

Chilkoot's Web-of-Life

Most of the fish species that use the Chilkoot watershed are anadromous: 1) born in fresh water, 2) spend part of their life in the ocean, 3) return to reproduce in fresh water. This fresh-salt-fresh life history is crucial to the health and productivity of the landscape. Anadromous fish, mammals and bird life transport ocean nutrients and food energy into the watershed benefiting forests, forest dwelling species, successive generations of young fish—and people.



Bald eagle. Robert H. Armstrong photo.

Salmon

All five Pacific salmon use the Chilkoot watershed: sockeye, coho, pink, chum and chinook (rare). All die soon after spawning; the carcasses fertilize the lake and become food for aquatic organisms, mammals and birds. Chum and pink depart the freshwater directly after the hatch. Coho, sockeye and chinook young may spend several years in freshwater before migrating to the sea.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game operates the fence-like weir to monitor salmon populations and provide management information to ensure the reproductive success of future generations.

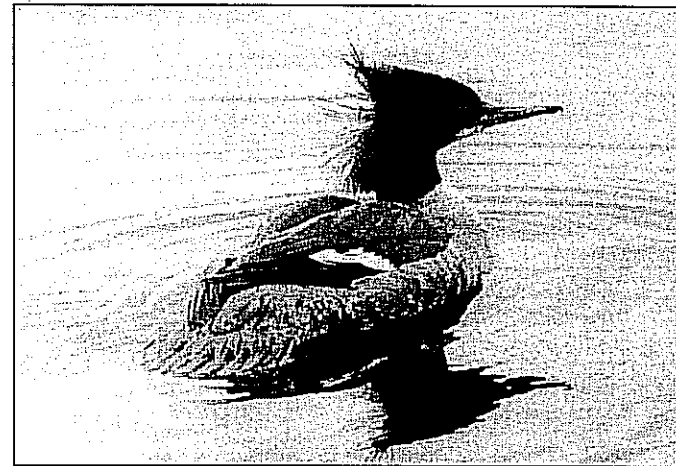
Char and Smelt

Variations on the fresh-salt-fresh life history are used by the Dolly Varden char and the eulachon, a species of smelt. Dolly Varden adults spawn in freshwater in the fall and overwinter in the lake. Adults and immature fish migrate to sea to feed in spring and then return to freshwater in summer— foraging on juvenile salmon, eggs and invertebrates. (See reverse side and photo for additional information on smelt.)

Mammals

Harbor seals are common in the lower river and estuary. During spring, Steller's sea lions forage on migrating smelt in the lower inter-tidal areas. The watershed is home to brown (grizzly) bears (*Ursus arctos*) and black bears. Bears forage on salmon, vegetation, roots and berries. Other mammal species that utilize salmon include coyote, wolf, mink, American marten, ermine and river otter.

Other local mammals include moose, mountain goat, beaver, lynx, wolverine, snowshoe hare and red squirrel. Mountain goats can be viewed with binoculars on the upper mountain slopes.



Common merganser female. Robert H. Armstrong photo.

Bird Life

Birds are major players in the Chilkoot Web-of-Life. Year-round species include raven, northwestern crow, bald eagle, common merganser, water ouzel (dipper), belted kingfisher and three gull species—mew, herring and glaucous-winged.

Many more bird species are seasonal, including the Bonaparte's gull, surf scoter, harlequin duck, goldeneye, magpie, Steller's jay, arctic tern, great blue heron, bufflehead, mallard, pintail, widgeon, northern shoveler, red-breasted merganser and a variety of song birds.

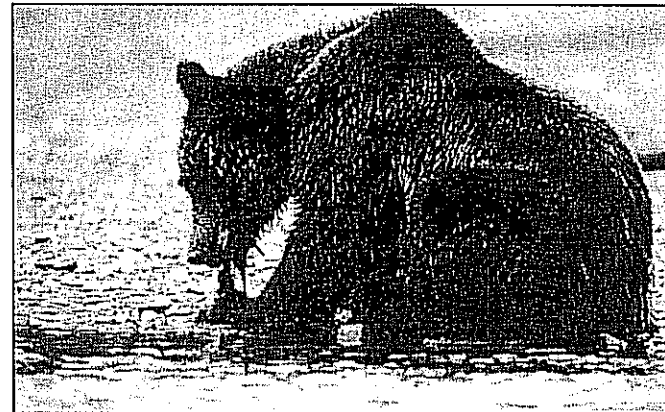


Common raven. Robert H. Armstrong photo.

Chilkoot Checklist:

Here's a checklist to help you minimize your effect on Chilkoot habitat and wildlife.

- ✓ WILDLIFE WATCHERS & PHOTOGRAPHERS:
 - DO NOT approach or follow bears on foot or with a vehicle.
 - View bears, eagles and other wildlife from a distance—preferably remain in your parked vehicle.
- ✓ ANGLERS:
 - Stop fishing if a bear is near you. Reel in—or cut—your line and wait until the bear is gone.
 - Keep a 100-yard safety zone between you and bears.
 - Clean fish in the river and throw remains in swift water.
 - Secure catch immediately in your vehicle.
 - Avoid disturbing fish spawning areas.
 - NEVER LEAVE FISH FOR BEARS!
- ✓ EVERYONE:
 - Help keep river banks intact and free of trash.
 - Use lakeside restrooms.
 - Be aware—bears may approach from any direction.
 - Unattended food, fish, coolers and other belongings WILL attract bears. Secure ALL food and fish INSIDE your vehicle.
 - Give bears the right-of-way.

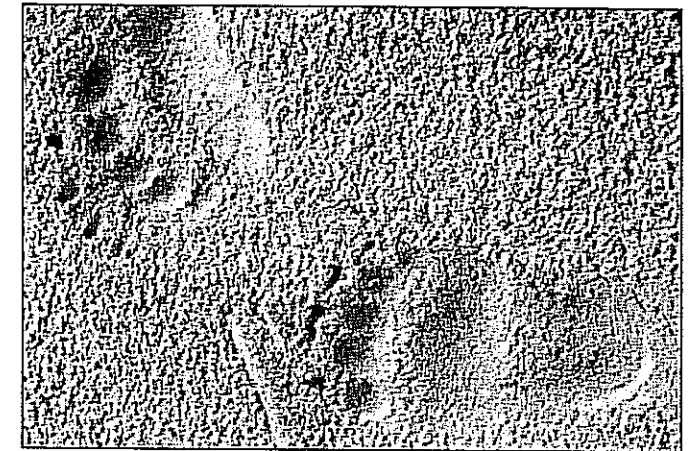


Brown Bear feeding on salmon. ADF&G photo.

Important Alaskan Laws

- It is illegal to attract bears with food or garbage either intentionally or negligently (5 AAC 92.410)
- It is illegal to feed bears (5 AAC 92.230)
- It is illegal to harass wildlife (5 AAC 92.080)

Respecting Chilkoot: A Community Treasure



ADF&G photo

This educational flier provides information to help you enjoy Chilkoot and understand the area's historical significance and natural history. Help future generations enjoy the area by minimizing your footprint today!

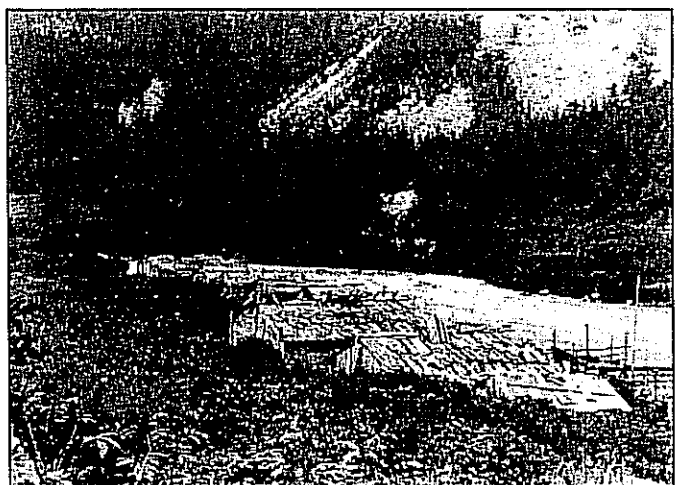
- *Respect the area as a cultural site.*
- *Respect all users and private property.*
- *Respect fish and wildlife: follow posted regulations and the Chilkoot Checklist (this flier).*
- *Avoid using the far riverbank—give brown bears and other wildlife undisturbed access.*
- *Use lakeside restrooms.*
- *Pack out trash.*
- *Leave only footprints*

This educational flier is a product of the Chilkoot River Corridor Strategic Planning Project. Funding for the flier is through the Alaska Conservation Foundation, Watchable Wildlife Conservation Trust Program. Additional project support is provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. For more information contact the Haines Chamber of Commerce.

Welcome to Ḻkoot — (Chilkoot)

The place now called "Chilkoot" has been used sustainably by the Tlingit Indians for many centuries. One story of Ḻkoot describes a destructive flood caused by a tremendous rock slide that hit the lake. The subsequent wave of water devastated the village and pushed large amounts of rock and sediment downstream⁽¹⁾.

In 1880, when the first Euro-Americans visited, about 130 people lived near the lakeshore and along the river⁽²⁾. However, families harvesting food away from the village would have been absent during the months when this census appears to have occurred. Permanent inhabitation, measured during winter, is believed to have been higher.



TRADITIONAL CLAN HOUSES, Chilkoot River, 1894. Note the difference in construction materials between 1894 and 1920. (MSCUA, University of Washington. Negative No. NA3072)

Social Structure

Tlingit marriage inheritance and community structure are organized around two balanced halves. The two halves are the Eagle and Raven moieties. Within each moiety are many clans. Clans of one moiety perform important reciprocal duties for the other. This mutual support system is found in all Tlingit communities.

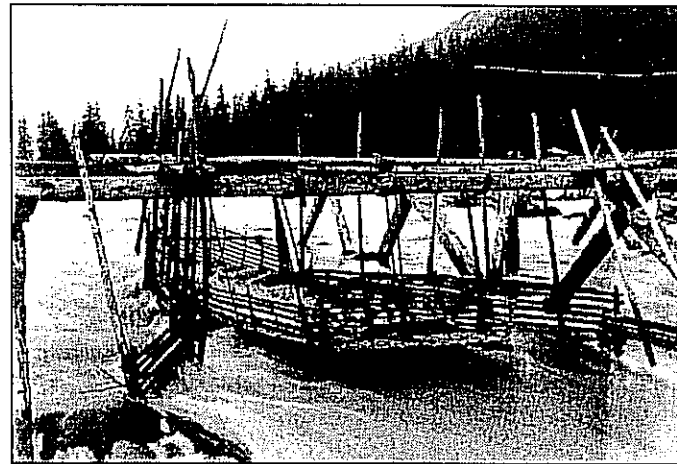
A traditional Tlingit marriage unites an Eagle with a Raven. The society is matrilineal. The moiety, clan and clan subdivision (house group) of a child is the same as his/her mother. Clan regalia such as Chilkat robes, vests, tunics, headdresses, button blankets, totems and other carved objects are more than art. They tell the story of the owner's ancestry.



NEAR THE PRESENT LOCATION OF THE CHILKOOT CULTURE CAMP, about 1920. (University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia. Negative No. S5-14774)

Ḻkoot Country

Local areas used for centuries by clans associated with Ḻkoot include downtown Haines (Deishu), the U.S. Army Tank Farm (Tanaani), the Haines Airport (Yandeis't'akye), Taiyasanka Harbor (Daayasaank'i) and the Chilkoot Trail, to name only a few. The Ḻkoot shared resources with groups from outside the area, including the people of Klukwan, many of whom are closely related⁽³⁾.



CHILKOOT FISH TRAP in action, 1894. (MSCUA, University of Washington. Negative No. NA3093)

People of the Land

Forests and shorelines provided an array of foods and materials useful in the highly artistic culture, including medicinal plants, berries and root crops, materials for canoes, housing, traps, dyes, weapons, fiber and basketry.

Land animals were used for food, clothing and trade. Important local mammals include mountain goat, black and brown bear, moose, wolf, coyote, land otter, beaver and ermine.

People of the Sea

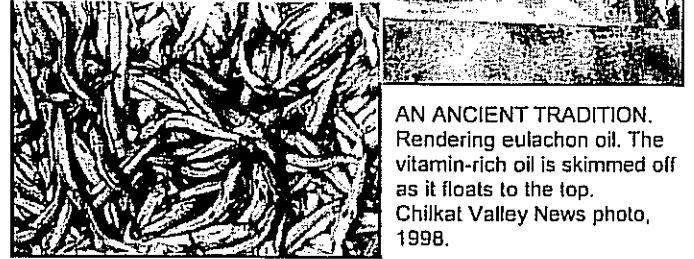
Ḻkoot prosperity depended on ocean productivity. In addition to yearly food requirements, trade needs were important in determining harvest quantity. A wide array of techniques and tools refined over centuries were used during harvest and preparation.

The Salmon

The food of greatest importance was, and remains, the sockeye (red) salmon. Traditionally, traps, dip nets, and long handled gaffs were used. Man-made rock channels, still visible in the rapids near the Ḻkoot Culture Camp, directed salmon virtually to the front door! Smoked and dried, the salmon keeps throughout the year.

The Eulachon (Smelt)

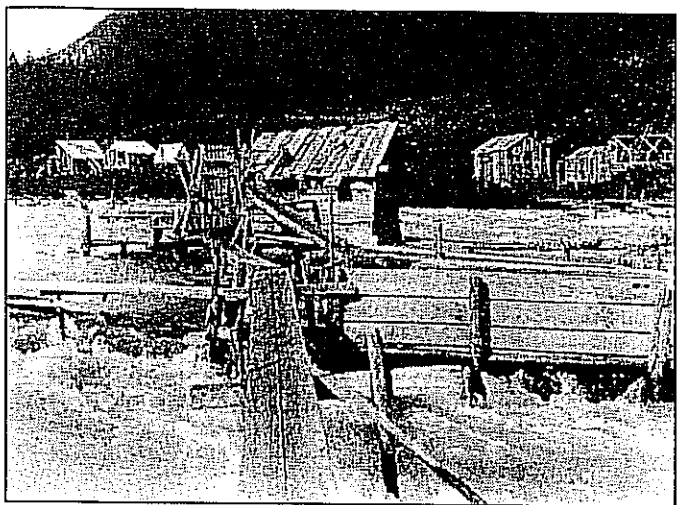
Smelt, called "eulachon," first arrive in February with the main run arriving in late April or early May. Dip netting eulachon is an ancient tradition along the Chilkoot and Chilkat river systems. The oily eulachon, eaten fresh, dried or rendered for its vitamin-rich oil, is highly prized.



AN ANCIENT TRADITION. Rendering eulachon oil. The vitamin-rich oil is skimmed off as it floats to the top. Chilkat Valley News photo, 1998.

Other Ocean Foods

Harbor seals, halibut, crab, and shrimp are also important along with nutritious sea weeds and shellfish gathered from the inter-tidal zone.



A "HOOKING STAND" for gaffing salmon, looking toward the east riverbank, 1911. (MSCUA, University of Washington. Negative No. NA2841)

Where are the Ḻkoot Today?

Descendants of Ḻkoot clans live in Haines, other Alaskan communities, and across the nation. Of the various clan houses associated with Ḻkoot country dating from the late 19th century, one remains. The Raven House is still in use on the Haines waterfront.

Between 1880 and the mid- 20th century, the same cultural tidal wave that swept across North America a few decades earlier came to Ḻkoot. Permanent village depopulation resulted from many factors: the Klondike Gold Rush, cannery based over-fishing, missionary activity, wage-based economics and a spectrum of deadly diseases such as influenza, smallpox, polio, TB and others.

Road construction in the early 1950's destroyed many cultural sites. Today the Ḻkoot Culture Camp, located downstream from the lake on a portion of the old village site, hosts summer youth programs in Tlingit lifestyle and applied sciences. For many descendants, a heartfelt connection remains to the place we now call "Chilkoot."

References

- 1) Dauenhauer, N.M. and Dauenhauer, R. (1994). *Haa Kusteewi: Our Culture* Vol. 3., University of Washington Press.
- 2) Krause, A. (1998). *The Tlingit Indians: Results of a Trip to the Northwest Coast of America and the Bering Straits*. University of Washington Press.
- 3) Hope III, A. and Thornton, T.F. (2000). *Will the Time Ever Come? A Tlingit Source Book*. Center of Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska Fairbanks Press.

Gunalcheesh! (Thank You!)

Special thanks to the Tlingit elders who provided assistance in the production of this educational flier.