

Fish Ladder at Nimbus Fish Hatchery on American River to Open for Returning Chinook Salmon on Monday, Nov. 4 Hundreds of Hungry People Will Benefit From Salmon Bounty

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On Monday, Nov. 4, 2013, the fish ladder at the Nimbus Fish Hatchery will open for fall-run Chinook salmon returning to the American River to spawn. The ladder will remain open until the steelhead trout season ends in March.

The American River once provided about 100 miles of salmon and steelhead spawning and rearing habitat, but when Nimbus and Folsom dams were built in the 1950s, much of that habitat was blocked. In cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Bureau of Reclamation built the hatchery in 1955 to help mitigate for the dams' impact on the fish. CDFW operates and maintains the hatchery on the behalf of Reclamation's Central California Area Office.

Reclamation annually installs a barrier (a weir) in the river to stop the upstream migration of the fish and guide them to the ladder entrance. The fish jump over twenty steps to the top of the ladder where they swim into a holding pond. In some years, more than 10,000 salmon will climb the fish ladder.

Hatchery workers then sort the fish in the spawning building. In nature, salmon die after spawning; in the hatchery, the fish are quickly killed so that the eggs or sperm (milt) may be retrieved more easily. The milt is mixed with the freshly taken eggs to fertilize them. A typical female Chinook salmon has about 5,300 eggs.



The salmon carcasses are put into bins which are loaded onto refrigerated trucks owned by American-Canadian Fisheries, Inc. Reclamation has a no-cost contract with the company to truck the fish to their plant where the edible and non-edible fish are sorted. The non-edible parts are transferred to a rendering plant to be made into products such as fertilizer; the edible fish is fileted and frozen and then given to the Sacramento Emergency Foodlink, a program that serves more than 150 agencies and food closets throughout the area. These different agencies pick up the salmon at Foodlink and distribute it to people in need. In 2011/2012, hungry people in the Sacramento area enjoyed 201,000 pounds of salmon from the Nimbus Fish Hatchery.

The eggs that are fertilized grow into 'fry' in 'raceways' (concrete ponds) until they are ready to transition to ocean waters at about 6 months old when they are 4-5 inches long. Steelhead remain in the raceways for a year before they are released at 8-10 inches long. The fish are pumped into special tanker trucks and driven to their release sites. Today, the Nimbus Fish Hatchery releases about 4 million Chinook salmon and 430,000 steelhead annually.

The public is welcome to visit the hatchery free of charge. The Visitor Center is open weekdays, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and weekends, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. (closed Christmas). It is located at 2001 Nimbus Road, Gold River, CA 95670 (Highway 50 & Hazel Ave.); it may also be accessed from the American River Bike Trail. The ladder's gate is sometimes closed to prevent overcrowding in the holding pond, so the exact times when fish are climbing the ladder are unknown.

For additional information on visiting the hatchery, please call CDFW at 916-358-2884 (TTY 800-877-8339) or visit www.facebook.com/NimbusHatchery or www.dfg.ca.gov/fish/hatcheries/nimbus.

