

The Chemainus River

by Bob Kissinger, February 2013

Located between Nanaimo and Duncan, volume wise, it is the smallest of the three rivers in this area. On the other hand it has a 63.5 km. anadromous mainstem draining from 359 square kilometres.

It is known as a flashy system as it has few lakes in its watershed to store and attenuate the flow. High water temperatures and low flows during the late summer/early fall is felt to be a significant factor in its decreasing fish populations. Reports since 1980 have indicated that the low summer flow has been increasing in duration and decreasing in volume.

FISH SPECIES

Reports have noted chinook, coho, chum, steelhead, rainbow as well as cutthroat trout and even dolly varden char.

Chinook

Spring Run- March to May

Fall Run - late September

Interestingly the spring chinooks have been found as far upsteam as Boulder creek while the fall chinooks seem unable to get past the partial blockage in Copper Canyon, just 12 km. from tide water.

The current chinook run appears to be about 100 to 200 fall fish with no recent information as to the spring run. This is down substantially from the high of 2000 in 1991.

Coho

The coho numbers have plummeted from a high of 7,500 in 1953 and '54 to a current belief of a return of about 200 fish in the fall.

Chum

From a high of almost 44,000 in 1982, it now believed that an average return may be 7,500 fish.

Steelhead

There appears to be three separate runs of steelhead.

Summer - July to September

Winter - Decemeber to March

Spring - April to June

The winter run is thought to currently be between 50 and 100 fish while the summer run to be some what over 50.

The late spring / early summer fish , like to spring chinooks, have been know to get past the Copper canyon partial blockage all the way to Boulder creek.

Rainbow, Cutthroat, Dolly Varden

Reportedly there are some resident rainbows and cutthroat trout while the dolly varden char were just noted as being found.

Sea run cutthroat trout are also mentioned but information on numbers and runs was absent.

During my 15 plus years of shrooming in the upper watershed I have noted a tremendous increase in the logging and in the size of the cuts. As of last fall I had only one of my orginal five shroom spots that had not been clear cut. As a result I am not overly optimistic about any increase in the chinook, coho, or the steelhead runs anytime in the near future.

Also as most of the watershed is a private forest land there has been only limited fish habitat restoration, mainly in the lower reaches.

As the Nanaimo hatchery has been doing some work with the fall chinooks, they may have more current information as to the strength of that run.

Cheers, Basher