



Photo by Mike Martin

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW THIS ARTICLE ON FFIMAGAZINE.COM](#)

## Fall Favorite: Washington's Klickitat River

*Fishing at Steelhead Ranch offers a front row seat to one of the Pacific Northwest's greatest runs of wild steelhead.*

By The Editors | June 2021

Brought to you by:





Photo by Jack Mitchell

One of the most unique rivers in the Pacific Northwest is Washington's Klickitat, which flows off the glaciated face of an active volcano—Mount Adams—and winds through several magnificent canyons and plenty of scrub oak country before dumping into the Columbia River at Lyle.

Lyle rests east of Hood River and west of the mouth of

Oregon's more noted Deschutes River. The Klickitat draws steelhead out of the Columbia from June through November, a mix of native stock and the hatchery raised Skamania strain. While we're not fans of hatchery fish, these steelhead will take you far into the backing if you hook them during highish water in June, and

sometimes make you wonder if a 9 would not have been a better choice than a flimsy 7-weight.

These steelhead—wild and hatchery—range between eight and 12 pounds on average but 16-to 20-pounders are in the mix. These fish have to be strong—they ascend a narrow chute on the lower river and plenty of other



Photo by Jack Mitchell

significant drops before reaching prime spawning grounds. These obstacles mean only the strongest survive. Plenty of Klickitat River faithful think these steelhead are as hard-fighting as you'll find anywhere.

Jack Mitchell, who owns Steelhead Ranch near the banks of the Klickitat, says, "We get some big, wild natives, but we got Skamania fish, too, and these are good ones—some of them you can't even hold onto in June when the water

is up.

"The hatchery fish come earlier as a rule. In June and July it's maybe 70 percent hatchery and 30 percent wild," Mitchell added, "but the bulk of the run is in August and September and by late season you're only catching wild fish."

Regarding reasonable expectations when fishing steelhead on the Klickitat . . . it's like steelhead fishing everywhere. When conditions are ideal the fish will be grabby. When the river is off-col-

or or marred by rains, small landslides and washouts, it might be tough to find one. But a proficient angler, who makes good casts during favorable water conditions ought to hook a fish a day or at least get a grab. On really good days, they might land and release three or four fish. So, think Dean River, Skeena, Clearwater, Ronde, Deschutes . . . this is high quality steelheading on some of the most beautiful water you can find anywhere in the world.



Photo by Jack Mitchell

Early season and summer fishing on the Klick is all about water conditions. As mentioned, the river drains off of Mount Adams and carries a glacial color on hot days. You can catch fish in those conditions, especially in the morning hours after cool evening temperatures control the melt, but the river fishes most consistently from mid-September through November. That is prime time for water conditions and numbers of fish.

The Klickitat offers great swing water throughout, one appealing run after another, but the bobber game works here too. Swinging skaters here, however, may not be as productive as on

other waters—during summer water clarity is an issue and during fall cold temps generally keep the fish's snouts below the surface. But that's not a hard rule.

"They don't come up as easily here as on some other rivers, but when they do it can be amazing," Mitchell said. "I've seen some crazy shit on this river, like sharks carving up the surface to get at the fly. But when it gets cold here, the only way you are going to get them is going subsurface."

Steelhead are the big draw on the Klickitat, but king/chinook salmon also are present during late summer. These fish range between 20 and 40 pounds and can turn a pleasant summer morning into full

chaos in about two seconds. Trying to hold one of those beasts on a six or seven-weight could feel like a near-death experience.

"Originally there were springers here, but there are only a few left," Mitchell said. "But in late August to the end of September there are some bright fall chinook to be caught. When we get wind that they are around we will target them specifically, especially early in the morning in low light."

If the combination of wild steelhead and bright kings gets you going, you can book days at Steelhead Ranch for 2021. Prime-time openings are available between September 15 and November 20 with a max occupancy of 8 anglers. Accommodations are "Bonanza-style" at a true western lodge located on a plateau above the river. Anglers can kick back and enjoy the views on this 40-acre complex before stringing up their rods and heading out for a day of steelhead bliss.

Steelhead Ranch is a 3.5 hour drive from Seattle and an hour and 40 minute drive from the Portland Airport (PDX).

Visits to Steelhead Ranch include lodging, guiding, breakfast, lunch and dinner, equipment and flies.

**For more information and to book this trip call Gil's Fly Fishing International at 1-406-317-1062.**

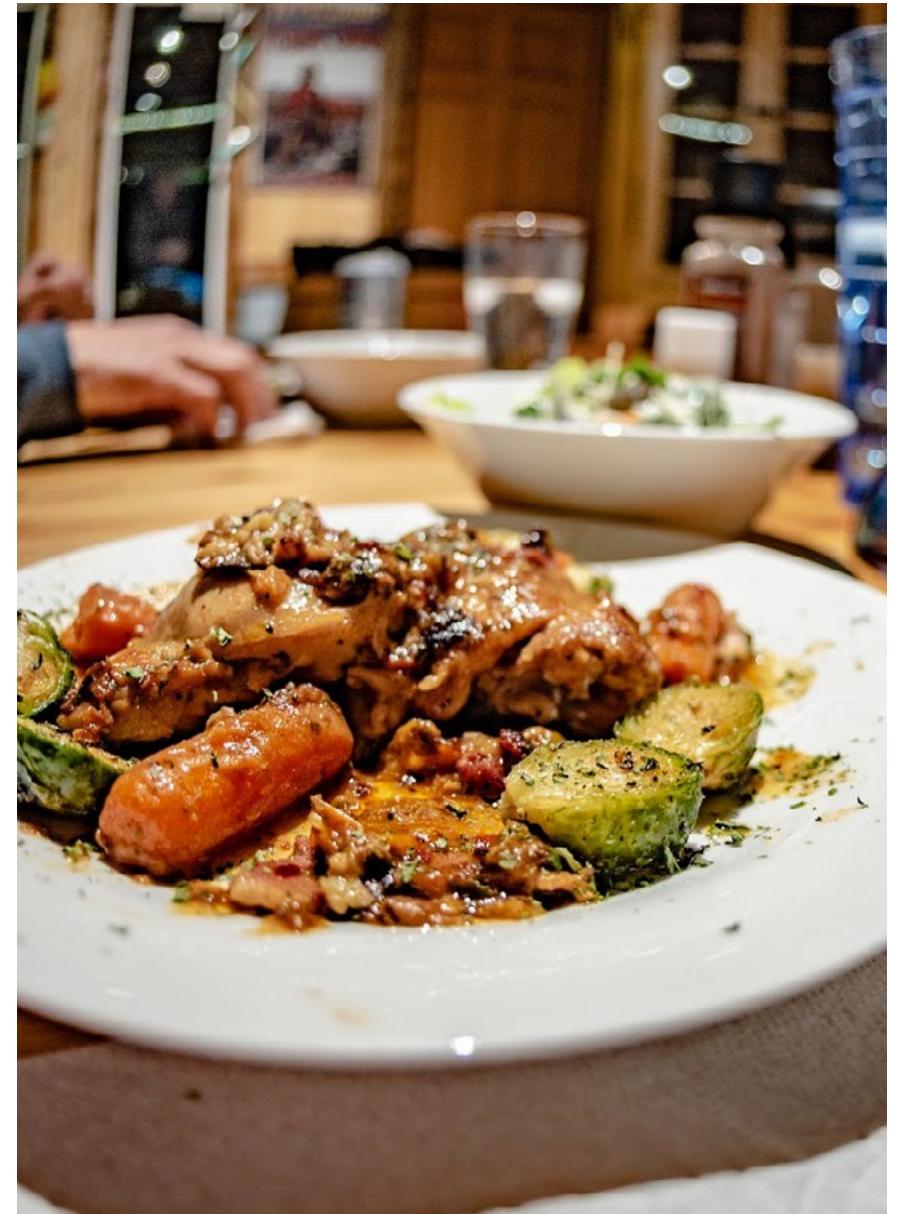


Photo by Mike Martin



Photo by Jack Mitchell

## FISH WITH US!

### CONTACT US:

[www.flyfishinginternational.com](http://www.flyfishinginternational.com)

[info@flyfishinginternational.com](mailto:info@flyfishinginternational.com)

North America: +1 (888)-304-4334

International: +1 (647)-268-6008

2345 Yonge Street, Suite 802 Toronto, ON, M4P 2E5, Canada.  
(By Appointment Only)

TICO #50025212

This magazine is brought to you by:



FLY FISHING INTERNATIONAL