

Southwest Region Fisheries Report



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Greetings!

Here it is, our inaugural Fisheries Report from the Southwest Region. It is our intention to provide anglers and others more and better information on fish and fisheries in this corner of the state and beyond. We also hope that this report facilitates better communication in both directions.

We commonly hear that anglers would like to hear more from us. What follows is a brief review of our program. The where, who, what, and why. This information should provide some understanding of our agency goals, management strategies, and personnel. We are hopeful this newsletter will increase enjoyment, excitement, and provide you the



A happy young angler with a Deadwood RBT

opportunity to engage more. Though we plan to start with a general overview, we will provide specifics towards the end of this letter and in future editions.

For more information on the fisheries, please visit the IDFG website and our fisheries page at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/fish/>. The website holds a tremendous amount of information that can improve your fishing experiences. If you would like to get into the details even more, the 2013-18 Fisheries Mgt. Plan, species plans, and annual reports can be found on the website. If you have any questions, please contact us at the email addresses to the left.

Initially, we plan to offer print copies. Afterwards, we will distribute electronically only, so please sign up NOW by sending your email address to: joe.kozfkay@idfg.idaho.gov or better yet look for news releases on our SW Region facebook page.

The SW Region - Where?

IDFG is organized on a regional basis, 7 regions and 1 sub-region (McCall). This letter will focus on the SW Region, excluding McCall. This portion of the SW region is managed out of the Nampa Office. Understanding this helps anglers know where and who to call and also how to interpret our rules book.

The region is huge, as large as some states. Tracing the boundaries helps: Start at Brownlee Dam, head south

along the Oregon border, turn east at the Nevada border, head north when you hit the Bruneau River, continue to Anderson Ranch Dam, follow the crest of the Sawtooths to Cape Horn, circle Bear Valley, and follow ridgelines back towards the east. This area includes portions of seven major river basins including: the Boise, Bruneau, Owyhee, Payette, Snake, and Weiser. Thousands of miles of streams and rivers along with thousands of acres of pond, lakes, and reservoirs.



The Southwest Region excluding the McCall sub-region



Crew pulling gill nets at Deadwood

Our primary goal is to promote fishing while conserving native species



A happy Boise River angler with steelhead

Who (is our staff)?

We possess one of the smaller regional fisheries programs in the state from a staffing level, mostly because we do not have a large anadromous fish monitoring and management program or any large-scale mitigation programs. At the peak, we consist of four full-time staff and up to eight temporary employees. Four of the temporaries assist with

field and lab work, as well as data entry for the management program. They spend a majority of their spring, summer, and fall tagging fish, backpack electrofishing, hiking to alpine lakes, or picking gill nets. The other four temporary employees keep the fishing and boating access sites operating via maintenance and construction activities. We often call this

the 5 Rs: roads, repair, restrooms, rubbish, and ramps, though docks need to be added to the list. These eight temporary employees are critical to our program.

Furthermore, there are a lot of other fisheries staff in the SW that work in other offices such as Nampa & Eagle hatcheries, Statewide Research, Genetics, Fish Health, and HQ.

What (we do) ?

What do we do? In short, we manage and promote sport fishing and we work to conserve native species. This is exactly what ID-FG's mission statement tells us to do: provide while conserving. A large part of our workload is spent assessing fish populations (i.e. how many, what kind, living where). From these surveys, we develop management strategies that further our "provide while conserving" mission. For instance, we may learn that we need to

improve habitat, reduce or increase harvest, change stocking practices, promote different water management practices, reduce rough fish populations, manage predators, or enforce rules more stringently. Afterwards, we seek to implement these strategies. Another large part of our program is access. We manage over 49 public fishing and boating access points. Access areas are simply places where anglers can access a river, fish off a dock, or

launch a canoe or boat. Access sites range from a small parcel of ground adjacent to a water body to department-owned and built reservoirs. In addition to these primary work responsibilities, we provide technical assistance, investigate fish kills, set fishing seasons and rules, inform and educate the public, teach fishing, and authorize people to utilize fish in different ways (tournaments, private ponds, commercial fishing, etc.).

Why (we do it)?

If you're reading this, I don't have to tell you why... You already know. Fishing is fun, it provides enjoyment, it reconnects us with friends, family, and nature, it relaxes us, and last but not least, it puts food on the table. There are many more reasons, why we fish

that are unique to each of us.

A oft forgotten aspect of fishing is that it is important to our local and state economies. Fishing in Idaho is a tremendous economic driver. Anglers spend money. Ask your significant others... they'll tell you. All joking aside, the most re-

cent estimate indicated that fishing generated over \$550 million in trip-related expenditures during 2011. Fishing is important, not just to us, but also for contributing to the state as a whole.

Kok(anee)-a-licious

Kokanee fishing in SW Idaho has exploded in popularity during the last decade. More consistent stocking and increases in angler skill have resulted in big catches. We've been



Size difference of age-2 (top) and age-1 (bottom) kokanee in Lucky Peak during summer

fortunate, because managing kokanee is challenging. Kokanee are very sensitive to their own numbers. Simply, a lot of mouths equals small fish or few mouths equals big fish and few bites. Finding the middle ground is important.

IDFG spends a lot of time and resources monitoring and managing kokanee. Survey techniques include trawling, hydroacoustics, limnological, and angler surveys (creel). These surveys inform stocking practices, predator management, season setting, rules, and improving knowledge of factors that affect kokanee populations.

In the SW, the big three fisheries are Arrowrock, Lucky Peak, and Deadwood reservoirs. Each presents unique challenges and opportunities. Arrowrock and Lucky Peak are both supported mostly by hatchery fingerling stocking, though wild production contributes some. Kokanee numbers are low in both systems, so size and growth are generally good. Arrowrock had outstanding fishing during 2013, with legitimate 20" adults caught.

Unfortunately, 2014 was mediocre, likely due to very low water levels during fall 2013. We suspect that low water levels led to mortality or entrainment (flushed through the

dam). Fortunately, Lucky Peak was very good in both years. And in 2014, anglers moved to Lucky Peak to take advantage of high catch rates. Growth rates in both of these waters have been outstanding, with age-2 kokanee often exceeding 16" by mid summer. It is worth noting that stocking in Arrowrock Reservoir is scheduled to increase by 50 K to



Thousands of kokanee being held in the spawning trap at Deadwood River/Reservoir and stopped downstream of the weir.

100K during 2015. We fully suspect that Arrowrock can support these numbers, yet continue to grow large fish.

Deadwood Reservoir populations operate totally differently. All ko-

kanees are wild. They grow much slower, reaching maturity after 3 years. Spawning habitat is almost limitless and FG has to reduce kokanee numbers to maintain enough groceries to allow fish to grow to desirable sizes. They literally eat themselves into runts-ville. Numbers are controlled by predator stocking (RBT and Chinook) and by blocking tributaries with weirs. It's worth noting that Deadwood produced Chinook and RBT that exceeded 10 lbs during 2014. Kokanee numbers are declining and once again anglers are catching kokanee of desirable sizes. More and continued suppression is needed as we've learned the hard way that kokanee in Deadwood can turn the tables very quickly.

Deadwood acts as the primary egg source for early-run kokanee eggs. Each fall, FG staff, mostly from Nampa Fish Hatchery, collects upwards of 6 million eggs from the Deadwood River during the fall. The eggs and resulting fingerlings

make a long journey by plane and truck. First they are flown to Cabinet Gorge for eye-up, then to Mackey for early rearing, then loaded onto a semi for stocking into 30 different lakes

and reservoirs around the state. A convoluted process that maximizes in-hatchery survival and benefits to anglers. Anglers in SW Idaho are very lucky to have these quality fisheries in their backyards.

Age two kokanee often exceed 16' in Arrowrock and Lucky Peak reservoirs

Lake Lowell



Bass were tagged during '14 to estimate harvest rates

Lake Lowell possesses 500 lbs of carp per acre



A large channel catfish sampled near the upper dam

Lake Lowell (LL) is a popular fishing water. So, we have spent quite a bit of time trying to understand and improve fish populations. Since 2006, biologists have captured fish with nets and electrofishing, tagged them, and implanted radio transmitters. All efforts were designed to learn about reproductive cycles, populations sizes, and harvest and growth rates.

In short, we learned that LL has some good to great fishing opportunities for several species, but common carp abundance and biomass is keeping LL from reaching its full potential.

How many carp is too many? LL has 1.2 million, combined they weigh 5 million lbs. The reservoir is only 10,000 acres, so there are 500 lbs/acre. Unbelievable, except that when IDFG studied LL in the 1950s, numbers and biomass were almost exactly the same. LL carp spawn annually, are slow growing, and die young (max = 13 yrs old) compared to other wild populations. These characteristics create a reproductive juggernaut.

We explored several options for controlling their numbers. Rotenone was too expensive, and draining was not a realistic option. The only possibility was to manually remove large numbers on an annual basis. To achieve success, over 80% of carp would have to be removed and then periodic suppression would be needed.

We contacted large-scale

commercial fishermen (same people that star in "Bottom Feeders" on the Outdoor Channel) to see if LL could be netted effectively. During winter '13-14, nets were deployed and extremely large quantities of carp were netted. One net was estimated at 500,000 lbs. Unfortunately, many escaped and the rest were very difficult to transport to loading sites. Furthermore, transport costs to processing centers were too high to make this strategy profitable at this time. Disappointing to say the least, but all we can do is go back to the drawing board!!

While we were studying carp it became apparent that there were a lot of game fish in LL. Largemouth bass numbers were very high. We learned that most bass were very old, many in their teens, and slow growing. Bass fishing is tremendously popular and has been outstanding. Unfortunately, we were getting many reports of people poaching bass inside the slot limit or during the closed season. Based on this knowledge conservation officers patrolled LL more than

ever during '14. Many anglers were contacted and over 50 violations were detected. Continued education and enforcement efforts are being planned for '15 to protect this tremendous bass fishery. Remember, you can help by reporting violations to Citizens Against Poaching - (800) 632-5999. If you forget this number, remember that it's on the back of your fishing license.

Another couple of bright spots are the bluegill and channel catfish populations and fisheries. LL has many quality-size bluegill that hang out in or just outside the deep edge of the smartweed beds. More than a few of these bluegill exceed 8" that readily accept anglers offerings. Also, IDFG has been stocking 5-10K+ channel catfish fingerlings on a almost annual basis for the last 15 years. And it has worked!! There are loads of channel catfish in the 3-5 pound range with the chance to catch a real trophy. 15-20 pounders have been caught in survey nets. Better yet, there is almost nobody fishing for these two species.



Commercial carp netters seining carp in Jan '14

Trout In The City: Lower Boise River

The Boise River, especially the cold water reach from Lucky Peak Dam to about Middleton is a tremendous resource for anglers. What could be better than having quick and easy access to rainbows,



A giant male brown trout sampled from the lower river

brovns, whitefish, steelhead, and Chinook salmon in your backyard? Well, more of them and better access, right! IDFG is working towards these goals.

The Boise is a mixed fishery supported by both hatchery stocking and wild production. Over 40K catchable-sized rainbow trout are stocked in an average year. Tagging studies and the Tag-You're-It program have been used to optimize stocking practices, simply more fish are stocked in the months and locations when pressure and harvest are higher. Harvest rates for hatchery RBT are high, despite their relatively short life span. Brown trout stocking was resumed during 2009 and over 150K have been stocked since. Nearly half of this total was stocked during 2014. All hatchery brown trout fingerling are marked with a adipose fin clip to show hatchery origin. Thus far, few clipped brown trout have been sampled or reported by anglers indicating poor survival. However, it is too early to give up on this program. Instead, we are modifying size at stocking, locations, and tim-

ing in an attempt to improve survival. If you catch an ad-clipped brown, take note and let us know.

In addition to trout, about 1,000 steelhead and 500 Chinook were brought to the Boise creating tremendous excitement and fishing opportunity.

Despite extensive stocking, the Boise is still primarily a wild trout fishery with Rainbows making up the bulk of the fish-

ery along with lesser numbers of wild browns. Wild trout numbers have grown tremendously over the last couple of decades. The increase from 1994-2010 was over 17-fold. A large part of this was likely due to the establishment of higher and more consistent winter flows, improved water quality, and increased popularity of catch-and-release or selective harvest practices. A 2013 survey indicated that trout numbers have plateaued with a slight decline since 2010. The 2013 survey also

indicated that strong trout populations reside in downstream reaches. An abundance of juvenile wild brown trout were surveyed near Eagle Island. This area acts as a nursery for young fish.

Due to high recreational use and channel changes resulting from development, the Boise needs to be maintained to prevent flooding or safety hazards. Maintenance when done improperly damages fish habitat. Because of this, anglers and IDFG have been requesting that river managers maintain the river with a lighter hand. To their credit, FCD10 and others already have adopted much more-fish friendly practices which will benefit fish and wildlife in the long run.

Lastly, float boat traffic for the Boise is fairly limited due to poor or no access sites in certain reaches. IDFG is partnering with a couple of Treasure Valley cities in their efforts to improve access. Projects are in the planning stages and there are many hurdles to overcome, but access should be better in the next few years.

Wild trout numbers have stabilized after 2 decades of growth



A large wild Rainbow Trout from town. Photo courtesy of S. Rosenberger

South Fork Boise River

It's fair to say that the 2013 fires and subsequent ash, sediment, and debris slides were shocking. The river doesn't



A new rapid in the canyon

SFBR trout numbers have declined, but not catastrophically

look like it did, nor will it for quite some time. The impacts to fish populations were unknown.

On one hand, fish evolved to "handle" these conditions. Fire and its effects can be positive by adding downed wood, nutrients, and gravel. On the other, that was a lot of mud and ash. Ash can kill trout and other fish and suspended sediment may lead to delayed mortality or reduced growth. So, IDFG surveyed the river to determine how rainbow trout were impacted.

We measured several components of this population and compared them to previous years. Population data showed mixed results. Frustrating, but not out of the normal. One method indicated that the population was down by 50%, while the other indicated no change. It may be appropriate to view estimates as best and worse case scenarios. In other words, the number of adults likely declined, but not catastrophically. Angler reports have been similar.



An adult rainbow trout from the SFBR

What can we do to hasten the recovery? Our federal partners have completed some replanting work and are working on plans and acquiring funding for more replanting, culvert replacements, and tributary grade controls to prevent further erosion. Volunteers may be able to assist in these efforts.

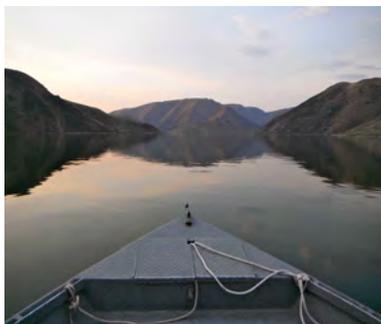
We also measured the number of fall fry and their survival rates through their first winter to their yearling stage. Prior to the fires, there were 2.3 fry per meter as measured by October backpack electrofishing. This is a surprising number of young fish in the system... certainly too many for the system to support if all survived. First winter survival in pre-fire conditions was only 15%. After the fire, fall fry numbers dropped to 0.5 fry per meter. However, over-winter survival was much higher than pre-fire. To our surprise, the number of spring yearlings didn't differ during this time period. This hints that a winter carrying capacity exists, but additional years of data are needed to be certain.

Also, a recovery team, including USBOR, USFS, Trout Unlimited, and IDFG developed a strategy to implement a flushing flow in August 2014. The pulse lasted for 8 days and reached flows of 2,400 cfs. Fine sediments were mobilized and transported downstream. A victory for trouts, albeit a small one. More work is needed as much more fine sediment needs to be flushed especially for that resting in areas downstream of Danskin Bridge. High snowpack would allow this to occur under normal dam operating procedures. If snowpack is lower, flows will need to be shaped to facilitate sediment transport.



Sampling young trout with a backpack electrofishing unit

Brownlee Crappie



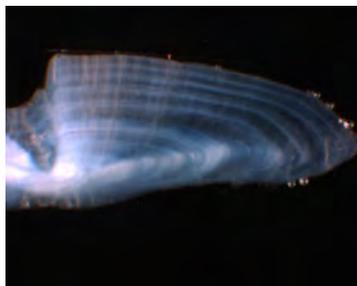
Destination Brownlee Dam to begin larval tows when the sun sets

Crappie fishing at Brownlee Reservoir is a favorite spring time activity especially when population abundance is high and average size approaches or exceeds 10". It's been too long. Fortunately, crappie fishing should be good to great during 2015.

Crappie can reproduce quickly, with adult females possessing tens of thousands of eggs. Larger and older females tend to have more eggs. Multiply egg number by the number of females in Brownlee even during the down years and an astronomical number of larvae are produced annually. After hatching, the half-inch larvae spend time in open water near the surface. At this time, they can be susceptible to starvation and predation. Conditions must be optimal for young crappie to survive. There needs to be an abundance of zooplankton, their primary food, and it needs to be the right size. Warm stable weather in the spring creates ideal conditions for zooplankton and fish. During their first several months, larval crappie are weak swimmers. This makes them susceptible to predators, primarily other fish, and to entrainment (being flushed

through a dam). So, it's critical that young crappie have enough food to grow quickly to avoid these sources of mortality and to be large enough to survive winter. Small differences in mortality, growth, or survival rates can have tremendous impacts on the numbers of crappie available for anglers several years later.

For reasons not totally understood, crappie across the country are often cyclic. Brownlee is no different. We've been averaging a good production year about every 5-7 years. The last really good fishery was produced by spawning that occurred during 2006. The adults provided good fishing during 2010-2012. During a 2012 creel survey, clerks measured and collected otoliths (ear bones) from 22 black and 35 white crappie. Remarkably 56 of 57 were six years old., showing how one year class can dominate the catch. Length ranged from 9–13". White crappie were generally a little longer and larger than black crappie. By 2013, these fish had largely died out.



A cross-sectioned ear bone from a 6-year old crappie

We monitor crappie production with a large 2 m x 1 m fixed frame nets that is towed behind a boat. We tow this net at 11 sites from Farewell Bend to the dam every two weeks at night during June and

July. Larvae are preserved and counted in the laboratory. We also use a flow meter to determine volume sampled.



The larval net

In peak years, larval numbers can exceed 1,000 larvae per 100 m³. Numbers like this were last documented during 2012.

Production was poor during 2007 and 2008. Since then, it has been higher. Also, Brownlee held strong numbers of 8" white crappie during 2014, so several types of information indicate that fishing will be good during 2015. The 2015 fishery will be supported mostly by fish produced during 2011 and 2012 year classes.

Note: we monitor CJ Strike Reservoir similarly.



Net contents: zooplankton, 2 larval and 1 yearling crappie

Crappie in Brownlee Reservoir live about 6 or 7 years.

Fishing and boating access

When asked, Idaho anglers consistently encourage the department to improve access. We've been listening. The SW operates and maintains about 49 fishing and boating access sites. These sites range from small parcels of land adjacent to a water body with no amenities to highly-developed sites with restrooms, multiple docks, camping sites, and boat ramps, like Horsethief. At these sites, anglers can launch a boat, park to go wading, pull up a lawn chair to the waters edge, or have access to a restroom.

2013 and 2014 were busy years. A water pump failed at Beachs Pond. When the pond drained, we took the opportunity to deepen the pond using heavy equipment. Afterwards, we repaired the pump and well casing, filled the pond and restocked with bass and bluegill from nearby waters. Similarly, a pump at Crane Falls Lake failed. We replaced the pump with help from Idaho Power Company and began pumping to improve water quality. An access site on the lower Payette River was improved by delineating roads and parking, as well as adding a temporary restroom kiosk. Similar work was completed at Lava Point on the Snake River. We fixed two spillways (Horsethief and Tripod) that had been damaged from winter conditions.

2015 promises to be an even busier year. As of now, we have 4, new larger maintenance or construction projects in the planning phase. The Riverside Pond project will install a new dock abutment and fishing dock at this popular fishing area. This project wouldn't be possible without help from Boise Valley Fly Fishers, Garden City, and Idaho Power Company. By late January, crews will dredge the boat ramp at Walters Ferry that had become silted in. We also have a large construction project planned for Sawyers Pond in Emmett. This project will close a dilapidated boat ramp, breach several dykes forming one larger pond, improve access roads and parking areas, replace docks, improve the main boat ramp, and repair walkways and restrooms. Also, a similar project will occur at Crane Falls Reservoir. Here, we plan to develop a better

boat ramp, add more and bigger fishing docks and add a new restroom and repair the existing restroom. Sawyers and Crane Falls should be completed by May 2015.

These project all are implemented to provide safer and more enjoyable fishing opportunities for our anglers. We welcome your input on this and other programs. An interactive map, that shows the locations and amenities for IDFG access points, may be found on the fish and game website at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/ifwis/fishingplanner/access/index.html>.

It's important to remember that many other entities provide fishing access areas including the USFWS, USFS, USBOR, counties, ACOE, IDPR, and IPC. Most of their sites may be found on their respective websites.



Access crews repaired failing concrete on the spillway of Tripod



Popular fishing docks built, installed, and maintained by access staff at Horsethief Reservoir

Road and access improvements at Lava Point on the Snake River



News & Notes

As always, we have a lot of other projects that require attention. We don't have the time or space to fully discuss all of these, but we will try to provide a brief overview:

- US Army Corps of Engineers and others are beginning to study the potential benefits and costs of raising Arrowrock Dam. We are providing technical assistance regarding how fisheries could be affected.
- A fish kill occurred in the lower Payette River during 2012-13 when Black Canyon Reservoir was lowered to study the dam for potential installation of a third turbine. IDFG is working with USBOR to determine and implement adequate mitigation measures for these losses.
- IDFG resident fish hatcheries are gradually shifting hatchery rainbow trout stocking to larger fish. After intense research efforts, it became apparent that anglers caught more trout when larger catchables were stocked. Not rocket science there, but anglers still caught more fish when large trout were stocked at lower numbers (proportionally less to offset the higher food and therefore cost requirements). More waters will be stocked with "magnums" during 2015, and this switch will be fully implemented by 2016, though only medium and larger-sized flat waters will be included. At this time, magnums will not be stocked in community fishing or flowing waters.
- IDFG staff are working with USFWS staff to develop a bull trout recovery plan that would set goals and develop implementation plans necessary to recover this species and remove it from the Endangered Species List. The USFWS website contains information of this process.
- Beginning in late January 2015, fisheries staff from around the state will begin developing draft rules for the 2016-2018 fishing rules brochure. Stay tuned, the department will be asking for comments on rules proposals and also seeking proposals from the public.
- Regional staff working cooperatively with ID Dept. of Agriculture secured funding to treat aquatic nuisance plants in Duff Lane, Horseshoe Bend, and Payette Greenbelt ponds. The primary target was Eurasian water milfoil. Milfoil, when overly abundant, can preclude fishing access and decrease habitat quality. Herbicide was effective in controlling this plant in all three ponds. Furthermore, we stocked grass carp, an obligate herbivore, to suppress re-growth of milfoil.
- The lahonton cutthroat trout program took a large hit during fall 2013 when an outlet structure broke on Bybee Dam. Unfortunately, repair required draining the reservoir. Less than average snow pack and rainfall have slowed re-filling. It will be several years before this trophy fishery is restored.
- Young hatchery sturgeon were stocked in the Snake River downstream of CJ Strike (50) and Swan Falls (100) dams. The parents were collected downstream of CJ Strike Dam by IPC staff, transported to College of Southern Idaho aquaculture facilities, raised by students, and tagged and stocked by IDFG. Hatchery sturgeon were also stocked in other regions. We expect to stocked these fish annually.



Hatchery white sturgeon acclimating to their new home.



Aquatic herbicide application via a boat-mounted spreader



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Our Mission

(Idaho Code Section 36-103)

All wildlife, including all wild animals, wild birds, and fish, within the state of Idaho, is hereby declared to be the property of the state of Idaho. It shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated, and managed. It shall only be captured or taken at such times or places, under such conditions, or by such means, or in such manner, as will preserve, protect, and perpetuate such wildlife, and provide for the citizens of this state and, as by law permitted to others, continued supplies of such wildlife for hunting, fishing and trapping.

Our Vision

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game shall work with the citizens of Idaho in providing abundant, diverse fish and wildlife and ensuring a rich outdoor heritage for all generations.



IDFG is proposing a fee increase for resident licenses, tags, and permits starting in 2016. However, Fish and Game is also proposing a “Price Lock” concept. Hunters, anglers, and trappers that buy an annual license every year starting in 2015 would be exempt from fee increases. The exemption continues for as long as you continue to buy annual licenses regardless of this or future increases.

More Idahoans fish or hunt. They support wildlife conservation and management through the purchase of li-

censes and tags. However, more than 60% of hunters and anglers don’t renew their license each year. If just 10% of those intermittent buyers renewed annually, Fish and Game revenue would increase \$1 million annually. The Price Lock is a way for Fish and Game to provide an incentive to hunters and anglers to help keep prices low by buying each year.

Your annual license is an opportunity to hunt and fish, and it’s an investment in the future of Idaho’s wildlife. Your license dollars pay for Fish and Game

to manage wildlife for your enjoyment and benefit. Fish and Game does not receive any state general tax dollars. Your license dollars pay for the fish stocked and the work needed to set hunting and fishing seasons each year. It also ensures future generations will be able to enjoy Idaho’s great hunting and fishing.

More information can be found at <https://fishandgame.idaho.gov/content/pricelock>.