

BACKGROUNDER
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Sockeye Salmon Life Cycle



The Fraser River provides habitat for the iconic sockeye salmon.

Eggs

The life cycle of a sockeye salmon begins in the fall when an adult female returns to her natal freshwater stream to lay up to 4,000 eggs in a gravel nest. Only 10 per cent of the deposited eggs survive through to the smolt stage. Of these, perhaps three to five per cent survive through to adulthood.

Alevins

In the late winter, the eggs hatch into alevins, which retain the yolk as a nutrient-rich sac that hangs below its body. They remain hidden in the gravel nest and feed from the nutrient-rich yolk sac until it is completely absorbed. Alevins are about one inch in length.

Fry

Once alevins leave their gravel beds, they grow to become fry which migrate into a freshwater lake.

Smolts

In their second year of life, fry become smolts. Smolts make their way downstream to the ocean and remain in the open ocean for two to three years.

Adults

Once the sockeye reach a mature state, they weigh around 2.2 kilograms on average and will follow their path up the mainstem river past Vancouver and into the various tributaries back to where they were born in order to spawn and complete their life cycle. Some populations like Early Stuart sockeye cover 1,100 kilometres to their headwater spawning areas.

There are hundreds of separate sockeye stocks within the Fraser River watershed.