# Spring Chinook

### First Salmon, Last Chance

Across the Pacific Northwest, spring Chinook salmon transcend the iconic, traveling thousands of miles to their home rivers as early as March, long before any other salmon species.

Spring Chinook are the beating heart of complex food webs that sustain resident orcas and spirit bears. For millennia, they have centered salmon communities like the Yurok and Karuk people of California. They are our identity. And after 150 years of increasing, unprecedented threats, they are on the brink of extinction.

There is hope. Breakthroughs in conservation science are unlocking the secrets of this amazing fish, and powerful, grassroots efforts are reasserting Indigenous knowledge in how we manage salmon rivers.

But with spring Chinook runs in a tailspin, we must act, and fast. If we don't, we'll almost surely be the last people to live with the first salmon.



\*2020 Joint Staff Report: Stock Status and Fisheries for Spring Chinook, Summer Chinook, Sockeye, Steelhead, and Other Species (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife).



## **C** This is the last chance for a species that's about to go extinct."

—Charley Reed, Hoopa Valley Tribal member, Karuk cultural practitioner, and descendant of the Yurok people

#### **SPRING CHINOOK ON THE BRINK**

- Over the last 25 years, the average smoltto-adult return ratio for wild spring Chinook dropped to less than 1% (4-6% SAR is needed for recovery) across their range.
- In California, spring Chinook are extinct in the Shasta and Scott Rivers. On the Salmon River, a key Klamath tributary, just 106 springers were counted in 2020.
- On the Snake River, spring Chinook have seen a 19% annual decline in returning fish over the last decade.
- In Oregon, fall Chinook are replacing the Rogue River's renowned spring run as a dam blocks access to exclusive spring Chinook habitat.
- In the Salish Sea, Southern Resident orcas are disappearing alongside Fraser River spring Chinook, which have declined by more than 70% since 2015.



#### SPRING CHINOOK ACTION PLAN

- Remove the Klamath and Snake River dams
- Empower Indigenous knowledge in salmon management practices
- Increase endangered species protections for spring Chinook across their range
- Improve the access of spring Chinook to exclusive spawning habitat
- Promote the use of selective fishing tools like weirs, wheels, pound nets, and dip nets
- Decrease incidental mortality rates in recreational and commercial fisheries
- Reduce competition from hatchery salmon

#### Saving a True Climate Survivor

Hundreds of thousands of years ago, a tiny genetic mutation changed everything for one Pacific salmon species. GREB1L, the DNA variation that dictates early freshwater return, drives spring Chinook to hopscotch high up rainand-snowmelt-swollen rivers to claim coldwater habitat that other salmon species can't reach.

This genetic advantage helped spring Chinook thrive despite ice ages and floods, predators and natural disasters. It could help them adapt now to rapid climate change. But first, we must remove the human barriers blocking their success.

**66** The science is finally clear on this: if you lose a spring Chinook run, it's gone for good. We're running out of time for the Klamath and many other rivers." —Dr. Matt Sloat, Wild Salmon Center Science Director



Wild Salmon Center works with Tribes, First Nations, scientists, governmental agencies, and conservation groups to develop and implement science-based strategies for salmon conservation. For more about WSC's spring Chinook campaign, visit wildsalmoncenter.org/spring-chinook.