

Who, Who, Who Let The Bass In?

By Mark Kabush, SCA Board Member

Smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu lacepede*) whose appearance belies their rather lovely lot in classification, probably migrated down the Pend Oreille River system from Noxon Reservoir, an impoundment of the Clarkfork River many years ago. They then came up the Lower Priest River and eventually populated both the Lower and Upper Priest Lake in significant numbers. They showed up only recently in the Upper Lake, but some fishermen, our fearless leader Jim Bellatty for one, have been catching them in good numbers this past summer.

Smallies, as they are known to those who fish for them are an aggressive and well armored fish. They have numerous tough scale along their back and a sharp-spined dorsal fin. Their flesh is white and flaky and makes good table fare for those who prefer white meat and have the patience to filet them. On rod and reel they are one of the gamest fish that swim. They often jump when hooked and can pull mightily when they fight. Smallies can reach a weight of five pounds regularly and many fishermen prize them.



Although I have found little research as to the effect of Smallie introduction on our native cutthroat (CT) and bull trout (BT) the former threatened and the latter endangered, it would seem probable that their effect will be deleterious to the CT and probably the BT as well. Smallmouth young feed on the same crustaceans and aquatic insects that small CT and BT do, and their reproductive capabilities are staggering. I found that a seventeen inch Smallie may contain over 20,000 eggs. A CT of the same length will contain about 2,000 eggs.

So here they are, and here they will stay. The overall effect of their presence on our native trout has not been scientifically determined, but given their diet and reproductive capabilities it seems obvious that their presence bodes ill.

Two books with valuable information on Smallmouth and Trout are:
Inland Fishes of Washington by Richard S Wydoski and Trout Biology by Bill Willers

To those who fish for Smallmouth Bass, I wish “Tight lines” and a sharp filet knife.