

## 2004 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**. 2004 sponsors of the program were **Moritz Sport and Marine**, 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 and two major prizes were given away this past 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 winner was **Dan Anderson of Beulah**. **Dan won a Okuma Classic 300 L Salmon Reel**. The season end prize was won by **Dan Helland of Sheyenne**. **Dan 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.

Through the summer 275 report coupons were submitted. The leading lure for the summer was the squish or the needlefish at 105 followed by cutbait with 52, a crankbait with 44 and the squid at 43. These lures caught 89% of the salmon reported caught. Four main colors caught 77% of the fish. They were, in order, white, blue, green, and pink. The flasher was again the leading attractor but the favorite color was white instead of the traditional blue flasher. This is the sixteenth year that I have compiled this report and blue has been the favorite for fourteen of those years. The salmon weighed a total of 1,381 pounds or about a 5.0 pound average for the season. For the summer, the average lure depth was 54 feet and the lure was fished over an average of 78 feet of water. 109 salmon were picked up between 9am and noon, 65 between noon and 3pm and 41 between 6am and 9am. Five areas produced 79% of the salmon. Pochant Bay led the way producing 78 fish and was followed by the face of the dam, Government Bay, the Riverdale Bluffs, and Deadman's Bay.

The season started very slow, if measured by the number of coupons turned in. In May five were submitted, June saw six turned in and July had 56 coupons submitted. Obviously the salmon fishing was better than that during those three months but for some reason anglers didn't take the time to fill out the coupons and turn them in. But because of the low number of coupons submitted, I decided to combine the results of the three months rather than report each month separately. May, June, and July saw a total of only 67 report coupons being filled out and sent in. The Riverdale Bluffs were the leading location for catching salmon. Twenty four salmon were caught on a squish or needlefish. White at nineteen was the favorite lure color and thirty seven salmon were caught between 9am and noon. The white flasher was the preferred attractor of seventeen salmon, The fish averaged 4.3 pounds and were caught 41 feet down in 61 feet of water.

August, as usual, was the most productive month. In all, 157 coupons were submitted in August. Pochant Bay accounted for 60 of the salmon caught in August, followed by Deadman's Bay (26), Government Bay (25) and the Riverdale Bluffs with (15). The prime time of the day to fish was 9am to noon (59), followed by noon to 3pm (38), and 6am to 9am (32). Four main lure

presentations were key to August fishing. The squish or needlefish led the way with 71, followed by cutbait at 29, a squid at 26 and a crankbait at 22. Lure color was spread out primarily between four choices. Those top four were: white (38), blue (36), green (28), and pink (21). A white flasher (41) led the way. The average fish size was 5.1 pounds and the average depths were 63 over 90 feet.

During September 51 report coupons were sent in. The face of the dam was the best producer with 13 fish. Cutbait caught 18 of the 51 salmon. White at 12 was the favorite color of the salmon, followed by green with 10. From 9am until noon (13) salmon were netted while 6pm to 9pm accounted for (10) salmon. Thirty two salmon were caught without the use of an attractor in front of the lure and a white flasher led the attractor charge. The average September salmon weighed 5.7 pounds. The September salmon were caught at an average lure depth of 40 over 59 feet of water.

As a quick review of the season, in May, June, and July a 4.3 pound salmon could be caught on the Riverdale Bluffs on a white squish or needlefish pulled behind a white flasher. You had to be fishing between 9am and noon at 41 feet down in 61 feet of water to catch that salmon.

As we moved into August you could catch a 5.1 pound salmon at Pochant Bay between 9am and noon. You again had to be using a white squish or needlefish behind a white flasher. Finally fish that squish 63 feet down over 90 feet of water.

September found that you again needed to be fishing on the face of the dam as it was the hot place to be. Fishing there between 9am and noon with cutbait in a white hood and no flasher would get you a 5.7 pound salmon. By the way, that salmon came at 40 feet over 59 feet of water.

Just like the past four years when you compare data 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 2002 another drop of a pound and a half and from 2002 to last year saw a one pound drop. The 2000 peak of 10.0 pounds has shrunk to 5.2 pounds in 2004. That's a reduction of almost one half in just four years. 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. In 2002 it was 21% and that percentage dropped from 78% in 2000 to just 10% in 2003 and now a meager 3% in 2004.

Just a couple of thoughts before I let you go. I would encourage all anglers to give early spring salmon fishing a try this year. There are three productive methods that you can use to pick up salmon at this time of the year. You can give planer boards a try, use your downriggers or throw out long lines. All three or combinations of the three will work. For lures the obvious favorites are spoons and crankbaits. Since spoons don't generally dive I like to run them off of my downriggers and I run the cannonballs 5 to 7 feet down. I usually run all my lures 50 to 125 feet behind the boat. Normally I will troll the shoreline, whether in a bay or out in the open lake, and I try to stay in 15 to 45 feet of water. When running planer boards I will get them 50 to 75 feet off to the sides of the boat. Of course when running crankbaits you set your shallow running cranks on the shore side of the boat with your diving cranks on the deep water side of the boat. My experience has shown that the heavier spoons, not the fluttering type, work the best and cranks and spoons that are blue, green, chartreuse or silver have been my favorites. For crankbaits, the Rebel series has done well for me over the years with the Rapala's being another good choice. My favorite area to troll is anywhere from Douglas Bay east to Steinke's Bay. Depending on the wind, some days I just tuck into Douglas Bay, Garrison Bay or Steinke's Bay but on calmer days I try to cover as much shoreline as possible. Just like with walleyes, if I pick up a salmon, I turn right around and go back through that area. It seems that spring salmon tend to run in packs and because they are usually feeding on something when you come across them, they are reluctant to leave that general area. If you get into fish you will have a blast. The salmon are near the surface so the fight is immediate and there is no flasher so the fight is more intense. I have even gone to using my 6 to 8 foot walleye rods with baitcasting reels for added enjoyment. Now I realize that lake access might be an issue this May but if you get on the water give early season salmon fishing a try. If you get into fish I know you won't regret your decision.

We all wish we had more water and those 10 to 18 pound salmon but we don't. Like my Dad would have told me, quit dwelling on the half empty glass of water and enjoy the half that is full. Get out there and make the most of it, enjoy your times outdoors, watch for tagged salmon and turn the heads in to the Game and Fish and fill out those coupons and continue sending them in. Thanks!

Skip Jack

Charts to follow:

## MOST PRODUCTIVE FISHING AREAS BY MONTH

DC = Douglas Creek    PB = Pochant Bay  
 DF = Face of the Dam    SB = Scoria Bay  
 RB = Riverdale Bluffs    DB = Deadman's Bay  
 ST = Steinke's Bay    GB = Government Bay  
 GA = Garrison Bay    DT = DeTrobriand Bay  
 TR = Tailrace    HB = Hazen Bay

(There was no data available for 1989)

YEAR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT
1990	DC	DF	DF	PB	DB
1991	DC	DF	DF	DB	PB
1992	DF	DF	RB	DB	SB
1993	DC	DF	DF	DF	SB
1994	DF	DF	DF	DF	DF
1995	SB & ST	DF	DF & RB	GB	RB
1996	GA	DF	RB	DB	GB
1997	DT	DF	DF	DB	DF
1998	TR	TR	DF	PB	DB
1999	TR	TR	HB	DB	DF
2000	DF	DF	DF	DF	SB
2001	TR	TR	DF	DB	DF
2002	DB	DB	DB	GB	DB
2003	GB	GB	GB	DB	DB
2004	RB	RB	RB	PB	DF

NUMBER OF FISH CAUGHT  
AND  
AVERAGE FISH WEIGHT  
AUGUST & SEPTEMBER

YEAR	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	TOTAL	WEIGHT
1989	290	158	448	6.0
1990	397	210	607	5.8
1991	380	140	520	4.3
1992	293	41	334	4.5
1993	276	65	341	4.6
1994	221	84	305	4.4
1995	332	264	596	5.3
1996	669	274	943	6.0
1997	431	200	631	5.6
1998	442	172	614	6.0
1999	455	142	597	6.2
2000	424	64	488	10.0
2001	391	73	464	7.8
2002	229	117	346	6.4
2003	314	55	369	5.6
2004	157	51	208	5.2

AVERAGE FISH SIZE BY MONTH  
(POUNDS)

YEAR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGU ST	SEPT
1989	4.4	4.4	5.2	6.4	7.1
1990	4.6	4.0	5.4	6.9	6.3
1991	3.2	3.8	3.3	5.1	4.7
1992	3.7	3.7	4.0	4.9	5.2
1993	2.2	2.2	3.8	5.7	5.5
1994	2.3	2.7	3.6	4.6	5.1
1995	2.3	4.1	3.1	5.3	6.3
1996	3.5	3.9	4.7	6.0	5.9
1997	3.8	4.1	4.2	5.5	5.9
1998	3.2	5.4	4.4	6.1	5.8
1999	3.8	6.6	5.9	6.1	6.4
2000	6.1	6.1	8.3	10.1	9.5
2001	8.8	8.8	7.4	7.8	7.5
2002	4.9	4.9	5.9	6.6	6.0
2003	4.3	4.3	4.3	5.6	5.4
2004	4.3	4.3	4.3	5.1	5.7

AVERAGE LURE DEPTH BY MONTH  
(FEET)

YEAR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGU ST	SEPT
1989	25	25	37	79	37
1990	10	32	61	87	78
1991	12	40	67	86	83
1992	25	25	63	86	14
1993	13	17	22	81	25
1994	13	12	45	78	43
1995	6	34	73	80	82
1996	10	25	45	80	72
1997	12	22	55	92	64
1998	18	12	48	74	79
1999	20	24	49	95	59
2000	26	26	50	75	40
2001	18	18	39	75	73
2002	29	29	63	61	57
2003	60	60	60	80	78
2004	41	41	41	63	40

# TERMINAL TACKLE COLOR BY MONTH

BL = BLUE PK = PINK CH = CHARTREUSE  
 WH = WHITE GR = GREEN RB = RAINBOW  
 SI = SILVER

YEAR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT
1989	BL	BL	PK	PK	PK
1990	CH	WH	WH	GR	RB
1991	BL	BL	BL	PK	PK
1992	BL	BL	BL	GR	GR
1993	GR	GR	BL	WH	PK
1994	GR	BL	BL	WH	PK
1995	BL	PK	BL	BL	PK
1996	RB	BL	PK	GR	PK
1997	GR	GR	BL	PK	PK
1998	GR & BL	CH	BL	PK	PK
1999	GR	WH	BL	BL & PK	PK
2000	BL	BL	BL	BL	BL
2001	GR	GR	WH	WH	BL & PK
2002	SI	SI	BL	WH	WH
2003	WH	WH	WH	BL	GR
2004	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH



# TERMINAL TACKLE BY MONTH

YEAR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT
1989	CRANK	CRANK	SQUID	SQUID	SQUID
1990	CRANK	SQUISH	SQUID	SQUID	SQUID
1991	CRANK	SQUISH	SQUISH	CUTBAIT	SQUID
1992	CRANK	CRANK	SQUISH	CUTBAIT	SPOON
1993	SPOON	SPOON	CRANK	SQUISH	CRANK
1994	CRANK	CRANK	CRANK	SQUID	SQUID
1995	SPOON	SQUISH	SQUISH	SQUID	SQUID
1996	CRANK	CRANK	SQUID	SQUID	SQUID
1997	CRANK	SPOON	SQUISH	SQUID	SQUID
1998	CRANK	CRANK	SQUISH	SQUISH	CUTBAIT
1999	CRANK	LIVEBAIT	SQUISH	SQUID	SQUID
2000	CRANK	CRANK	SQUID	SQUID	SQUISH
2001	CRANK	CRANK	SQD&SQH	SQUID	CUTBAIT
2002	SPOON	SPOON	SQUISH	SQUID	SQUID
2003	SQUID	SQUID	SQUID	CUTBAIT	CUTBAIT
2004	SQUISH	SQUISH	SQUISH	SQUISH	CUTBAIT

AVERAGE WATER DEPTH FISHEDBY MONTH  
(FEET)

YEAR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGU ST	SEPT
1989	47	47	61	113	60
1990	34	53	91	120	104
1991	36	71	96	119	111
1992	54	54	97	120	27
1993	38	48	44	105	45
1994	30	28	63	110	69
1995	21	62	118	123	114
1996	37	58	91	123	96
1997	39	47	71	138	103
1998	30	23	73	105	103
1999	28	34	69	132	87
2000	37	37	70	103	56
2001	26	26	54	111	95
2002	48	48	84	87	77
2003	85	85	85	111	105
2004	61	61	61	90	59