

Quilcene National Fish Hatchery: The First 100 Years

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The first mention of a hatchery on the Big Quilcene River was as a state facility, but by 1909 it had transformed into a federal venture. A second hatchery was also established on the Duckabush River. The major role of these hatcheries was to propagate salmon and other food fishes. The Alaskan fish hatcheries were considered very successful in boosting the numbers of salmon available to the commercial fishing industry and the intent was to duplicate that success in Puget Sound and its tributaries.

The primary rearing program was a fall chum operation conducted jointly by the Quilcene and Duckabush hatcheries at Walcott Slough, adjacent to the town of Brinnon, Washington. Other species the hatcheries reared primarily consisted of coho, followed by winter steelhead along with minor numbers of fall chinook. A pink salmon program was initiated utilizing eyed eggs received from the Afognak, Alaska station.

In 1930, a trout production program was initiated at the Quilcene hatchery for the purposes of stocking the waters of Olympic and Mount Rainier National Parks as well as on military reservations. The hatcheries were among the Hood Canal stations that distributed spawned salmon carcasses to charitable institutions and needy private individuals during the Great Depression, and the local Civilian Conservation Corps camp made improvements to the Quilcene station's large broodstock pond in 1934. A salmon dehydrating plant, utilizing the spawned carcasses from the Walcott Slough fall chum program, was constructed at the Quilcene station in 1935.

Starting with the 1940 Annual Report, the hatchery was listed as being an agency of the Department of the Interior rather than being under the Department of Commerce. The Duckabush hatchery closed in 1942, and World War II forced strict rationing measures.

The 1950's saw an expansion of the hatchery via a large-scale construction project completed in late 1951.

In 1964 and 1965, the hatchery was again expanded and upgraded. By the early 1960's, the trout production program had grown to encompass 2/3 of our total production.

The trout program was discontinued in 1979 and emphasis shifted back to anadromous salmon. Efforts at establishing spring and fall chinook – and fall chum – runs in the Big Quilcene River were attempted, but today coho salmon comprise our sole hatchery run.

Today, Quilcene National Fish Hatchery is enjoying a new role as a partner in hatchery conservation programs for listed and depressed stocks of salmonids.