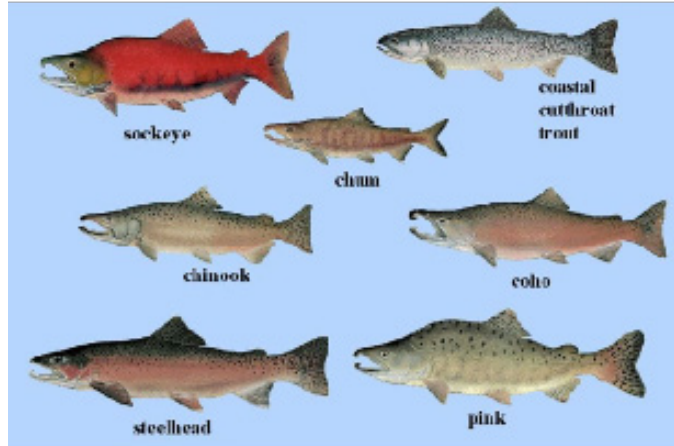


Salmon and Native American Tribes in Oregon

Salmon are a special type of fish. There are many types of salmon. All salmon are **anadromous**. This means they are born in freshwater rivers and streams. As they grow, they travel out to the saltwater ocean and live most of their lives at sea. When they are ready to spawn new fish, they swim back to where they were born. They lay their eggs in the same stream they came from.

The tribes in Oregon have relied on salmon for thousands of years. The Columbia River was a rich source of salmon for the tribes. Salmon often traveled over 1,000 miles upstream to the Columbia River tributaries. **Tributaries** are rivers and streams that empty into other rivers. They swam through Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and British Columbia to get to their home stream. Salmon were also plentiful in many other Oregon rivers that emptied directly into the Pacific Ocean. The tribes that lived directly along the Columbia River and the Oregon Coast had the easiest access to salmon. However, all nine of the Oregon tribes have deep connections to salmon.



Types of salmon. This photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA.



The Columbia River and its tributaries. This photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA.

Salmon is considered a **First Food**—a type of food that Oregon tribes have depended on for thousands of years. Other first foods include elk, deer, berries, roots, and fresh water. Some tribal creation stories say that when the Creator made humans, he called together a council of all animals and plants. He asked each for a gift to help humans survive. Salmon was the first to come forward. Salmon offered his body as food for the people. He was followed by Water. Because Salmon and Water were the first, they receive special honor by many tribes.

Many of the Oregon tribes celebrate a **First Salmon Ceremony**. This is a religious ceremony that occurs before open salmon fishing can begin each year. Each tribe is different, but for many tribes the

Salmon and Native American Tribes in Oregon (Continued)

purpose of the ceremony is to thank the Creator for giving salmon as a first food. The ceremony also honors the Salmon for keeping their promise to return each year. Everyone in the tribe participates in a feast that focuses on the first salmon. Tribal leaders usually let the salmon pass through the rivers for a few days. They limit the number of fish that can be taken. This protects the future so that enough fish can spawn. Later, open fishing is allowed for everyone.



Salmon cooking at a traditional ceremony. This photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND.



Northwest Indian trade network. Image Credit: Education Northwest map based on Indian trade network map from Nch'i-Wána, "The Big River": Mid-Columbia Indians and Their Land (Eugene S. Hunn).

Before 1855, it was common for over 1,000 Native people to fish at each fishery spot on a river. Tribes would catch hundreds of thousands of fish each year. Salmon could be dried and kept for winter food. They were so plentiful that tribes from far inland came to trade. Celilo Falls on the Columbia River was the center of a large **Native American trade network**. Other Native Americans came from faraway places, such as Montana, to trade their goods for salmon. This made the tribes that had a lot of salmon wealthy by the standards of their time.