

Self-Guided Tour

Winthrop National Fish Hatchery



Please use this self-guided tour or find an available staff member or volunteer. Visitor hours are 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Winthrop National Fish Hatchery (NFH) opened in 1942 as mitigation for the Grand Coulee Dam's impact on migrating fish in the upper Columbia River basin. Adult sockeye, spring Chinook, and steelhead were the initial species raised at the hatchery. In 1951, Winthrop began rearing not only salmon, but also rainbow and brook trout. After decades of change, today, Winthrop raises 200,000 steelhead, 400,000 spring Chinook, and 250,000 coho salmon. That means we release almost 1 million fish into the Methow River each spring. Follow this numbered self-guided tour to find out how we do it.

Trout feed is available at the main entrance. Please only feed the fish that are in the trout pond, indicated on the map to the right with a ★. The trout pond is used for Kids' Fishing Day (12 & under), the second Saturday of each June.

Please be courteous of areas marked "staff only" & return this pamphlet when you're done.

Starting at the main entrance, enter our nursery building and turn to the left.

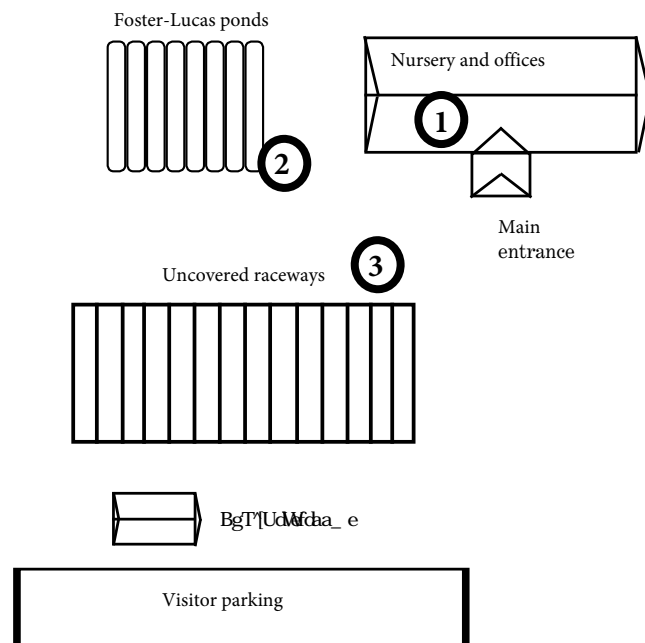
Stop 1: Nursery building

The nursery building houses our green fry tanks & egg incubation stacks. After being fertilized with milt (sperm), eggs are placed in the incubation trays, where they develop in to sac-fry (or alevins) over several months. As alevin, the fish are feeding off of their yolk sac. Once the yolk sac is mostly absorbed, the fish are placed in the green tanks, where they begin feeding on a dry mash and continue developing through the fry stage. Initially, fry are fed 8 times per day. You can expect to find spring Chinook in the tanks from late February - March, coho from early April - late May, and steelhead from late July - late October. After leaving the tanks, the fry head outside to continue developing into the parr & smolt stages.

Continue outside through the door at the left end of the nursery building.

Stop 2: Foster-Lucas ponds

These ponds are a semi-circular style that is original to the hatchery. We use these ponds from late March - early July when spring Chinook fry leave the nursery building and come outside. The circular structures you see floating in the water are called "robo" cleaners.



They help consolidate waste and aid in cleaning.

Continue to the uncovered raceways between the Foster-Lucas ponds and the visitor parking lot.

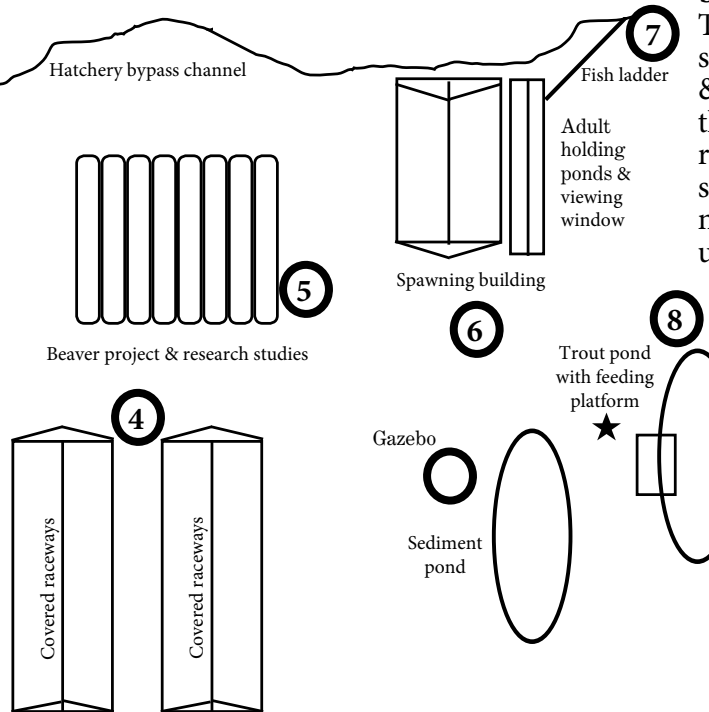
Stop 3: Uncovered raceways

These flow-through style raceways typically house coho salmon & about two-thirds of our spring Chinook population. Coho salmon are placed here as fry after leaving the nursery building in late May, while Chinook are moved here in early July from the Foster-Lucas ponds. Fish will be released directly from these raceways in to the hatchery bypass channel during the upcoming April, and hopefully return a few years later to spawn.

Continue across the grounds to the covered raceways.

Stop 4: Covered raceways

These two sets of flow-through style raceways house steelhead and the remainder of our spring Chinook. Chinook are moved from the Foster-Lucas ponds in early July, and will be released in the upcoming April directly from these raceways.



Steelhead fry are placed here from the nursery building in late October and will remain here for the next 18 months until release. Depending on the time of year you're visiting (like late fall or winter), there may be two spawning years of steelhead - a fry group that was just moved there and a parr/smolt group that will be ready for release in the coming April.

Look across from the covered raceways & you may spot a beaver.

Stop 5: Methow Beaver Project

Beavers are temporarily housed in these old ponds during the summer months. The project is supported by the Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation; read their informational signs or ask staff for more information.

Continue to the spawning building & up the stairs to the viewing room or down the ramp to the viewing window.

Stop 6: Spawning building

The spawning building is used weekly for steelhead in April, spring Chinook in August, & coho in Oct./Nov.. Adults are brought into the building, where they are checked for ripeness. Fish that are ready to spawn are stripped for their eggs and milt. Fish that are not ripe are sent back to the holding ponds until the following week.

Walk around the side of the spawning building to find the fish ladder & bypass channel.

Stop 7: Fish ladder & bypass channel

Many spring Chinook & coho adults return to the hatchery via the fish ladder, while steelhead adults are primarily obtained by hook & line. Salmon scale the fish ladder & hang out in the adult holding ponds until it's time to spawn. The base of the fish ladder is where our smolts enter the bypass channel & begin making their way to the Methow River.

Stop 8: Trout pond

What's going on at the hatchery right now?

Not sure what to keep your eyes out for? Use this general schedule for ideas of what to look for during your visit, and don't hesitate to ask volunteers or staff for more information.

Spring - Adult steelhead are returning to spawn. Spawning occurs weekly in April and May. Make sure to check out the spawning building and take a peek through the adult salmon viewing window. Our steelhead, coho, and spring Chinook salmon smolts are ready for release! From April to mid-May, fish are leaving the hatchery and beginning their journey to the Pacific Ocean. If you see emptying raceways outside, that's why; but don't worry, we still have fish for you to look at! Coho and spring Chinook fry and steelhead parr are on station. In early May, steelhead are receiving a coded wire tag and adipose fin clip, so that they can be recognized as a hatchery fish once they leave next spring. Feel free to take a look inside the tagging trailer.

Summer - Adult spring Chinook are returning to the hatchery, and spawning will occur from mid-August to September. In June and July, we are likely busy giving excess adult Chinook to our tribal partners, like the Colville, Spokane, and Yakama Tribes. The tribes will use these fish to feed tribal members and practice other aspects of their cultural heritage. Make sure to check out the spawning building and viewing window. The tagging trailer will be here in early July and August to give spring Chinook and coho salmon their hatchery markings. You should be able to spot some beavers during your visit too.

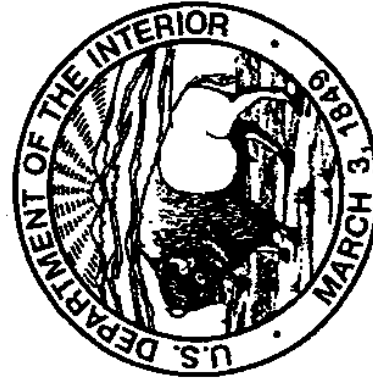
Here in June? Kids Fishing Day (12 & under) is the second Saturday in June. We provide the fishing gear & prizes while kids get to fish the trout pond.

Hatchery volunteers are available for tours Thursday - Monday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. during the summer months. Staff members are generally busy with fish culture during this time, but don't hesitate to ask them questions if a volunteer is unavailable.

Fall - Adult coho salmon are returning. We are working with the Yakama Tribe to spawn coho from mid-October through November, so take a look in the spawning building and viewing window. A portion of our steelhead and spring Chinook get PIT (passive integrated transponder) tagged in early October, while coho receive their tags in November. We use PIT tags to estimate survival & return data, among other things. If the PIT tagging trailer is here, make sure to take a look inside.

Winter - Things slow down here at the hatchery from December - February. The fish aren't as active during the cold, so staff members keep busy with maintenance & wood shop projects, report writing, & snow removal. We are all anxiously waiting for the spring Chinook eggs spawned in late summer to hatch in February. Coho eggs from the fall will hatch in to alevin in late March.

*Check out our website at fws.gov/leavenworthfisheriescomplex
or find Leavenworth Fisheries Complex on Facebook*



Thank you for visiting!

