

# Spawning Salmon Etiquette



Cortes creeks are relatively small water bodies in comparison to the larger river systems on the adjoining mainland and Vancouver Island. There are only a handful of creeks on Cortes that are salmon-bearing and support returning salmon to spawn in their natal waters. Basil Creek, at Squirrel Cove, is the most active salmon creek on Cortes, and is accessible to public viewing in a couple of places. Chum salmon are the most easily seen here, due to their numbers, size, and habits. Coho are also present locally, but difficult to observe due to their speed, nocturnal movements and because they move much further up in a creek system.

It is a privilege to witness the epic return from the long sea migration and their final heroic act to spawn and return their spent bodies back to stream, forest and all the wild creatures who thrive on this, as they put their last effort into their species survival.

For the sake of these salmon, please be mindful of your presence when watching spawning salmon in Cortes creeks, and **follow some simple guidelines:**

- no walking in the creek; that means enthusiastic children of all ages!
- keep dogs on leashes and out of the creek, but best if dogs are left at home
- approach salmon quietly and slowly; it's hard not to point enthusiastically, but this gesture often scares them
- approach from downstream (that way, if you startle the salmon, they will swim upstream rather than downstream where they came from)
- be respectful of private property

There are **two public viewing places for Basil Creek**, and we ask that you stay off private property. The public can easily observe salmon at the mouth of the creek where it empties into Squirrel Cove, and at the public trail below the restored open-bottom arch where the salmon enhancement educational signage is erected. Chum are often seen pooling just below the arch, so move carefully, please.

The other salmon-bearing creeks on Cortes are James Creek running through the Children's Forest emptying into Carrington Lagoon, Hansen Creek running along the Gorge Hill emptying into the Gorge Harbour, and Whaletown Creek emptying into Whaletown Lagoon. James Creek is the most accessible to public and has the bonus of an energizing forest walk through the Children's Forest. Unfortunately, the lower reaches of Hansen and Whaletown Creeks run through private property with no public access.

Community eyes & ears are most helpful for FOCI Streamkeepers who continue to monitor and count spawners from mid-October through November. The usual first signs of spawners preparing to move upstream are:

- fish rising to the surface in the bays adjoining major creeks
- presence of sea lions and seals tracking the salmon
- an increase of seagull and eagle activity in the area

Please remember these important pointers for salmon and stream etiquette!

Above all, take the time to truly appreciate the miracle that you are looking at. Each pair of spawners might lay 2000 glistening pink eggs, of which perhaps four might live to come home again. Imagine...the epic tale of survival that each could tell of their four-year adventure.

*"Salmon feed the trees that make the oxygen we breathe."*