecting our business interests, to say nothing of our Idaho lifestyle and the preservation of one of the world's great natural wonders. Idaho's first natural resource industry, salmon fishing, continues to have tremendous potential in the 21st Century."

- Peter Johnson

Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation Board Member
Former head of Bonneville Power Administration



The Idaho Fish & Wildlife Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of natural resources: fish, wildlife and habitat. Among its goals are habitat conservation and restoration, public education and community/grassroots organization and funding of resource projects. It meets these goals by forging partnerships between the public and private sectors and by supporting conservation activities that inform and educate the general public.



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