

The Life of Chinook Salmon

Spawning is the ultimate goal in the life of a Pacific salmon. Both males and females will die in the river, in the same spot they were born. Their bodies will provide food for a host of creatures, from raccoons and crows, to aquatic insects.



Eggs



Salmon start their lives as small eggs buried in gravel nests, called redds, in freshwater streams. The eggs stay hidden in the gravel until they're ready to hatch.

Circle of Life

Chinook salmon, like all Pacific salmon, live an anadromous life cycle. They are born in freshwater rivers and streams like Salvador Creek, then travel to the ocean where they feed and grow. After a few years, they return to the same stream where they were born to lay eggs, restarting the salmon life cycle.



Spawning Adult



As salmon return upriver to spawn, their bodies adapt to freshwater, change color, and grow hooked jaws. After laying fertilized eggs in new redds, they die, completing their life cycle.

Alevin



Eggs "hatch" into tiny salmon called alevins which still have a yolk sac attached to their bellies to feed them as they grow. Typically, these young fish will stay near their redd.

Jack/Adult



Once salmon reach the ocean, they are considered adults. Depending on the species, most adult salmon stay in the ocean anywhere from 1-6 years while they eat and grow rapidly. Jacks are salmon that return to their freshwater stream earlier than their counterparts and are often smaller in size.



Smolt



As fry prepare to enter the ocean their bodies adapt as they swim downriver. Smolts start to develop shiny, silver scales and will continue to adapt as they swim towards the ocean.

Fry



After alevins have fully absorbed their yolk sac, they become fry. Once fry have left their redd, they search for food and try to avoid being eaten. During this stage, fry begin swimming downstream.



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Tiny Fish, Big Future

Salmon Nursery in Salvador Creek



Adult salmon return to the creek where they were born to lay their eggs, ending their long journey from the ocean. These fish are weak and vulnerable as they spawn, so please leave the fish undisturbed. After they lay their eggs, the babies hatch here, grow, swim to the ocean, then return years later to repeat the cycle.



Stay on the Trails

Avoid shortcuts or contact with the water. Erosion and silt can suffocate eggs and baby fish. Leaving the creek undisturbed gives these fish their best chance at surviving to adulthood.

Watch Your Step

Walking on spawning beds can harm eggs and baby fish. Please do not disturb the fish, the creekbed, or its surroundings.



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