

Alison Farmer

Rivers, Streams and Oceans, paper 1.

The coastal temperate rain forest ranges from northern California to Kodiak Island, Alaska, and contains strong geological and climatic gradients that results in diverse life history strategies in salmon and the plant and animal communities that are intrinsically linked to their nutrient rich cycles. Non native blood to the area over the last century has broken a critical connection that coexisted between specie and the environment. Years of logging, damming, urbanization, along with many other wounds to the rivers of life are now undermining the salmon's survival along with that of numerous other inter-dependant species including our own.

Rivers and streams flow out to the ocean like veins, transporting the life giving blood of woody debris and fresh cool water, carrying out all the fatty sediment that blocks up arterials and spreading the nutrient rich food over many miles for other life to feed on. Salty lunar tidal waters pulse like a heart, keeping channels open, cutting away obstacles, washing wounds with its healing salt and carrying the rivers suffocating sediment to the bottom of the ocean for bottom feeders to nourish on. To Indigenous tribes the river was a source of life giving water and food and received sacred respect. For thousands of years an ecosystem sustained life and embraced natural disasters like fertile rich floods. However, over several decades, a short time of any ecosystem, non natives have inflicted unnatural catastrophes of flood defenses, river diversions and dams, as man inserts his power over nature, trying to tame its wildness. Rivers were seen only to sustain commerce, not life, transporters of water, ships and sewage.

Anadromous salmon have always been a constant in the rivers journey, adapting their own patterns of life that reflect climatic conditions and environmental habitats. These spiritual creatures spawn and often die upstream, the fry then travel to the ocean growing and sheltering in pools, banks and protective wood debris. After anywhere from a year to five years, depending on species, they return more often to the same river to repeat the cycle. The rich biological properties and energy of their birth and death are carried along the flow for their own survival as well as many others. However years of blocking their channels, filling their pools, removing their woody protection, warming their water with sewage and human bank degradation along with the introduction of non native species and plants have caused their numbers to decline to such an extent that their extinction now looms and we are removing them from our diet in order to aid their survival in our rivers. To depletion of salmon from our tables and our rivers severs a connection that goes deeper than we can even imagine and may finally break down a robust ecosystem that we are an intrinsic part of. Thank fully our eyes are opening.