



# Willamette Spring Chinook – Life History and Habitat Connections

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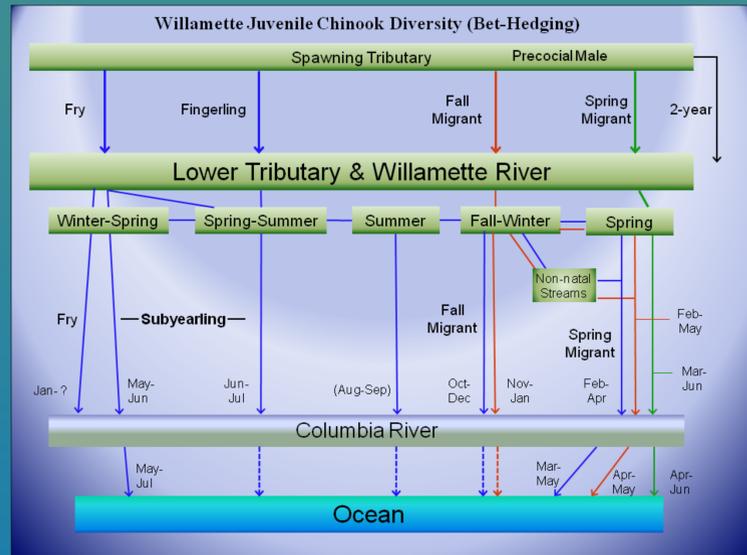
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Corvallis



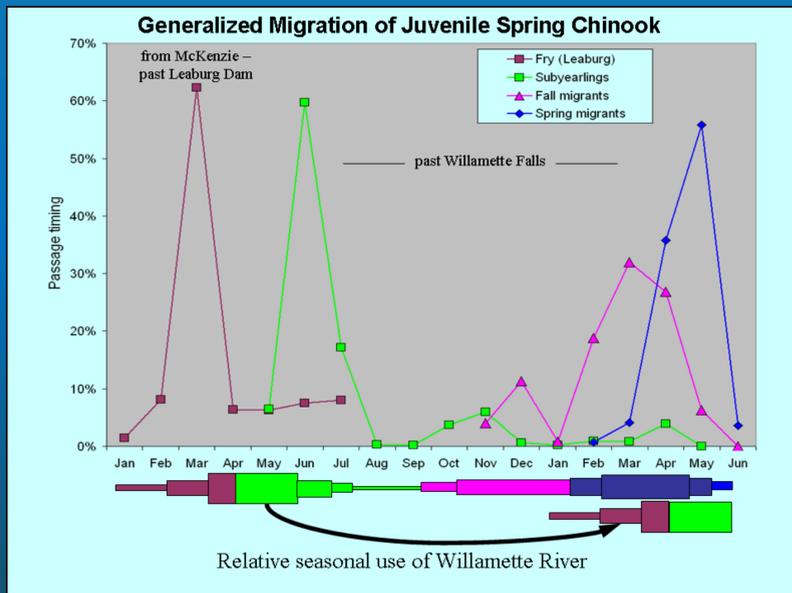
## Life Cycle of Juvenile Chinook

Willamette spring Chinook exhibit a wide range of rearing and migratory life histories

As a result, they use a wide range of habitats for growth and rearing, including the Willamette River



- Patterns of movement shows some fry leaving spawning tributaries shortly after emergence in winter & early spring
- Migrant fry rear in the main-stem Willamette, in edge habitat
- Some leave the Willamette as subyearlings after rearing in the mainstem
- Some juvenile Chinook rear through the summer and winter, leaving the Willamette as yearling migrants



Juvenile Chinook are most abundant in the Willamette River during winter and spring when fry, subyearlings, and yearling fish are all present

## Juvenile Chinook in the Willamette River

- The type of habitat juvenile Chinook use depends on the size of the fish and on the time of year
- Fry use edges of the river, larger fish move into deeper water
- Juvenile salmon use shallow gravel bars in spring and deeper pools in summer
- During winter floods, juvenile Chinook move into flooded side channels, floodplains, and small, intermittent streams



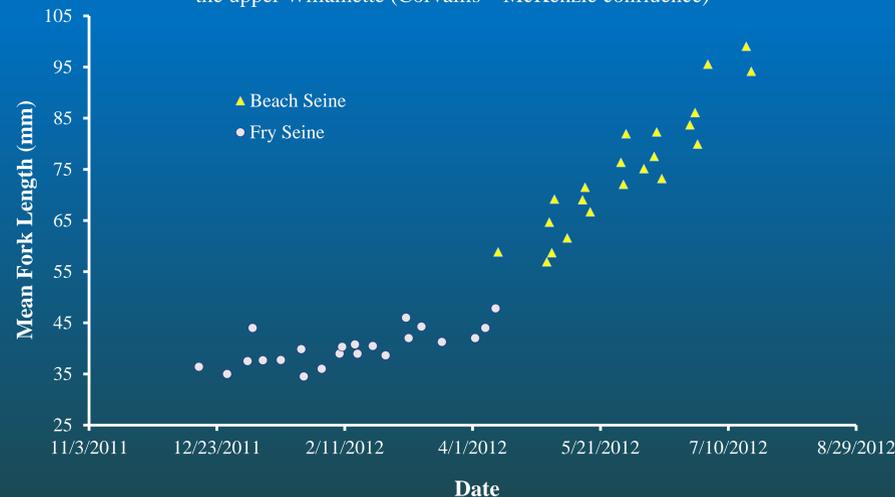
Areas of the river that are actively changing provide good juvenile Chinook habitat

Some Chinook fry migrate to the mainstem Willamette soon after emergence, so they can grow quickly in this productive habitat and smolt as subyearlings

Emergence timing and migration of Chinook fry from 2011 brood year

	Peak Spawning	Est. Early Emergence	First fry caught	Peak catch	Distance to nearest spawning (miles)
North Santiam	Sept 30	Nov 22	Nov 23	March	0 – 27
South Santiam	Sept 28	Nov 29	Dec 7	April	0 – 33
Santiam	N/A	N/A	Dec 7	March	27 – 45
McKenzie	Sept 27	Dec 10	Dec 28	April	0 – 34
Upper Willamette	N/A	N/A	Dec 16	February	34 – 149
Mid Willamette	N/A	N/A	Dec 13	March	39 – 119
Lower Willamette	N/A	N/A	Jan 6	April	119 +

Mean lengths of juvenile Chinook from the 2011 brood year sampled in the upper Willamette (Corvallis – McKenzie confluence)



## Reconnecting Salmon and the River

- Willamette spring Chinook evolved in a dynamic river system, adapting to the changing river by expressing diverse life histories.
- The mainstem Willamette provides important habitat for juvenile Chinook following a number different life histories
- Juveniles migrate into the mainstem at different life stages and are present in the Willamette all year
- A proportion of Chinook fry from each spawning tributary migrate into mainstem habitats soon after emergence
- Many of the juvenile Chinook that rear in the Willamette migrate to saltwater as subyearlings, a life history that contributes to adult returns

Many sections of the Willamette River used to be a vast network of braided channels



Lidar imagery and graphic design by Daniel Coe <http://www.oregongeology.org/pubs/ll/p-posters.htm#Willamette>

Historically, juvenile salmon had access to a wide diversity of habitats that supported diverse life histories. At present, the most active areas are those with natural banks.

Current restoration efforts are working to restore connectivity among flood plain habitats and to protect dynamic areas of the Willamette.



Flooded channels & fields – Harkins Lake, June 2010  
Michael Pope, Greenbelt Land Trust

## Current and future research

- Growth and migration of yearling migrants rearing in the upper McKenzie
- Survival to adult return of juveniles following the different life history pathways
- Contributions of fry migrants from the major spawning rivers
- Understanding size and growth thresholds that trigger migration