

A meeting place for fish



Rainbow smelt are slender, silvery fish about six to eight inches long, with dark backs and multi-colored, shimmering sides. They migrate into estuaries from the ocean each winter and spawn in the spring.



The Pleasant River ends its 44-mile journey here at Columbia Falls. The convergence of land, river, and sea creates a rich habitat for many animals, including fish such as alewives, Atlantic salmon, and American eels. Today the Wild Salmon Resource Center—formerly a hydroelectric plant that drew power from a dam across the falls—functions as a conservation fish hatchery and hub for watershed education.

The rainbow smelt is another fish that returns here from coastal waters to spawn. Local people have relied on smelt as a traditional food for centuries. In early spring, smelt are netted on the incoming tides and cleaned in the small camps along the shore. The Pleasant River estuary is one of the last places on the East Coast where a sustainable smelt fishery is still possible.



Labels marked boxes of smelt that were shipped throughout the region during the 19th and early 20th centuries.



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