

Salmon in Bellevue

Fall is the time when salmon return to local streams to spawn, and sightings are being reported around the city. Bellevue has more than 60 miles of streams, many of them habitat for chinook, coho and sockeye salmon.



Where are the salmon coming from?

Salmon migrate from salt water to fresh water to spawn (deposit and fertilize eggs). A salmon born in a waterway such as Kelsey Creek can make its way to the Pacific Ocean by swimming through Mercer Slough to Lake Washington, on to Lake Union via the Lake Washington Ship Canal and through the locks into Puget Sound. Salmon stay in the ocean for two to four years and then return in the fall months.

How do salmon find their way back to local streams?

Little is known about why or how salmon travel thousands of miles to return to the stream where they started. Scientists think seasonal changes, currents and the earth's magnetic forces trigger migration to fresh water. Another theory is that salmon use celestial navigation—the sun by day, stars by night—to guide them. Scientists also believe that once salmon are near streams, they use smell to find their way to their home stream.

What do salmon need to survive?

Salmon are fragile and sensitive to water conditions. This sensitivity makes them excellent indicators of water pollution, which impacts people as well as fish. Salmon need certain conditions to be healthy:

- Streamside vegetation and stable stream flows.
- Cool, clean water with enough oxygen.
- Clean, loose gravel to protect salmon eggs from predators and allow water to flow through the eggs for oxygen.

Where can I see salmon in Bellevue?

Many salmon sightings are on private property in Bellevue and inaccessible. The best public places to spot salmon include:

- Kelsey Creek at the southeast corner of the intersection of 140th Avenue Northeast and Bel-Red Road, upstream of the 140th Avenue culvert.
- Fish ladder at 118th Avenue Southeast, just south of Southeast 8th Street. Look for the blue Mercer Slough signs.
- Kelsey Creek Farm - West Tributary adjacent to main parking. Fish have been seen all along the stream, from the parking lot to the pioneer cabin.
- Kelsey Creek Farm - over the hill on the east side of the farm - stand on the footbridge to view or go to a stream viewing area, down the trail to the south.

If you see a dead salmon in a stream, it's important not to remove the carcass. They bring beneficial minerals and nutrients back from the ocean, which is good for streams.