



Fishing in the Valdez Area

Valdez

Valdez is located at the head of a fjord in Eastern Prince William Sound (PWS). The Valdez Arm supports the largest sport fishery in PWS and the largest pink salmon commercial fishery in the state. Anglers fishing from Valdez account for nearly one-half of the fishing effort in PWS. Valdez is home to about 4,500 year-round residents, but the population swells considerably in the summer. Visitors can arrive by air via a 35 minute flight from Anchorage, road (305 miles from Anchorage and 365 miles from Fairbanks), and sea via the Alaska Marine Highway System ferries.

Understanding Sport Fish Regulations

Every year ADF&G releases four sport fishing regulations booklets for the Northern, Southcentral, Southeast, and Southwest areas. Sport fishing regulations specific to the Valdez area such as bag and possession limits, seasons, tackle, or bait limits can be found in the current Southcentral Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet.

These booklets are free of charge and are available at ADF&G offices, wherever sport fishing licenses are sold, and online at www.adfg.alaska.gov under the Regulations tab. Before you cast out your line, make sure you read all the regulations for the waters you are fishing. Don't forget to check for advisory announcements and emergency orders on the ADF&G website at www.adfg.alaska.gov. Anglers can find advisory announcements and emergency orders on the ADF&G website under the Sport Fishing tab. Select the Fishing Information link

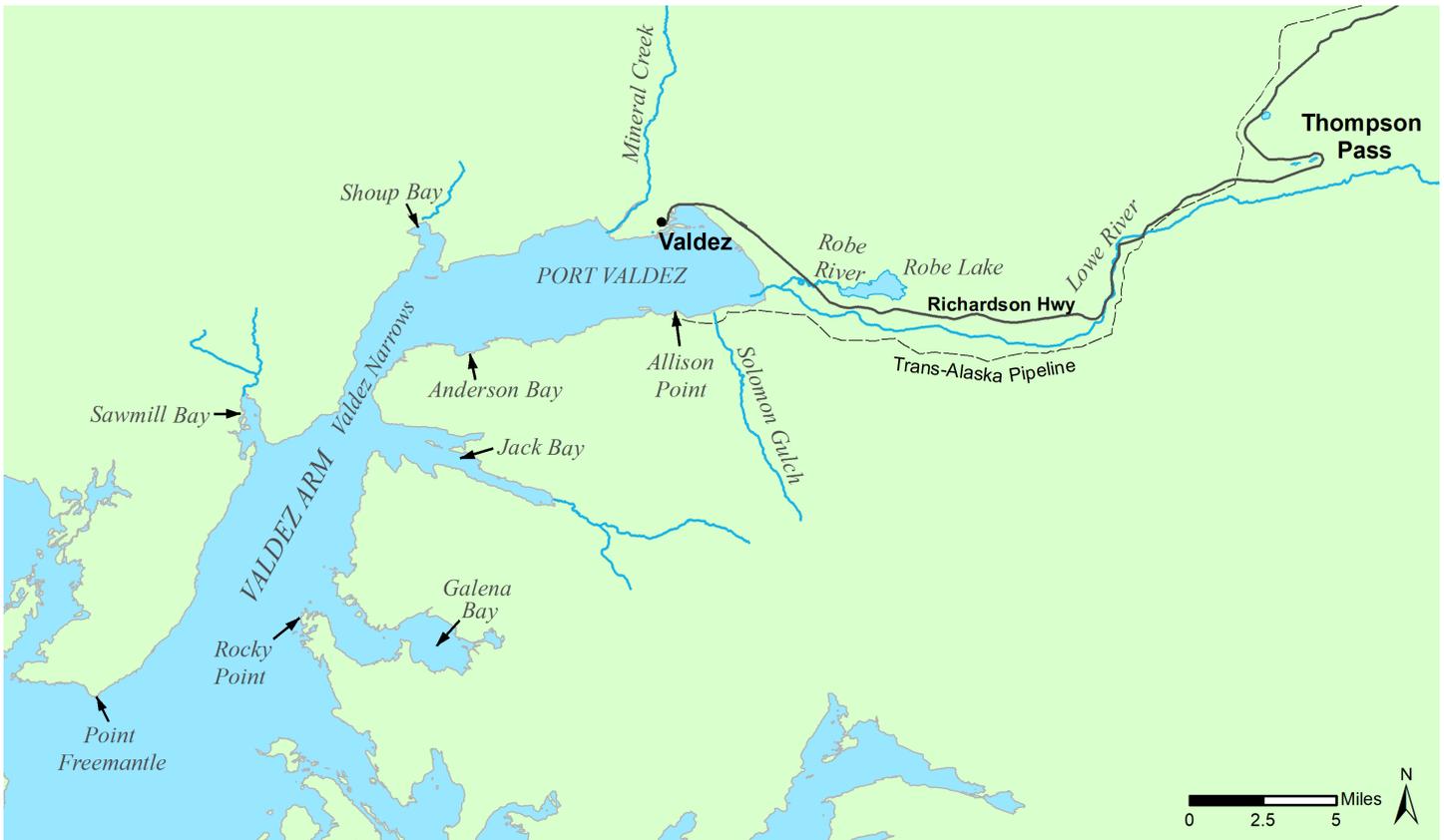


Photo: Brendan McCabe

and then the Emergency Orders and News Releases tab. Once there, anglers can select the region and management area they intend to fish. ADF&G may issue an advisory announcement and emergency order to open, liberalize, close, or restrict any fishery at any time due to biological needs. In the event an advisory announcement and emergency order is issued, ADF&G attempts to release the documents a minimum of 24 to 48 hours before it becomes effective.

During the summer ADF&G posts weekly in-season fishing reports online. Anglers can find these under the Fishing Reports tab under the Fishing Information tab. ADF&G staff records these in-season fishing reports on the Prince William Sound sport fishing hotline at (907) 267-2504. The Division of Commercial Fish (DCF) updates an in-season fishing hotline at (907) 424-7535. Anglers can also subscribe to receive the notifications via their email. Updates are also posted on the ADF&G - Sport Fishing Southcentral Alaska Facebook page. If you have any questions, please contact the Cordova ADF&G office at (907) 424-3212 or the Anchorage ADF&G office at (907) 267-2218.





There is an active commercial fishery in the PWS area, so please be careful around their boats and nets. The DCF webpage has a wealth of information including in-season harvest reports. For additional information, please visit the ADF&G webpage at www.adfg.alaska.gov and select the Commercial Fishing tab. Anglers may also contact the ADF&G DSF central regional office at (907) 267-2105.

Fisheries

Both the Division of Commercial Fisheries and the Division of Sport Fish maintain fish weirs and sonar projects in order to help with in-season management. In addition, private, non-profit hatcheries may have weir projects set up. When available, weir counts and sonar estimates can be found on the ADF&G Sport Fish webpage under the “Fish Count” tab.

Fishing Regulations

PWS is a vast area and it has sport fishing regulations affecting bag and possession limits, tackle, areas open to fishing, and hours open to fishing. Please review the current Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet before you go fishing. Don't forget to read the PWS “General Regulations,” “Fresh Water Special Regulations,” and “Salt Water Special Regulations” sections. Anglers can either pick up a hardcopy of the Southcentral regulations booklets at local ADF&G offices and sporting good stores, or review it online on the ADF&G website.

Fish Identification

Coho salmon or king salmon? Pelagic rockfish or nonpelagic rockfish? You'll find a fish identification guide in the back of the current Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet and online at <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=animals.listfish>. The identification guide does not include all the rockfish species in Alaska but provides the most common pelagic and nonpelagic species caught.



Photo: Brendan McCabe

Pink Salmon

Solomon Gulch Creek and Hatchery

Pink (and coho) salmon returning to the Valdez Fisheries Development Association's (VFDA) Solomon Gulch hatchery have created a popular sport fishery in recent years. These hatchery fish are "common property" fish, and are available for all user groups to harvest. Over 100 million pink salmon fry and several hundred thousand coho salmon smolt are released every year. This results in runs of tens of millions pink salmon heading back to Port Valdez. In addition, there are three more hatcheries that rear pink salmon, and over 200 streams that support natural returns of pink salmon. Pinks arrive in Port Valdez Bay in mid-June, peak around July 4, and fresh fish are still available into August.

Pink salmon have a two-year life cycle. Pink salmon fry do not rear in fresh water; instead, almost immediately after emergence from their eggs, they travel to near shore salt water to feed. Pink salmon grow quickly, reaching 3.5 to 6 pounds before returning for spawning the following summer. Pink salmon provide excellent action on light tackle. Since they are such aggressive biters and good fighters, pinks are a fun way to introduce someone to salmon angling, as well as providing excellent table fare when fresh or canned right away.

Shore fishing is best off the breakwater beach near the harbor and along the beach at Allison Point. Anglers fishing by boat can catch pink salmon by casting or trolling along the shoreline. Medium-sized spinners or lures such as Krocodile spoons, Vibrax spinners, and Flying C Lures provide good action. Pink salmon fishing is generally best within a few hours on either side of high tide. Cannery Creek in Unakwik Inlet is another noteworthy pink salmon fishery accessible from Valdez.

For those who are interested in viewing the hatchery operations, self-guided tours are available, and the hatchery area is open 24/7. For questions contact the VFDA at (907) 835-4874.

Coho Salmon



PWS has both wild and hatchery coho salmon runs. Wild stocks support growing fisheries in many of the small streams draining into bays of PWS. Most wild stocks are characterized as small and scattered, and can be hard to manage.

Wild coho salmon spawn in Eastern PWS's freshwater streams August through October. After spawning, the adult fish die, leaving their eggs to hatch the following spring. The juvenile salmon remain in fresh water that summer and the following winter. In the spring of their second or third years, the young fish, now called smolt, migrate to the salt water. They remain in marine waters for about 14 months before returning to fresh water as 8- to 12-pound adults to spawn. Because PWS streams experience severe flooding from time to time, wild stocks have been and will continue to be extremely variable.

The primary coho salmon fisheries are in the Valdez Narrows and off the beaches of Allison Point, Anderson Bay, Mineral Creek, and Gold Creek. Coho salmon arrive in Valdez Bay by the first week of August, and peak mid-August through early September.

Coho salmon strike readily at lures, salmon roe, and flies, making these aggressive and hard fighting fish a prime target of sport anglers. While most shore anglers use spinners or lures such as Pixees, Vibrax, Spin-N-Glos, and Tee-Spoons, fishing salmon roe or herring below a bobber is also popular and productive. Boat anglers will find trolling with whole or cut herring behind a flasher effective. Many boat anglers fish with bright hootchies (imitation squid) in the silty waters near Allison Point. There are also good coho runs at Bay of Isles, Port Chalmers, and on the north side of Hinchinbrook Island.

Chinook Salmon

Chinook salmon return at different ages. Some, called "jacks," return after only one year in salt waters. These fish weigh only 1-2 pounds and are almost always males. Others return after two years at about 5-15 pounds. Most of these are also males. The majority of Chinook salmon; however, return after three or four years at sea at a weight of 25-45 pounds. Chinook salmon can also be caught year-round as "feeder" kings, which roam around the rich waters of PWS, fattening up before returning to their home streams to spawn. Many Chinook salmon anglers use larger lures and spoons, such as Pixees, Krocodiles, Vibrax, or herring under a bobber. Trolling anglers often add a flasher/dodger.

Chum Salmon

Chum salmon are usually caught while fishing for pink or coho salmon. Chum salmon have the widest distribution of any of the Pacific salmon, and utilize the broadest spawning areas, both intertidal and fresh water. Like pink salmon, chum salmon fry also quickly move out to near shore salt water soon after emerging from the gravel. Chum feed in ocean waters for 3 to 6 years before returning,

Chums are especially hard fighters that will take a variety of flies and lures. Hatchery chum salmon runs to Port Chalmers have also been fished by sport anglers.



Sockeye Salmon

There are small runs of sockeye salmon available in PWS throughout most of the summer. Juvenile sockeye salmon may spend one to three years rearing in freshwater lakes before becoming smolt and migrating out to salt water. Once at sea, they reach 4- to 12-pounds after one to four years.

In the Valdez area, most of the sockeye salmon are caught in the fly-fishing-only area of the Robe River. Small streamer flies on an 8-9 wt. fly rod, or smaller spinners and a medium-action spinning rod loaded with 15-20 lb. monofilament are popular methods.



Halibut, Rockfish, and Lingcod

Halibut are found throughout PWS waters, on or near the bottom over mud, sand, or gravel banks and below steep drop-offs. Near Valdez, they can be found in the Narrows and along the coastlines of the numerous islands in Eastern PWS.

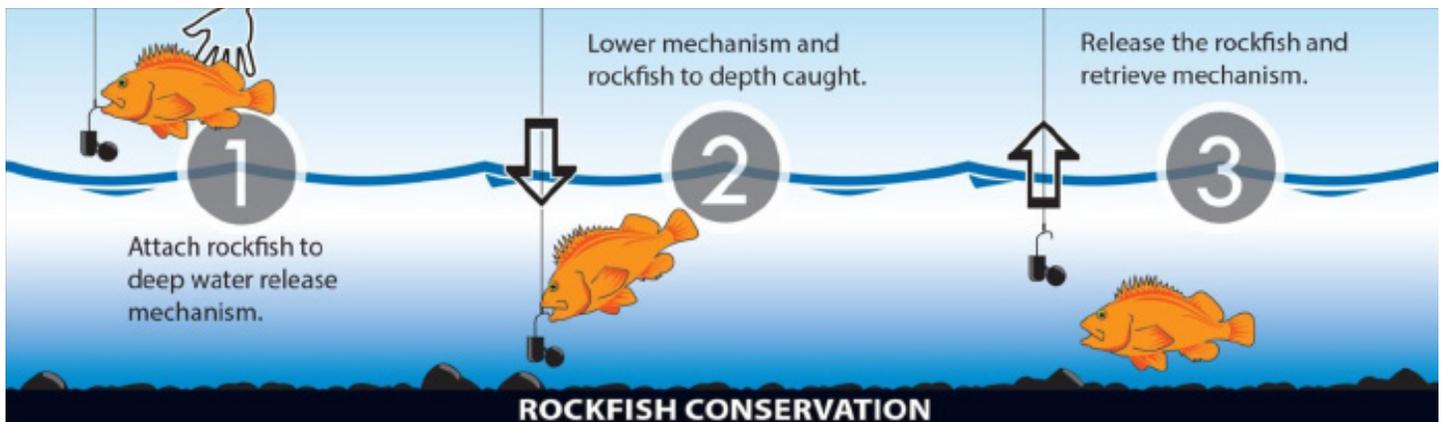
For these fish, a stout fishing rod and jigs or cut herring are the best tackle. Some of the more popular fishing areas include Knowles Head, Red Head, Galena Bay, and Sawmill Bay. Peak halibut fishing is June through July.

Both rockfish and lingcod are found throughout PWS waters. Careful management is required for sustainable fisheries, and both rockfish and lingcod have special regulations.



Compared to most fishes, rockfish grow slowly and live a very long time. Many do not reach sexual maturity until age 15 or older, and some can live over 100 years. Rather than laying and fertilizing eggs in the open waters like most fish, rockfish mate internally, then give live birth to as many as 2.5 million tiny larvae. Survival of these larvae is usually very poor, depending on predation levels and ocean conditions. Because of the high mortality of larval rockfish, relatively few offspring reach adulthood.

Rockfish also have a closed swim bladder system, which just about assures that a rockfish pulled up from over 65 feet will have difficulty re-submerging unassisted if not

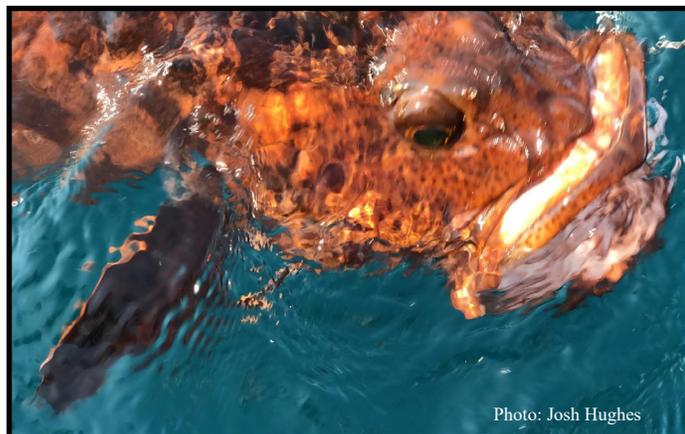


quickly released at depth of capture. If a swim bladder is punctured, and the fish released, infection is likely to occur, and the fish could die. Rockfish can be released safely with the use of a deep water release mechanism. These devices are available for purchase in most sporting good stores in Alaska. For more information on how deep water release works check out our rockfish page which includes a helpful deep water release video: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingRockfish.main>. Please note, effective 2020, all anglers must carry a deepwater release device onboard their vessel when sport fishing in salt water and use the device to release rockfish that are not harvested at depth of capture or 100 feet.

As a result of their unique biology, all Pacific rockfishes are highly susceptible to overharvest. Regulations are very conservative, and fisheries managers also ask that you limit your harvest of these fish to what you will actually consume. The best way to minimize catching rockfish is to avoid rockfish habitat while targeting other species.

Anglers targeting rockfish and their tasty white fillets use a medium stout rod loaded with 200-400 yards of 30-80 pound test line. Some anglers use lighter gear to enhance the fishing experience. Commonly used terminal tackle includes silvery lures or jigs aggressively jigged to attract nearby fish. Use of herring as bait also works well. Pelagic rockfish can also be caught on fly-fishing gear.

Lingcod spawn December through March, with males guarding nests through June. Without this protection, other fish and shellfish would eat all the eggs within days. Males are very defensive during this time, and will snap at anything, thus making them more vulnerable to overharvest. Adult lingcod are often caught near steep rocky banks by anglers jigging for halibut. In Eastern PWS, fish up to 30 pounds are caught.



Shellfish

Crab

There is a PWS tanner crab and golden king crab season; however, this is a subsistence fishery and only open to Alaska residents. There are regulations on the season, buoys, pot construction and, pot limits, and a permit is required.



There are five species of shrimp found in Alaskan waters: northern (pink), spot, coonstripe, humpy, and sidestripe. In PWS, spot and sidestripe shrimp are the main species caught in recreational shrimp pots.

Shrimp live at various depths and various habitats. Spot and coonstripe shrimp are generally found in rock piles, coral gardens, and on debris-covered bottoms. Northerns, sidestripes, and humpies are usually found on flatter, muddy bottoms. Northern shrimp can be found over the widest depth range (60-4,800 feet) while humpies and coonstripes usually are found in shallower waters (18-1,200 feet). Spot shrimp seem to be caught in greatest concentrations around 360 feet, but range from 6-1,500 feet, but most concentrations occur in waters deeper than 240 feet.

ADF&G data show that most shrimp harvest comes from Port Nellie Juan, Culross Passage, Squaw Bay, Blue Fjord, King's Bay, Port Wells, Bay of Isles, McClure Bay, Derickson Bay, Deep Water Bay, Cochrane Bay, Knowles Bay, Blich Reef, Columbia Bay, Unakwik Inlet, Glacier Island, and Port Gravina. Most harvesters get about 0 to 1 gallons of shrimp per pot-day of effort. Less than 5% of harvesters get 2 or more gallons.

For more information, request a copy of "Prince William Sound Shrimp" from ADF&G, or download a copy from the ADF&G website. There are regulations on buoys, pot construction, and pot limits, and a permit is required. For additional information, please contact the local ADF&G office or review the current regulation booklet.

Dolly Varden Char

Dolly Varden belong to a group of fish called char. The light spots on their sides distinguish them from most trout and salmon, which are usually black spotted or speckled. Dollies spawn in streams, usually during the fall from mid-August to November. Most Dollies migrate to sea in their third or fourth year, but some wait as long as their sixth year. This migration usually occurs in May or June. Once at sea, they begin a fascinating pattern of migration.

After their first seaward migration, Dolly Varden usually spend the rest of their lives wintering in and migrating to and from fresh water. Southcentral Alaska Dolly Varden

overwinter in lakes, go out to sea in the spring to feed, then return to a lake or river each year for the winter. Mature Dollies are about 5-6 years old, and about 12-16 inches long. They may weigh up to 1 pound at this age. The state record Dolly Varden was caught from the Noatak River, in Interior Alaska, and weighed 19 pounds, 12.5 ounces.

Dolly Varden are available in most of the Valdez area streams throughout the year. Dolly Varden will usually strike readily at almost anything the angler offers. During the spring, try small spinning lures in the lake outlet streams and in salt water. For fly anglers, smolt or alevin patterns can produce surprising results along the saltwater beaches during the spring and summer months.

Try fishing near spawning salmon, in deep holes, and at the creek mouth on an incoming tide. Lake fishing for sea-run Dolly Varden can be good from late August through November. The fish begin entering lakes in late August and are in prime condition after their spring and summer growing season. Ice fishing in lakes during the winter can also provide excellent sport for those willing to brave the elements.

Like its close relative, the Eastern brook trout, the Dolly Varden is excellent for eating. Catch one which has been at sea for awhile, and you have a fish unsurpassed in quality. The flesh is pink, firm, and full of flavor.

Stocked Lakes

In order to provide additional angler opportunity and diversity to Valdez fisheries, Alaska Department of Fish and Game hatcheries stock rainbow trout into three area lakes. Every spring fish are released into Thompson and Blueberry lakes in the Thompson Pass area off the Richardson Highway; and in Ruth Pond in downtown Valdez.

U.S. Coast Guard/ Homeland Security

There is a large security buffer zone around the Alyeska Pipeline terminus. Boat traffic is not allowed. Boaters are responsible for knowing where the boundaries are. For more information, visit the U.S. Coast Guard Alaska district webpage at www.pacificarea.uscg.mil or contact the Valdez Coast Guard at (907) 835-5350.

Hotels, Fishing Charters, Camping

For information on charter operators, as well as hotels, camping, and other services in Valdez, contact the local visitors center.

- Valdez Convention & Visitor's Bureau
309 Fairbanks Drive, Valdez, Alaska 99693
www.valdezalaska.org

Eastern PWS also has public cabins managed by the U.S. Forest Service's Chugach National Forest. For more information about the public cabins, please visit the U.S. Forest Service's website at www.fs.usda.gov or to reserve a public use cabin please visit www.recreation.gov

The City of Valdez sponsors a halibut derby from May through Labor Day weekend, a silver (coho) salmon derby from early August through Labor Day weekend, and a pink salmon derby during July. Derby tickets and details are available from the Valdez Convention & Visitor's Bureau. The tickets are also sold at many Valdez tackle shops, grocery stores, and other vendors.

Weather

Summer temperatures are usually moderate, with highs ranging from 55°F to 70°F (12.7° C to 21°C). Layered clothing is best, and don't forget to pack a raincoat, rain pants, and a good waterproof hat. Weather conditions in PWS can change quickly. Use caution when boating and obtain current weather forecasts from National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at (907) 835-4505, or from their recorded message at 1 (800) 472-0391.



SPORT FISHING SERIES PRODUCED BY:

Southcentral Region
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Sport Fish

333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99518
Sport Fish Information Center

(907) 267-2218
M-F 8am - 5 pm
Except on state holidays



These opportunities funded in part by Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game complies with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This summary is available in alternative communication formats. If you need assistance, please contact the ADF&G ADA Coordinator at (907) 465-6078; TTY/ Alaska Relay 7-1-1; or 1 (800) 770-8973.

Pacific Salmon Identification

Chinook (king) Salmon



- Spots on back and both lobes of the tail
- Black mouth with a black gumline

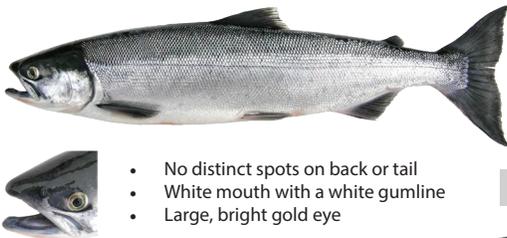
Coho (silver) Salmon



- Spots on back and upper lobe of the tail
- Black mouth with a white gumline

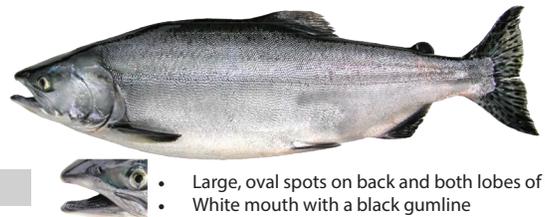
Marine Phase

Sockeye (red) Salmon



- No distinct spots on back or tail
- White mouth with a white gumline
- Large, bright gold eye

Pink (humpy) Salmon



- Large, oval spots on back and both lobes of tail
- White mouth with a black gumline

Chum (dog) Salmon



- No spots; calico bands on body (often faint in salt water)
- White mouth with a white gumline

Photographs courtesy of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Chinook (king) Salmon



- Spawning adults turn maroon or olive brown
- Spots on body and both lobes of the tail remain

Coho (silver) Salmon



- Males develop pronounced "kype" (hooked-nose)
- Spots on back and upper lobe of the tail remain
- Male and female turn dark maroon and have dark backs

Spawning Phase

Sockeye (red) Salmon



- Spawning adults develop dull-green heads
- Males develop hump on back
- Both female and male turn red

Pink (humpy) Salmon



- Spawners turn dull gray on their backs and upper sides
- Lower sides appear cream color or white
- Large, oval spots on back and both lobes of tail remain

Chum (dog) Salmon



- Spawners develop pronounced, vertical calico bands on sides
- Males exhibit large, canine-like teeth



Photographs by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.