

Russian River Angler Information Signs update

Steelhead season kicked off in the Russian River this week with the first lifting of the low flow closure for the 2020/21 season. Though flows remain low and the river mouth mostly closed in the past weeks, intrepid anglers were greeted by new information signs funded and installed by Russian River Fly Fishers with help from Redwood Empire Trout Unlimited and The Russian River Wild Steelhead Society. This collaborative effort is intended to inform anglers of regulations on the river and promote safe catch and release practices to ensure that wild fish aren't harmed when caught.

The signs come during a critical time for the river's fish. Years with early season low flow – like this year – often see spawning tributaries disconnected from the mainstem river despite mainstem flow being sufficient for brief openings of the recreational fishing season. This means migrating fish, both steelhead and federally endangered coho salmon, are relegated to the mainstem river until more rain comes. Since coho generally spawn earlier than steelhead in the Russian River, anglers are much more likely to encounter coho early in the season in dryer years. As of Friday Jan. 8th, just 13 steelhead have returned to Warm Springs hatchery marking a slow start to the steelhead season. With that in mind, we hope anglers will be extra mindful to not drag fish on the bank, use a rubber net, minimize handling time and keep fish's gills underwater when catching and releasing fish.

CDFW has noted that license sales increased dramatically this year, likely because folks are looking for safe outdoor activities in response to Covid. We expect many new anglers to be on the river this winter and I hope RRF members take pride in the signs when they see them at access points along the river, knowing we are doing our part to educate anglers and protect the resource.

-Charlie Schneider is RRF's conservation coordinator