

Salmon Basics

The Columbia River Basin provides habitat for six species of anadromous salmon: chinook, coho, chum, sockeye, pink, and steelhead. Anadromous salmon hatch in fresh water rivers and tributaries, where they rear for a year or two. They migrate to the ocean, where they mature. Two to five years later, they return to their place of origin to spawn.

Salmon abundance is cyclical. It rises and falls in accordance with natural conditions. Long-term changes in climate, atmospheric pressure, and water temperature create ocean conditions that are sometimes favorable to salmon survival and sometimes not. Short-term weather patterns – hot summers and cold winters – can also affect survival rates.

It's a difficult journey from egg to spawning adult which is why Mother Nature equips spawning female salmon with 5,000 eggs! Only about 2 percent of all salmon hatched will live to adulthood – highest mortality occurs early in the lifecycle when the eggs emerge from the gravel.

Other important mortality factors include natural predators, such as birds, other fish, sea lions and disease. There are also man-made impediments like dams, pollution, habitat destruction, and ocean, commercial, sport and tribal fishing. With so many obstacles to adulthood, adult salmon that make the arduous journey from the ocean to spawn in their natal streams are vitally important to sustaining the species.



Northwest RiverPartners is a partnership of farmers, electric utilities, ports, and large and small businesses in the Pacific Northwest. We are dedicated to ensuring the Columbia and Snake remain living, working rivers to benefit families and businesses in the region.

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