

THE ROGUE WILD

# Enjoy the river, but always remember safety comes first

By Howard Huntington  
of the Daily Courier

In May, 19-year-old Joshua Eddy ventured out to snap a picture on the banks of the Rogue River, slipped in and drowned.

In July, two other people came to the same end, one after leaping from a boat to save his dog and the other while trying to swim across the river. Both were adults and neither wore a life jacket.

The Rogue is beautiful — and unforgiving. Here are a few basic safety tips for beginning rafters and for swimmers from the state Marine Board, veteran Josephine County Marine Deputy Ernie Fields and other sources:

**General rules**

■ **DRESS FOR SUCCESS:** In 15 years of patrolling the Rogue, Fields says he has never recovered a drowning victim who was wearing a life

jacket.

State law requires all children 12 and under to wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket at all times on a boat that is under way. People over 12 must wear a life jacket in rapids rated Class III or higher, and have one readily accessible at other times. Violations carry a \$260 fine per

person.

Different life jackets are made for different circumstances. Some jackets are more comfortable because they inflate only on contact with water or by lanyard, but they may not inflate fast enough if a rapid suddenly dumps you in the drink.

Swimmers are not required to wear a life jacket, but it's always a good idea.

Be sure the jacket fits. "I don't care if it's a Mickey Mouse, Spider-

Man or whatever, if it's not comfortable, you're not going to wear it," Fields says.

"The biggest thing, I think, is that egos get in the way at times. Nobody else in the group is wearing it, but, you know what? Oh, wow, be the person that wears their life jacket all the time, because you, unfortunately, may end up being the" one who has to save someone without a jacket.

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Dave Strahan, a river rat and fishing tackle salesman, shows off a 30-inch steelhead he landed on the Rogue River near Robertson Bridge.

## A salmon or steelhead can be reeled in most of the year somewhere

By Jeff Duewel  
of the Daily Courier

A couple of decades ago, guide Bob Rafalovich had a father and son from Utah in his drift boat somewhere below Marial in the Rogue's wild canyon.

The kid reeled in a 20-pound steelhead in the morning, biggest-ever for Bob's boat.

Then the dad reeled in a 60-pound salmon, biggest-ever for Bob's boat.

And they'd never even been fishing before.

"I told them they should give it up and never try again," Rafalovich said.

That's the essence of Rogue River fishing: You can go after a salmon or a steelhead for most of the year somewhere on the Rogue.

Before and after the Rogue became a Wild and Scenic River in 1968, the lower reaches, with Agness as an epicenter, had a large following of fishermen chasing the famed "half-pounder."

That's a yearling steelhead that migrates upriver before adulthood, runs from 12 to 18 inches, and likes to smash flies.

"That half-pounder run has been the hallmark of the river, for years and years," Rafalovich said. "Fly fishing was always the ticket in those early days, that's what everybody wanted to do. My preference was always twitching flies in front of the boat. That works better than just about anything."

According to a Medford Mail Tribune article in 2011, the

### Fishing on the Wild and Scenic Rogue River

(Mouth of the Applegate to Lobster Creek)

■ **STEELHEAD:** Summer steelhead are present in this stretch pretty much from May to December, with August through November the prime months.

Popular techniques include fly fishing with streamers or nymphs, drifting salmon egg imitations in fall, drifting worms or roe anytime, or tossing spinners and spoons.

Bank access is plentiful between the mouth of the Applegate and Grave Creek, and several boat ramps are available for drift boaters.

Multiple-day trips below Grave Creek are offered by numerous guides serving the area.

■ **SALMON:** The spring chinook tend to be caught far more easily upstream of the mouth of the Applegate River, during May and June. Fall chinook, from July through October, are the prime target for most of the Wild and Scenic River section.

Coho are also available in November and December. Salmon often seek deeper, faster water than steelhead and tend to be caught with larger plugs and lures, or bait bounced off the bottom. A drift boat is helpful.

"Rogue River Twitch" dates to the 1950s on the lower river, where fishing guide Willard Lucas of Lucas Lodge discovered a trick to get his clients into more of those half-pounders.

Lucas would have clients let out about 40 feet of line in front of the boat, while he rowed back and forth, as many fishermen do today while using diving plugs.

Grants Pass guide Ray Slusser, with over 25 years of experience, said the half-pounder run isn't what it used to be. Fall releases of cool water from Lost Creek Dam is one theory floated by anglers. Overall declining numbers is another.

"They used to come out of the canyon, those half-pounders, and you'd catch them all over around Grants Pass and down," Slusser said. "That would be at the end of August and early September. Now they hardly ever come out of the canyon in great numbers, you don't start catching them until September and they're usually below Galice. Now, you do your best half-pounder fishing in November."

Slusser started fishing in the mid-1950s as a child, with his father by the old railroad bridge near the current water filtration plant.

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