



Protection status: Priority species in Washington State

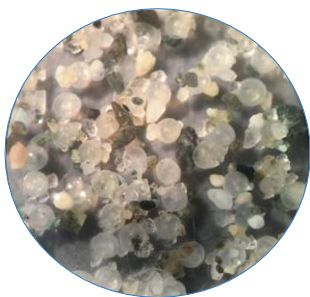
How to identify: Slender silver body and pointy nose and mouth

Life history: Up to 7 years, up to 8 inches in length. Diurnal – feeding during the day and resting at night.

Pacific Sand Lance (*Ammodytes hexapterus*)

The sand lance is a small silver fish that plays an important role in the Puget Sound food web.

Spawning takes place on **sandy beaches** in the intertidal zone from November-February, often near bays or inlets with freshwater influence.



Females lay thousands of tiny eggs, each only one millimeter in diameter, or the width of a sharpened pencil tip!



Incubation lasts about 4 weeks, then the sand lance hatch and start to feed on microscopic plants and animals floating in the water column - phytoplankton and zooplankton.

Juveniles forage on larval crustaceans, fish, and marine worms during the day and burrow into well-washed fine sand and gravel to rest and hide from predators at night.



When resources are low in late winter, sand lance will remain buried in deep water sand fields in a **dormant state** to conserve energy for up to five months!

Priority species like the sand lance require protective measures due to their tendency to congregate in large numbers during spawning, sensitivity to habitat alteration, and recreational, commercial, and tribal importance.



The sand lance grows by feeding on plankton.



It becomes a nutrient-rich superfood for salmon,



which in turn are prey for killer whales.





Essential habitat: Reliant on sandy intertidal beaches for spawning

Essential habit: Burrowing face first into sand and gravel to rest and escape predators

Fun fact: Can survive buried in coarse sand during low tide for up to 5 hours

"Their shape makes them attractive to many predators because they are easy to swallow... It's like eating spaghetti instead of a meatball."

Michelle Staudinger, USGS scientist

Pacific Sand Lance (*Ammodytes hexapterus*)

The sand lance is one of several relatively small **forage fish** that have a large impact on other species around the Puget Sound. Forage fish consume and capture the energy of some of the smallest plants and animals in the marine food web. When preyed upon, forage fish transfer that energy and essential nutrients to more than 100 other species, both marine and terrestrial!



Juvenile sand lance begin schooling when they reach one inch in size.

Adult sand lance spend March-August swimming and schooling in offshore Puget Sound waters.

Did you know? On average, Pacific sand lance make up **35 percent** of juvenile salmon diets. Sand lance are especially important to juvenile Chinook salmon - **60 percent** of their diets are sand lance!



Adult Pacific Sand Lance

Removing shoreline armor restores critical spawning habitat for Pacific Sand Lance.



Predators include juvenile salmon as well as many seabirds and marine mammals.

