

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Fact Sheet



Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) Named the state fish in 1961, the chinook salmon is the largest of the salmon species. Chinook salmon are also known as king salmon, tyee salmon, springer and blackmouth. They are prized by anglers for their large size and tremendous fight, and

by Native American tribes for cultural and spiritual reasons. Many tribes celebrate "First Salmon Ceremonies" with the first spring chinook harvested each year. Chinook can be recognized by dark-colored or black gums, irregular-shaped black spots on their backs and black spots covering the tail.

Where do chinook salmon live?

Chinook salmon are found in larger streams throughout Western Oregon and the Columbia River basin. They especially favor deep, large rivers. In Oregon, there are late spring and fall runs of Snake River chinook; spring and fall runs of Columbia River chinook; spring runs of Upper Willamette chinook; and spring and fall runs of chinook along the entire Oregon Coast. Juveniles have two rearing strategies. Chinook along the Oregon Coast and Lower Columbia spend a significant amount of time living in estuaries and lower river reaches before migrating to the ocean in the fall, while chinook in other areas remain in streams until they migrate.

What conservation issues affect chinook salmon?

Like all salmon, chinook need healthy streams with clean gravel, complex habitat and cool temperatures for spawning and rearing. Juvenile chinook also need healthy estuaries with cover and ample food. Easy upstream and downstream passage is necessary to ensure chinook can migrate at the right times to complete rearing and spawning. The Oregon Conservation Strategy highlights freshwater aquatic and estuaries as habitats that need our help.

How can Oregonians help chinook salmon?

- Maintain or restore water quality. See the Water Quality Management Plans on the Department of Environmental Quality's Web site for more information.
- Maintain or restore healthy estuaries, including salt marshes, where juveniles feed and grow to maturity.
- Maintain or restore complex stream habitats:
- Plant trees along streams
- Allow streams to interact with their floodplains
- Contact local watershed councils or ODFW for assistance.
- Follow in-water work guidelines to minimize activities during vulnerable periods of spawning. See ODFW's webpage for information on specific, local timing guidelines.

Did you know?

Chinook salmon lay their eggs in the largest gravel of any salmon. This allows the eggs to be protected from the higher river flows that occur in the winter. Chinook salmon may spend between 1 and 8 years in the ocean before returning to their home rivers to spawn, though the average is 3 to 4 years. Chinook typically use estuarine systems more than other salmon species.

the OREGON
CONSERVATION
STRATEGY

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