

Brita and the CoHo Salmon

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Six-month old Brita Pierson at first planting of coho salmon in Lake Superior, with Commissioner Jarle Lierfallom.

Forty years ago, in April of 1969, when Brita Pierson Aug was 6 months old, the first planting of coho salmon was scheduled to be released at the French River Hatchery. So, Brita and Karl Strom, who was 6 years old, and I went to witness the exciting event.

The hatchery was bustling with activity, with dignitaries. Even Jarle Lierfallom, the Minnesota Conservation Commissioner in 1969, attended. I thought it would be interesting to follow up, 40 years later, on the coho population. Don Schreiner at the French River Hatchery had a wealth of information on the coho's history and management over the years.

The coho salmon were stocked in Minnesota waters from 1969 through 1972. Stocking was discontinued based on slow growth rate, small size of creel fish, low return rate, late spawning migration, and high cost of the hatchery product. The coho have now become naturalized throughout Lake Superior. They have a 3-year lifecycle with anglers catching primarily 2 year old fish. There is no closed season for coho

salmon. The bag limit is 5 when combined with chinook, pink and Atlantic salmon, with a minimum size limit of 10 inches. To determine the yearly coho population three methods are used. Winter creel surveys are conducted once every 3 years and summer creel surveys are done annually. Charter captains file annual reports and these are summarized. French and Knife River traps are monitored to count adults entering those two rivers (annually, fewer than 25 are captured in each river's traps).

I learned that the coho salmon have provided a high quality fishery based on natural production. They will continue to be monitored to provide anglers with a great fun sport in the North Shore streams for many more years.