

The Sociocultural Value of Pacific Salmon to Tribes and First Nations

Summary of Findings

Pacific salmon are a **cultural and ecological keystone species**, irreplaceable and core to the identities and ways of life of Indigenous communities throughout the Pacific Northwest. This flyer summarizes insights on the sociocultural significance of Pacific salmon learned from engagement with the Tribal and First Nations Caucuses to the Pacific Salmon Commission.

Centered around the well-being of Indigenous communities and salmon, this study organizes findings from a series of interviews into a framework of five intersecting areas: **social** cohesion, **health** of humans and ecosystems, **livelihoods**, Indigenous **management** systems, and cultural **knowledge and practices**. Interview participants shed light on the following common themes.

Salmon is a Social Fabric: Salmon are integral to family structures, community cohesion, gatherings and ceremonies, and practices of giving, trading, and sharing—all central to cultural identity. The breadth and depth of participants' discussion around social gatherings highlighted the ways Indigenous families and Nations gather to cherish salmon. When salmon are scarce, Nations work hard to obtain salmon for ceremonial and subsistence needs in their communities and the communities of neighboring Nations. The exchange of salmon within and between communities strengthens the social fabric and cultural ties among Indigenous Nations.

Losses of Salmon and Cultural Wealth: Many salmon runs have declined significantly, and some salmon populations face extinction. Every participant in this study shared stories of the impacts of salmon decline on food, habitat and ecology, fishing, and physical health. Additionally, they discussed the roles of dams and non-Indigenous governance in this decline. The loss of salmon is a cultural crisis: without salmon, ceremonies, food security, traditions, learning, economies, and health all suffer. Indigenous communities feel a responsibility to stewardship that will ensure salmon are available for future generations.

Healthy Salmon, Healthy Communities: Indigenous communities need salmon for their mental and physical health. Losses in Tribal and First Nations salmon fisheries leave communities without fresh, dried, canned, or frozen salmon, increasing their dependence on commercially processed foods. Discussions around food and livelihoods frequently stressed the need for salmon for not only food and economic security, but also for sustaining human and ecosystem health and teaching traditions and cultural practices.



