



## Sharing the River with the Chinook Salmon

Congratulations on your decision to float the Middle Fork of the Salmon River!!! While on the Middle Fork, you will be sharing the river with more than 10 species of fish, one of which is the Chinook salmon. The Chinook salmon in the Middle Fork are extraordinary fish! Each year, thousands of small Chinook salmon leave the Middle Fork and swim downstream to the Pacific Ocean. The fish remain in the ocean for up to five years and can reach lengths of more than 50 inches and weights of more than 50 pounds. Following their time in the ocean, the fish make the long journey back to the Middle Fork. Sometime between July and September, the fish prepare nests in the gravel at the bottom of the river in which they bury their eggs. The eggs incubate over the winter and hatch the next spring. The small fish remain in the river for up to two years after which they leave for the Pacific Ocean thus starting the cycle over again. Here are a few interesting facts about Chinook salmon in the Middle Fork:

- *Middle Fork Chinook salmon make one of the longest migrations to salt water of any fish in the world with some fish swimming more than 800 miles to the ocean.*
- *Chinook salmon do not eat once they leave the ocean but rely entirely on energy reserves to make the long swim back to the Middle Fork.*
- *Some Middle Fork Chinook salmon spawn at elevations above 6,800 feet which is higher than any other spring-summer Chinook salmon spawning area in the World!*
- *A single female Middle Fork Chinook salmon can produce up to 5,000 eggs.*
- *Chinook salmon die soon after they lay their eggs but their bodies provide nutrients for their young and more than 100 other species.*
- *The Middle Fork Chinook salmon population is one of only a few remaining Chinook salmon populations in the continental United States that have not been genetically altered by hatchery fish.*
- *The Middle Fork basin contains some of the best Chinook salmon habitat in the entire Columbia River basin.*

Considering the unique nature of Middle Fork Chinook salmon, it is truly a special experience to share the river with such an extraordinary fish!

### ***Middle Fork Chinook Salmon are in Trouble***

Unfortunately, Chinook salmon in Idaho, including those in the Middle Fork, are in trouble. Over the last 100 years, Chinook salmon numbers in Idaho have declined sharply and these fish are threatened with extinction. Subsequently, Chinook salmon throughout Idaho have been listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act and managers are working hard to protect and restore these fish.

### ***What can floaters do to help the Chinook salmon?***

Without precautions, floating and associated activities can have a negative impact on Chinook salmon. However, if visitors follow the four simple rules on the back of this pamphlet, the impact on the fish will be minimal.





## ***Four Simple Rules to Reduce the Impact of Floating on Chinook Salmon***

Without precautions, floating and associated activities can have a negative impact on Chinook salmon. However, if visitors follow these four simple rules the impact on the fish will be minimal.

**1. DO NOT TRANSFER NON-NATIVE SPECIES TO THE MIDDLE FORK** — Without proper precautions, floaters can transfer non-native species to the Middle Fork. Some of these species, such as aquatic nuisance species (e.g. — zebra mussels) and noxious weeds (e.g. — leafy spurge), can harm the environment, cost large amounts of money to control, and reduce the quality of the recreational experience. Therefore, you are **required** to do the following **prior** to your trip:

- *Ensure that all equipment is free from organisms. This can be done by inspecting equipment and removing all organisms and material that might contain organisms. This includes water, mud, plants, seeds, fish blood, etc. Each item should then dry for at least five days or be frozen for at least three days.*
- *Purchase a current Idaho Invasive Species Fund Sticker. Idaho law requires that all boats, including non-motorized vessels, have a current Idaho Invasive Species Fund sticker. Inflatable, non-motorized vessels must be less than 10 feet in length to be exempted from this requirement. For more information on this rule, please contact the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation at 800-247-6332 or [reghelpline@idpr.idaho.gov](mailto:reghelpline@idpr.idaho.gov) or visit their website at <http://parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/idahoinvasivespeciesfund.aspx>.*

**2. DO NOT DISTURB ADULT CHINOOK SALMON** — Adult Chinook salmon may be seen in the river and streams. Visitors are welcome to watch these fish from a distance but be careful that you do not disturb them. If adult Chinook salmon are encountered while floating, stay as far away from them as is safely possible and move past them as quickly as possible. Do not chase the fish or strike at them with oars or other objects.

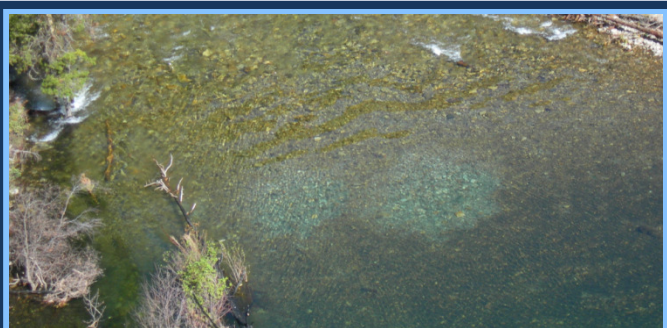
**3. DO NOT DISTURB CHINOOK SALMON REDDS** — Chinook salmon dig nests in the bottom of the stream in which they bury their eggs. These nests are called redds. If something disturbs the redd, such as a boat or oar hitting the redd or person walking through the redd, the eggs can die. Floaters will be provided the location of known redds when they launch but they should also look for new redds (see inset). When redds are encountered, avoid disturbing them by:

- *Staying at least 25 feet from the redds*
- *Ensuring that boats and oars do not strike the redds*
- *Refraining from stepping on or near the redds*

**4. DO NOT FISH FOR CHINOOK SALMON** — Fishing for Chinook salmon is prohibited in the Middle Fork drainage. While anglers may fish for other species, they must not fish for Chinook salmon. If you do accidentally catch a Chinook salmon, be careful not to harm the fish and release it immediately.

By doing these four simple things, you will help protect the Middle Fork Chinook salmon and you will help ensure that floaters in the Middle Fork will be able to share the river with these extraordinary fish for generations to come.

For more information on Chinook salmon in the Middle Fork, please contact the Middle Fork Ranger District at 208-879-4101.



Two Chinook salmon redds as seen from the air. Redds are typically large depressions in the gravel that are lighter in color than the surrounding area.

Credits: Middle Fork artwork (front) by Matt Jeffress and Bart Gamett, USDA Forest Service. Photograph of Chinook salmon redds (back) by Russ Throw, USDA Forest Service.