

Submitted in Support of the U.S. Navy's 2023 Annual Marine Species Monitoring Report for the Pacific



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## Migration route and timing through the NWTT of Chinook salmon acoustically tagged in the Gulf of Alaska



**Citation:** Smith, J.M., and D.D. Huff. 2024. Migration route and timing through the NWTT of Chinook salmon acoustically tagged in the Gulf of Alaska. Prepared for: U.S. Navy, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Prepared by: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Northwest Fisheries Science Center under MIPR N00070-19-MP-001OJ. March 2024.

<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>		<i>Form Approved</i> <b>OMB No. 0704-0188</b>	
<small>Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Washington Headquarters Service, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.</small> <b>PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</b>			
<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 03-2024	<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Monitoring report		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> October 2020 to June 2022
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> MIGRATION ROUTE AND TIMING THROUGH THE NWTT OF CHINOOK SALMON ACOUSTICALLY TAGGED IN THE GULF OF ALASKA		<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b> N00070-19-MP-0010J	
		<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
		<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Joseph M. Smith David D. Huff		<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
		<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
		<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> NOAA Fisheries, Northwest Fisheries Science Center		<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Commander, U.S.Pacific Fleet, 250 Makalapa Dr. Pearl Harbor, HI		<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
		<b>11. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>			
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The migration route and timing of Chinook salmon along the coast of Washington State is not well understood. To determine when and where Chinook salmon of different genetic stocks enter and transit through the U.S. Navy Northwest Training and Testing Area (NWTT), we tagged 298 maturing adult salmon across five locations throughout the Gulf of Alaska. The tagging locations included Kodiak in October 2020 (n = 80), Yakutat in March 2021 (n = 32), Chignik in August 2021 (n = 36), Craig in June 2022 (n = 51), and Sitka in June 2022 (n = 99). We have detected 61 acoustically tagged Chinook salmon (tagged in Kodiak = 10, Yakutat = 5, Chignik = 4, Craig = 12, Sitka = 30). The 298 tagged Chinook salmon included eleven different genetic stocks that were from Southeast Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, or Oregon. This included four Evolutionary Significant Units (ESU), Lower Columbia River, Puget Sound, Snake River fall-run, and Upper Willamette River, that are listed as threaten by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and one ESU, the Oregon Coast, that is a candidate for ESA listing. The Lower Columbia River, Upper Willamette River, and Oregon Coast ESUs were subsequently detected by receivers. The Lower Columbia River ESU fish were detected in Pacific Northwest waters (Canadian and Washington Coast) in August and October but were not detected by receivers specifically in the NWTT. The Upper Willamette River ESU fish were detected in Pacific Northwest waters in April, June, and July and by receivers within the NWTT in July. The Oregon Coast ESU fish were detected in the Pacific Northwest waters in September and October and by receivers with the NWTT in September and October. This study has provided novel evidence that fish tagged in Alaska transit through the NWTT.			

**15. SUBJECT TERMS**

Monitoring, tagging, Chinook salmon, endangered species, Northwest Training Range Complex, Northwest Training and Testing, Washington Coast, Gulf of Alaska

**16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:**

<b>a. REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified
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**17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT**  
UU

**18. NUMBER OF PAGES**  
14

**19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON**  
Department of the Navy

**19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)**  
808-471-6391

## **Executive Summary**

The migration route and timing of Chinook salmon along the coast of Washington State is not well understood. To determine when and where Chinook salmon of different genetic stocks enter and transit through the U.S. Navy Northwest Training and Testing Area (NWTT), we tagged 298 maturing adult salmon across five locations throughout the Gulf of Alaska. The tagging locations included Kodiak in October 2020 (n = 80), Yakutat in March 2021 (n = 32), Chignik in August 2021 (n = 36), Craig in June 2022 (n = 51), and Sitka in June 2022 (n = 99). We have detected 61 acoustically tagged Chinook salmon (tagged in Kodiak = 10, Yakutat = 5, Chignik = 4, Craig = 12, Sitka = 30). The 298 tagged Chinook salmon included eleven different genetic stocks that were from Southeast Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, or Oregon. This included four Evolutionary Significant Units (ESU), Lower Columbia River, Puget Sound, Snake River fall-run, and Upper Willamette River, that are listed as threaten by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and one ESU, the Oregon Coast, that is a candidate for ESA listing. The Lower Columbia River, Upper Willamette River, and Oregon Coast ESUs were subsequently detected by receivers. The Lower Columbia River ESU fish were detected in Pacific Northwest waters (Canadian and Washington Coast) in August and October but were not detected by receivers specifically in the NWTT. The Upper Willamette River ESU fish were detected in Pacific Northwest waters in April, June, and July and by receivers within the NWTT in July. The Oregon Coast ESU fish were detected in the Pacific Northwest waters in September and October and by receivers with the NWTT in September and October. This study has provided novel evidence that fish tagged in Alaska transit through the NWTT.

## **Background**

The United States (U.S.) Navy conducts military training and testing activities in two northeast Pacific Study Areas; the Northwest Training and Testing (NWTT) Study Area and the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Study Area. These activities are crucial for preparing combat-ready military forces capable of defending the nation. At the same time, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries is charged with managing and protecting threatened and endangered marine species in these waters. Part of their responsibility includes issuing permits to the U.S. Navy, allowing them to conduct their training and testing activities. Both NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Navy share common objectives, which include minimizing the impact of military training and testing activities on protected species without compromising the effectiveness of training and testing. Additionally, they aim to reduce adverse environmental effects resulting from such activities. To achieve these goals, close collaboration and communication between the two entities are essential. The data generated from these cooperative efforts provide critical information about the geographical distribution and habitat of marine species within the Navy's study areas. This information enables the Navy to adapt its training and testing activities accordingly, while implementing protective measures for ESA-listed salmonids and other vulnerable species. Consequently, this approach allows for a balance between the Navy's mission requirements and the conservation of protected marine life in northeast Pacific.

This particular project is dedicated to the study of Pacific salmonids in the offshore waters encompassing the existing Northwest Training Range Complex (NWTRC) and the offshore Naval Undersea Warfare Center Keyport Range Complex. These two areas collectively form the NWTT Study Area. In addition, the initial capture and tagging of ESA-listed ESU's with Alaskan waters provides valuable information about the occurrence and distribution of these fish in or near the GOA Study Area. The research conducted within this project is specifically focused on a region that is crucial for both the Navy's monitoring objectives and the conservation of species of interest, as outlined in current and future monitoring plans. By concentrating on this vital region, the project aims to support the U.S. Navy's commitment to minimizing the impact of its training and testing activities on Pacific salmonids and other marine species while ensuring the effectiveness of its operations. This research will provide essential information to inform decision-making and enable the implementation of protective measures for the marine ecosystem in the NWTT and GOA Study Areas.

To understand the migratory patterns and behavior of Chinook salmon tagged in the Gulf of Alaska, we used acoustic tags to track individual fish to determine if and when they transit through the Navy's NWTT Study Area. In addition to tracking their movements, genetic stock identification (GSI) was used to determine the distinct populations of Chinook salmon. By monitoring the movements and genetic makeup of these important fish, this study aims to

provide crucial insights to mitigate potential impacts of Navy activity on their migration, as well as to inform future conservation and management efforts to protect and sustain this species.

## Methods

*Tagging:* Chinook salmon were tagged in five locations along the Gulf of Alaska (Figure 1). Chinook salmon were caught with hook and line. Each individual was immediately put into anesthetic (25 mg/L; AQUI-S® 20E) until the fish reached level III anesthesia (i.e., total loss of equilibrium and no reaction to touch stimuli, ~4 min.). Chinook salmon were surgically implanted with Innovasea 69 kHz V16-4x transmitters (diameter = 16 mm, length = 68 mm, weight = 24 g in air, power output = 158 dB, battery life = 1910 d, random ping rate between 70 and 110 s). The use of AQUI-S® 20E, an anesthetic/sedative, was used under Investigational New Animal Drugs (INAD) permit #11-47. Once anesthetized the fork length (nearest cm) was measured, scales were taken from the preferred area for aging, and a fin clip was taken from the anal fin for genetic analysis. To implant the transmitter a 20 mm incision was made with a sterile scalpel, the V16 transmitter and a passive integrated transponder (PIT) was inserted into the body cavity, and the incision was sutured with two or three simple interrupted surgeon's knots using an Ethicon Y513 4-0 Monocryl suture with a 19 mm reverse cutting needle. After surgery, the fish was placed in a recovery tank of fresh seawater with an aerator until the fish was vigorously swimming and recovered (~5-10 min.). After recovery the fish was released near the capture location. The latitude, longitude, and the time of fish release was recorded for each individual.

The tagging locations, month and year of tagging, and number of fish tagged at each location included Kodiak in October 2020 (n = 80), Yakutat in March 2021 (n = 32), Chignik in August 2021 (n = 36), Craig in June 2022 (n = 51), and Sitka in June 2022 (n = 99) (Figure 1, Table 1).

Genetic samples were taken for each tagged fish and additional fin clip samples were taken from individuals that were either not adequate size for tagging or not in good enough condition for tagging (Table 1). Therefore, the number of fish tagged and analyzed for genetic stock group were different. Genetic analysis was performed by the NWFSC Conservation Biology Division to determine genetic stock. The percentage of each stock group was determined for each location.

*Table 1. Sample size in each location including the number of individuals tagged and the number of individuals with fin clips taken for genetic samples.*

<b>Samples</b>	<b>Chignik</b>	<b>Kodiak</b>	<b>Yakutat</b>	<b>Sitka</b>	<b>Craig</b>
Number tagged	36	80	32	99	51
Number genetic samples	40	91	48	128	47

## Chinook Salmon Tagging Locations

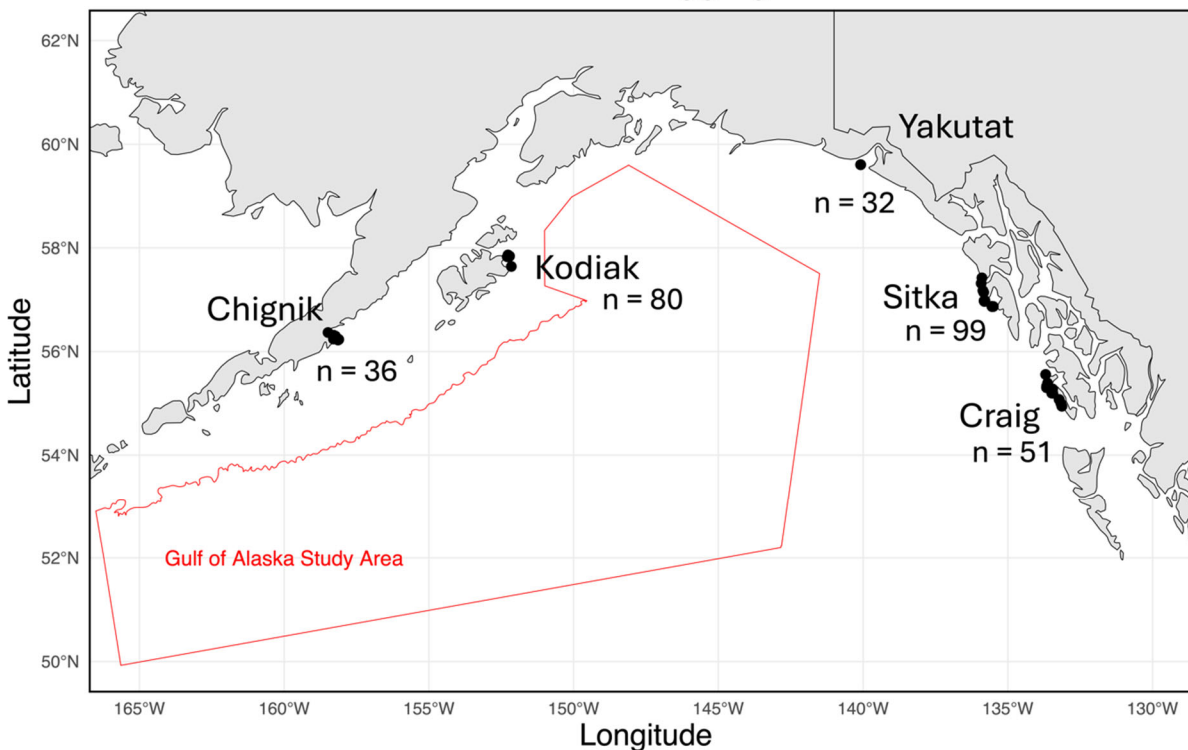


Figure 1. Chinook salmon tagging locations and the number tagged within the Gulf of Alaska. The red outline shows the U.S. Navy Gulf of Alaska Study Area.

*Fish detection:* We deployed InnovaSea 69 kHz VR2AR acoustic receivers along the coast of Washington State to detect acoustically tagged Chinook salmon. The number and configuration of receiver deployments varied by year (n = 69 in 2020, n = 133 in 2021, n = 98 in 2022, n = 60 in 2023). Individuals were also detected by acoustic receivers deployed by other groups (n = 92 in 2020, n = 86 in 2021, n = 95 in 2022, n = 46 in 2023) including Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary, University of Victoria, University of British Columbia, and Kintama consulting company. Additionally, detections were reported via the Ocean Tracking Network (OTN).

*Data analyses:* Detection histories for each individual that include individual ID, tagging date, genetic stock ID, detections locations colored by year and month of detection, and date of last detection were mapped using Program R. Histograms of the number of unique individuals detected by month were plotted for fish detected anywhere in the Pacific Northwest (Canada, Washington, Oregon) and for fish detected by receivers deployed within the NWTT.

## Results

The proportion of different genetic stock IDs varied across tagging locations (Table 2, Figure 2). As stated above, there were more genetics samples taken than individuals tagged. In Chignik (n

= 40), the highest proportion of individuals originated from West Vancouver Island (70.0%), followed by Southeast Alaska (22.5%), and Upper Columbia River summer/fall (7.5%). In Kodiak, (n = 91), most individuals originated from Southeast Alaska (60.4%), followed by Upper Columbia River summer/fall (11.0%), West Vancouver Island (9.9%), Willamette River spring (7.7%), South Thompson River (4.4%), North/Mid Oregon coast (3.3%), West Cascade spring (2.2%), and West Cascade fall (1.1%). In Yakutat (n = 48), most individuals originated from West Vancouver Island (41.7%), followed by Southeast Alaska (27.1%), Willamette River spring (18.8%), Upper Columbia River summer/fall (6.3%), West Cascade spring (2.1%), West Cascade fall (2.1%), and East Vancouver Island (2.1%). In Sitka (n = 128), most individuals originated from Upper Columbia River summer/fall (32.0%), North/Mid Oregon coast (19.5%), West Vancouver Island (15.6%), Southeast Alaska (14.8%), South Thompson River (12.5%), East Vancouver Island (2.3%), West Cascade fall (2.3%), and Snake River fall (0.8%). In Craig (n = 47), most individuals originated from West Vancouver Island (36.2%), Upper Columbia River summer/fall (19.1%), Southeast Alaska (17.0%), West Cascade fall (10.6%), North/Mid Oregon coast (6.4%), South Thompson River (4.3%), East Vancouver Island (4.3%), and South Puget Sound (2.1%).

Table 2. The percentage of each genetic stock group at each location. The \* indicates genetic stock groups that are within ESA threatened ESUs. The \*\* indicates a genetic stock group that is a candidate for ESA listing.

<b>Genetic stock group</b>	<b>Chignik</b>	<b>Kodiak</b>	<b>Yakutat</b>	<b>Sitka</b>	<b>Craig</b>
North/Mid Oregon coast**	0.0%	3.3%	0.0%	19.5%	6.4%
Snake River fall*	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%
Upper Columbia River summer/fall	7.5%	11.0%	6.3%	32.0%	19.1%
Willamette River spring*	0.0%	7.7%	18.8%	0.0%	0.0%
West Cascade spring*	0.0%	2.2%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%
West Cascade fall*	0.0%	1.1%	2.1%	2.3%	10.6%
South Puget Sound*	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%
South Thompson River	0.0%	4.4%	0.0%	12.5%	4.3%
West Vancouver Island	70.0%	9.9%	41.7%	15.6%	36.2%
East Vancouver Island	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	2.3%	4.3%
Southeast Alaska	22.5%	60.4%	27.1%	14.8%	17.0%



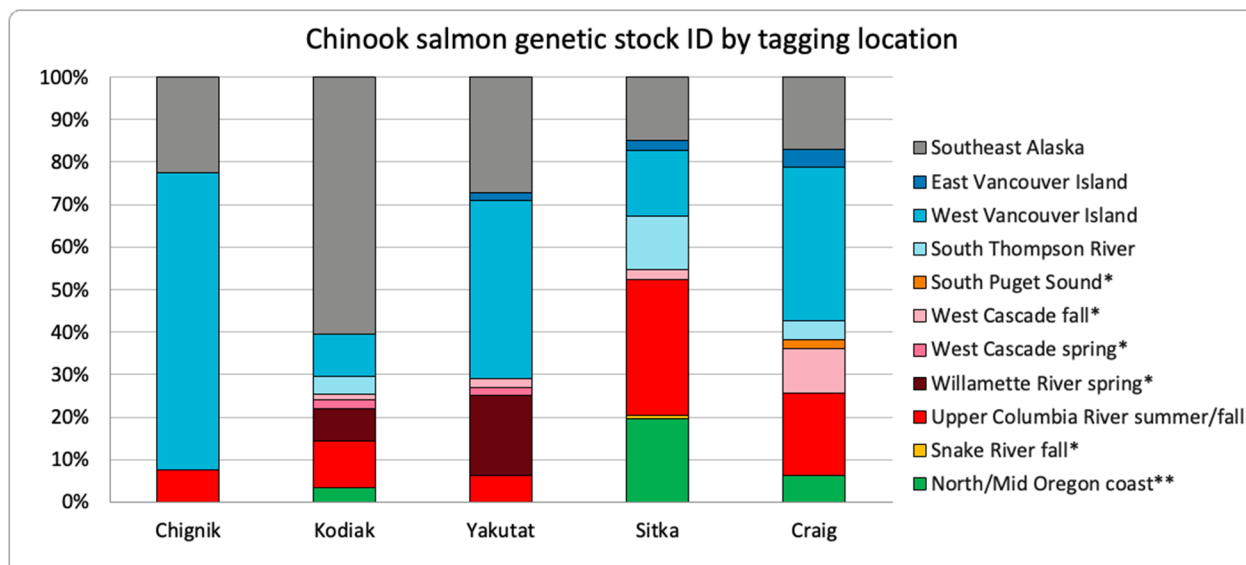


Figure 2. Stacked bar plot showing the percent of different genetic stock IDs captured at each of the tagging locations. Colors indicate genetic stock ID. The \* indicates genetic stock groups that are within ESA threatened ESUs. The \*\* indicates a genetic stock group that is a candidate for ESA listing.

Genetic analysis identified three genetic stocks that are within ESUs listed as threatened under the ESA. These include South Puget Sound (n = 1 in Craig), Snake River fall (n = 1 in Sitka), and Willamette River spring (n = 7 in Kodiak, n = 9 in Yakutat). Additionally, Oregon Coast fish which are a candidate for ESA listing were tagged (n = 3 in Kodiak, n = 25 in Sitka, and n = 3 in Craig)

Of the 298 Chinook salmon tagged in Alaskan waters, 61 (20.5%) of these fish were subsequently detected by receivers in Pacific Northwest waters (Kodiak = 10, Yakutat = 5, Chignik = 4, Craig = 12, Sitka = 30). Individuals were detected 18 to 804 days after tagging (Table 3). The Puget Sound ESU and Snake River fall-run ESU individuals were not subsequently detected after tagging. The detection trajectory of each of the 61 detected individuals is presented in the supplementary material at the end of this document. Chinook salmon were detected within the Pacific Northwest waters (Canada, Washington, Oregon) between March and October, except for May (Figure 3). The Lower Columbia River ESU was detected in Pacific Northwest waters in August and October (Figure 3). This ESU was not specifically detected by receivers deployed within the NWTT. The Upper Willamette River ESU (which is labeled as the Willamette River spring genetic stock group) fish were detected in Pacific Northwest waters in April, June, and July (Figure 3) and specifically within the NWTT in July (Figure 4). The Oregon Coast ESU fish were detected in the Pacific Northwest waters in September and October (Figure 3) and specifically within the NWTT in September and October (Figure 4). Chinook salmon from all ESUs were detected on receivers specifically within the NWTT between June and October (Figure 4).

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Table 3. The unique fish ID, tag date, fork length (cm), ESU, number of detections, number of unique stations, date of last detection, and number of days from tagging until the last detection for each detected Chinook salmon.

Unique fish ID	Tag date	Fork length (cm)	Genetic stock	ESU	Detections	Stations	Last detect date	Days to last detect
Chignik_013	8/15/21	53	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	490	7	10/22/22	433
Chignik_017	8/15/21	62	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	56	8	10/18/22	429
Chignik_033	8/17/21	71	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	30	2	10/30/23	804
Chignik_035	8/17/21	58	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	17	2	9/2/23	746
Craig_007	5/28/22	68	SSE_AK	NA	1	1	8/28/22	92
Craig_009	5/28/22	72	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	263	5	9/13/22	108
Craig_013	5/28/22	64	SSE_AK	NA	59	2	9/6/22	101
Craig_014	6/7/22	71	NA	NA	21	3	9/6/22	91
Craig_018	5/26/22	70	NA	NA	30	4	9/19/22	116
Craig_027	6/8/22	66	W_Cascade_fa	Lower Columbia River	46	3	10/7/23	486
Craig_028	6/11/22	74	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	1	1	9/7/22	88
Craig_033	6/11/22	44	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	63	5	9/15/22	96
Craig_036	6/10/22	59	S_Thompson_R	NA	16	3	7/25/22	45
Craig_041	6/11/22	54	NA	NA	2562	6	10/26/22	137
Craig_045	6/8/22	75	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	38	3	10/18/22	132
Craig_046	6/7/22	63	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	13	4	9/3/22	88
Kodiak_010	10/18/20	59	SSE_AK	NA	45	1	5/14/21	208
Kodiak_029	10/18/20	69	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	197	14	11/5/20	18
Kodiak_047	10/21/20	65	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	11	4	9/3/21	317
Kodiak_048	10/21/20	74	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	104	7	3/4/21	134
Kodiak_061	10/24/20	65	NA	NA	3	1	7/13/21	262
Kodiak_064	10/24/20	72	S_Thompson_R	NA	1	1	3/5/21	132

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Kodiak_065	10/24/20	64	SSE_AK	NA	16	3	8/25/21	305
Kodiak_068	10/24/20	66	Northern	NA	402	10	4/21/21	179
Kodiak_075	10/24/20	63	SSE_AK	NA	124	6	3/23/21	150
Kodiak_077	10/24/20	73	Willamette_sp	Upper Willamette River	17	2	6/25/21	244
Sitka_017	6/16/22	63	N/Mid_OR_Coast	Oregon Coast	76	4	10/4/22	110
Sitka_019	6/17/22	68	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	11	3	9/7/22	82
Sitka_022	6/17/22	67	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	20	1	8/7/22	51
Sitka_023	6/17/22	71	S_Thompson_R	NA	5	1	8/25/22	69
Sitka_035	6/17/22	74	S_Thompson_R	NA	619	9	10/20/22	125
Sitka_038	6/17/22	73	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	64	8	9/7/22	82
Sitka_042	6/17/22	68	N/Mid_OR_Coast	Oregon Coast	44	3	9/30/22	105
Sitka_044	6/17/22	69	N/Mid_OR_Coast	Oregon Coast	2	1	9/4/22	79
Sitka_047	6/19/22	70	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	37	3	9/4/22	77
Sitka_048	6/19/22	73	S_Thompson_R	NA	16	4	7/11/22	22
Sitka_051	6/18/22	65	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	100	10	9/13/22	87
Sitka_052	6/18/22	63	NA	NA	24	3	8/17/22	60
Sitka_053	6/22/22	79	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	35	4	9/4/22	74
Sitka_054	6/19/22	70	S_Thompson_R	NA	29	4	8/22/22	64
Sitka_056	6/19/22	62	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	72	5	8/24/23	431
Sitka_057	6/18/22	75	NA	NA	25	2	8/6/22	49
Sitka_060	6/20/22	69	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	69	6	9/8/22	80

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Sitka_065	6/20/22	59	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	25	3	6/25/23	370
Sitka_066	6/15/22	59	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	36	7	9/18/22	95
Sitka_070	6/14/22	73	NA	NA	22	2	9/15/22	93
Sitka_073	6/14/22	67	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	53	7	6/30/23	381
Sitka_074	6/14/22	69	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	57	4	9/12/22	90
Sitka_077	6/14/22	70	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	125	8	9/14/22	92
Sitka_080	6/14/22	70	NA	NA	107	10	8/28/22	75
Sitka_082	6/15/22	63	N/Mid_OR_Coast	Oregon Coast	59	4	9/24/22	101
Sitka_085	6/15/22	59	NA	NA	238	5	9/4/22	81
Sitka_092	6/15/22	69	NA	NA	73	7	8/28/22	74
Sitka_093	6/16/22	69	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	20	1	7/20/23	399
Sitka_097	6/15/22	56	NA	NA	18	2	9/1/22	78
Sitka_098	6/16/22	58	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	17	3	9/17/22	93
Yakutat_001	3/9/21	84	Willamette_sp	Upper Willamette River	23	4	7/8/21	121
Yakutat_005	3/8/21	70	U_Columbia_R_su/fa	Upper Columbia River Summer/Fall	23	4	8/22/21	167
Yakutat_012	3/26/21	79	Northern	NA	18	2	6/11/21	77
Yakutat_018	3/9/21	67	Willamette_sp	Upper Willamette River	24	3	4/24/21	46
Yakutat_026	3/8/21	70	W_Vancouver_Is	NA	37	4	8/16/21	161

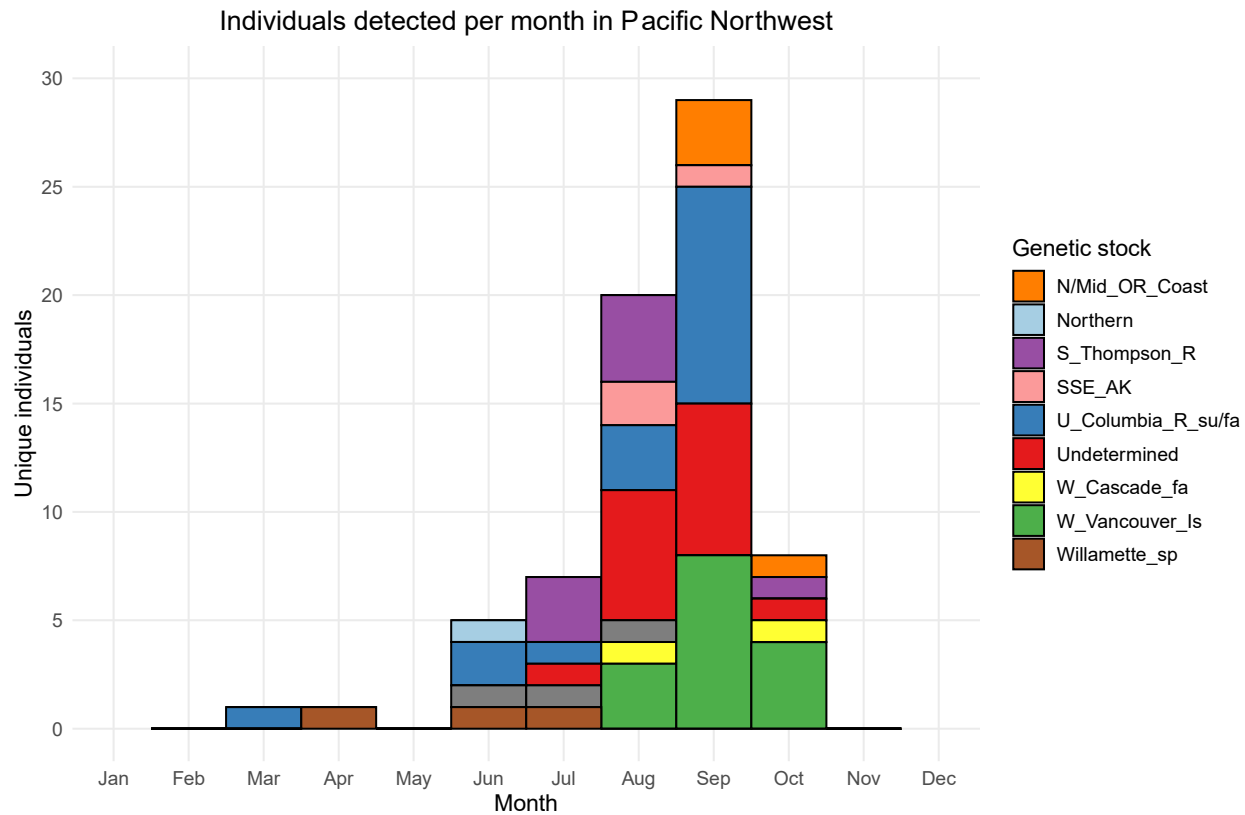


Figure 3. The number of unique individuals detected by month within the Pacific Northwest (Canada, Washington, Oregon). Colors indicate the genetic stock group.

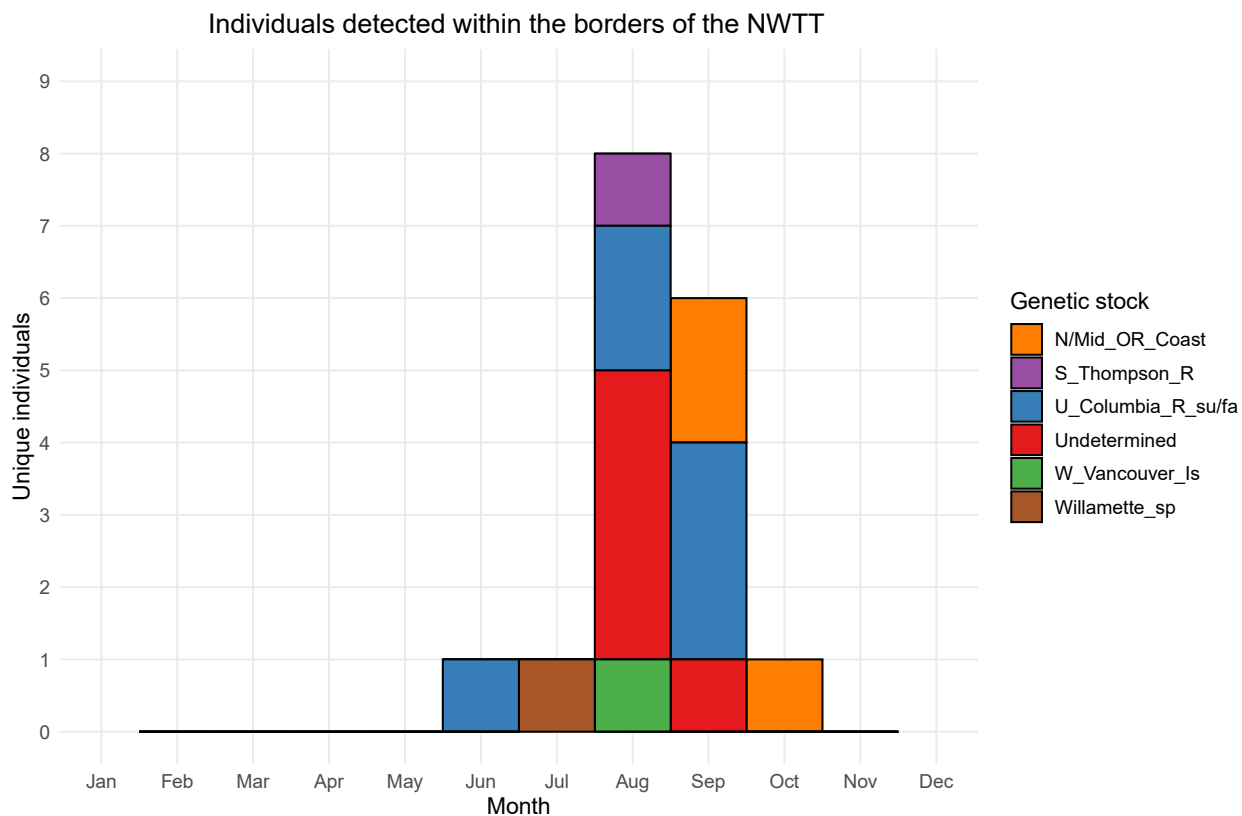


Figure 4. The number of unique individuals detected by receivers specifically within the NWTT. Colors indicate the genetic stock group.

## Conclusion

This study provided promising insights, by utilizing acoustic tags and genetic stock identification to document the migration of Chinook salmon tagged in the Gulf of Alaska and detected by Pacific Northwest receivers. There were 11 different genetic stocks captured at five different tagging locations across the Gulf of Alaska. The 298 tagged Chinook salmon included four Evolutionary Significant Units (ESU), Lower Columbia River, Puget Sound, Snake River fall-run, and Upper Willamette River, that are listed as threaten by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and one ESU, the Oregon Coast, that is a candidate for ESA listing. We successfully tracked individual fish as they transit through the Navy's NWTT Study Area and found that individuals were detected specifically by receivers within the NWTT from June to October. This study showcases the potential of this approach to determine the timing of Chinook salmon presence within the NWTT which can help mitigate potential impacts of Navy activities on the migration of Chinook salmon and other marine species.

These results contribute to future conservation and management efforts aimed at striking a balance between the U.S. Navy's mission requirements and the protection of protected marine life in the Pacific Northwest region. The collaboration and communication between NOAA

Fisheries and the U.S. Navy have been crucial in achieving these shared objectives. The data generated from this study can inform the development of adaptive strategies and protective measures for the marine ecosystem within the NWTT Study Area, ensuring the effectiveness of Navy activities while safeguarding vulnerable marine species.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to recognize the contributions of Andy Seitz and Michael Courtney to this project. Their assistance with fieldwork and logistics in Alaska was critical to the success of this work. Many thanks to Doug Jackson for generating plots and assisting with data management, analysis, and interpretation. We thank Andrea Balla-Holden from the U.S. Navy, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Environmental Readiness Division for providing funding to complete this study, and thank Chris Hunt, Stephanie Sleeman, Brittany Bartlett, and Jessica Chen from Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command for comments on the report and logistics support.

## **Supplementary Material**

The following pages are the detection histories for each acoustically tagged Chinook salmon that was detected after tagging. The top left of each plot gives the unique fish ID, fork length (cm), release date, and genetic stock of the fish. The release locations are indicated with a dark green circle and is connected to the first detection location by a dark green dashed line. The left plot is a zoomed-out view to show the full extent of detection history, and the right plot is zoomed in to show the detailed movements of each Chinook salmon and has the NWTT outlined in red. The color of the circles indicates the month and year of detection and detections are connected by lines base on detection time.