

## The Hazy Days of Hood Canal Summer Chum are Clearing Up

*“Looking at the graph, I was shocked at how fast and far the numbers of returning adult summer chum salmon had fallen.” – Dan Magneson, USFWS fish biologist.*



Hood Canal Summer Chum  
Photo: Thom Johnson, WDFW

In the early 1990s, the disappearance of a beautiful fish from the streams and rivers of Washington’s Hood Canal and Straits of Juan de Fuca got the attention of natural resource managers. After monitoring the area’s summer chum salmon stocks for several decades, they identified sharp declines and even possible extinction in this unique species. The managers knew they “needed to do something – quickly,” stated Thom Johnson, district biologist for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Gone were seven of the sixteen recognized summer chum stocks. Seven of the remaining stocks were rated at high risk of extinction. In a concerted effort to change the tide of what might become a disastrous event, the State and Tribal co-managers and a cadre of volunteer groups and private non-profits set to work rebuilding and protecting the chum stocks through activities over which they had immediate control: harvest and hatcheries.

The group operated on the premise that hatcheries and harvest could work to preserve the populations in the short term, but that habitat would ultimately have to be restored to regain healthy, self-sustaining populations of chum. “Habitat is where it’s at,” says Johnson.

Starting in 1992, all commercial fisheries in the area were restricted through time and area closures to ensure that summer chum made up no more than a (incidental) small fraction of the total harvest.



Tom Jay, Wild Olympic Salmon co-visionary with  
Salmon Creek summer chum.  
Photo: Bob Marett



Broodstock collection for a summer chum salmon  
supplementation project  
Photo: USFWS

Managers also identified hatcheries as the logical means for first preserving and then restoring the abundances of summer chum. By using hatcheries, they could bolster the remaining native stocks by increasing the survival of eggs and fry above levels attainable in the wild. Hatchery programs were also used to reintroduce the species into streams where the native summer chum stocks had gone missing.



Dave Zajac and Tom Kane capture summer chum in Hood Canal to support summer chum populations in the Big Quilcene River  
Photo: USFWS

Dave Zajac, Tom Kane and Larry Telles, working for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Quilcene National Fish Hatchery were among the first to realize how dire the situation was and to take leading steps that made a crucial difference.

Volunteer organizations, with the state's help, reintroduced wild summer chum in several historical summer chum streams. "Many great people who cared about summer chum came forward to help," says Tim Tynan, senior fisheries biologist for NOAA Fisheries. "If it hadn't been for their efforts, the fish could have winked out."

After boosting the abundance of summer chum in Salmon Creek, Wild Olympic Salmon and North Olympic Salmon Coalition collaborated with WDFW to reintroduce summer chum into Chimacum Creek. From a non-existent native population since the 1980s, the groups' efforts led to the annual return of 700 to 2,000 wild adult fish.

The Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group collaborated with WDFW and reintroduced a population in the Tahuya River using the native the summer chum stock from nearby Union River. Big Beef Creek also now supports a reintroduced stock from the Big Quilcene River. Thousands of adult fish now return each year. Long Live the Kings worked diligently to restore critically depressed native summer chum stocks in Lilliwaup Creek and the Hamma Hamma River.

Johnson sums it up: "With rebuilding of the stocks to higher abundances, monitoring and evaluation is now the key. We need to keep doing it so we know where we are. It's ongoing, and we are collaborating to make it happen. "