

STEELHEAD TROUT

MY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Oncorhynchus mykiss

BY THE NUMBERS

While I normally weigh between 8-11 pounds and grow to about two feet long, some of my species have grown up to 55 pounds (25 kg) and 45 inches (120 cm) in length!

HOW TO IDENTIFY ME

In freshwater we steelhead usually have dark-olive backs, a silvery-white underside, and are heavily speckled with a pink to red stripe along our sides. During our lives in the ocean we are torpedo-shaped, very silvery and even brassy in color on our upper bodies. That's how we got our name.

WHY I MATTER AND WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

As a sea-run trout, I have a truly unique lifecycle. We are born and spend the first part of our lives in freshwater, then migrate out to the ocean where we grow to adulthood. We then migrate back to freshwater, to the same river where we were born, to spawn a new generation of fish. We're also one of the top five sport fish in North America!

MY STATUS

Because our life cycles are so complex and dependent upon good habitat (both in the ocean and in freshwater), some populations across our native range in North America are healthy, while others may be declining or of concern. NOAA-Fisheries, the federal agency in charge of our species, has designated 12 Distinct Population Segments of steelhead on the west coast of the United States to help conserve our species.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Steelhead trout are the same species as rainbow trout but have different lifestyles.
- Steelhead can be grouped into winter and summer 'runs,' depending on when adults return to freshwater.
- Steelhead trout are anadromous, meaning they spend part of their lives migrating to, from, and within the ocean.
- Unlike Pacific salmon, steelhead may spawn several times before they die.

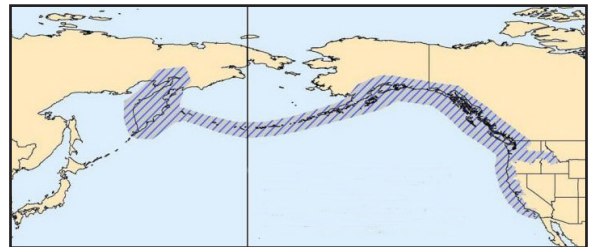


Figure 1. Steelhead are native to western North America and eastern Russia. Credit: NOAA-Fisheries.

- Young steelhead feed primarily on **zooplankton**. Adults feed on insects, mollusks and crustaceans, fish eggs and small fish (including trout).
- Some steelhead will stay in freshwater and never migrate to the ocean. Those are known as 'resident' trout. Sometimes offspring of resident trout become steelhead and head to the ocean!
- Steelhead are often called the 'fish of a thousand casts' because they are so hard to catch!
- They are an important food for many animals such as birds, bears, river otters, raccoons, and even seals, sea lions and orcas.
- Dams without a way for fish to swim around them, block steelhead from reaching spawning grounds.
- Poor timber harvest or agricultural practices may raise water temperatures, pollute waterways, and reduce water flows steelhead need to survive.

Fish illustration by Laury Zicari, USFWS, Retired.



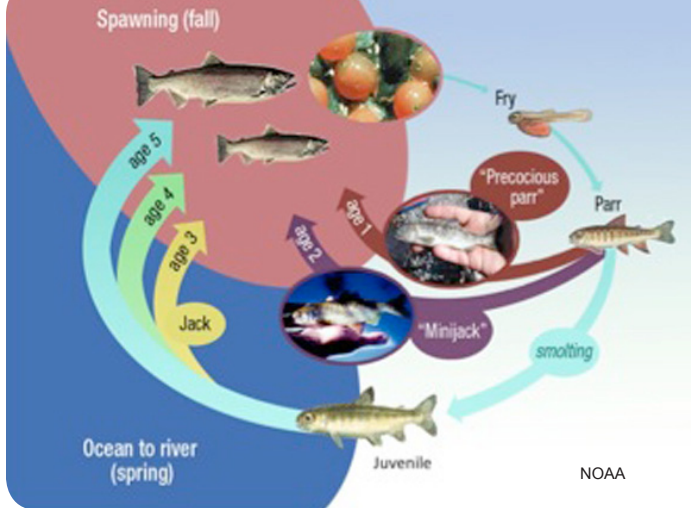
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MORE ABOUT US

STEELHEAD TROUT LIFE CYCLE



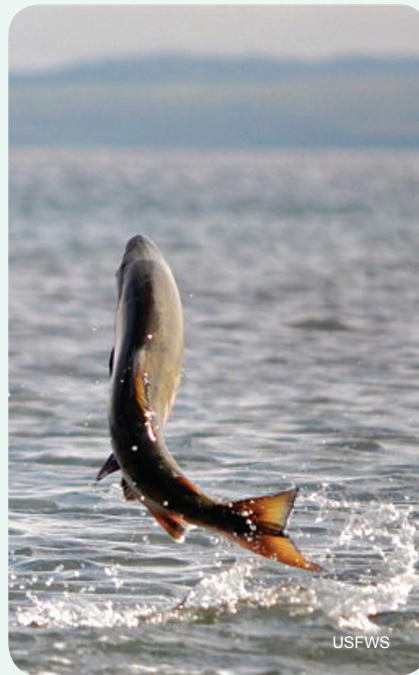
Like adult salmon, adult steelhead stop eating when they return from the ocean to freshwater.



Steelhead, like salmon, make nests known as 'redds', which will contain up to 1,000 eggs.



National fish hatcheries raise over six million steelhead trout each year for sport fishing, commercial and tribal harvests, and to help recover threatened populations.



Steelhead trout easily out-jump salmon and humans. They will leap almost 11 feet up and over a waterfall! They're also like swimming racecars, accelerating from zero to 25 miles an hour in a second!

YOU CAN HELP ME

Get to know me, if you don't already. Help make me visible to people who don't have the chance to see me by sharing your stories about me. Get involved in efforts to help conserve my habitat and maintain my populations into the future.



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