

FRASER RIVER COMMERCIAL STEELHEAD CATCHES IN

SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER - 1951 - 1954

During the past five years there has been an increasing amount of concern expressed by anglers regarding the general effect on the steelhead sport fishery of commercial catches of steelhead in the Fraser River. More recently, anglers who fish the Thompson River have felt that the commercial catch may be making serious inroads on the steelhead which are fished in the Thompson River areas from Lytton to Savona. One contention is that the commercial operations during the months of September and October may have particular effect on the steelhead of the Thompson River. The following table summarizes commercial catches of steelhead in the Fraser River on an annual basis from 1951 to 1954 and shows the September-October catches as a percentage of the annual catch.

Year	Sept.	Oct.	Sept.-Oct. Total	Sept.-Oct. total as % Annual Total	Total for year
1951	1193	965	2158	43.0%	5000
1952	369	284	653	14.5%	4500
1953	770	588	1358	28.9 %	4700
1954	1531	3936	5467	58.8%	9300
Totals	3863	5773	9636	40.5%	23,500

The average September -October commercial catch for the four years is slightly over 40% of the total catch. There is no possible method at present of determining whether the steelhead caught in September and October, or in any other month for that matter, are migrating to particular river systems. Even if it were possible to determine from which rivers these fish had originated, it would not appear to be practical to attempt to decrease the commercial catch. Steelhead, probably by reason of their small numbers relative to numbers of salmon, are not fished for as a species. They are caught by gillnetters who are fishing for salmon and are sold mainly on the fresh fish market.

The reason for the September-October steelhead catch comprising a high percentage of the annual steelhead catch probably lies in the relatively large numbers of gillnet boats operating in the Fraser in those two months. Any suggestion that further restrictions be placed on commercial operations of gillnet boats in the Fraser would meet with considerable opposition from commercial fishermen. It is suggested that we must be realistic in this case and face the fact that we are going to lose some steelhead each year to the commercial fishery. To attempt a program of evaluation of this loss would require a large expenditure, additional personnel, tagging programs and so forth. It is doubtful if such a program could be carried out by this Department with its present facilities.

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