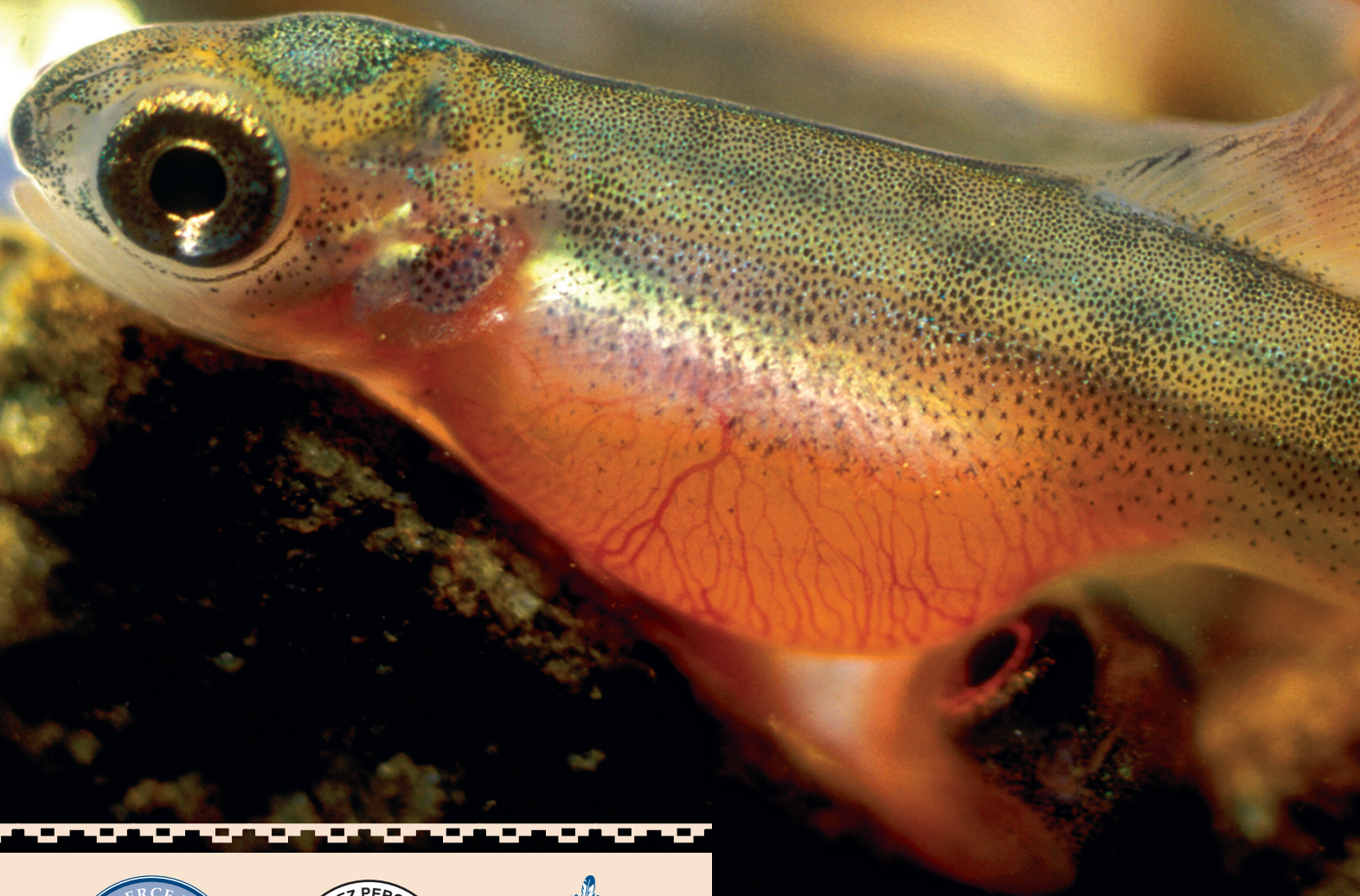


Snake River Fall Chinook Recovery

A tribal success story



To restore Snake River fall chinook salmon, the Nez Perce Tribe, in coordination with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA Fisheries, and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has implemented hatchery reform to bring back the fish from the brink of extinction.

In the early 1900's, Snake River fall chinook were widely distributed from the mouth of the Snake River upstream to Shoshone Falls in southern Idaho more than 900 miles from the ocean. As late as the 1930's, fall chinook returns in the Snake River numbered 500,000 adults.



The major Snake River subbasins that are part of this restoration effort are indicated in red.

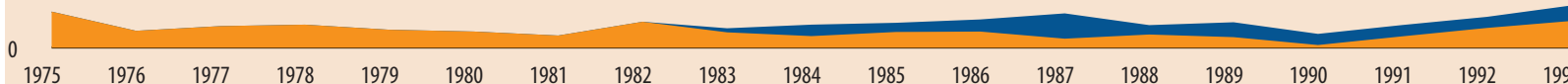
The construction of dams on the Snake River, beginning with Swan Falls in 1901 and continuing with the Hells Canyon Dam Complex in the 1950s and the Lower Snake River dams in later years eliminated or severely degraded 530 miles, or 80%, of the historical habitat. The most productive of that habitat was upriver from the site of Hells Canyon Dam, which has no fish passage. A precipitous decline of Snake River fall chinook followed with only 78 wild adults observed at Lower Granite Dam in 1990.

NOAA's response to the listing of Snake River fall chinook under the Endangered Species Act in 1992 threatened the tribal fall season fishery, the remaining tribal commercial fishery. In 1994 NOAA sought to restrict the tribal fishery under the ESA setting the stage for a potential landmark conflict between tribal treaty rights and the ESA.

- **NOAA's goal:** cut the tribal fishery to increase the fall chinook at Lower Granite Dam by 24 fish.
- **The tribes' goal:** fairly allocate the burden of conserving the salmon among all sources of mortality, establish a connection between hatcheries and harvest while developing a program that would benefit Snake River fall chinook and allow the tribes to exercise their treaty reserved fishing rights.

With the stage set, U.S. District Court Judge Malcolm Marsh warned the parties that while he was willing to hear this case, not everyone would like the outcome. The tribes were risking their treaties signed in 1855 and the federal government was risking the Endangered Species Act. Taking his warning to heart, both parties began negotiating.

The agreement reached by the parties led to a cutting-edge hatchery program that allows the Nez Perce Tribe to supplement natural chinook populations with hatchery-reared fish of the same stock. The agreement spurred the development and issuance of Secretarial Order #3206 by the secretaries of Interior and Commerce, which





Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery

Located on the banks of the Clearwater River in Idaho, the Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery Complex began operations in 2003. This is the main facility supporting the Clearwater River component of the Snake River fall chinook program. At the facility, the tribe strives to preserve the genetic integrity of affected fish populations while enhancing harvest opportunities for treaty Indian and non-Indian fishers. The Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery Complex uses several semi-natural rearing techniques to encourage hatchery-reared fish to behave like their wild counterparts.

Total hatchery (shown in blue) and natural origin (shown in orange) Snake River fall chinook salmon counts at Lower Granite Dam. The year the Snake River Fall Chinook Recovery Program began is circled in red.



facilities in the Snake River Basin as well as the Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery were essential to the implementation of the program. The tribes secured the initial funding for the program through the U.S. Congress. In 1996, Congress instructed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to construct acclimation facilities under the Lower Snake River Compensation Plan. Today the Nez Perce Tribe operates and maintains three acclimation facilities at Captain John Rapids, Pittsburgh Landing and Big Canyon under the LSRCP in addition to the Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery.

seeks to harmonize the federal government's duties to the tribes and the ESA.

Hatchery Production

The details of the Snake River Fall Chinook Program were refined in 1995 through *U.S. v. Oregon* processes, when the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes reached an agreement with state and federal agencies to begin supplementation of Snake River fall chinook above Lower Granite Dam. The development of numerous rearing and acclimation



Together, these facilities release approximately 450,000 yearling and 2.8 million sub-yearling fall chinook smolts each year into the Clearwater and Snake rivers. These releases have dramatically increased the number of natural and hatchery origin adult fall chinook returning above Lower Granite Dam. Many of them spawn naturally, their offspring helping to increase the natural origin fish returns.

A Shared Success

The higher returns of Snake River fall chinook in recent years allowed co-managers to open their first fall chinook fishery in the Snake River in 35 years in 2009. This fishery has occurred each year since then.

Although there has been a significant increase in the number of fall chinook adult returns and redds as a result of tribal efforts, the productivity of natural and hatchery origin fall chinook returns is still being evaluated. In the meantime, local Indian and non-Indian fishers in the Snake River are experiencing a bounty unseen since the construction of the dams.

The Road to Recovery

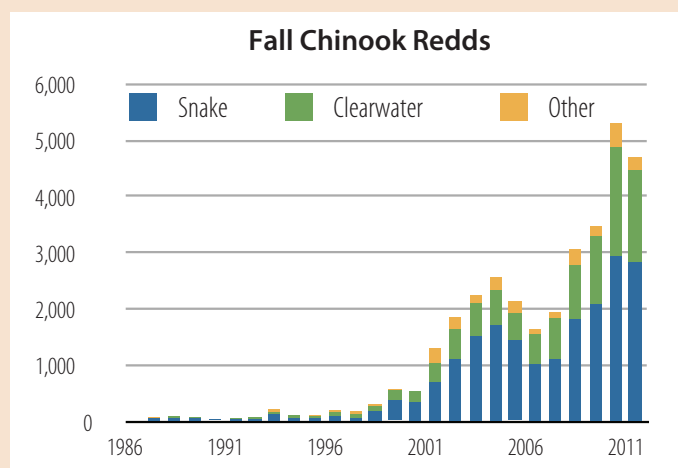
Adult fall chinook salmon returns have increased from less than 1,000 adults to Lower Granite Dam annually from 1975-1995 to a record count of more than 41,000 in 2010. The natural origin adult return in 2010 was just under 10,000 fish, which was a record since the construction of Lower Granite Dam



Multiple salmon nests or "redds" are visible on this stretch of the Clearwater River. Photo courtesy Nez Perce Tribal Fisheries.

in 1975. The 2011 return was the second highest at just under 8,000 natural origin adults.

NOAA has discussed an abundance goal of 2,500-3,000 natural origin Snake River fall chinook for potential de-listing even though no formal recovery criteria has been established. The progeny of the Fall Chinook Acclimation Program and the Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery spawners are considered listed under the Endangered Species Act when they return to spawn. The tribal program will aid in ESA recovery of the Snake River fall chinook while helping support Snake River, Columbia River, and ocean fisheries.



For More Information

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