

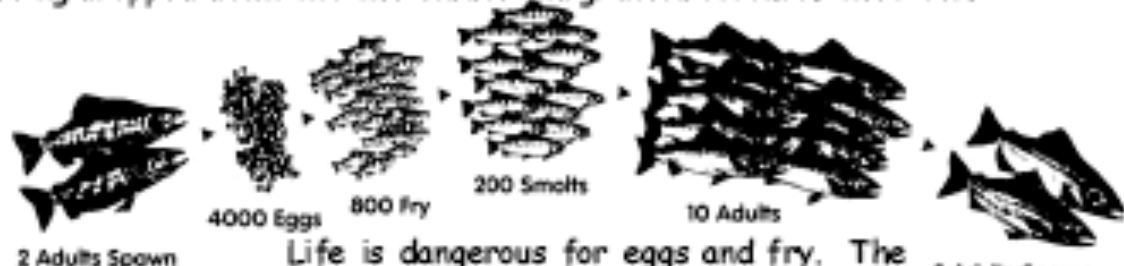
# Eggs! Eggs! Eggs!

## Where Wild Fish Come From

The natural spawning process is complicated and uncertain. And, survival is definitely not in the cards for most of the eggs and fry.

Spawning begins as the season and light changes. The male begins producing milt and the female, her eggs. The fish swim upstream, spurred by the flow of the clear, cold water, until they find the spot where they hatched. The females find an area with adequate gravel and flow and create a redd by fanning their tail fin to rearrange and clear the gravel. On a second pass, they lay their eggs, which fall down into the larger gravel.

Males come in behind depositing the milt across the redd and slightly upstream so that the eggs will be covered with milt and fertilized. Chances are very good that fertilization might not be complete or that conditions in the water or gravel may not be just right. Eggs may die in the process of being laid. Whatever the reason, Many eggs never make it beyond the point of merely being dropped down into the cobble and gravel bottom of the river.



Life is dangerous for eggs and fry. The water may cool, or warm up. Natural and artificial pollutants may change chemicals in the water and poison the fish. Floods may bury the eggs in silt or wash them away. They may be eaten by insects, fish or amphibians scavenging along the bottom or birds, like the water ouzel (dipper) that search the bottom for eggs and insects.

If the eggs are lucky enough to hatch, a new set of dangers awaits them. Should they stray or be washed out of their nursery backwater, they may be overcome by the flow of the river. Insects, like dragonfly larvae, may eat the tiny fish. Sharp-eyed predators, like herons and mergansers or bigger fish, including trout, will be hunting the fry and fingerlings. As they grow larger the fish will encounter fish-eating (piscivorous) mammals as well, predators like raccoons, skunks, bobcats, bears and even people.

