

Abundant Salmon in the Skagit this Season

By Kyle Koch

It's been a wild year for SFEG spawner surveys and we're just mid-way through the season. Chinook? Check. Kokanee? Check. Coho & chum? Check. Pinks? OH BOY do we have pinks; these fish have been somewhat overwhelming to count this year. Usually we use counters to help us keep track of live fish but due to the deluge of pinks that we've seen the counters are actually slowing us down. Over 5,000 were counted on just one survey on the Nookachamps and just as many counted on Jones Creek.

Like last year, it took awhile for creeks such as Alder, Jones, and Hansen to fill up after the very dry summer that we had. Because of this we weren't expecting to see anything



Volunteer Chris Brown with a coho carcass from Parsons Creek

because the Chinook tend to be done spawning by then. We did, however, find a healthy, wild female carcass, not far from the shop and she had indeed spawned. The East Fork of the Nookachamps is so far tied with the record of most live Chinook (4) seen on a spawner survey in one day. The most surprising creek has been Parsons, with these largest-of-all-salmon being spotted as late as the first week in November.

More kokanee, which are miniature, landlocked sockeye, have been counted this year on Barnes, Finnegan and Mud Creek (tributaries to Lake Samish) than the last 15 years combined. These fast, bright-red salmon were difficult to count due to their sheer numbers. We've always heard that they're small, but until you see them you don't realize it, and yes, the average cutthroat is beefier than these guys and gals. Their redds also could fit comfortably in the bottom of a 5-gallon bucket.



Field Technician Kyle Koch with Barnes Creek kokanee

Chum arrived somewhat early this year and have had slightly better numbers than last year's record low live counts. Coho were very early this year with adults spotted in mid-October. Most notably coho have been sighted in Klahowya Creek, which has not seen any spawners since one lone individual in 2005.



So far this has been a very exciting year for spawner surveys, and we thank the hearty volunteers who are braving all weather to keep accurate counts. Any time wild Chinook are documented on our surveys it's a big deal, and this season has delivered. Hopefully in the years to come we'll be blessed to see even more.