Salmon Derby brings fishing and conservation together

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. John Fisher was his guide.

“I fished all year, but this is the best salmon day I’ve ever had,” Randles said. “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 in 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.

“I just love getting out on the water and enjoying the day,” said Bernhardt. “I fish all year, but this is the best salmon day I’ve ever had.”

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 anglers,” their dad said.

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

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, a prime salmon-producing area. Middle Rogue Steelheaders event attracts dozens of anglers

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the work is finished will pro-
vide excellent habits for
salmon and steelhead.
Nelson explained that
stream restoration is nec-
esary in many of Oregon’s
rivers due to the area’s his-
tory of gold mining, road
construction, and stream
altering and mining.
They include removing
barriers so that salmon can
make it upstream, restoring
riparian and floodplains so
that the fish have a place to
spawn, and reducing the
downstream water with spa-
in areas that had been
removed.
“It’s a fish, but conserva-
tion work is really what I’m
doing in the fishery,”
said Nelson. “It’s a fish

Biggest Salmon: 1. Sean
Norton, guide Jake Rhey.
2. Ian Rose, guide Matt
O’Hara.
Combined: 1. Sean Han-
mill, Mark O’Hara, 29.5
pounds. 2. Mike Olson,
Nick Hansen, Jon Trefethen,
Kenny Snow, 19.7. 3. Ron
Bernhardt, Mike Pullin,
guide Jesse Bar. 18.6.
Biggest Plentiymore trout:
1. Rich Higgins, 5.3 pounds.

Service eager for many
years, as being out in nature
that much really makes you
appreciate it, and want to take
care of it.”

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