Reiter Ponds winter steelhead (Skykomish River)

Hatchery returns from WDFW weekly escapement reports (November through February, 2013–2026), plus when, where and how to fish. Prepared Nov 3, 2026.

Reiter Ponds is WDFW's main steelhead hatchery on the Skykomish River, near Gold Bar and Index. Its winter fish are the Wallace River Hatchery stock; the Wallace River Hatchery has its own report. Numbers below are the **Adult Total** on the Reiter Ponds winter steelhead row of WDFW's weekly escapement reports (a preliminary, cumulative, season-to-date count of fish at the hatchery rack).

> **Read this first, for 2026–27.** A June 2026 emergency closure of the Skykomish to protect wild Chinook ran through Oct 31, 2026, and WDFW says it overrode the planned Reiter Ponds steelhead fishery. From Nov 1 the Skykomish is closed to salmon through Nov 30 (mouth to the Big Eddy railroad bridge), and I found no emergency rule closing steelhead after Oct 31. WDFW has changed this basin's rules repeatedly, so check its emergency-rules page the day you go.

265
median season total at the Reiter rack across the 11 seasons with 100+ fish (range 61–797 over 14 seasons)

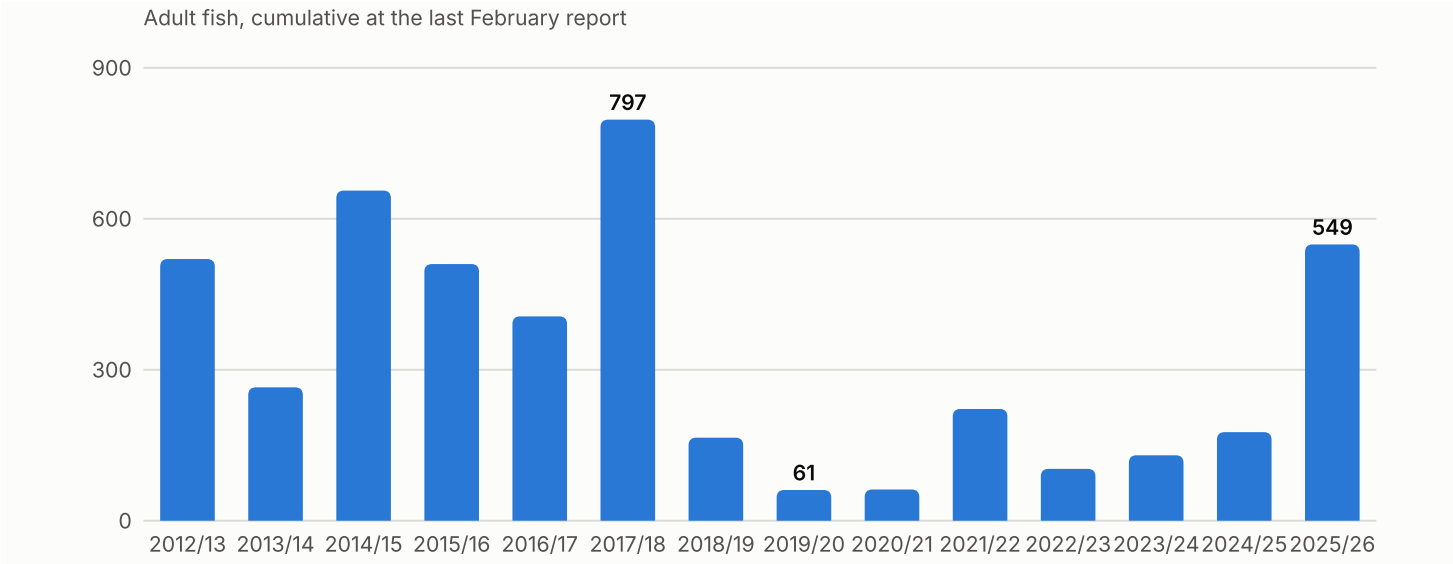
549
2025/26 total at the Feb 26 report, third-highest of 14 seasons after 797 (2017/18) and 656 (2014/15)

54%
of fish arrived in January (Nov 0%, Dec 23%, Feb 23%), pooled over 11 seasons

139,964
winter smolts released from Reiter in 2025, due back this winter (second-largest of 2015–2025)

1. Season returns

Each bar is the Adult Total on the Reiter Ponds winter steelhead row of the last February report. WDFW labels every number preliminary.



The 2012/13 bar starts from the January report because the WDFW archive begins in 2013. The two low seasons, 2019/20 and 2020/21 (61 and 62 fish), followed releases of 98,533 and 124,707 smolts, or about 0.5 to 0.6 rack fish per 1,000 smolts against 4 to 6 in the best years.

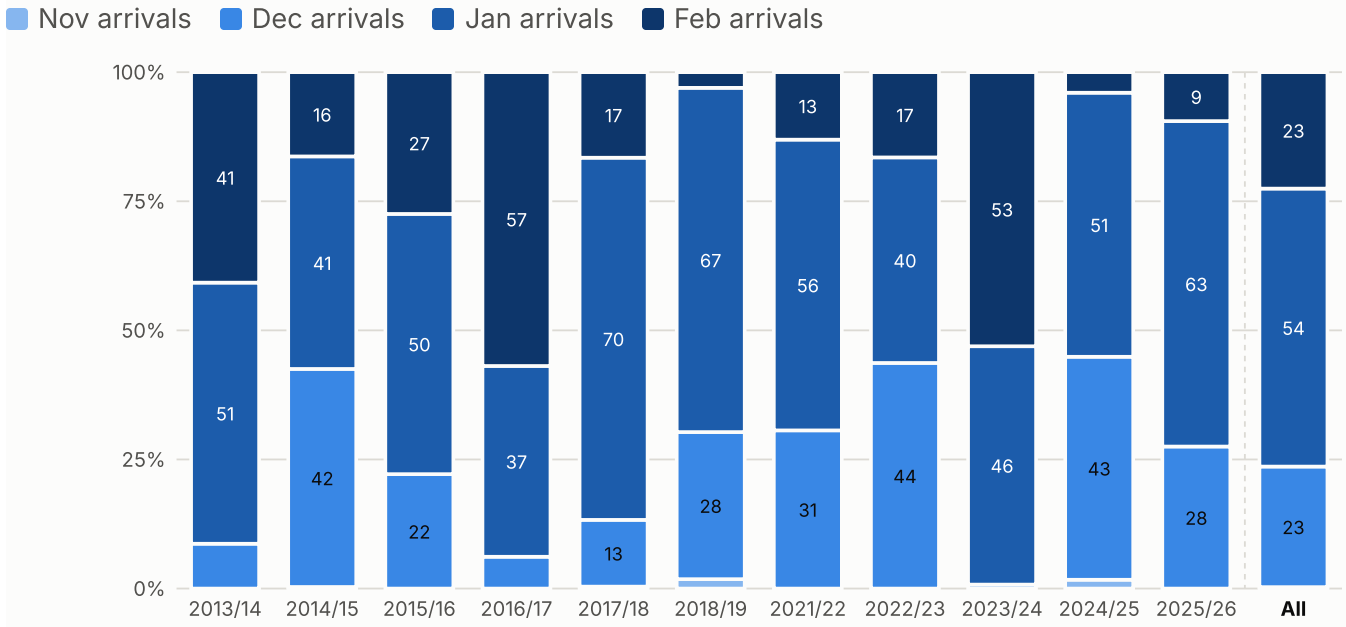
Season	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Winter smolts released the prior spring	Rack fish per 1,000 smolts
2026/27 (upcoming)	—	—	—	—	139,964	—
2025/26	0	151	497	549	131,617	4.17
2024/25	3	79	169	176	139,832	1.26
2023/24	0	1	61	130	108,151	1.20
2022/23	0	45	86	103	50,189	2.05
2021/22	0	68	193	222	107,923	2.06
2020/21	0	33	62	62	124,707	0.50
2019/20	0	2	45	61	98,533	0.62
2018/19	3	50	160	165	134,411	1.23
2017/18	3	106	665	797	139,179	5.73
2016/17	0	25	175	406	144,781	2.80
2015/16	0	113	370	510	n/a	—
2014/15	2	279	549	656	n/a	—
2013/14	0	23	157	265	n/a	—
2012/13	—	—	300	520	n/a	—

“Nov” to “Feb” use the last weekly report of each month. Smolt counts are WDFW's winter releases at “Skykomish R” (Reiter Ponds), 2015–2024 releases, which WDFW says return mostly the following winter. The per-1,000 figure is

indicative only: it assumes about 1.5 years from release to return, and rack counts are not total river returns. The 2026/27 row is the upcoming season (the 2025 release).

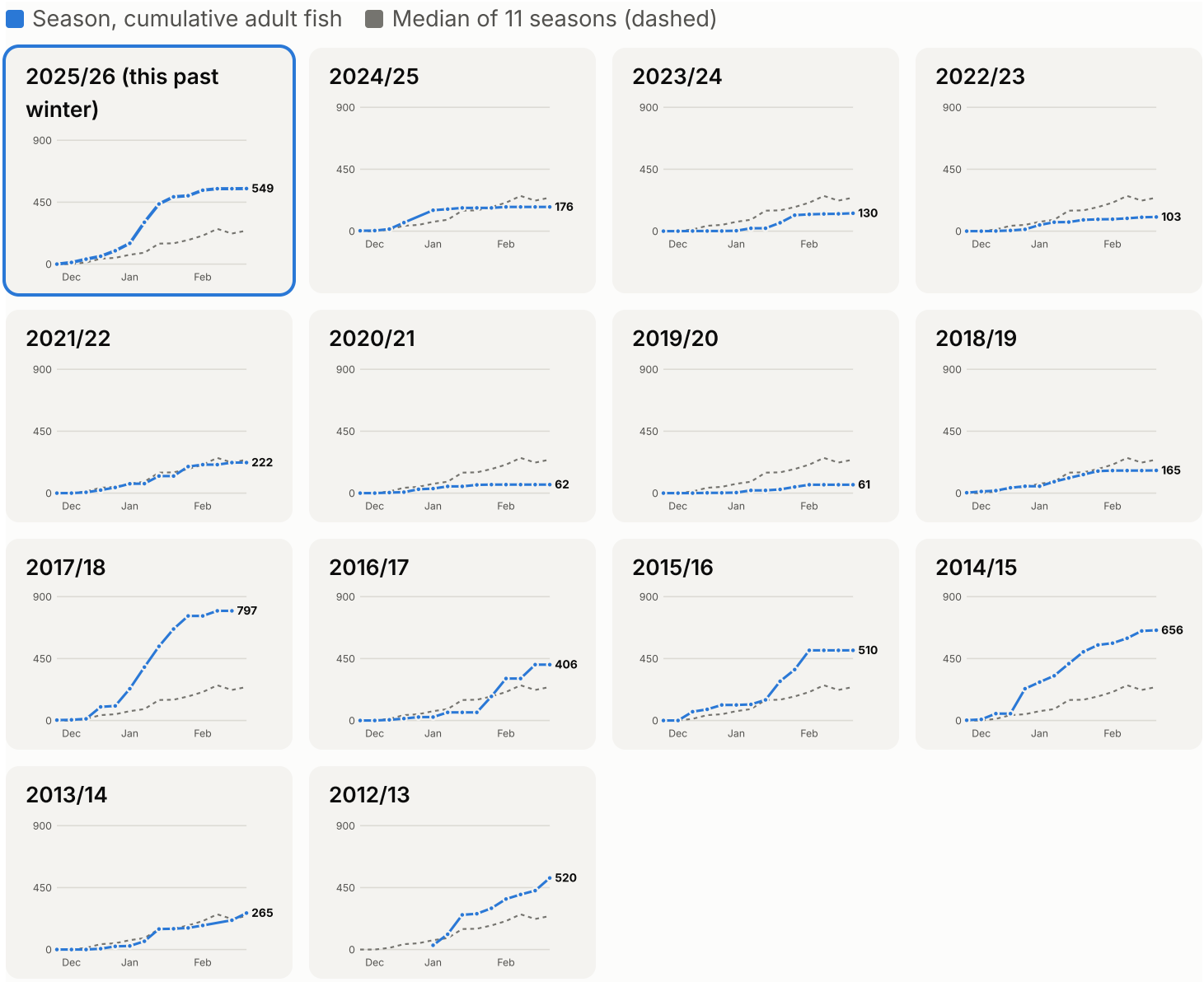
2. When the fish arrive

Pooled over the 11 seasons with 100+ fish (3,979 fish): Nov 0%, Dec 23%, Jan 54%, Feb 23%. Median end-of-month cumulative share: Dec 28% and Jan 83% (range 43–97%). Reiter's run is late and long: a quarter of the fish arrive in February.



3. Week by week

Each solid line is one season's cumulative Adult Total from the weekly reports. The dashed line is the median of the 11 seasons with 100+ fish. Hover a point for the week's add.



2025/26 against the median. The season ran ahead of the median every week from Dec 4 on, by 12 to 341 fish. The week ending Jan 8 added 153 fish (28% of the season) and Jan 15 added 133, so those two weeks brought 286 (52%). Weekly adds: 12, 24, 21, 40, 54 (Dec 4 through Jan 1), 153, 133, 52, 8, 40, 11, 0 and 1 (Jan 8 through Feb 26).

Typical pattern. The five weeks ending Jan 8 through Feb 5 brought in 64% of the fish counted week to week (2,462 of 3,840). The biggest single weeks, pooled, are Jan 15 (586 fish), Jan 29 (513) and Jan 8 (508). In 8 of 11 seasons the biggest week ended between Jan 8 and Feb 5; the others peaked at Dec 18, Dec 25 or Jan 1.

Cumulative adult fish, week by week

Season	Nov	Dec 4	Dec 11	Dec 18	Dec 25	Jan 1	Jan 8	Jan 15	Jan 22	Jan 29	Feb 5	Feb 12	Feb 19	Feb 26
2025/26	0	12	36	57	97	151	304	437	489	497	537	548	548	549
2024/25	3	4	15	62	—	152	160	169	169	169	176	176	176	176
2023/24	0	0	1	1	1	3	21	21	61	116	122	125	126	130
2022/23	0	0	1	5	13	45	65	66	82	86	87	93	101	103

Season	Nov	Dec 4	Dec 11	Dec 18	Dec 25	Jan 1	Jan 8	Jan 15	Jan 22	Jan 29	Feb 5	Feb 12	Feb 19	Feb 26
2021/22	0	0	6	22	41	68	69	124	124	193	207	207	222	222
2020/21	0	0	4	7	28	33	49	49	60	62	62	62	62	62
2019/20	0	0	0	2	2	4	20	20	27	45	61	61	61	61
2018/19	3	12	18	39	50	50	83	110	135	160	164	164	164	165
2017/18	3	5	12	99	106	231	388	539	665	760	760	797	797	—
2016/17	0	0	5	14	25	25	59	59	59	175	305	305	406	406
2015/16	0	0	64	81	113	113	117	150	285	370	510	510	510	510
2014/15	2	8	50	50	231	279	325	413	499	549	562	598	651	656
2013/14	0	0	0	6	23	26	60	149	151	157	175	—	213	265
2012/13	—	—	—	—	—	31	111	252	260	300	367	400	428	520
Median	**0**	**0**	**12**	**39**	**45.5**	**68**	**83**	**149**	**151**	**175**	**207**	**256**	**222**	**243.5**

Fish added each week

Season	Dec 4	Dec 11	Dec 18	Dec 25	Jan 1	Jan 8	Jan 15	Jan 22	Jan 29	Feb 5	Feb 12	Feb 19	Feb 26
2025/26	12	24	21	40	54	153	133	52	8	40	11	0	1
2024/25	1	11	47	–	–	8	9	0	0	7	0	0	0
2023/24	0	1	0	0	2	18	0	40	55	6	3	1	4
2022/23	0	1	4	8	32	20	1	16	4	1	6	8	2
2021/22	0	6	16	19	27	1	55	0	69	14	0	15	0
2020/21	0	4	3	21	5	16	0	11	2	0	0	0	0
2019/20	0	0	2	0	2	16	0	7	18	16	0	0	0
2018/19	9	6	21	11	0	33	27	25	25	4	0	0	1
2017/18	2	7	87	7	125	157	151	126	95	0	37	0	–
2016/17	0	5	9	11	0	34	0	0	116	130	0	101	0
2015/16	0	64	17	32	0	4	33	135	85	140	0	0	0
2014/15	6	42	0	181	48	46	88	86	50	13	36	53	5
2013/14	0	0	6	17	3	34	89	2	6	18	–	–	52
2012/13	–	–	–	–	–	80	141	8	40	67	33	28	92

Week columns are the weekly report nearest each date, within three days; “Nov” is the last November report. A negative number means WDFW revised its cumulative count down, and “–” means no report fell in that week. Weeks with no hatchery row count as 0. The median rows use the seasons that clear the fish-count cutoff and carry a missing week forward from the week before.

4. Outlook for 2026–27

There is no published WDFW forecast. I found no 2026–27 hatchery return forecast for Reiter Ponds in WDFW's steelhead pages, its season-setting documents or its emergency rules. WDFW has published such forecasts in past emergency rules, and a regional office may have an internal number. What WDFW does publish is the smolt release behind this winter's run: **139,964 winter smolts in 2025**, which WDFW says return mostly in the 2026–27 winter. The 2024 release was 131,617.

Rough estimate from past rack rates (my arithmetic, not WDFW's)	Rack fish per 1,000 smolts	Fish at the rack for 139,964 smolts
Median of past seasons	1.65	about 230
Middle half of past seasons	1.05 to 3.14	148 to 440
Lowest to highest past season	0.50 to 5.73	70 to 802
Last winter (2025/26), for comparison	4.17	549 fish

Method: the 2025 release multiplied by each past season's rack fish per 1,000 smolts (the ten seasons 2016/17 to 2025/26, with rates from 0.50 to 5.73). The estimate ignores ocean conditions, closures and fishing that remove fish before the rack, and rack counts are not total river returns. Treat it as a rough range, not a prediction.

How long steelhead spend in the ocean

Steelhead do not spend just one year at sea. They typically spend about one to three years at sea, and a few spend four. The usual Puget Sound winter steelhead is a “two-salt,” a bit under two years at sea; fewer return as one-salts, and some as three-salts. The early-winter hatchery smolts in these reports are released as yearlings in spring and mostly return the winter after next, about 1.5 years later. Fish that stay out an extra year arrive the following winter, so one release can feed two winters, and my rack fish per 1,000 smolts slightly understate a release's total contribution. Unlike Pacific salmon, steelhead can survive spawning and return to sea, which is part of why wild fish should be released unharmed.

5. Where and when to fish the Skykomish

No section-by-section catch data exists for this river, so each call combines the hatchery arrival timing above (measured), the regulations (verified from eRegulations, last updated Oct 5, 2026, and WDFW rule filings) and local reports and press (anecdotal).

Upper: Big Eddy (Hwy 2 railroad bridge) to the forks, including Reiter Ponds and Cable Hole

Best: Jan 8–Feb 5 (peak weeks). Second: Dec 18–Jan 1.

Reiter is the hatchery terminal area, and local reports call it the Skykomish's most productive bank spot; Cable Hole just below it is fished at low to medium flows. Reiter's run is the latest of the Skykomish hatcheries, with 54% of fish in January and 23% in February. This reach is open Nov 1–Feb 15 under the standard rules, and fishing from a floating device is prohibited from 1,000 feet below to 1,500 feet above the Reiter outlet. Access is on both the hatchery side (Reiter Road) and the Highway 2 side. Risk: WDFW has closed the Reiter water to protect broodstock (from Dec 30, 2016, reopened Jan 26, 2017; Jan 7 to 14, 2019, when the Skykomish was closed from the mouth to the forks) and closed hatchery steelhead retention on Dec 19, 2019. Confidence: higher.

Mid: Sultan to Big Eddy, including the Sultan River mouth, the Wallace River mouth and High Bridge

Best: Dec 10–Jan 15, on a falling river.

Guides and shop staff name the Cracker Bar at Sultan, the half-mile of south-bank access above the Sultan bridge, and the Wallace mouth as consistent producers. Fish pass through here before Reiter, so this reach fishes earlier than the hatchery water. Confidence: moderate.

Lower: Monroe (Lewis Street bridge) to Sultan, including Ben Howard Road

Best: Dec 1–Dec 25.

Early hatchery fish show up here first: a guide reported two fish drifting Sultan to Monroe in an early-winter push. Only about 28% of the Reiter run has reached the rack by the end of December. The standard rules are selective gear with single barbless hooks through Nov 30 (bait allowed from Dec 1), and floating devices are prohibited from 2,500 feet below the Lewis Street ramp to the ramp. Confidence: low to moderate.

Wild fish are mixed in, and the Snohomish Basin wild winter run is critically low (local sportsmen's leaders cite returns of 372 in 2018). Release all wild steelhead and avoid handling them.

6. Most favored lure and method

A float (bobber) and jig, in pink, peach, orange or black-and-red “nightmare,” often tipped with a prawn or roe. WDFW itself posted a hatchery winter steelhead caught that way on the Skykomish.

- **Float rig:** a local newspaper's how-to uses 15–20 lb mainline, a bobber stop and bead, then a bobber and an 8–12 lb fluorocarbon leader of 12–36 inches to the jig. A retailer's guide recommends glow tape on the float for pre-dawn fishing.
- **At Reiter and Cable Hole:** bobber and jig, swinging spoons and drift fishing all get recommended. Weekday mornings are less crowded.
- **Dirty, higher water:** back-trolled diving plugs in chrome, pink and purple, from a boat between Sultan and Monroe, and heavier spoons.

This is the consensus of published reports, forum posts and guide comments, not a catch-by-lure survey. I found no creel data that ranks lures for this river.

> **Regulation notes (eRegulations, updated Oct 5, 2026; confirm in the WDFW pamphlet and emergency-rule page before you fish)**
>
> - **Skykomish, mouth to Wallace River:** selective gear and one single-point barbless hook Nov 1–30, night closure in November; game fish open Nov 1–Jan 31.
> - **Wallace River to Big Eddy:** same November rules. **Big Eddy to the forks (Reiter section):** game fish Nov 1–Feb 15, no floating devices near the Reiter outlet. Statewide hatchery steelhead size and daily limit apply, with wild steelhead released.
> - **2026 closures I found:** all Skykomish fishing closed through Oct 31 (June 2 emergency rule); Skykomish salmon closed Nov 1–30 (Oct 22 rule); Snohomish River closed Oct 3–Nov 1.
> - Reiter's release goal is 140,000 winter smolts (WDFW, 2019). In low-return years WDFW can close the Reiter water with little notice to let fish reach the trap.

How the numbers were checked

- I downloaded all 231 weekly reports (Nov–Feb, 2013–2026) directly from WDFW and read the Winter Steelhead tables from the PDF text layer. In 708 of the 711 hatchery rows parsed (all facilities), the Adult Total equals on-hand + lethal spawned + released + shipped + mortality + surplus; the other three are off by one jack and are not Reiter rows.
- The same parse re-checked the 149 Whitehorse Pond numbers from the earlier Stillaguamish report with zero mismatches.
- Reiter's Adult Total includes fish WDFW moved there from the Wallace River Hatchery (the Wallace row comments say “Shipped to Reiter”).

Using this report. This is an independent analysis of public WDFW hatchery escapement reports, WDFW's smolt-release tables, published regulations and public fishing reports. It is not an official WDFW product. Hatchery counts are WDFW's preliminary numbers. Facts are as of Nov 3, 2026, and fishing rules in this area change with little notice, so confirm the current rules on WDFW's emergency-rules page or the Fish Washington app before you fish. Where a point rests on anglers' reports rather than counts or regulations, the text says so.

Sources

- WDFW hatchery escapement reports (weekly PDFs, 2013–2026)
- WDFW steelhead smolt releases
- Washington eRegulations, Puget Sound special rules S–Z
- WDFW, Snohomish Basin fisheries closed to protect wild Chinook (2026)
- Skykomish salmon closure, Nov 1–30, 2026 and June 2, 2026 closure
- WDFW emergency rule, Dec 17, 2019; Dec 2016 / Jan 2017 closure; Jan 2019 closure
- Riptide Fishing, Skykomish fishing spots; Everett Herald, Skykomish report; Everett Herald, early winter steelhead; Dispatch, Steelheading 101; Sportsman's Warehouse, winter steelhead spots