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Scientists, Managers, and Citizens Convene for the Greater Good of Mat-Su Salmon

17th Mat-Su Salmon Science and Conservation Symposium

Palmer Depot, November 18 & 19, 2024

PALMER, ALASKA – This annual event brings people together to share information and exchange ideas about salmon science and conservation in the Mat-Su Basin. This year the symposium will be held at the Palmer Depot (610 S. Valley Way). The agenda includes over 30 oral and poster presentations from 9 am to 4 pm daily, and an open-to-the-public evening social at Feather & Flour (927 S Cobb St.) on Monday featuring Palmer musician Aspenyarrow and an open acoustic music jam, 4:30-7:30 pm.

This year's theme, Making the Invisible Visible: Unraveling Freshwater Mysteries through Science and Storytelling, will unfold with the help of four keynote presenters. On Monday, founder and director Jeremy Monroe and natural history photographer David Herasimtschuk of Freshwaters Illustrated will share how they work to conserve freshwater worlds through visual storytelling.

On Tuesday, we'll learn about a true science mystery. In 2020, Dr. Jenifer McIntyre of Washington State University, and colleagues, discovered that acute die-offs of coho in roadway-impacted watersheds in Puget Sound can be blamed on a novel chemical called 6PPD-quinone, one of the most acute toxicants known to science, that leaches from vehicle tires. Dr. McIntyre will illuminate the history of 6PPD-quinone, state of the science for understanding its toxicity, and regulatory actions to address the issue. Dr. Patrick Tomco, Professor of Chemistry and Director of the Applied Science, Engineering and Technology Lab at UAA, will provide important updates on 6PPD-quinone here in Alaska. A panel presentation will follow that focuses on 6PPD-quinone in the Mat-Su and what we can do about it.

This year's symposium covers a broad range of topics related to salmon habitat, reflecting diverse areas of expertise held by Partnership members. We will have presentation blocks on Indigenous salmon stewardship, fish and habitat assessment, aquatic invasive species, salmon habitat restoration, fish passage, human use, policy, and climate change. Guest speakers will include Mat-Su Borough Assembly member Stephanie Nowers and Peter Micciche National Fish Habitat Partnership Board Member and Kenai Borough Mayor, among others.

“The Partnership sees a need and opportunity for proactive stewardship of rapidly changing salmon systems to help Mat-Su salmon cope and adapt to climate and land-use changes,” says Jessica Speed, Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership coordinator.

The Mat-Su Partnership has been recognized nationally for its proactive approach to salmon conservation. The Deshka River was named a “Water to Watch” in 2022 by the National Fish Habitat Partnership. “Our partners—and the Partnership through project support—have invested years of applied scientific assessments on the Deshka, one of the most productive Chinook salmon-producing streams in the Susitna River basin. The national recognition of this work is a testament to the value of working together for the benefit of salmon and their habitat,” said Mike Daigneault, Regional Habitat Restoration and Partnerships Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

“Conversations in the back of the Palmer Depot during previous symposiums launched our efforts to understand the thermal sensitivity of the Deshka system and to develop proactive conservation actions,” said Sue Mauger, Science Director of Cook Inletkeeper and member of the Partnership’s Science and Data Committee.

Additionally, we are excited for the poster session introducing us to additional science, conservation, and policy efforts and the people behind those projects. Enjoy a special art display from Palmer High School students. A data transfer session will continue discussions from previous Symposiums that speak to the challenges of ensuring that current salmon science can inform community decision makers. As always, the two-day forum is an excellent opportunity for an exchange of ideas about salmon science and conservation.

For almost two decades, this two-day forum has enabled the fluid exchange of ideas about salmon science and conservation between peers and diverse stakeholders. The need is great to not only increase our scientific knowledge of salmon and their habitat, but to translate and share it by way of impactful and clear storytelling in order to reach those making decisions that impact our world.

Anyone interested in conservation of Mat-Su Salmon and their habitat is welcome and encouraged to attend. To register for the symposium, go to www.matsusalmon.org. It costs \$50/day inclusive of lunch and refreshments. Students are free. If expense is a barrier, please contact jessica.speed@tu.org.

For more information including a full agenda, visit www.matsusalmon.org, follow us on Facebook @MatSuSalmon, or contact: Jessica Speed, jessica.speed@tu.org, 907-575-7818.

The Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership believes that thriving fish, healthy habitats, and vital communities can co-exist in the Mat-Su Basin. Because wild salmon are central to life in Alaska, the partnership works to ensure quality salmon habitat is safeguarded and restored. This approach relies on collaboration and cooperation of diverse stakeholders to get results.