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## BPA Squawfish Program Nets Record Catch

### Bonneville Power Administration

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**PORTLAND, Ore. - The results are in. BPA's 1995 sport reward squawfish program hooked more of the pernicious predators that feed on juvenile salmon and steelhead than ever before. Preliminary numbers show a catch of 199,600, over 35 percent more than last year's take.**

Why does BPA fund the northern squawfish program? Much of BPA's annual \$400 million fish and wildlife effort goes to improving fish migration by increasing river flow at critical times in the salmon's life cycle and improving fish passage facilities at the federal dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. But if the number of predators that feed on salmon and steelhead is not reduced, many of the juvenile salmon and steelhead that make it downstream would get gobbled up. That's where the Squawfish Management Program comes in. The comparatively modest \$5 million cost of this program pays big dividends in helping protect the ratepayers' larger investment in salmon recovery.

Here's how the sport reward program worked. Anglers first registered at one of 13 check stations before they started fishing. Check stations were located at strategic points ranging from Cathlamet Marina near the mouth of the Columbia to Greenbelt Boat Ramp near Lewiston, Idaho. To get paid, anglers had to present fish that were fresh, live or on ice and at least 11 inches. When they were ready to call it a day, anglers returned to the same check station where they had registered to receive a hand written voucher for the number of fish caught. They would then mail the vouchers in to receive a check by return mail a couple of weeks later.

So what's the bottom line? Early estimates indicate that about 16 percent of the total population of predator-sized squawfish ended up in anglers' nets this year compared to 8 to 12 percent in previous years. The long-term benefit of the squawfish bounty program since it began in 1990 is even more impressive. Biologists project that there will be 36 percent fewer predator-caused salmon deaths because of the squawfish program. That means a lot more juvenile salmon will survive their run to the sea in 1996.

A number of factors contributed to the success of this year's program, which ran from May 1 through Sept. 24. This year's level of effort was up by one third over last year's. And the anglers who participated this year were more effective, catching an average 3.25 fish per day compared to last year's 3.15.

The increased level of effort was probably due to increased incentives created by the tiered reward scale, according to John Skidmore, program coordinator. Anglers were paid \$3 each for the first 100 predator-size fish, \$4 each for 101 up to 400 and \$5 each for all fish after 400. A total of 124 people finished the season in the \$5 category. In addition, squawfish with special tags were worth \$50 and made the lucky anglers eligible for higher cash prizes.

Another new factor in this year's program was seminars and how-to bulletins showing anglers the best

way to catch squawfish. "More people fished smarter," Skidmore said.

"We at BPA are pleased with this year's results," said Skidmore. "Even though the Squawfish Management Program is not a big ticket item in BPA's overall \$400 million fish and wildlife budget, it returns full value by substantially improving the odds of survival for endangered salmon."

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