



At first glance, you may think it's an eel or even a snake, but it's not. It is a Pacific lamprey. Lampreys are a very strange looking fish with their round sucking mouth and eel like bodies. This fascinating creature has no paired fins, jaws, or bones. Their unique life history is similar to the salmon who share the rivers of the Pacific Northwest.

Lampreys are the oldest fish alive today with a fossil record as far back as 500 million years. Like the sturgeon, this fish has not changed much throughout the centuries. The Columbia River Basin is home to 3 species of lampreys including the Pacific lamprey, the western brook lamprey, and the river lamprey.



Cultural Significance

Pacific lampreys are one of the many religious and subsistence foods of the Native Americans in the mid-Columbia River Plateau. Although lampreys are called *ksuyas* or *asum* in the Sahaptin native tongue, many people refer to the Pacific lamprey as "eel." Fishing for lampreys is done by hand, dip net, or long pole and hook at sites where lampreys gather together, such as below falls or rapids.



