

## Clark County, Washington Endangered Species Act Information

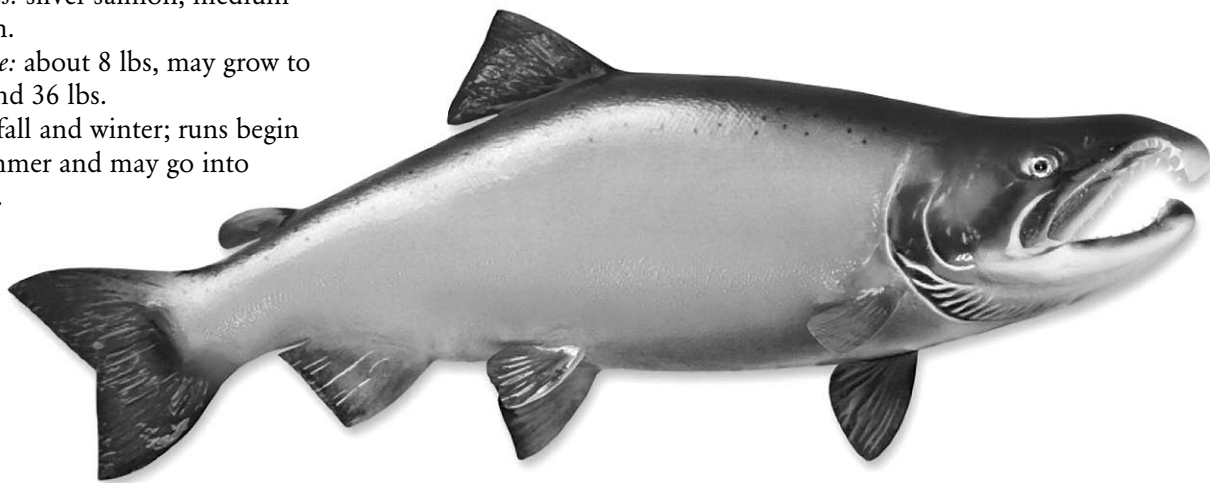
# Coho Salmon

*Oncorhynchus kisutch*

*Other names:* silver salmon, medium red salmon.

*Average size:* about 8 lbs, may grow to 2 ½ feet and 36 lbs.

*Spawn in:* fall and winter; runs begin in late summer and may go into December.



**C**olumbia River natural coho were listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act in 2005.

### **What are Coho salmon?**

Coho salmon are anadromous fish, which means they are born in freshwater, migrate to the ocean, and then return to freshwater to spawn. Anadromous fish benefit from both freshwater and marine habitats. Freshwater streams have fewer predators and are safer for the development of young fish. Marine habitats have more abundant food and may support more rapid growth and larger fish.

### **Habitat and life history**

Coho spawn in tributaries to larger rivers from mid-October until January. They need cold water and stable gravel substrates. Females prepare several nests called redds, in which

they lay their eggs. The eggs incubate for six to eight weeks before hatching into yolk sac larvae. The larvae remain in the gravel until the yolk sac is absorbed and then emerge as fry from January through April. Sediment can choke and suffocate these vulnerable young fish.

After they emerge, the fry spend more than a year growing in freshwater streams before turning into smolts capable of breathing in salt water. While in freshwater the fry eat plankton and insects. These fish live in smaller tributaries, river edges, sloughs, and off-channel ponds while they are growing. They are about four to five inches long when they begin their migration as smolts to the ocean during the spring run-off.

After acclimating to salt water in the Columbia River estuary, the smolts migrate out to sea. While in the ocean, coho eat smaller fish and

grow rapidly. They return to the estuary at age three or four. From there, they seek out the stream in which they were born to spawn.

### **Why are coho numbers declining?**

While fish populations have always fluctuated, there has been a steady downward trend in returning numbers of coho. Natural causes include flooding, predators, and ocean conditions, but the main causes of the steady declines are due to human activity. These include over harvest, hatchery productions that overwhelm natural spawners, hydropower facilities that block migrations, and degraded habitat in streams, rivers and estuaries. Some human activities have also increased the success of natural predators such as birds, seals, and sea lions.

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## What can we do to help?

There are many things we can do as individuals to help salmon recovery. Since we have the most direct impact on freshwater habitat, making sure streams have clean, cool water, plenty of food, and not too much sediment can decrease juvenile mortality. That means we can't allow stormwater run off to carry sediment and pollutants into streams; we can preserve shade along stream banks; and we can make sure there is a variety of native plants in riparian (streamside) areas to provide food. Trees that fall into streams help create pools for shelter and cool water, and protecting springs and seeps helps provide cool water. Wetlands provide filtration and side channels are a good refuge during high water. Making sure that fertilizers, pesticides, and large animals stay out of streams can help a lot.

For more information about coho salmon:

- Clark County ESA Program at [www.saveoursalmon.com](http://www.saveoursalmon.com) or call (360) 397-2022.
- Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board at [www.lcfrb.gen.wa.us](http://www.lcfrb.gen.wa.us).



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