

FISH FACTS

Chinook Salmon of the Napa River Watershed

 **Chinook salmon**, also known as king salmon, are by far the largest of all Pacific salmon. Four and five year old adults often grow to over 3 ft. long and tip the scales at 50 lbs. or more.

 Chinook are **anadromous** fish, meaning they are born in freshwater, migrate to the ocean, and return to freshwater as adults to spawn.

 While at sea, chinook are brilliant silver. As they move into freshwater, they darken to deep maroon or reddish brown. Spawning males are darker than females and develop a hooked snout, called a **kype**.

 Chinook in the Napa River Watershed are a **fall-run** species, meaning they begin to migrate from the ocean to their freshwater spawning grounds in the fall.

 In the Napa River Watershed, chinook salmon spawn between Yountville and Calistoga in areas of the river with suitable gravel and consistent flow.

 Spawning occurs throughout November and December, depending on flow conditions, with activity usually peaking near Thanksgiving.

 A salmon nest is called a **redd**. A female builds the redd by creating a depression with her tail (**caudal fin**) in the gravel on the stream bottom.

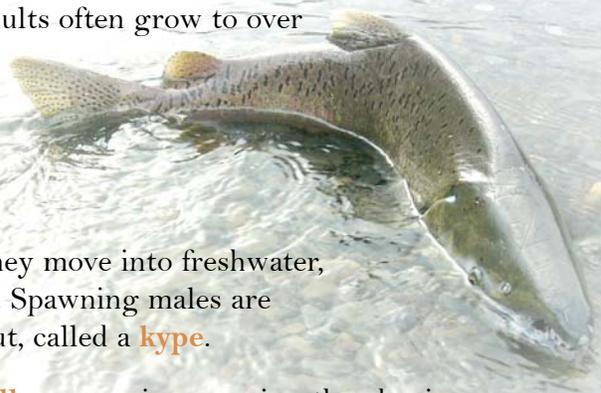
 Chinook die shortly after spawning and their decaying bodies contribute vital nutrients to the stream ecosystem.

 During the past several years, the Napa River Watershed has seen a surge in the number of chinook salmon spawning.

 In winter 2004 the Napa County Resource Conservation District (RCD) conducted field studies along a 3.5 mile stretch of the Napa River and found 62 spawning nests and over 100 spawning adults.

 The survey also showed that some of the fish were strays from fish hatcheries in the Central Valley. Regardless of their origin, it is possible that a self-sustaining population of chinook salmon is developing in the Napa River.

 For information about fishing regulations go to www.fgc.ca.gov/html/fishregs.html



Chinook salmon in Sulphur Creek, Dec. '04
Photo by Joe Wheaton

Good Places to See Chinook Salmon* in the Napa River Watershed

Calistoga Community Center

Veterans Memorial Park
in downtown Napa

Yountville Eco-Preserve

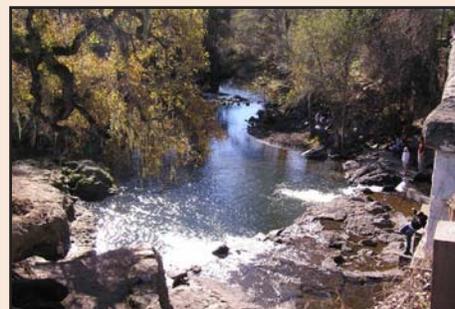
Zinfandel Lane bridge
near St. Helena

* Look for salmon at these locations during spawning season in Nov. and Dec. Some of these sites are next to private property. Please respect property lines.

If you see salmon call the RCD's
Salmon Hotline

707.252-4188 x109

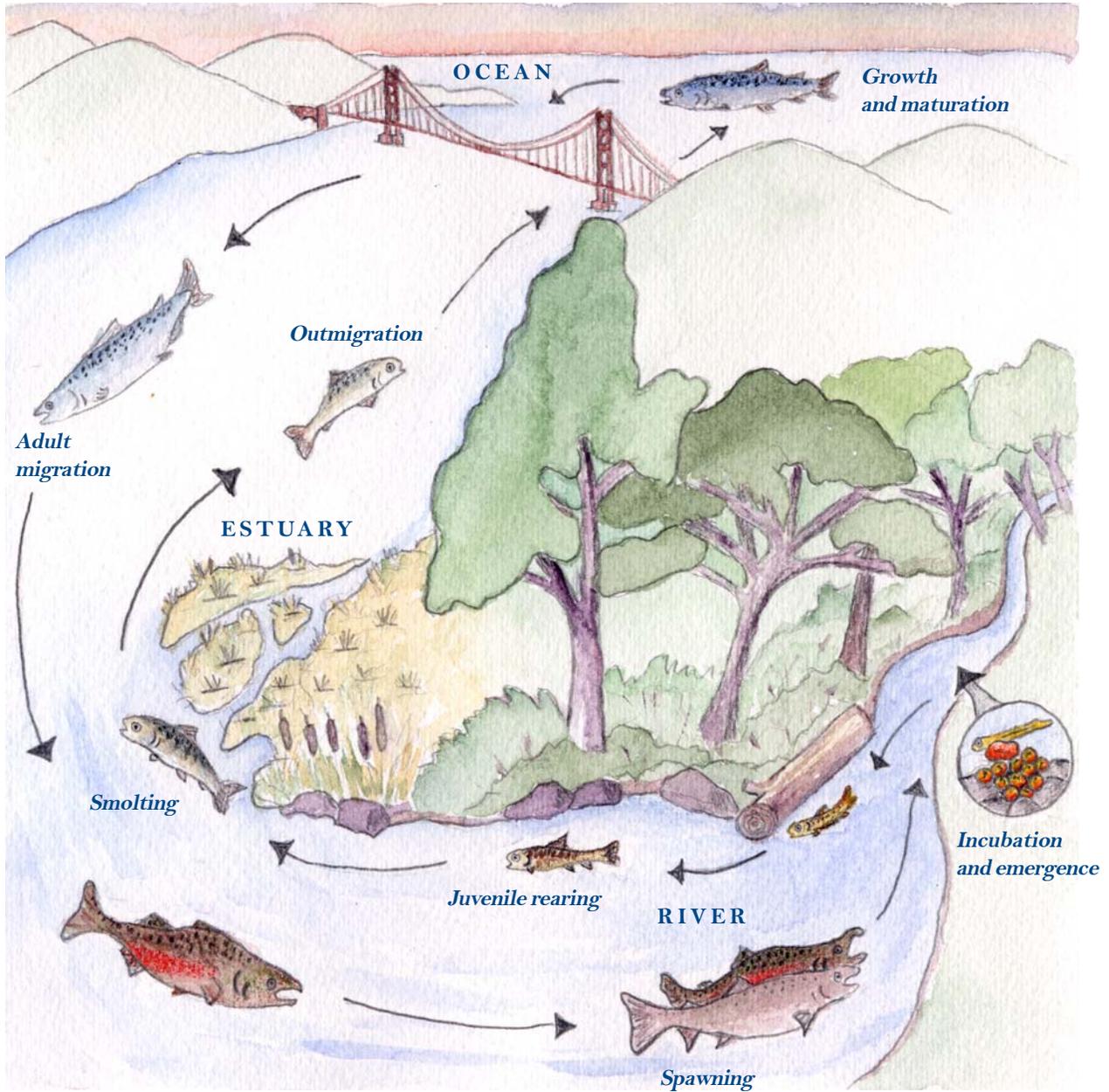
Report where, when, how many, and, if possible, color and approximate size. This data will help the RCD assess the status of their populations.



Watching salmon at the Zinfandel Ln. bridge, Dec. '05

Kathleen Edson

CHINOOK SALMON LIFE CYCLE



Artwork by Jenny McIlvaine

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF CHINOOK SALMON IN THE NAPA RIVER WATERSHED*													
Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct		
Adult migration													
Spawning													
		Egg incubation											
		Emergence											
		Juvenile rearing				Juvenile rearing in the Napa River Estuary							
		Smolting											

* There is tremendous variation within any given salmon population. This is a generalized description of their life history in the Napa River Watershed.

This fact sheet was prepared by Jenny McIlvaine of the Napa County Resource Conservation District (RCD) with assistance from RCD Senior Biologist Jonathan Koehler and funded through Napa County's Watershed Education Program coordinated by the Conservation Division of the Napa County Conservation, Development and Planning Department.