

## The Babine Salmon Hatchery

To help meet the fishing interests of the Pacific coast Babine Hatchery was established in 1907, 1 km below the outflow of Morrison Lake. In its first year of operation, April 1908 Babine Hatchery released 4 663 000 fry. Officer Pretty describes low autumn water levels and carcasses littering the bottom of the river. Babine Hatchery operated until 1936, when it was shut down due to government cutbacks.



Figure 1: Babine Hatchery at the Outlet of Morrison Lake, 1935

Built with an eight million sockeye egg capacity, Babine Hatchery released a total of 170 953 598 sockeye fry into the Morrison watershed during its 28 years of operation. An additional 5.5 million fertilized eggs and twenty five million “fingerlings” or yearlings were released. Eggs were obtained primarily from Morrison Creek and supplemented intermittently with eggs obtained from the Babine River, Fulton, Morrison, Perrie, Pinkut, Tachek and Tahlo Creek as well as from the Stuart Lake hatchery (Babine Lake Hatchery: Source and Distribution table, date unknown).

Sockeye were pushed up the creek by the native fisheries crew walking up the creek and corralled between three barricades to be caught in hand nets. While this method generally captured the required number of sockeye it was reported by A. Forsyth in 1912 that much damage to previously created redds would occur and alternate methods needed to be considered. Eggs were collected, stirred with roe then gently rinsed and left to harden for two hours. Once they were packed into shallow stackable trays in back-pack boxes, protected with moss, they were transported by boat up to Morrison Creek where the 80 pound packs were shouldered 2 miles up the creek by the first nations crew.

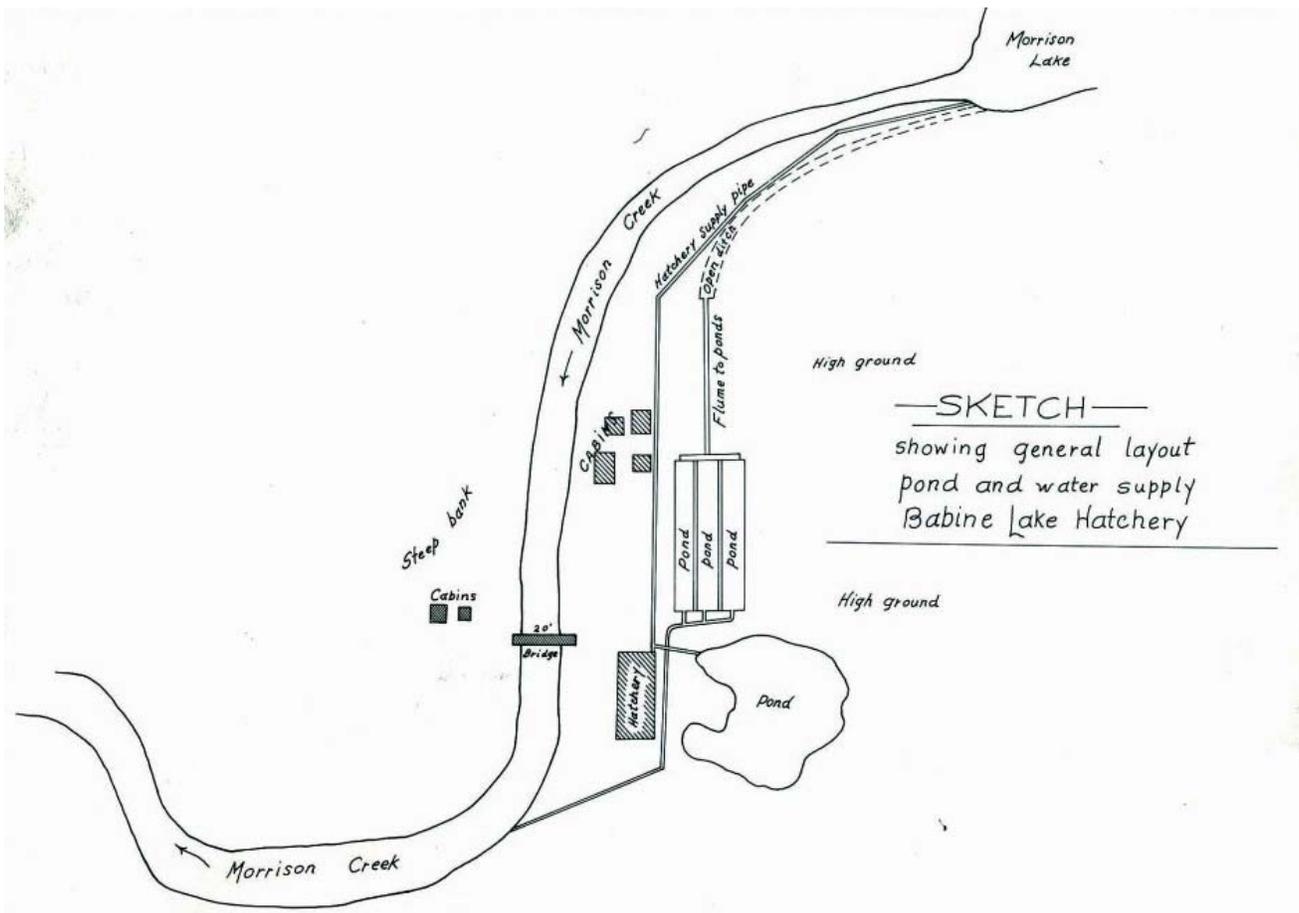


Figure 2: Sketch of the Layout of Babine Hatchery, Morrison Creek.

In the spring twenty five percent of the fry were released into a man-made pond destined for Morrison Creek. The remaining fry were transported up Morrison Lake to “the mouths of creeks with suitable food supplies” on a modified pontoon scow with screens fastened to each end which provided 6 – 8 inches of continuous flow en route up Morrison Lake (Tony Southgate, 1979).

On September 19th, 1912 Fisheries Overseers A. Forsyth and T.G. Wynn visited the Babine Hatchery during its 5th year of operation. They reported extremely low water levels such that even with augmentation of deeper channels by the hatchery employees the salmon were still unable to enter Gordeau Lake (aka Morrison Lake). During this visit Forsyth and Wynn note the presence of “quite a few steelhead” and are informed that the Coho have a very good run in Morrison Creek as well.

Traditional environmental knowledge, TEK, describes a rock ladder built in the lower end of Morrison Creek where the river ran wide and shallow. The rock ladder was described as several jetties of rocks alternating from the sides of the river towards the center to provide a deeper, slower channel for the salmon to swim up. It is estimated to have been built between 1901 and 1913. There is no evidence of this ladder now, but there is a rock barricade just below the site of the ladder. This barricade is lined with black plastic and wooden gates and boards are evident along the bank.

The site of the Babine Fish Hatchery is now covered in wide spaced Aspen and mature Birch. Three proximal hauling roads attest to the logs used by the hatchery and an old intake pipe and outflow culvert are still evident at the edge of the creek. It was observed that though the intake is mapped on the bottom left side of Morrison Lake it is currently approximately 100 meters below the lake, suggesting a decrease in the level of Morrison Lake.