

Watch For Redds

For More information
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The Situk River between Nine Mile Bridge and Situk Lake is exceptional spawning habitat. All five species of Pacific salmon found in Alaska spawn in this stretch of river. Dolly Varden Char, the majority of the Situk Rivers steelhead, and by extension a significant portions of Alaska's steelhead population, also spawn in these waters. Each species prefers slightly different conditions (depth, gravel size, distance from the sea), and spawn at slightly different times, but there is a great deal of overlap.

No matter what time of year you fish the Situk, it is likely that some part of a future run is incubating beneath the gravel.

Salmon and Steelhead lay their eggs in gravel nests called redds. Redds can only be made in places where pure, cool, oxygenated water filters through clean gravel. This is the habitat that salmon are seeking when they make their spawning journey from the ocean. As most anglers know, salmon return to the place in which they were spawned. Redds are an essential part of the salmon cycle.

The female salmon establish and defend territories on the spawning grounds. Male salmon compete with each other for favorable positions next to females. It is the female salmon that create the redds by turning sideways and fanning their bodies to suction and sweep gravel aside. They then lay their eggs in these depressions which are fertilized by male fish. The female then covers the eggs with gravel from the top of the redd.

Eggs and newly hatched salmon, are immobile, and must remain in the gravel where they are vulnerable. Foot traffic and other disturbance can crush or displace the young salmon. Silt, mud, and fine sediments can fill in the spaces between the gravel, cutting off the flow of water and smothering the redd. Pollutants can kill the eggs while they are in the redd.

Salmon and Steelhead migrate great distances and face many hazards, but their life is perhaps most precarious before they emerge from the gravel.



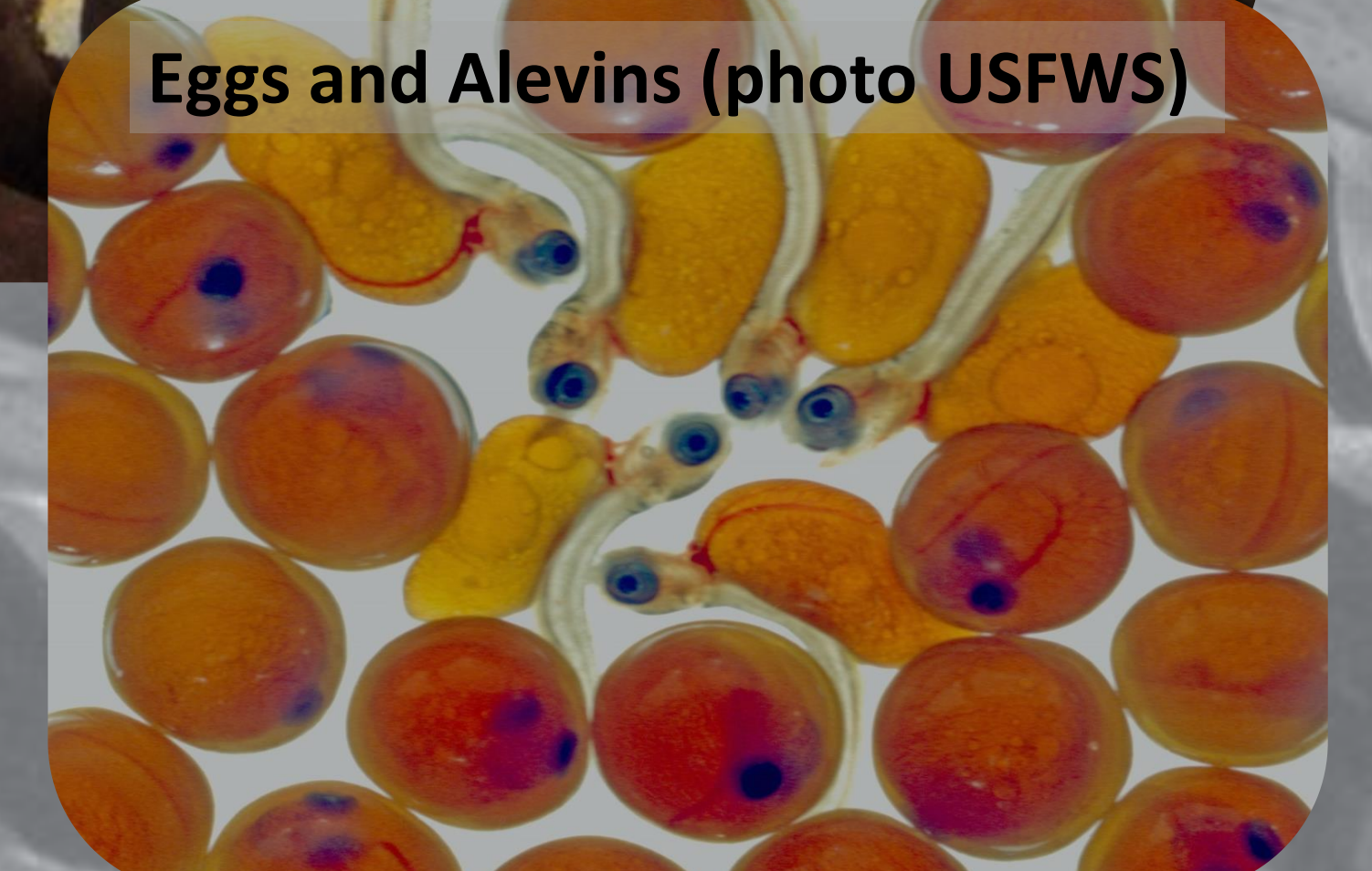
Coho salmon



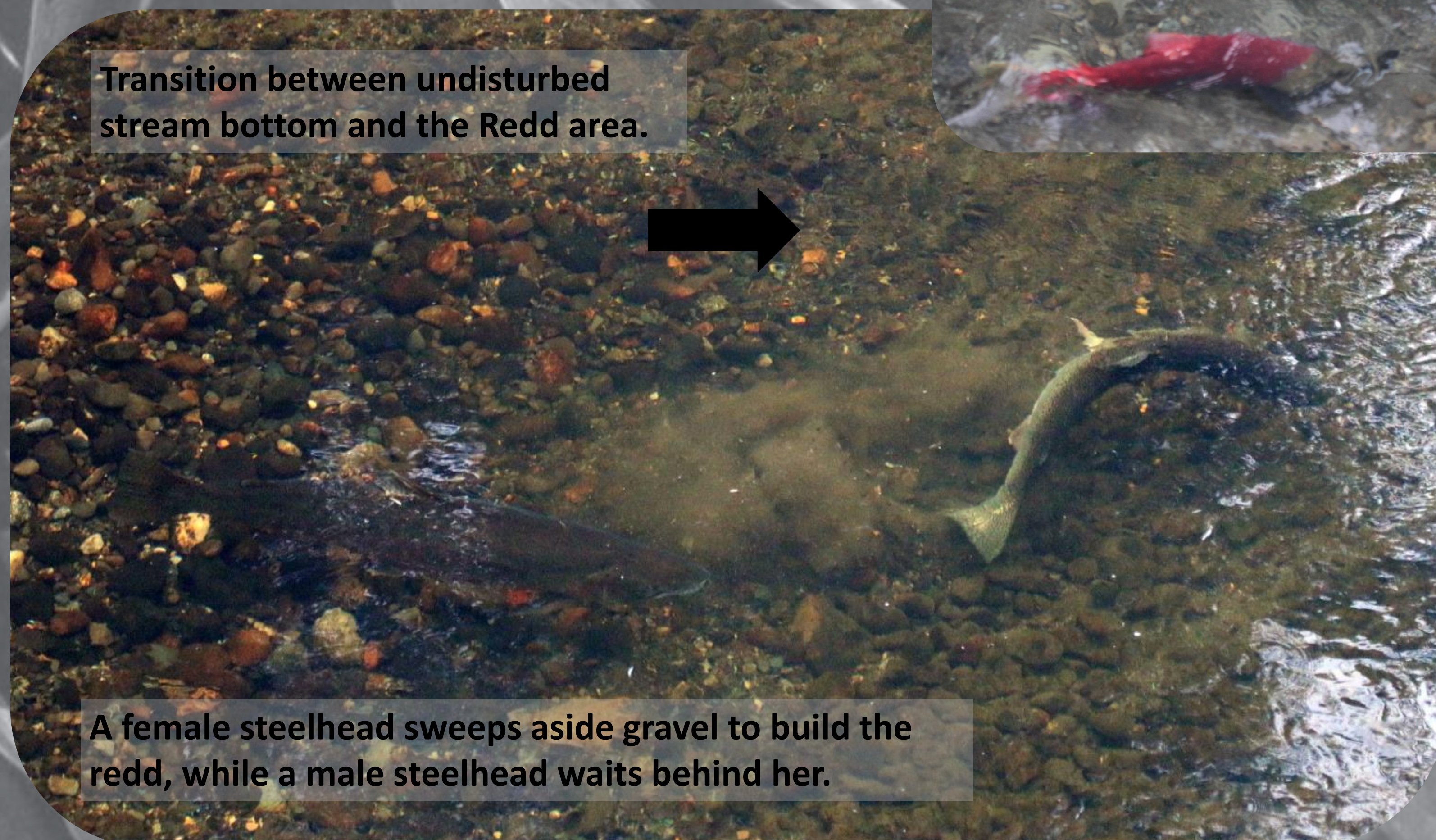
Sockeye salmon



Pink salmon



Eggs and Alevins (photo USFWS)



Transition between undisturbed stream bottom and the Redd area.

A female steelhead sweeps aside gravel to build the redd, while a male steelhead waits behind her.

Redds can be found anywhere with current and gravel, but are most common in the tailouts of pools and in shallow runs. They can appear as series of ridges and depressions in the stream bed, or as a single mound and depression. Sometimes they may only be evident as patches of freshly turned gravel. Spawning fish, if present, often appear darker and more worn. Pockets of eggs can be found throughout the redd area not just in the ridges or depressions.

Please avoid redds as you fish the Situk River.

Other measures that can help reduce your impact on redds include:

- Respecting closed areas
- Avoid targeting actively spawning fish
- Not anchoring your boat, dragging your anchor, or operating a motor through shallow water in which redds are present
- Keeping the river free of soap, oil, gas, and litter
- Stay on trails and use access points as much as possible
- Don't cut or clear streamside vegetation