

June 21: Wounded Warrior Fishing Day



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Steelheaders host 15 Wounded Warriors on a beautiful day at Green Peter

The weather was perfect, the fish were biting, and everyone had a good time June 21 at the first Wounded Warrior Fishing Day at Green Peter Reservoir.

Organized by the Mid-Valley Chapter of the Northwest Steelheaders, the event drew 15 mid-valley Wounded Warriors, veterans who were injured during active duty, for a morning of kokanee fishing.

The day started with a 5 a.m. briefing at Sunnyside Park, where boat assignments were made. Everyone was then shuttled to Green Peter for six hours of fishing, followed by a catered barbecue picnic.

In addition, all of the "guests of honor" received a fishing rod and reel, a gear bag, Northwest Steelheaders membership and hat, and a "thank you for your service" from all.

"We were blessed with beautiful skies, calm 'seas' and positive attitudes," said Ron Pockrus, the Steelheaders member who coordinated the event.

There were 10 boats, and 18 Steelheader crew members.

"I really enjoyed it," says Kevin Nygren, an Army veteran who lives in Millersburg. "It was a special time."

Nygren reeled in 15 kokanee. "It's like fishing for trout," he said. "Kokanee have softer mouths. When you set the hook, you've got to be careful. The hook can come right out of their mouth."

He also appreciated the opportunity to get together with fellow Wounded Warriors. "Sometimes you feel a bit isolated. Most people don't have the experiences that Wounded Warriors have had."

An Army captain, Nygren had done a tour of duty in Afghanistan and was about to head to Iraq in 2009 when he was seriously injured during a training exercise at Fort Stewart, Georgia. He was tackled from behind during a base defense exercise, injuring his knees, hip and lower back. He still deals with daily pain and faces hip replacement down the road.

Nygren is a disabilities analyst for the state of Oregon, and frequently fields benefits-related questions outside of work from veterans.

He hopes to do more fishing this summer, and would welcome another Wounded Warrior Fishing Day next year.

"We would love to have this continue," he said. "They (the Steelheaders) were great people to be around. You could tell they were supportive of wounded warriors."

Based on the response, Pockrus also hopes the fishing day becomes an annual event.

"It was a success because it got them out of their homes, the environment they're in so much, and put them in a positive environment in the great Oregon outdoors," he said. "We as a community can help them overcome their wounds."