PILE PERCH (*Rhacochilus vacca*)

Pile Perch are usually silvery, but occasionally brown or dusky in color. They have a distinctive dark bar in the middle of their body. Their tail is forked and their second dorsal fin has long rays. During breeding season their pelvic and anal fins are bright yellow and males have black spots on their snout. Pile Perch can be found alone or in schools.

OVERVIEW

- **Oregon Conservation Strategy Species**
- **Size:** Up to about 17 inches long
- **Weight:** Up to about 4 pounds
- **Lifespan:** Up to at least 13 years
- **Key Strategy Habitats:** Nearshore, Estuaries
- **Similar Species:** Other members of the family Embiotocidae, which are variously known as perch, surfperch, and/or seaperch. Strategy Species in this Family include Shiner Perch, Striped Perch and Redtail Surfperch.

RANGE AND DISTRIBUTION

In Oregon: Pile Perch can be found throughout the state's marine waters and in estuaries.

Everywhere Else: Pile Perch range extends from southern British Columbia to central Baja.

FUN FACTS

Favorite Food: Mussels, barnacles, crabs, shrimp, and snails.

- Pile Perch are members of a family of fishes, Embiotocidae, that have internal fertilization and give birth to live young.
- Adult Pile Perch use Oregon estuaries during spring and summer and leave them in the fall after females give birth.
- In addition to the short, blunt teeth on their lips, Pile Perch have thick, flat, blunt teeth in their throats that they use to grind up the shelled food that they eat.
- Pile Perch are one of the biggest members of the surf perch family.

LIFE HISTORY AND ECOLOGY

Pile Perch, like other members of their family, have internal fertilization during mating with embryos that develop inside females that are then born live. Mating takes place in fall and females store sperm for about 3 months before the eggs are fertilized. Fertilization of eggs for Pile Perch examined in Oregon estuaries generally occurs from mid-December to early February with most of the larval fish born from

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July to mid-August after a gestation of about 196 days. Pile Perch mate and give birth in the ocean as well as in estuaries. Pile Perch generally mature from 2 to about 5 years of age and can live up to at least 13 years. Females give birth to between 7 and 80 young with the bigger, older females producing more young than smaller females. Pile Perch can be found as lone individuals and in schools, sometimes mixed with other species.

Known predators of Pile Perch include Copper Rockfish, Kelp Bass, Striped Bass, cormorants, seals, and sea lions. Humans also eat Pile Perch. Their remains have been found in Native Americans middens, there were commercial fisheries for them in California and they are frequently caught and eaten by recreational anglers along the west coast.

DIET AND FORAGING

Pile Perch forage mainly on things with shells. They eat mussels, barnacles, crabs, shrimp, snails, clams, brittle stars, and sand dollars. They will also eat octopus, fish eggs and fishes

HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Pile Perch live in marine and estuarine waters. They generally live around some sort of structure like rocks, piers, pilings, jetties, kelp beds, and eel grass, they but are also sometimes found over sand. Pile Perch are most common from the intertidal zone out to about 300 feet but have been reported in depths of almost 700 feet.

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Threats: Habitat loss and alteration. Prey availability affects body condition and abundance. Toxic chemicals.

Conservation and management: Pile Perch are not a target species of commercial fisheries. They are commonly caught by recreational anglers. This species is not under federal management. The west coast states manage recreational fisheries for this species.

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PILE PERCH (*Rhacochilus vacca*)

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