



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet Coho Salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*)



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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Coho Salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*)

 tourism.oregonstate.edu/coho-salmon-oncorhynchus-kisutch/

By colliiek2

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The Pacific Fishery Management Council finalized recommendations for the 2020 ocean salmon season recently. Forecasts for Columbia basin hatchery Coho Salmon abundance are very poor this year. Recreational Coho quotas were reduced from what was available in 2019. (<https://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/salmon/>)



Coho that has returned to fresh water. (Courtesy of NOAA)

It hasn't always been this way

The State of Oregon in February 1995 considered listing Coho, sometimes called Silvers, as a threatened or endangered species. At that time, findings did not justify the listing for either State or Federal designations.

In 1998, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) authorized the first selective hatchery Coho (fin-clipped) fisheries. These selective fisheries allowed limited, but successful, targeted Coho salmon fisheries to resume the development of Coho.

By 2011, small scale non-selective Coho seasons opened along the Central Coast in September. Oregon Coastal Natural (OCN) Coho had made a strong recovery.

This September season proven to be an effective management option because it targeted abundant OCN Coho and limited fishery impacts on other Coho populations of concern.

Fast forward to 2020

These September seasons continue to be very popular with the angling public. ODFW created a great snapshot for Coho and Chinook salmon limitations and seasons in three general areas along the Oregon Coast. Download a copy of '2020 Recreational Ocean Salmon Season' one-page map at:

https://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/salmon/Regulations/docs/2020_Rec_Ocean_Salmon_Season_Map.pdf.

Lookalikes

In the ocean, Coho and Chinook salmon can look very similar. Anglers must correctly identify the species of salmon being caught in order to follow regulations. Restrictions, such as legal lengths and seasons, often vary based on the species.

Anglers who incorrectly identify their catch may, and be in conflict with regulations, could have their fish confiscated and pay a fine.

Avoid identification problems

Coho have a distinct banding pattern on their lower jaw that ODFW considers as the single best way to identify them. There are dark bands on the inside and outside of the gum line and a white gum line in the middle. The back border can be very narrow.

Other distinctive markings include spots on the upper lobe of their tails. The sides of the Coho also become red when they return to freshwater. Their backs, heads, and fins will become dark greenish color.

Coho are one of five species of Pacific salmon

Coho spawn in freshwater, yet spend a great deal of their lives in the ocean. Spawning and juvenile rearing usually occurs in tributary streams or lakes that contain a lot of small gravel. In-stream structures, such as large and small woody debris, and tree-lined banks attract Coho. These structures can help control water temperature and provide protection from predators.

The juvenile smolts migrate to the ocean in the spring of their second year. Some males, known individually as a "Jack" return to the freshwater. The number of jacks returning is a fairly accurate abundance predictor for the fall. A two-year-old Coho may be more than

two feet long and weigh eight pounds.

Heavy Eaters

During the next 16-20 months, Coho feed heavily in offshore waters. Their diet includes small fish such as herring, sandlance, anchovies, and sardines. Sometimes it also includes juvenile pink and chum salmon and sablefish. Some Coho will overwinter in-land in streams and lakes.

Coho return in the late summer or fall as a 3- or 4-year old to spawn in their natal streams. All Coho salmon die after spawning. Adults may reach 25 pounds or more, and rarely exceeding 15 pounds.

Human Interface

Coho salmon are high in protein and excellent table fare. Indigenous people have revered Coho as a food staple and symbol of life and sustenance.

Ocean and climate, habitat loss, and degraded water quality changes impact Coho populations. State and Federal agencies carefully monitor fish stocks to prevent over fishing, and promote restoration and conservation efforts.

References and additional information:

- 2020 Oregon Sportfishing Regulations” booklet
- ODFW has several online articles (see <https://myodfw.com>).
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has a very thorough page on Coho (see <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/coho-salmon>).