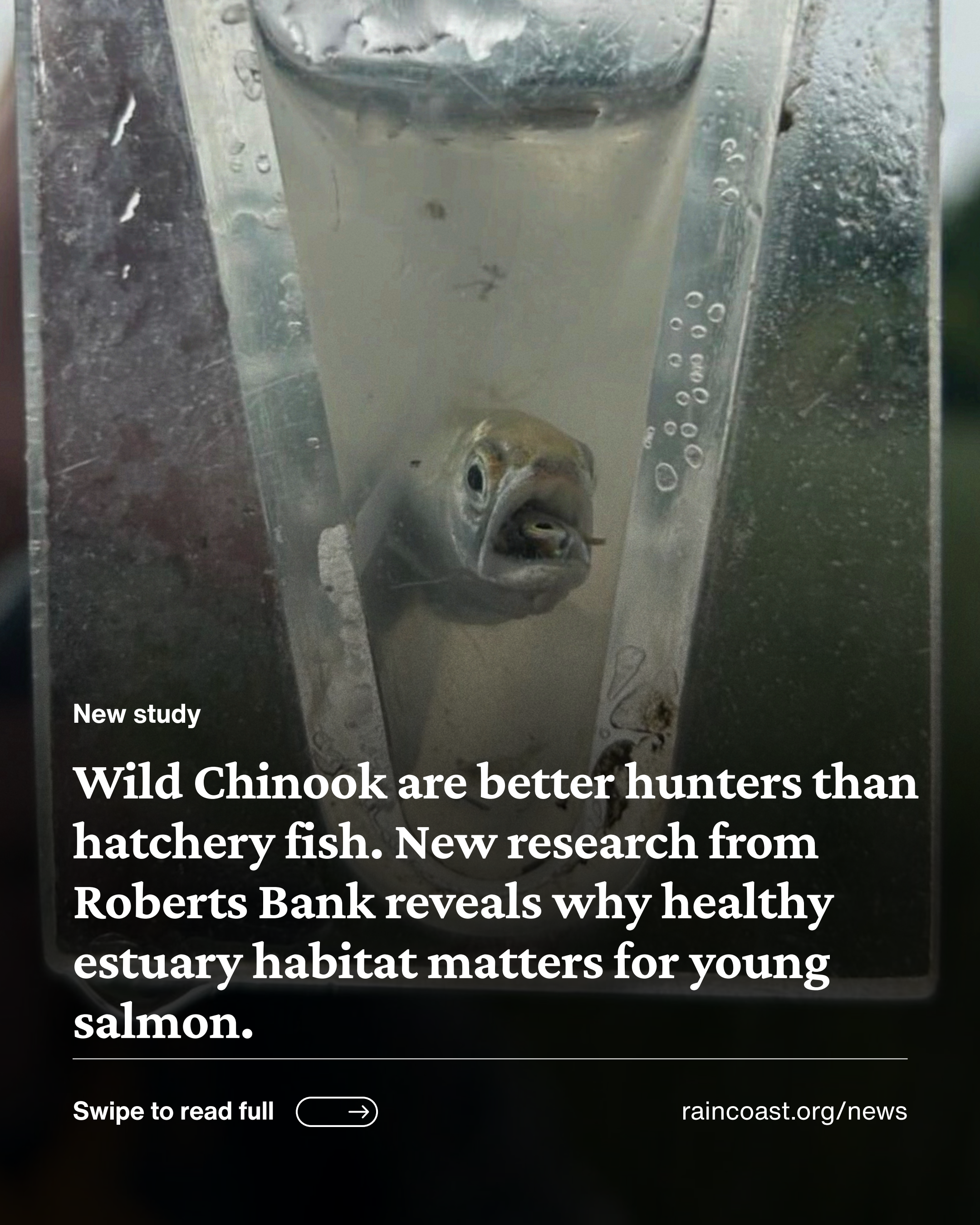


New study

Wild Chinook are better hunters than hatchery fish. New research from Roberts Bank reveals why healthy estuary habitat matters for young salmon.

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A critical stage of life.

Before heading out to the open ocean, young Chinook salmon spend weeks to months in the Fraser River Estuary.

Here, they feed, grow, and adjust to life in salt water.

What they eat during this time can help determine their chances of surviving in the ocean.

What did researchers find?

Researchers compared the diets of wild and hatchery juvenile Chinook salmon at Roberts Bank.

They discovered wild Chinook had approximately 51% fuller stomachs than hatchery fish...

Despite hatchery fish generally being larger.

Wild fish were more diverse foragers.

Wild Chinook ate a wider variety of prey, including energy-rich insects. They also began eating fish at smaller sizes than hatchery Chinook.

Being bigger doesn't necessarily mean being better at finding food.

Why does eelgrass matter?

Both wild and hatchery Chinook relied heavily on small forage fish, particularly Pacific sand lance and herring.

Of the three estuary habitats studied, eelgrass beds were the only habitat where researchers found Chinook consuming these energy-rich fish prey.

Eelgrass is more than underwater vegetation. It's an important feeding ground for young salmon.

The big picture.

A habitat under pressure.

These findings highlight the importance of protecting Roberts Bank. In the Lower Fraser, 85% of floodplain habitat has already been lost.

Yet eelgrass beds and the forage fish they support face continued development pressure, including the proposed Roberts Bank Terminal 2 and Pacific Link Pipeline projects.

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