



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet

Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*)



tourism.oregonstate.edu/chinook-salmon-oncorhynchus-tshawytscha/

By
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September 8, 2020

The Chinook salmon is an important keystone species for the U.S. Pacific Northwest. It is a vital food source for a diversity of wildlife, including orca whales, bears, seals, and large birds of prey.

Chinook salmon is prized by people who harvest salmon both commercially and for sport. Chinook are the largest Pacific salmon species.



Chinook salmon

Big guys

On average, these fish are 3 feet long and weigh approximately 30 pounds. Some individuals can grow to over 5 feet long and 110 pounds!

Chinook salmon live about three to seven years. Juvenile salmon stay in freshwater habitat for the first year or so, before moving to the estuaries and then the open ocean. Estuaries provide a lot of food and nutrients to the developing salmon.

Return to breed

The fish spend approximately two to four years feeding in the ocean before returning to the spawning grounds to breed and die.

Endangered

The Chinook Salmon is on the U.S. Endangered Species List. The Sacramento River winter-run population in California is classified as endangered wherever it is found.

Other naturally spawned populations in California, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington are classified as threatened. Why the Chinook and other Pacific Northwest salmon have declined is no mystery.

4 H's

The causes are known as “the four H’s”: harvest, habitat, hatcheries, and hydroelectric power.

Harvest refers to the overfishing by commercial fishing interests.

Habitat refers to degradation of a species home range, usually by pollutants. Another example would be increases in water sediments making a stream uninhabitable by the salmon or their eggs.

Captive-bred **hatchery** fish, released in the waterways used by native fish, compete and interbreed with the natives and weaken their stocks.

Hydroelectric dams have had perhaps the largest impact, blocking migration routes. Flood control and power generation were the original goals of these dams, rather than fish. As such, the dam construction changed the quality, quantity, rate of flow, temperature of the water, and species mix in rivers, lakes, and tributary streams.

Protection of Chinook salmon is crucial to maintain healthy Pacific Northwest ecosystems and to provide a delicious food source for years to come.