

Why Hatchery Fish?

When settlers first arrived in the Pacific Northwest, they found fish in virtually every stream, from the Columbia to tiny tributaries. Canneries were set up on most rivers with millions of pounds of salmon pressed into tins. At the same time, rivers were compromised by logging, mining, agriculture, and, later, urbanization. Even as late as the 1950s, new sections of Highway 101 were built across estuaries and coastal streams, eliminating entire runs of anadromous fish. People couldn't imagine that the huge runs would ever fail to appear.



Commercial harvest, Astoria, 1905.

As early as the late 1800s, hatcheries were built in an attempt to replace the natural runs. As dams were constructed, mitigation hatcheries appeared, in the belief that they would replace the wild fish that could no longer reach their spawning grounds. Today, we depend upon hatchery fish to provide a fishery for both sport and commercial fishermen.



Anglers are much more likely to catch a hatchery fish in most major sport fisheries in Oregon. Without hatchery fish, there wouldn't be much to catch and there wouldn't be much interest in fishing. Without interest in sport fisheries, rural economies that thrive during productive fishing seasons would suffer great losses, and anglers would not feel compelled to protect our rivers and lands for future generations of outdoor recreationalists.

Excess hatchery fish provide thousands of pounds of protein to local area food banks and shelters. Volunteers process tens of thousands of food quality hatchery salmon for needy families in rural and urban areas. Salmon that arrive at the hatchery in excess will feed thousands of hungry Oregonians a healthy protein source that is typically out of range for low income families.



Excess hatchery fish also provide an incredible nutrient base for starved ecosystems that historically had healthy runs of wild salmon and steelhead. The Steelheaders have invested heavily in equipment to enable volunteers to disperse hatchery carcasses back into remote areas to benefit the next generation of salmon as well as an entire forest ecosystem that has been starved since we began drastically altering our landscape.

Emerging science may help us answer how to manage our hatchery populations better, but, until our wild ecosystems can sustain strong rural economies and keep young anglers engaged in our sport, we're going to need hatchery fish. The Association of Northwest Steelheaders is going to keep fighting for our rights to produce hatchery salmon and steelhead for a long time into the future.



Association of Northwest Steelheaders

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