

Article Last Updated: 3/29/2006 10:33 PM

Relocating the salmonflies

Tight Lines

By Brett Prettyman
Tight Lines
Salt Lake Tribune

As a "fly fisher," I've heard that silly little joke about how hard it must be to find hooks small enough to catch insects more times than I care to remember.

A true group of "fly fishers" will make another effort to catch and relocate salmonflies from the Blacksmith Fork River to the Logan River in northern Utah on April 8.

But these flies are anything but little.

Last spring, volunteers from Cache Anglers, Utah Trout Unlimited and the Bureau of Land Management's BugLab at Utah State University, among others, gathered on the Blacksmith Fork to collect salmonfly nymphs and transport them to the Logan River in Logan Canyon.

The big bugs, the size of fingerling, have a historical presence in Logan Canyon and why they disappeared remains a mystery. Some avid anglers, including inquisitive entomology professor Mark Vinson at USU, were curious to see if *Pteronarcys californica* could still survive in the canyon. They met in the summer of 2004 to formulate a reintroduction plan.

The first of four relocations was held in spring 2005. By late May last year, salmonfly nymphs had crawled from the Logan River and burst from their exuvia with wings - undoubtedly into the mouths of pleasantly surprised trout, who haven't seen the seven-course meals since at least the mid-1970s.

Vinson is calling the reintroduction effort a success so far, but says it will take time to see if the salmonflies can become established once on the Logan. To help the process, four spring transplants will take place from the Blacksmith Fork, which connects with the Logan River on the west side of Logan City.

"From the standpoint of a fisherman, conservationist and a father who is interested in entomology from a fly-fishing standpoint, it has been a great success," said Chris Thomas, one of the original planners of the reintroduction and now president of Utah Trout Unlimited. "Most people who fly fish know how important salmonflies are to the biomass of a river, and what they could add to the sport on the Logan River. To be able to get a population started and being able to say you contributed is unusual for us common folk."

In addition to adding major calories to the Logan River food chain, anglers are hoping to one day find themselves in the thick of a major salmonfly hatch watching big trout gorge themselves on the fresh flies.

There are other benefits. Thomas' daughter, Madison, did her fifth-grade science project on salmonflies and the Logan River reintroduction. She earned an A.

The project, not Madison's mind you, has drawn international attention; volunteers showed up for last year's trapping from as far away as New York.

"The large community response is a sign of success as well. You wouldn't believe how many people contacted me

about this project or when I meet people around town, they'll say, 'Hey, you're that guy who is transplanting salmonflies. . . . My dad used to tell me about the great salmonfly hatches on the Logan back in the day.' "

Madison is not the only one who deserves an A. Here's to those who had the foresight to come up with the idea and then follow it through.

Contact Brett Prettyman at brettp@sltrib.com or 801-257-8902. Send comments to livingeditor@sltrib.com.

Salmonfly nymphs, catch and release

At 10 a.m. April 8, meet at the bridge at the mouth of Blacksmith Fork Canyon, on state Road 101 east of Hyrum. Bring waders to help collect salmonfly nymphs. After two hours, the group will head to Logan Canyon to release the nymphs. A cookout lunch sponsored by the BugLab at Utah State University will be held after the release. For more information, contact Chris Thomas at 435-797-3753 or chris.thomas@usu.edu.