

2002 SALMON REPORT RESULTS

by Jack Long

A number of years ago the salmon report coupon program was pioneered. The intent of the program was two-fold. It would give salmon anglers a weekly update on salmon activity, fishing depths, "hot" locations and presentations that were working best at the time. The other benefit of the program was an annual summary of the salmon activity. The report coupons are made available at bait and tackle shops and anglers are encouraged to pick them up, complete one for each salmon caught and mail them in. Each week the coupon results are compiled into a report and this report is broadcast Thursday, Friday and Saturday on **KFYR 550 AM Stereo Radio**. 2002 sponsors of the program were **Moritz Sport and Marine**, Bismarck/Mandan; **KFYR 550 AM Stereo Radio**, Bismarck; **Gibbons Fiberglass & Aluminum Boat Repair**, Bismarck; and **Dakota Tackle Inc.**, Bismarck. A special thank you to **KFYR 550 AM Stereo Radio** for their continued support of the project. Their support over the years has greatly benefitted salmon anglers in their pursuit of salmon.

As an encouragement to anglers to submit coupons, weekly prize packages, twice monthly cash prizes and two major prizes were given away this year. The major prizes are awarded at mid-season and at the season's end. In each case, the drawing is from all coupons submitted prior to the date of the drawing. The mid-season drawing winners was **Monica Paczkowski** of Bismarck. Monica won a **Okuma Classic 300 L Salmon Reel**. The season end prize was won by **Tim Mitchell** of Rapid City, SD. Tim won a **Okuma Classic 300 L Salmon Reel**, an **8ft. Shimano Rod, 100 feet of 20 lb line and a "25 Long A Bomber" Lure**. The mid and season end prizes were donated by **Wade Anderson and Dakota Tackle Inc.** of Bismarck. The weekly prize packages winners are selected from those coupons turned in for that week. The packages are a combination of lures and attractors and were donated by **Rhys Davis Ltd.** maker of the **Teaser** and **Anchovy Special** lures, **O'Ki Tackle** maker of the **Big and Lil Shooter** flasher, **Silver Strike Distributing** of Bismarck, **Stinger Spoons and Sidekick Attractors** and **Captain Kits Marina located in the Lake Sakakawea State Park**. Weekly prize winners in 2002 included: Doug Kitzan, Glenn Schiff, Bob Gregoire (twice), Don Bitz, Bruce Made, Lugene Gerber, Jack Long and Bob Valeu, all of Bismarck; Fern Veer (three times), Dickinson; Darla Larson, Sheyenne; Barb Ash and Judy Devier of Devils Lake; Erik Sunderland, Mandan; and Rob Anderson of Minot.

Through the summer 445 report coupons were submitted. The leading lure for the summer was the squid at 164 followed by the squish or needlefish with 98 and cutbait at 95. These three lures caught 80% of the salmon reported caught. Four main colors caught 72% of the fish. They were, in order, white, green, blue, and pink. The flasher was again the leading attractor but the favorite color was white. It is interesting to note that in all the years this report has been compiled, this is the first time that blue was not the leading attractor color. In fact this year, blue came in third following both white and green. In the past years we have seen a pattern of contrasting colors between the attractor and the terminal tackle, such as a blue flasher with a pink needlefish. This year like colors produced very well and especially a white attractor and white

tackle or green on green. The salmon weighed a total of 2,766 pounds or about a 6.3 pound average for the season. For the summer, the average lure depth was 58 feet and the lure was fished over an average of 82 feet of water. 140 salmon were picked up between 9am and noon, 116 between noon and 3pm and 95 between 6am and 9am. Five areas produced 88% of the salmon. Deadman's Bay led the way producing 115 fish and was followed by the face of the dam, Government Bay, Pochant Bay, and the Riverdale Bluffs.

May and June started extremely slow again in 2002 with a total of only 24 report coupons being filled out and sent in. Deadman's Bay was the leading location for catching salmon. Eleven salmon were caught on spoons. Silver was the favorite lure color and 9am to 3pm was the best time of the day. The fish averaged 4.9 pounds and were caught 29 feet down in 48 feet of water.

July saw an increase with 75 coupons being turned in. Deadman's Bay was the best place to catch a salmon. The squish or needlefish earned top honors with 29 salmon. Blue was the color of the month with 20 fish. The best time of the day was between 9am and noon when 27 fish were caught. A blue flasher was the preferred attractor. The average salmon weighed 5.9 pounds and was caught 63 feet down over 84 feet of water.

August, as in every year before, saw a definite change in angling success. In all, 229 coupons were submitted in August. Government Bay accounted for 50 of the salmon caught in August, followed by Deadman's Bay (42), Pochant Bay (39) and the face of the dam with (35). The prime time of the day to fish was 9am to noon (78), followed by noon to 3pm (67), and 6am to 9am (51). Three main lure presentations were key to August fishing. A squid led the way with 93, followed by cutbait at 54 and a squish or needlefish at 50. Lure color was spread out primarily between four choices. Those top four were: white (63), green (54), pink (33), and blue (27). A white flasher (72) led the way. The average fish size was 6.6 pounds and the average depths were 61 over 87 feet.

During September 117 report coupons were sent in. Deadman's Bay was the best producer with 35 fish. The squid caught 50 salmon and was followed by cutbait (20) and the squish or needlefish (18). White at 33 was the favorite color of the salmon, followed by green (21). From 6am until 9am (30) salmon were netted while noon to 3pm accounted for (27) salmon and 9am to noon (26) salmon. The green flasher (28) led the attractor charge. The average September salmon weighed 6.0 pounds. The September salmon were caught at an average lure depth of 57 over 77 feet of water.

As a quick review of the season, in May and June a 4.9 pound salmon could be caught at Deadman's Bay on a silver spoon. If you were fishing between 9am and 3pm and fishing 29 feet down in 48 feet of water, you were in the right place at the right time.

As we moved into July, you should unload your boat in the lake and head back to Deadman's Bay. Keep a squish or needlefish handy, but make sure it is blue and trailing a blue flasher. Do your fishing between 9am and noon and stay in 84 feet water with your lure down 63 feet.

Following all these directions should land you a 5.9 pound salmon.

In August you could catch a 6.6 pound salmon at Government Bay between 9am and noon. You had to be using a white squid behind a white flasher. Finally fish that squid 61 feet down over 87 feet of water.

As we moved into September, you again needed to boat north to Deadman's Bay as it was the hot place to be. Fishing there between 6am and 9am with a white squid and a green flasher would get you a 6.0 pound salmon. By the way, that salmon came at 57 feet over 77 feet of water.

Season Conclusions -

As data is compared going back to 1989 for the months of August and September, the prime salmon fishing months for many anglers, it is discouraging to look at last year's numbers. In 1989 the average size fish reported for the year was 6.0 pounds. 1990 saw this dip slightly to 5.8 pounds and then it spiraled downward to an all time low of 4.3 pounds in 1991, the same year we saw Lake Sakakawea experience a record low of 1815.0 feet in May. For the next three years the salmon weight fluctuated between 4.4 and 4.6 pounds. This, in all likelihood, was the result of the massive smelt die-off the Lake experienced due to the loss of the cold water habitat. 1995 saw a reversal of the trend and because we saw a refilling of the reservoir and a return of the smelt, our average weight made almost a one pound increase in one year from 4.4 to 5.3 pounds. The good days returned and the annual weights continued to increase and finally peaked at a 10.0 pound average in the year 2000. But unfortunately as we have seen a return of diminishing water levels on Lake Sakakawea, the average catch weights are also diminishing. From 2000 to 2001 we saw a drop of over two pounds and from 2001 to last year another drop of a pound and a half. The 2000 peak of 10.0 pounds has shrunk to 6.4 pounds in 2002. Also the number of salmon report cards submitted has fallen off to numbers reflective of the low water years of 1991 to 1994. Finally the most revealing indicator of the effect of lake levels as they relate to salmon development is the size of the fish caught. In year 2000, 78% of the salmon caught weighed eight or more pounds. As the lake level dropped so did the salmon size. 2001 saw only 53% of the salmon weighing eight or more pounds. And that percentage dropped from 78% in 2000 to just 21% in 2002. Coincidence - I for one don't think so. Much has been said about the politics of a balanced water control program on the Missouri River reservoirs so I won't spend time campaigning here. But doing everything possible to preserve this splendid fishery, not only the salmon but the walleyes, northerns, and smallmouths too, is now critical. Whether it's lawsuits, conservation, shortened barge seasons or other common sense approaches, it's time for the Corps to take note and just do the right thing - not what's politically best for them.

As in the past, thank you to all who took the time to fill out and send in the coupons. Without coupons, there's nothing to report!