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included known winter ranges within the Omak/Nespelem, San Poil and Inchelium Wildlife Districts.

“The survey this year showed that all species were either stable or increasing with the exception of areas that were impacted by wildfire or timber harvest, but it is expected to see local population declines after habitat is impacted,” said Sam Rushing, Omak/Nespelem District wildlife biologist for Colville Tribes Fish and Wildlife (CTFW). “The presence of snow improves conditions for spotting and identifying big game on the landscape. This provides color contrast which gives us an advantage especially in areas with dense vegetation cover.”

During the ten days the aerial surveys were conducted, two wildlife biologists were in the helicopter for about eight hours each day or as much as weather conditions allowed. According to one biologist, they were really lucky this year and the weather cooperated on all but one day that surveys were conducted.

“The elk population is thriving, with two large groups of 100 or more elk observed in each of the three districts. Moose numbers are looking good overall, although moose calf numbers are definitely low in some areas,” said Eric Krausz, lead wildlife population biologist for CTFW. “White-tailed deer and mule deer numbers looked stable across most of the Reservation, with the exception being lower than normal mule deer numbers observed within the Hellgate Game Reserve, likely resulting from competition for competing resources with elk and big-

horn sheep, and within the 2021 Cold Springs Fire burn scar, where mule deer likely fled following the fire.”

Rose Piccinini, San Poil District wildlife biologist for CTFW said, “The biologists really get to see the lands they are managing from a different perspective and it provides them with invaluable information about the land and the way that the animals use it during these critical months. “Every year there seem to be moments during the flights that stand out for each biologist. Last year, I got to observe pronghorn for the first time and seeing them flee on their tiny legs was a sight that will certainly stay with me. This year, I was able to observe one of the San Poil District’s wolf packs as they sunned themselves on a snowy ridge and that experience is absolutely something I won’t forget anytime soon.”

Inchelium District Wildlife Biologist Corey Peone stated that this year he surveyed the northern reservation boundary line, the Columbia River to the east and south, and the ridge tops of Summit Trail, Jones Creek, and Refrigerator Canyon.

“During the flights almost all species were viewed including mule deer, whitetail deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, pronghorn, coyote, and wolf. Good counts were observed for all species, including record highs for elk and moose,” he said.

Aerial surveys have been conducted since 1985 to ensure that wildlife populations are healthy and will meet the cultural and subsistence needs of the tribal membership. The annual big game surveys are funded by the Colville Confederated Tribes.

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE PROJECT PARTNERS



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A GREAT REWARD PROGRAM CONTINUES FOR ANGLERS



Anglers we still need your help to reduce the number of northern pike in Lake Roosevelt and here’s how you can take advantage of a great opportunity!

When you participate in the Northern Pike Reward Program offered by the Colville Tribes’ Fish and Wildlife (CTFW) Department, you can get paid \$10 for every pike head turned in but you must be 17 years of age or older to participate in the program. Also,

the fish heads must be in good condition and there is no daily harvest limit. All pike count for a payout whether big or small. In 2020, anglers turned in 1,122 northern pike with a payout of \$11,220. This brings the total number of pike anglers have removed to 3,193 since 2017.

Anglers can drop off their pike heads at these locations: Noisy Waters Gas Station, Kettle Falls boat launch, Hunters boat launch, Fort Spokane

boat launch, and the Inchelium Fish and Wildlife office.

Northern pike are a non-native invasive fish species that have the potential to devastate other fish populations such as redband trout, kokanee, white sturgeon and burbot. If northern pike expand downstream into the mid and lower Columbia River, they have the potential to compromise salmon and steelhead recovery efforts.

“We are working hard to protect native fish populations and provide quality recreational fisheries in Lake Roosevelt and Rufus Woods reservoirs,” said Holly McLellan, fish biologist for CTFW. “Northern Pike have the potential to destroy these fisheries. We appreciate the public’s help with removing this invasive fish and protecting our shared natural resource.”

Northern pike can live more than 20 years, exceed 50 inches and weigh up to 45 pounds. One adult female can produce up to 250,000 eggs.

For more information about the Northern Pike Reward Program, including a detailed map of where the pike are located, go to www.cct-fnw.com/news/ and scroll to the bottom. If you would like to share pictures of your pike catch, send them to holly.mclellan@colvilletribes.com.

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SAINT MARY'S GETS A NEW BUILDING FOR ACCLIMATING STEELHEAD



If you drive past Paschal Sherman Indian School on Omak Lake Road, you can now see a large metal building located near Omak Creek. It was built to protect two circular fish ponds, a pump house and an electrical system that is used to acclimate hatchery steelhead.

According to Colville tribal fishery staff, they now have a fully functioning facility.

"This project is important to the hatchery steelhead program and the tribe as it protects our resources," said Wes Tibbits, fish biologist for Colville Tribes Fish and Wildlife. "The building covers two 20-foot circular ponds, and each pond can hold up to 10,000 steelhead smolts."

Adult steelhead collected in Omak Creek are spawned and reared at Wells Hatchery. After they reach smolt size, 6 inches or so, they are transported from Wells Hatchery to the Saint Mary's Acclimation Facility. "Fish are acclimated for up to two months which helps imprint them with Omak Creek water so they return as adults," according to Tibbits.

Previous fires and flooding caused

damage to the acclimation facility and several upgrades were needed.

"To protect the tribes' assets from catastrophic events and daily environmental damage, it was important that we put up a structure like this," said Tibbits. "The floor of the acclimation building is made of gravel and rock and there is even more spread out on the outside to protect it against fires and floods. The metal building protects the fiberglass tanks from sun and

wind damage."

The HVAC system helps with ventilation and aids in moisture control for the building.

Previous upgrades at this facility included installation of the two circular fish tanks, a new water intake system and a new monitoring system and an upgraded electrical panel.

The project was funded by Grant County Public Utility District and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.



CHIEF JOSEPH HATCHERY UPDATE

It takes a lot of work to care for thousands of fish eggs, tiny alevin and fry at a hatchery.

Since January, Chief Joseph Hatchery staff picked out dead fish eggs from each tray in the incubation room, monitored salmon eggs and fish growth, and fed tiny fry.

When they grow to alevin size (looks like a tiny fish with a pot belly), they start flapping around in their trays. At that time, staff carefully transfer them into the blue starter tanks where they get fed for the first time. CJH staff also put in a lot of work to prep the outside raceways in order to transfer several thousand fish to each of them.

"Our staff care for the eggs and alevin by monitoring trays regularly to ensure growth and development are progressing as expected and noting any abnormal growth," said CJH Manager Matt McDaniel. "Water temps in the incubation trays are recorded daily, which assists culturists in the expected development stages based on total temperature units throughout the time they are in the trays."

When the fish grow to about 4 inches in length, they get tagged with a coded wire tag and/or get their adipose fin clipped. The fish are put through an automated system that sorts, clips and tags juvenile salmon. The system is so fast and accurate that it can process over 60,000 fish in an eight-hour period. The clipping of the adipose fin shows that the fish were raised in a hatchery.

"Once they are processed through, they are transferred to the different ponds and they will continue to grow until they are moved to the acclimation ponds or released from CJH," McDaniel said.

February co-employees of the month: Fred Charles and Spencer Cleveland.

Total eggs/alevins on station are:

- BY20 segregated summer chinook: 510,000
- BY20 integrated summer chinook: 760,000
- BY20 segregated spring chinook: 850,000

Fish currently in the acclimation ponds will be released in mid-April of this year:

- BY19 MetComp 10j spring chinook (Riverside Pond): 222,980 (28 fish per pound)
- BY19 integrated summer chinook (Omak Pond): 303,173 (35 fish per pound)

Current populations at CJH and scheduled release dates:

- BY19 segregated spring chinook: 794,135 (9.6 fish per pound) – to be released April 2021
- BY20 MetComp 10j spring chinook: 240,000 (1,210 fish per pound) – to be released April 2022 from Riverside Pond
- BY19 segregated summer chinook: 569,677 (28.8 fish per pound) – to be released April 2021
- BY20 segregated summer chinook (sub-yearlings): 182,176 (1,037 fish per pound) – to be released May 2021
- BY20 integrated summer chinook (sub-yearlings): 87,647 (507 fish per pound) – to be released May 2021 from Omak Pond

The estimated total of fish fry that will be released this year is about 2.5 million.

WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS CONDUCT BIG GAME COUNTS



Some of you may have seen a helicopter flying in recent weeks and maybe you saw it more than once as biolo-

gists were conducting their annual big game surveys on the Colville Indian Reservation.

The surveys are always conducted in the late winter months when big game species have moved to winter ranges due to higher snow levels in the mountains. Biologists count big game species such as; moose, elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep and pronghorn. Once biologists compile all the numbers, they will use that data to support recommendations to the Tribal Council for future hunting seasons, and to Tribal Forestry and BIA regarding proposed land conversion and timber harvest. Areas that were surveyed

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