



NEWS RELEASE

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CHINOOK SALMON RELEASED IN HISTORIC HABITAT



(Nespelem, Wash. August 19, 2021) – Recently, hundreds of adult summer chinook were released upstream of Grand Coulee and Chief Joseph dams.

The releases are part of a huge undertaking by the Colville Confederated Tribes (CCT) to reconnect salmon to their historic habitat.

In July and August, 235 adult chinook were released in the Sanpoil. On August 16, 107 adult chinook were released in Lake Rufus Woods just behind Chief Joseph Dam. The chinook were surplus hatchery fish from the Douglas County PUD's Wells Hatchery.

Casey Baldwin, research scientist for Colville Tribes' Fish and Wildlife (CTFW), said that all of the fish were PIT tagged.

“In the Sanpoil, the PIT tags will tell us if they move out of the river or up the West Fork. In Lake Rufus Woods, the PIT tags will tell us if they move into the Nespelem River, or if they fall back through Chief Joseph Dam and go to a hatchery or a tributary.”

Since 2019, the CCT have held several cultural and educational releases to reintroduce salmon into blocked areas of the Columbia River.

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“The CCT have been waiting patiently for salmon to return to the upper Columbia (above Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee dam) for over 80 years,” said Joe Peone, director for CTFW. “But now we are taking steps to make it happen. We have transported hundreds of adult salmon around the dams in the last few years.

Peone says the tribes will continue to release salmon into waters above the blocked area in years to come and that there are plans in the works to trap and haul sockeye in the future. “It is critical that the CCT take a leadership role in restoring salmon to their historic natal waters.”

This fall, fisheries staff will go to the release sites and monitor the fish along the Sanpoil River and in the upper watershed to observe the fish spawning.



“In 2020, we observed a lot of spawning near the release sites and this year, we put some fish in the same locations but we also put some fish lower down river, so it will be interesting to see how they do compared to the upper release sites,” said Baldwin. “Next spring, our juvenile trout monitoring program will be able to document out-migrating salmon smolts. We will be able to put tags in them and document their journey to the ocean, and if we are lucky, perhaps even see a few adults return to the Columbia.”

The CCT, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT) and other stakeholders have been working on salmon reintroduction for years.

“As a Colville Tribal citizen, to participate and witness the cultural and educational releases of salmon continues to inspire me and we have also heard the same reaction from so many throughout the region about the incredible potential of returning salmon to its historic habitat,” said Executive Director for UCUT, DR Michel. “The recently completed Phase 2 Implementation Plan cites the cultural and educational releases as key activities to provide data that will inform how future fish passage facilities will be designed and placed in the blocked area of the Columbia River. The Phase 2 Implementation Plan is being shared with resource managers throughout the region, it will be a living document that will continue to be developed and improved as information and data are gathered.”

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Goals of the cultural and educational releases include:

- Meet cultural and ceremonial needs of the tribes by reconnecting salmon with their historic habitat and reconnecting people with the salmon.
- Contribute to knowledge about movement, survival, and behavior of fish in the streams, reservoirs and dams that will answer key uncertainties or better inform the development of experimental designs for studies in later phases of reintroduction.
- Provide opportunity for salmon to spawn in the natural environment to generate offspring for downstream fisheries and future stock for additional reintroductions.
- Ecosystem benefits such as reintroduction of marine derived nutrients for stream, riparian, forest and wildlife.

