Often referred to as New York’s “Flagship Hatchery,” the Salmon River Fish Hatchery supports a world-class trout and salmon fishery in Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, and their tributaries. From the North Country to the Niagara River, fish stocked from the Salmon River Hatchery provide opportunities to catch trophy-sized trout and salmon year-round in New York.

Constructed in 1980, the hatchery is just upstream from the confluence of Beaverdam Brook and the Salmon River. The facility consists of a main hatchery building that houses the “start tank” room, a raw water headbox area where reservoir and well water enter the building, a spawn house where eggs are collected, an egg incubation area, a “reeration” building which adds oxygen to the reservoir water, and several workshops/storage rooms for equipment and feed. The visitor center offers several large balcony viewing areas that allow people to watch hatchery activities occurring inside and outside the building.

The water used to rear the fish is supplied by multiple sources. A large pipeline feeds the hatchery with approximately 9,000 gallons of water per minute from the Lighthouse Hill Reservoir. Since the temperature of the reservoir water can vary from 32°F to 75°F, a more consistent source of cold water is supplied from a series of deep and shallow wells located on the hatchery’s 400+ acres. These wells can provide another 800-1,000 gallons per minute. Depending upon the time of year, these water sources are used alone or in combination to attain appropriate water temperatures.

Hatchery staff rear and stock approximately 3 million Chinook and coho salmon, steelhead, and brown trout in more than 100 public waters in 11 counties, and help federal agencies stock smaller numbers of Atlantic salmon.

Tens of thousands of people from all over the world visit the hatchery each year, especially during its annual “National Hunting & Fishing Day Open House,” held the fourth Saturday in September. The visitor center has three large aquariums and many interpretive displays, and is generally open from April 1st until November 30th, seven days per week, weather permitting. If you visit the hatchery you might have the opportunity to watch the fish culturists collect eggs from adult fish—salmon in the fall (generally starting the Tuesday after Columbus Day), steelhead in the spring (around April 1st).

As the spawning season approaches, adult fish swim up the Salmon River from Lake Ontario and into Beaverdam Brook and then the hatchery’s fish ladder. The ladder is a popular spot for visitors to view large fish as they navigate up the ladder and jump into the hatchery’s holding pond. Eggs collected during spawning runs are placed in special incubators that are supplied with a constant flow of water. When the eggs hatch, the emergent fry are...
transferred to aluminum start tanks where they are fed a specially formulated dry diet and begin the process of growing to stockable size.

The fish are stocked from shore into nearshore net pens, and offshore from a landing craft or barge. Barge stocking uses trucks and a reconditioned surplus military landing craft to transport loads of fish to a specified destination. The fish are released well offshore, out of reach of the many avian predators. Stocking season generally runs from late March until early June, with a smaller number of trips in the fall.

Salmon River Hatchery is a busy place with plenty for visitors to see and do. There are always fish in the hatchery’s tanks or eggs in the hatchery’s incubators. Through Governor Cuomo’s NY Works Program, DEC has committed nearly $14 million in upgrades to the state’s hatchery system, including recent improvements to Salmon River Hatchery’s visitor center: new televisions and photographs; interpretive videos; lighting; and signage. In addition, the governor also recently announced that the state will provide $5.25 million to modernize the Salmon River Fish Hatchery. This will help ensure Lake Ontario continues to be a world class fishing destination.

Thomas Kielbasinski is the manager at the Salmon River Hatchery.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT
Chinook Salmon

- Not native to New York; first stocked in the Great Lakes in 1873; currently only found in Lakes Erie and Ontario.
- Also called king salmon—largest of the Pacific salmon, can reach 40+ pounds in NY.
- Adult chinooks spend most of their time in deeper, open water, but will follow prey fish into nearshore areas in early spring and late summer or early fall. In the fall, breeding Chinooks congregate or “stage” around the mouths of streams in preparation for making their spawning runs, which generally start in September and are completed by early November. Adult salmon die shortly after spawning.
- Most of the salmon caught in New York’s Great Lakes are hatchery-reared.