

2025 North Coast Salmon Report Card Annual Report



By:
Dan Troxel
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Northern Region
Klamath River Project
50 Ericson Court
Arcata, CA 95521

August, 2026

Summary

Recreational salmon harvest on the Klamath, Trinity and Smith Rivers requires the possession and use of the North Coast Salmon Report Card (Salmon Card or card). Anglers use this license endorsement for self-reporting effort and catch primarily for Chinook Salmon. However, as a self-reporting tool, the Salmon Card does not currently provide a robust data set, with the last data year having approximately a one-quarter return rate. Due to this, Salmon Card data is not used for harvest estimates. As detailed in the report below, we provide issuance, revenue and show trends in effort data across the usage area, which is useful for areas in which there are no active creel surveys. In 2025, recreational salmon fishing was closed for the third consecutive year in the Klamath River basin. Recreational salmon fishing remained open on the Smith River, so there was angling opportunity under the purview of the Salmon Card. Sales did increase from the previous year, but overall sales of the card were markedly lower than years in which fishing was open in the Klamath River basin.

Introduction

Salmon are a popular sport fish among California's recreational anglers. In particular, Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) are targeted by anglers in the ocean and in-river fisheries. For fishing in-river salmon on the North Coast of California, anglers are required to report their effort and catch to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Salmon Card is a required license endorsement for all recreational anglers targeting Chinook Salmon in the Klamath-Trinity and Smith River systems (Appendix A). The Klamath-Trinity Salmon Report Card was first issued in 2008 and then modified slightly to include the Smith River as of 2012, thus establishing the current version of the Salmon Card, which has been the same template since. The contemporary format was preceded by the California Sport Salmon Punch Card, which was a reporting system for recreational salmon fishing state-wide, including ocean fisheries.

The Salmon Card shall be purchased as required to supplement annual and lifetime fishing licenses, as well as purchased individually for unlicensed anglers; those younger than 16 years of age, or those fishing on a California "Free Fishing Day". The card includes three reporting requirements; fishing location, effort and catch. The effort component includes the month and day fishing took place, and the location code of where fishing took place. The catch component includes retention and release information for grilse (jack) and adult Chinook Salmon, as well as hatchery mark information for each fish when applicable. The card also includes release and hatchery mark information for Coho Salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), which are state and federally listed as threatened and may not be retained. Issuance of any harvest reporting card comes with several requirements, including but not limited to; have report card in immediate possession while fishing, entries shall be made legibly in indelible ink, catch to be immediately reported upon landing a fish (retained or released), report cards are non-transferable, and report cards must be returned by January 31 of the following year. Information and regulations for Sport Fishing Report Cards (including the Salmon Card) can be found in the current California Department of Fish and Wildlife Freshwater Sportfishing Regulations. Additional report card(s) may be purchased when the first card is completed, if the angler shall continue salmon angling.

Funding from the Salmon Card sales goes into the Department's General Fund, which is used for various expenditures throughout the Department. For purposes of the Klamath River Project, the card revenue

funds creel survey effort occurring prior to August 6 in the lower Klamath River, including both the field data collection and data entry. Additionally, these funds are used for Salmon Card data entry for those submitted to the Department by mail.

Year in Review

In 2025, the Smith River was open to recreational salmon fishing. The Klamath-Trinity basin was closed to recreational salmon fishing following the Fish and Game Commission's adoption of the "closed to salmon fishing" option via the annual regulatory process in May 2025.

Issuance and Revenue

In 2025, a total of 8,625 Salmon Cards were issued. A total of 6,698 annual cards were sold at a \$8.25 fee (a \$0.25 increase from 2024). As of 2019 the "Lifetime" North Coast Salmon Report Cards cost \$0.00, (no longer a fixed \$1.00 fee). In 2025, a total of 1,927 cards were issued to holders of Lifetime Sport Fishing Licenses. License sales accounted for a total revenue of \$55,259 for 2025. This year ranked second lowest in total number of cards issued as well as revenue generated since first implementation in 2008 (Figures 1 and 2). To date, Salmon Card sales have generated \$1,986,922 in the eighteen years of issuance, with an annual average of \$110,385. As seen in Figure 1, sales peaked in 2012, which coincided with the highest Klamath in-river quota since institution of the freshwater-only version of the Salmon Card in 2008.

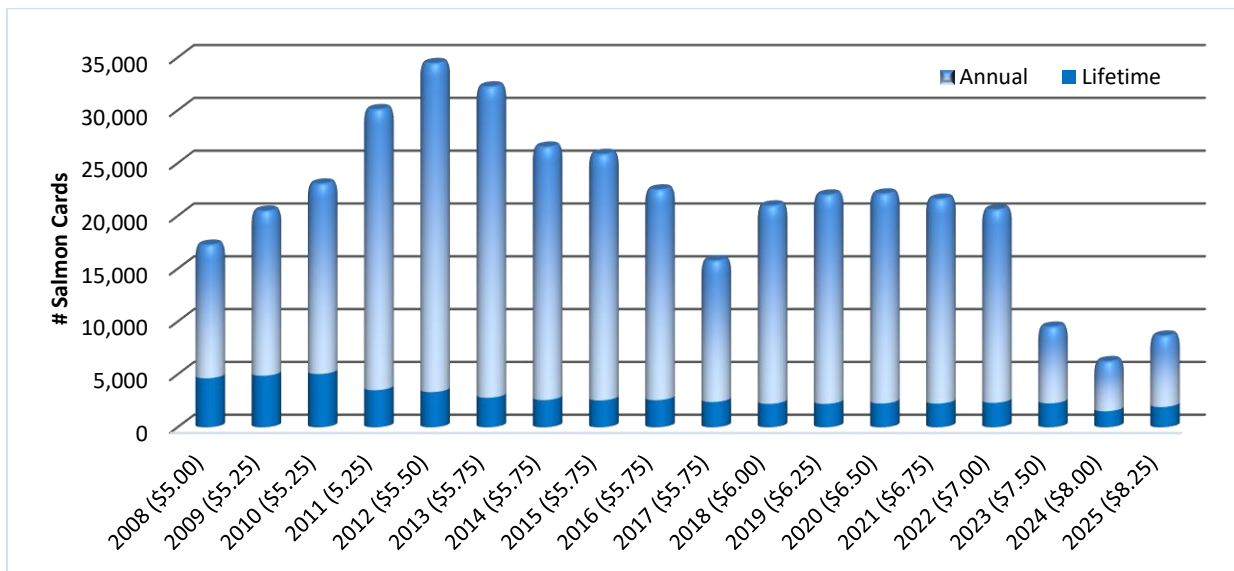


Figure 1. Salmon Card number issued by year.

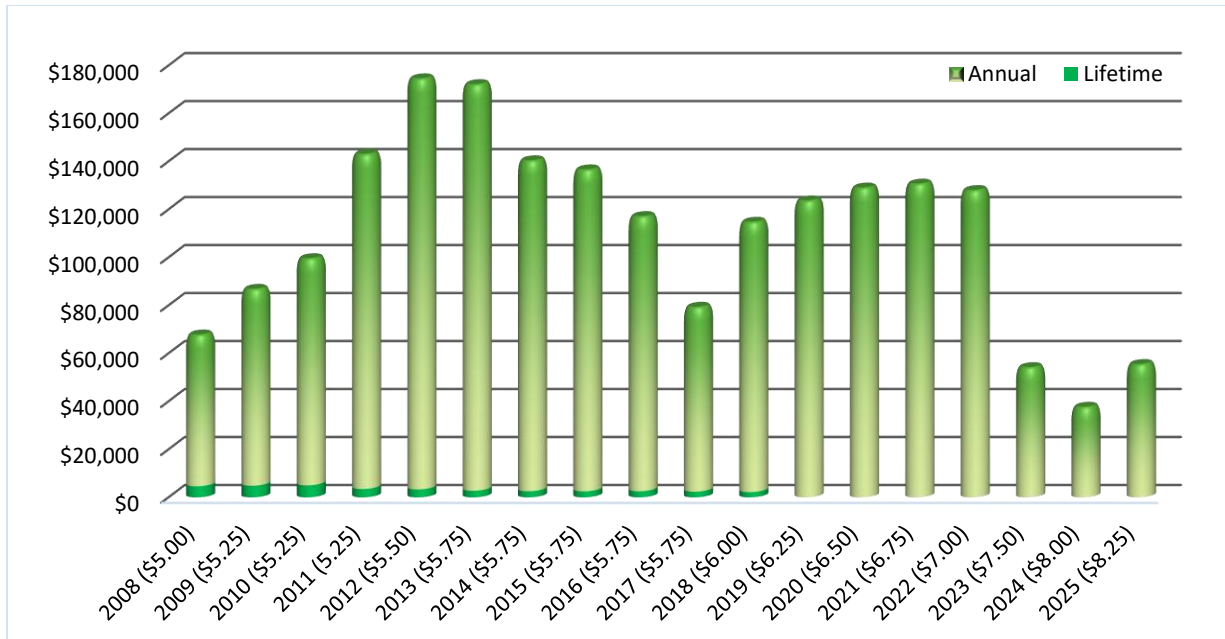


Figure 2. Salmon Card revenue and annual purchase price by year.

Harvest Reporting

Under the current Code of Regulations, anglers with a Salmon Card are required to report harvest to the Department. This can be done by mailing it directly to 5341 Ericson Way Arcata, CA 95521, or anglers can submit their harvest information through the Department's online portal at:

<http://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Licensing/Fishing#44521416-harvest-reporting>

Online reporting of harvest is available January 1 through March 31 each year, after which point, late cards must be mailed to the Department.

Though anglers are required to return or report their Salmon Cards by January 31 of the following year, return rates are far less than 100%, however most returned cards are submitted by the deadline. A relatively small number of cards are submitted after that date, with most cards not being submitted. As of May 1, 2026 the total number of returned 2025 North Coast Salmon Report Cards was 2,284; a 26.48% return rate.

Most Salmon Cards are submitted by the card holder via the Department's online harvest reporting portal. For 2025, a total of 2,093 were submitted through the online portal, and the remaining 191 cards were mailed in and entered by CDFW staff. Comparing usage levels, those submitted through the online portal account for 222 used and 1,871 unused cards, while mailed in cards accounted for 94 and 97 used and unused report cards, respectively. Of the total returned cards, 2,245 were returned by anglers that purchased a single card. Additionally, 16 anglers purchased and returned two cards (the original and an additional card), as well as one angler that returned three cards (the original and two additional cards), and one angler that returned 4 cards (the original and three additional cards).

Report Card Use and Usage by River

Of the 2,284 Salmon Cards returned, a total of 1,968 (86.16%) were returned “Not Used”. Of the 316 cards that were used, 108 (34.18%) were used for a single angling trip. Cumulatively, the data reported indicates a total of 1,199 instances of angler effort, however there are a total of 11 instances of effort that do not have Location Code data available, resulting in an adjusted total of 1,188 valid angler trips reported. Of this effort, the Klamath River accounted for 47 trips (3.96%); followed by the Trinity River for 84 trips (7.07%); and Klamath basin tributaries accounted for 10 trips (0.84%). The Smith River accounted for the largest number of trips 1,047 (88.13%). Some or all of the effort in the Klamath and Trinity Rivers could possibly be explained by anglers completing their Salmon Card at the same time as their Steelhead Report and Restoration Card as a matter of habit, or if they caught a salmon while fishing for steelhead and used their Salmon Card to report salmon releases. It is worth noting that due to regular season structure and subsequent adopted salmon fishery closures, at no point was the Klamath-Trinity basin open to recreational salmon angling, despite effort and the harvest of one fish being reported. On the Klamath River, effort was reported generally in the summer and fall. It is also worth noting that some reported effort in parts of the Klamath occurred at times in which salmon fishing would not have been open under “normal” regulatory season structure. As noted on the Smith River, the fishery was open for the year as normal with regards to seasons, bag and possession limits, as well as low flow closure restrictions.

Location distribution is categorized by the location codes on the Salmon Card, to be entered by the angler when engaging in recreational angling. Submitted data indicates that on the Klamath River, of 47 instances of effort, 25 (53.19%) of which occurred in the area from the Highway 96 Bridge to the mouth. On the Trinity River, of the 84 instances of effort, 71 (84.52%) of which occurred in the area from Old Lewiston Bridge to Hawkins Bar Bridge. On the Smith River, of 1,047 instances of effort, 512 (48.90%) instances occurred from the Smith River mouth up to the mouth of Rowdy Creek and 444 (42.41%) occurred from the mouth of Rowdy Creek to the confluence of the North and South Forks.

Effort Demographics

Salmon Cards are primarily issued to California resident anglers. In 2025 cards with at least one line of effort were returned by anglers from California and ten other states. No cards were returned by anglers of international origin. In terms of effort, California resident anglers accounted for 1,084 (90.41%) of the total 1,199 reported instances of effort.

Catch and Harvest

Total reported catch for Chinook Salmon included 258 (230 adults and 28 jacks) harvested and 699 released (507 adults and 192 jacks). Currently Smith River jacks are identified as ≤ 22 " total length (TL), while Klamath-Trinity basin jacks are identified by a variable length adopted into regulation annually. As the salmon fishery was closed in 2024, there was not a cut-off length adopted into regulations, so any differentiation between jack and adult salmon on the Klamath or Trinity Rivers would have been up to the anglers interpretation. Hatchery adipose-clipped Chinook Salmon generally account for varying percentages of catch depending on basin or sub-basin. A total of 254 Chinook Salmon were reported harvested in the Smith River, including 226 adults and 28 jacks, of which a total of 59 fish were of

hatchery origin (23.22%) A total of 538 Chinook Salmon were reported released in the Smith River, of which 61 were of hatchery origin (11.34%). Within the Klamath-Trinity basin, only four salmon were reported harvested, two clipped and two non-clipped fish were reported harvested resulting in a 50% hatchery component. Of released salmon in the Klamath-Trinity basin, 106 Chinook Salmon were released, of which 48 were of hatchery origin (45.28%). Only the Smith River reported coho releases, a total of 27 coho were reported released, including 11 hatchery marked fish (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. 2025 Angler harvested jack and adult ad-clipped and unmarked Chinook Salmon by river.

River	Chinook Adults		Chinook Jacks		Totals
	Ad-clip	Non-clip	Ad-clip	Non-clip	
Klamath	1	1	0	0	2
Trinity	0	0	0	0	0
KT Tribs	1	1	0	0	2
Smith	57	169	2	26	254
Totals	59	171	2	26	258

Table 2. 2025 Angler released jack and adult ad-clipped and unmarked Chinook Salmon and maxillary or ad-clipped and unmarked Coho Salmon by river.

River	Chinook Adults		Chinook Jacks		Coho (All)	
	Ad-clip	Non-clip	Ad-clip	Non-clip	Clip	Non-clip
Klamath	27	17	1	15	0	0
Trinity	21	39	6	27	0	0
KT Tribs	0	2	0	6	0	0
Smith	57	344	4	133	11	16
Totals	105	402	11	181	11	16

Discussion

Since 2008, Salmon Card sales have generated over \$1.98 million in revenue for the Department. In 2025, Salmon Card sales generated just over \$55,000, or half of the annual average over the past eighteen years. Fewer cards were sold, obviously attributed to the closure of recreational salmon fisheries in the Klamath-Trinity basin (Appendix B).

The 2025 Salmon Cards were subject to a single fee structure change. The annual card increased in price by \$0.25 to a total of \$8.25. This gradual price increase continues to offset the elimination of the fixed \$1.00 fee for Lifetime license holder Salmon Cards, which would have generated \$1,927 under the previous fee structure. As indicated from conversations with CDFW License and Revenue Branch staff, the change in fee structure for the lifetime license card was done to eliminate all lifetime license elements from leveraging the lifetime trust fund and are now distributed directly to their respective element (Sivak, 2020. Pers. Comm.)

In 2025, effort data is not reflective of normal seasons. Data on the Smith River may reflect effort more or less as normal, with likely some influence from anglers shifting effort from the Klamath-Trinity basin to the Smith River as these locations are within a modest ~1 hour driving distance. Reported effort in the Klamath and Trinity Rivers could include anglers illegally or unknowingly targeting salmon despite the closure, or angler use of Salmon Card to report salmon releases while engaged in directed steelhead angling. With regards to return rates and reporting requirements, based on historic anecdotal information from project staff, the return rate for Salmon Cards has generally been around ~30-35%. The 2024 card year represented the lowest overall return rate at 22.74%. In 2025, return rates showed a modest increase to the current 26.48%, however this return rate remains lower than previous years in which the fishery was open in the Klamath-Trinity basin. As noted, the cut-off date for this year's analysis was May 1, the same date as most previous reports. It is intended that May 1 will continue to be used as the annual cut-off date for collecting Salmon Card data, as it is three months after the submission deadline. Although cards are continually submitted late throughout the year, the bulk are submitted on time, or shortly thereafter. Although the return rate has generally been between one-quarter and one-third, this is still well below the goal of 100% return rate for all sport fishing report cards and will continue to be monitored in future years' data.

There are efforts being made to standardize report card requirements. Section 1.74(d)(A) states that "Any report card holder who fails to return or report their salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, or abalone report card to the Department by the deadline may be restricted from obtaining the same card in a subsequent license year or may be subject to an additional fee for the issuance of the same card in a subsequent license year." Implementation of such fees or report card issuance restrictions could increase return rate, as evidenced by the Sport Lobster Report card. Lobster cards had very low return rates (10-15%) in the early years of implementation (2008-2012). Upon implementation of the fee in regulatory year 2012-2013, the return rate roughly doubled (25-30%) but also resulted in a substantial increase in logistics and data management (Tom Mason, pers. comm. 2018). As of 2022, lobster report card returns are reported to be trending above 50%, and further statistical analysis has been used to extrapolate submitted card data to allow for use in fishery management. In contrast to the recreational lobster fishery, a substantial portion of North Coast recreational salmon fisheries are well-monitored by various surveys; lower Klamath River creel survey, Trinity River Angler Tag>Returns and a creel survey conducted on the Hoopa Reservation by Hoopa Valley Tribal Fisheries. The Smith River is the only major sector that is currently not surveyed for recreational effort (historical and recent surveys; see Zuspan 2018), and Salmon Card data is not currently used in management applications. Salmon Cards do assist in enforcement efforts regarding daily bag and possession limits, as well as providing indications of general trends in fishing locations.

In addition to the items noted above, the Department is working towards implementing electronic licensing, endorsements and harvest report cards across all hunting and fishing validations. At this point, electronic Salmon Cards remain under development and remain solely as printed "hard copy" versions. With the implementation of electronic harvest reporting, it is hoped that automatic uploading of report card information will be provided to the Department in near real time and eventually will no longer rely upon card holders to submit their information under their own volition. This presumably will increase

reported data and perhaps offer enough information for use in the crafting of fishing regulations. As these electronic products are developed and implemented, report results may need to be altered to reflect the organizational structure of these data.

The Smith River, unlike the Klamath-Trinity basin, is subject to low flow closure management. Fishing below the confluence with Rowdy Creek remains open regardless of river flows from the fourth Saturday in May through April 30, however beginning September 1, the river above this location is subject to closure when the river discharge is less than 600 cubic feet per second (cfs). In 2025, the section above Rowdy Creek was closed from September 1, and first opened on October 25. Flows then decreased, implementing a closure of the section beginning October 30. The section re-opened November 4 through December 11. Another closure was in place from December 12 through 14 and then re-opened on December 15 and remained open for the rest of the year (Walkley, pers. comm. 2026). This is reflected in the data insofar as effort was limited to the area below Rowdy Creek until approximately late October, at which time angler effort above Rowdy Creek increased dramatically. Anecdotal information from CDFW staff indicates that access below Rowdy Creek is limited, as much of the area is bounded by private property anglers primarily use the public access points, while in contrast, upriver areas offer numerous access points, allowing anglers to target fish over a greater area.

Until 2020, length cut-off between jacks and adults were the same for both the Smith River and the Klamath-Trinity basin, at 22" total length, at which time, the length cut-off in the Klamath-Trinity basin was increased to 23" TL. In 2023, the FGC approved regulation changes that allow for an annually variable length cut-off to be implemented with the quota and bag/possession limits each year. Although this was approved in regulation in 2023, it was not actually implemented due to the fishery closure. As a basin closure occurred in 2025 as well, the usefulness of this regulatory tool has not yet been able to be assessed. This new tool will likely allow for more effective in-season management of the Klamath basin in-river quota, and result in the decreased likelihood of post-season estimates exceeding the harvest allocations. A similar annual variable length cut-off is not currently established or currently being considered for the Smith River basin.

With regards to the removal of four dams on the Klamath River mainstem in 2024, it is anticipated that the Salmon Card will need to be updated to reflect the additional locations that will be accessible to anglers in the future. Currently these "new" sections of river are closed to fishing due to ongoing restoration work, but in the future will need to be identified as additional location(s) on the card or appended to existing location codes. Similar to electronic updates in licensing, these elements are currently under development and will be integrated into the harvest reporting and this report as they are implemented.

In conclusion, Salmon Cards may prove to be a valuable tool in corroborating the validity of other management methods, monitoring regional effort trends, assessing angler demographics, identifying bias in angler reported information, and in general, providing the Department with another resource that educates recreational anglers on regulations and resource management.

References

ALDS Control Center, 2025 North Coast Salmon Report Card. May 1, 2026. California Department of Fish and Wildlife

License Sales Statistics, 2025. May 1, 2026. <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Licensing/Statistics>. California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Mason, T. 2018. Personal communication, Spiny Lobster report card. Invertebrate Project. California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Zuspan, M. 2018. A Synthesis Report of 25 Salmonid Creel Censuses Spanning 60 Years from 1955 through 2014 in the Smith River, Del Norte County, California. California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Sivak, D. 2020. Personal communication, changes in lifetime salmon card fee structure. ALDS Specialist. California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Walkley, J. 2026 Personal communication, Smith River low flow closures. Region 1 Coastal Fisheries. California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Appendix B. Multi-year cumulative Salmon Card license sales. January 1, 2026.

