

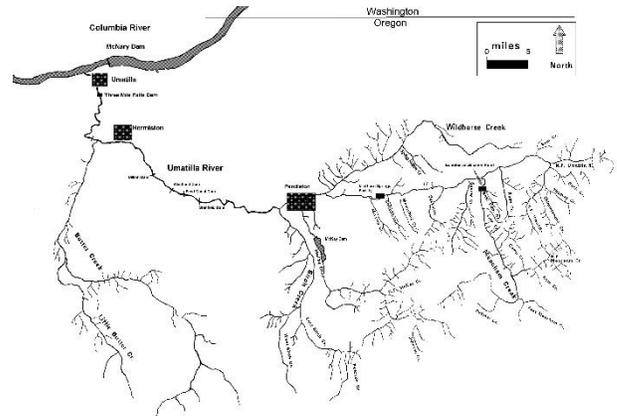
Umatilla & Walla Walla River Summer Steelhead

March 2022

Umatilla River

Under permanent regulations, the Umatilla River is open for hatchery steelhead fishing from Jan. 1-April 30 and Sept. 1-Dec. 31 and for coho and fall Chinook from Sept. 1-Nov. 30.

The summer steelhead fishery on the Umatilla River is primarily a harvest fishery. The majority of angling effort occurs below Three Mile Falls Dam (TMFD), near Hermiston and Pendleton. Over 95 percent of the land ownership on the Umatilla River is private so access and angling effort is very concentrated. Overall, the both the number of hatchery and natural origin steelhead caught below TMFD is higher than above (Figure 1 and 2).



Most of the fall angling effort in the Umatilla is for coho and fall Chinook. Even when steelhead fishing is closed, anglers can still target fall Chinook and coho. Due to lack of creel surveys, the number of steelhead being hooked and released in the closed section is unknown.

After Nov. 30 (when fall salmon fishing closes) and until the following May when spring Chinook trapping begins, TMFD is operated on 5-day trapping and 9-day video weir operation. Any hatchery steelhead that pass during the video operation period are allowed to migrate upstream.

The average return of steelhead returning to the Umatilla basin for the for the past 10 years has been 2352 natural origin and 474 hatchery fish (Figure 3). According to the Umatilla Fisheries Management and Evaluation Plan (FMEP) for summer steelhead, the critical abundance threshold (CAT) is 375 and the minimum abundance threshold (MAT) is 1500 natural origin fish (Figure 4)

The Umatilla steelhead broodstock program requires a total of 56 natural origin and 34 hatchery fish to meet broodstock goals. The McKay steelhead outplant study will also require 30 hatchery fish for those study efforts, which started in 2021 and will likely continue until 2025.

Walla Walla River

Under permanent regulations, the Walla Walla River is open for hatchery steelhead from Jan. 1- April 30 and Sept. 1-Dec. 31.

The majority of summer steelhead that return to the Walla Walla River in Oregon are natural fish since there is no hatchery production program. Any hatchery fish that do return are stray fish, which anglers target. Over 98 percent of all the land ownership in Oregon along the Walla Walla River is all private so access and angling is very concentrated.

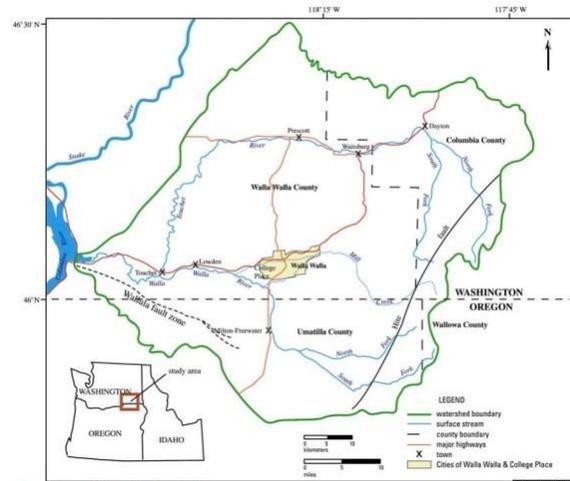


Figure 1.—Walla Walla River basin. Combs 2000.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife operates a fishery on the Walla Walla, below the Washington and Oregon border. The majority of spawning grounds are above the forks of the Walla Walla, in both the North and South Forks.

The average return of steelhead to Nursery Bridge over the past 7 years is 359 fish. (Figure 4). The Walla Walla FMEP for summer steelhead the CAT is 250 natural origin fish with a MAT of the habitat in the Walla Walla basin 1000 fish (Figure 5).

In 2021, the Umatilla recreational fishery for both steelhead and salmon was closed between the Hwy 730 bridge and TMFD, but open for angling and retention from TMFD to the Umatilla Indian Reservation Boundary. Closing the steelhead fishery below TMFD allows collection of hatchery fish for broodstock and outplant efforts at TMFD while still allowing anglers to angle and harvest hatchery fish above TMFD. The Walla Walla River was closed to both steelhead angling and retention as returns were not far from the CAT goal.

Similar restrictions may occur on both rivers in 2022, though managers will monitor in-season PIT return of Umatilla River steelhead to determine if returns are higher than TAC predictions and opening is possible.

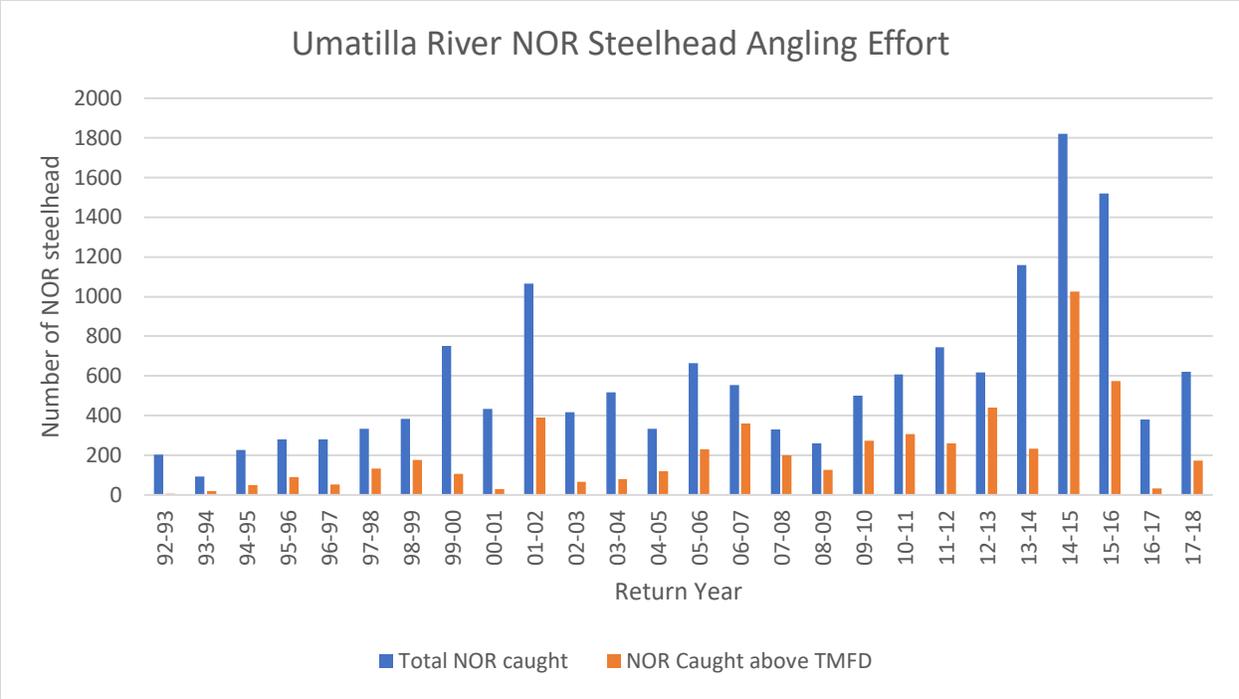


Figure 1. Natural Origin (NOR) steelhead angling comparing total NOR caught and NOR caught above Three Mile Falls Dam.

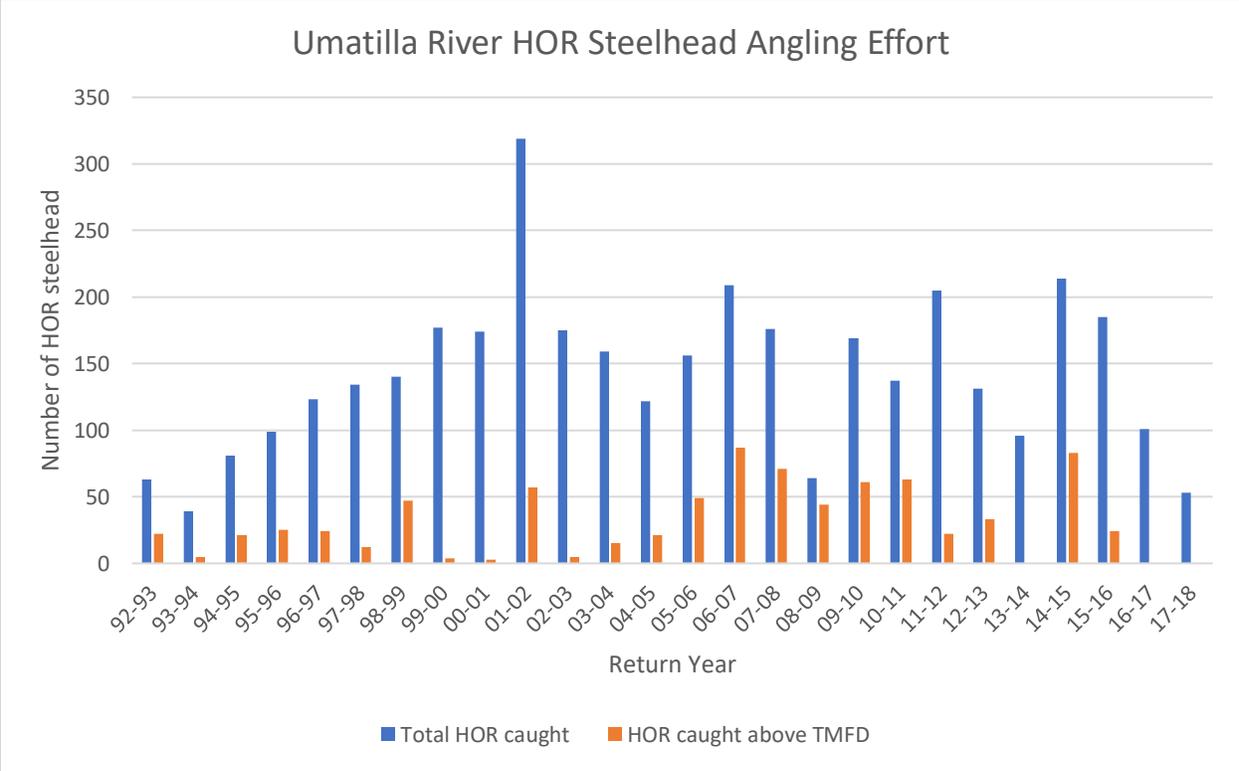


Figure 2. Hatchery Origin (HOR) steelhead angling comparing total HOR caught and HOR caught above Three Mile Falls Dam.

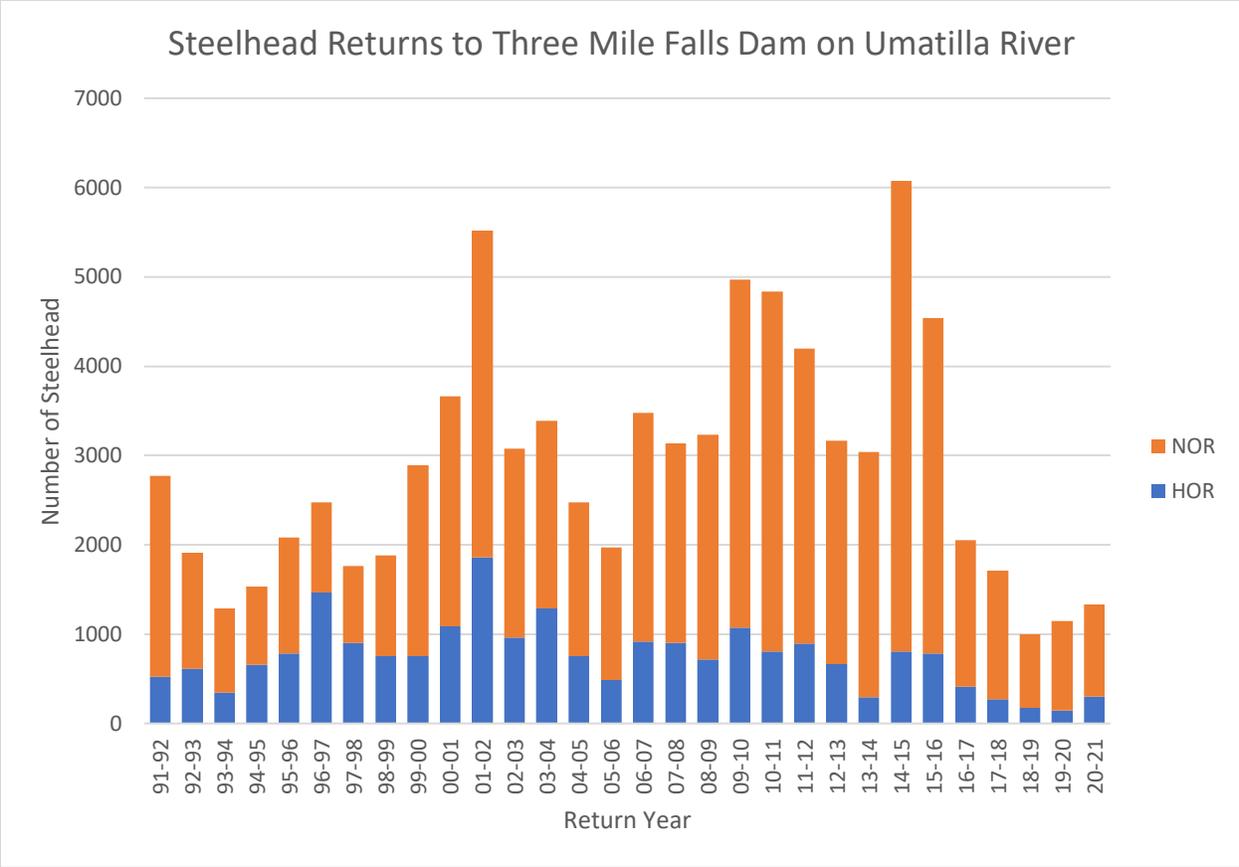


Figure 3. Steelhead returns, both natural and hatchery origin, to Three Mile Falls Dam on Umatilla River.

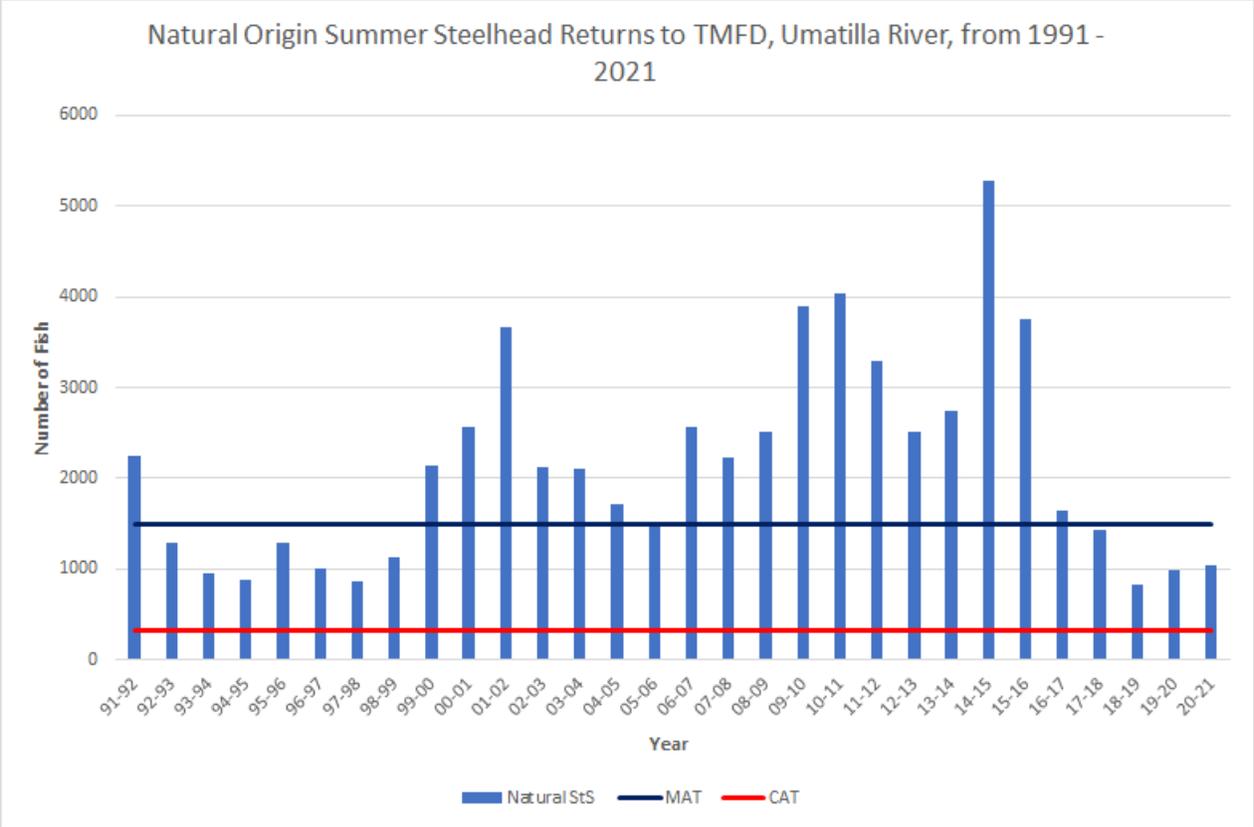


Figure 4. Natural origin steelhead returns on the Umatilla River between 1991 – 2001 with the MAT and CAT population abundance thresholds.

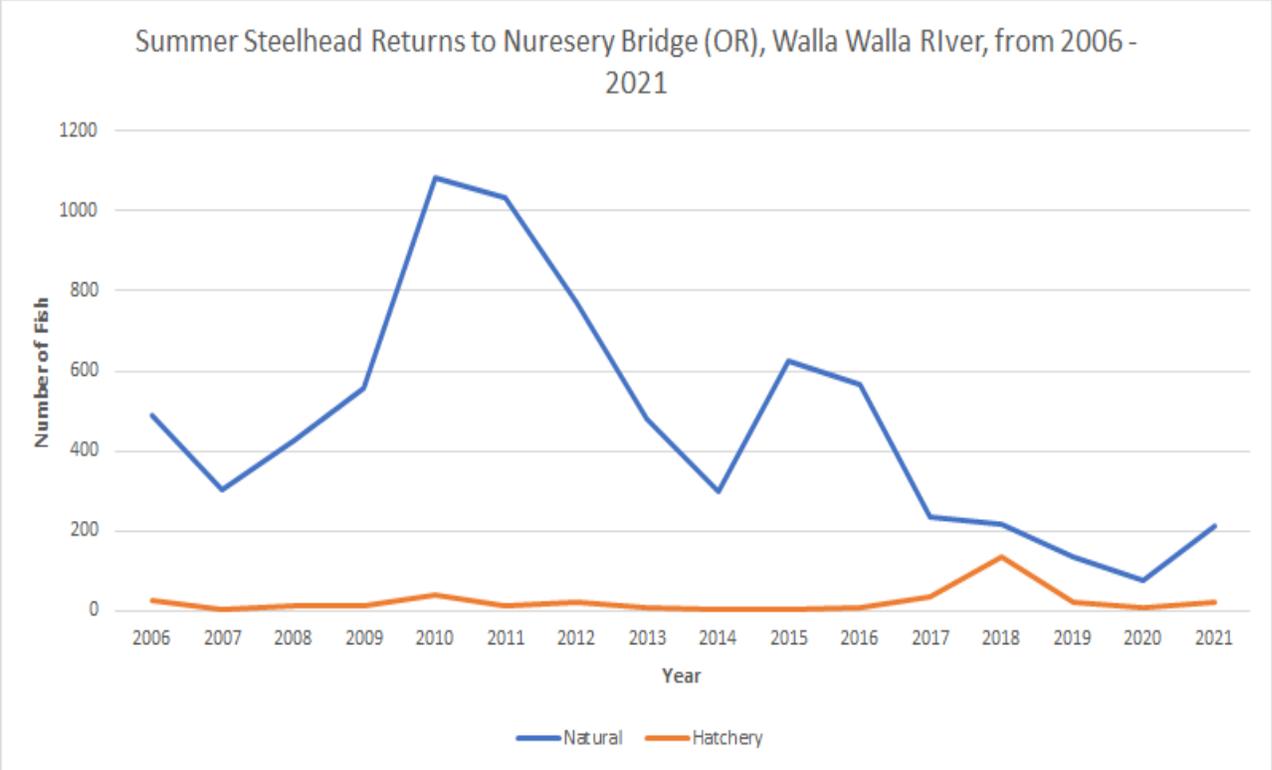


Figure 4. Walla Walla River steelhead returns to Nursery Bridge.

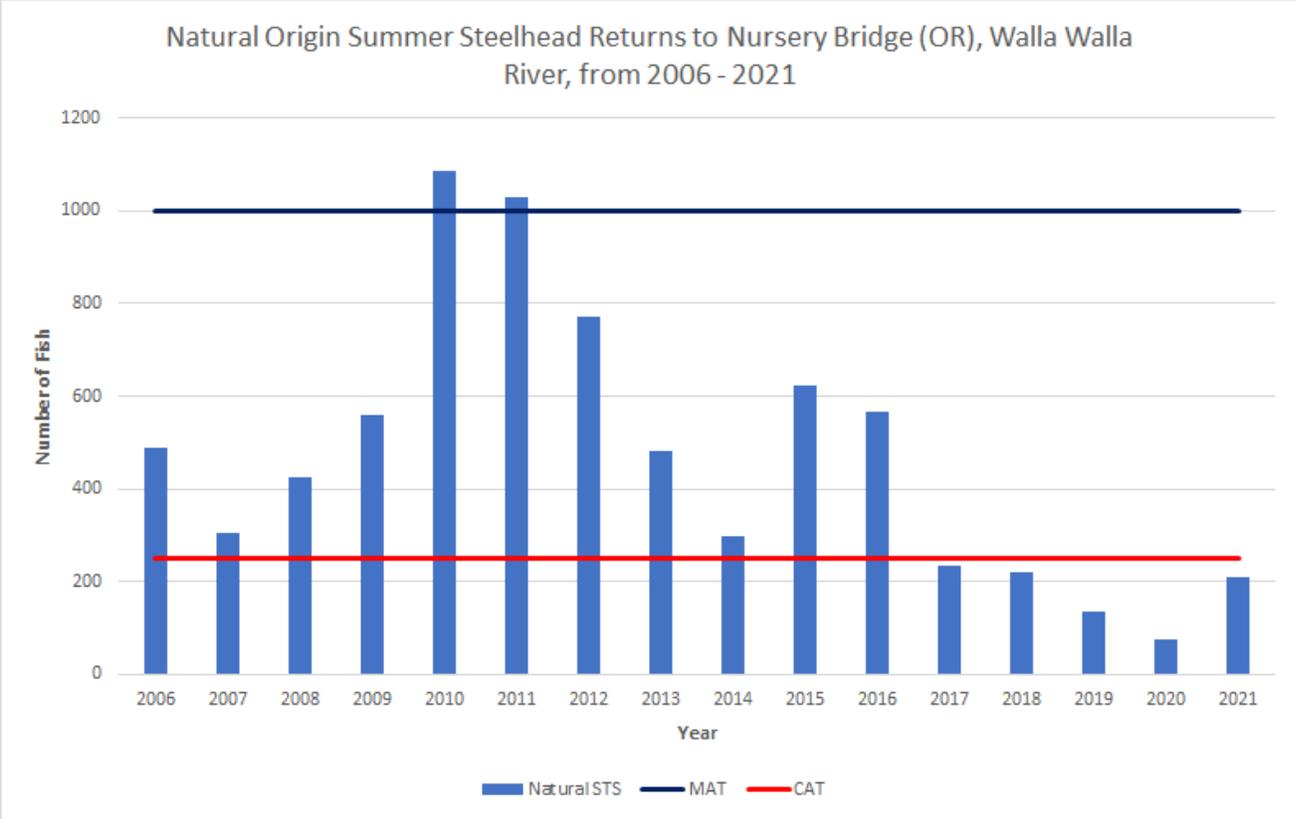


Figure 5. Natural origin steelhead returns to Nursery Bridge, OR, between 2006 and 2021 with the MAT and CAT population abundance thresholds.