

Salmon Derby brings fishing and conservation together



Photos by TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Paul Stulz with the Middle Rogue Steelheaders weighs an 8.8-pound chinook landed by Cole Tidwell at Valley of the Rogue State Park during the 24th annual Salmon Derby on Saturday.

## Middle Rogue Steelheaders' event attracts dozens of anglers

By Jason McMillen  
of the Daily Courier

**VALLEY OF THE ROGUE STATE PARK** — The third time was the charm for Sean Randles, who won the Middle Rogue Steelheaders' 24th annual Salmon Derby on Saturday.

Randles' winning fish weighed in at 16.2 lbs. It was his third year competing in the salmon derby, but it was his first time winning a prize. Jake Riley was his guide.

"I fish all year, but this is the best salmon boat day I've ever had," said Randles, who lives in Grants Pass and is a construction project manager for Avista. "The guys, the food, the fish — I love everything about the derby and look forward to it every year."

Ron Bernhardt, a fourth-time competitor at the derby, didn't land any of the cash prizes, but ended the day with a 9.8-pound salmon — a prize in its own right.

He has lived the Medford area his whole life and works for Willie Boats. He said he's been fishing the Rogue River and its tributaries for 20 years.



Emilie Blair, 6, the daughter of guide Shane Blair, helped her dad by bagging the meat after he fileted the catch of the day. "She and her 2-year old sister are both fishergirls," their dad said.

"I just love getting out on the water and enjoying the day," said Bernhardt. "Plus the conservation work they use the proceeds for is great. I wish they held more competitions. They are always a lot of fun."

The derby had 18 teams of two persons this year, who fished anywhere from Gold Hill to Grave Creek, hoping to land a huge fall chinook.

The mission of Middle Rogue Steelheaders is primarily to conserve, protect and restore cold-water fisheries and their watersheds across Southwest Oregon.

Its members do this primarily by raising money for stream restoration and other riparian projects, and working on the projects, to keep the activity they know and love sustainable.

According to Doyle Nelson, the club's second vice president, the derby this year finished off a four-year promise to raise \$35,000 for the Rogue River Watershed Council's Salt Creek project.

Salt Creek is located in Jackson County near Butte Falls, and after

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the work is finished will provide excellent habitat for salmon and steelhead.

Nelson explained that stream restoration is necessary in many of Southern Oregon's creeks due to the area's history of gold mining, and other factors such as farming and ranching.

Tasks include removing barriers so that salmon can make it upstream, restoring sand and gravel gradients so that the fish have a place to lay their eggs, and cooling down stream water with riparian plants that had since been removed.

"I like to fish, but conservation work is really what I'm doing in the Steelheaders," said Nelson. "I was a Park

**Biggest Salmon:** 1. Sean Randles, guide Jacob Riley, 16.2 pounds; 2. Mark O'Hara, guide Jacob Riley, 13.3.

**Combined:** 1. Sean Randles, Mark O'Hara, 29.5 pounds; 2. Mike Olson, Jeremiah Wann, guide Kenny Snow, 19.7; 3. Ron Bernhardt, Cole Tidwell, guide Jesse Blair, 18.6.

**Biggest pikeminnow total:**  
1. Rich Higgs, 5.3 pounds.

Service ranger for many years, so being out in nature that much really makes you appreciate it, and want to take care of it."

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