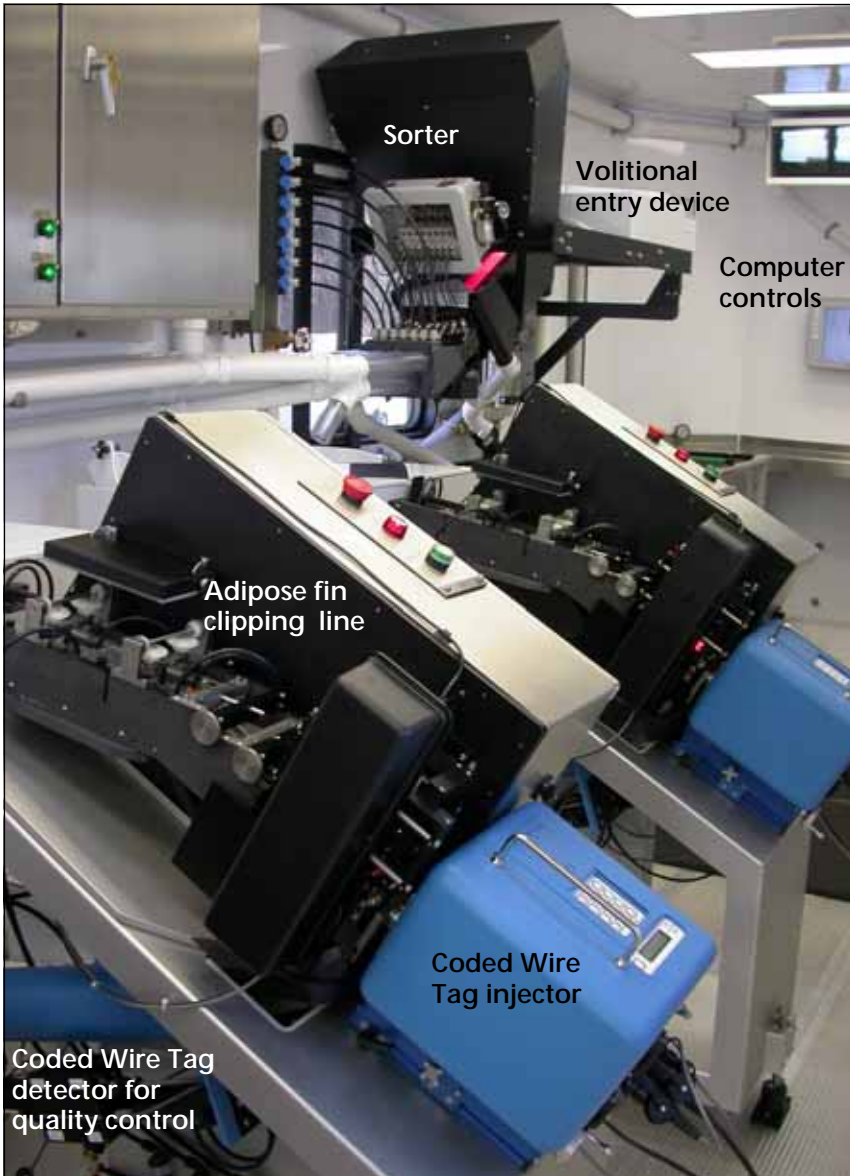


High-Tech Tagging



California's program became feasible with Northwest Marine Technology's AutoFish System (above). The system uses advanced technology to sort and process salmonids at a hatchery. The fish are first measured and sorted, then their adipose fins are clipped, or they are coded wire tagged, or both. The fish are returned to the pond, never having been dewatered, anesthetized, or handled by humans. These systems can mark and tag >60,000 fish per day.

More than 32 million fall Chinook salmon are released annually from hatcheries in California's Sacramento River Basin, USA. These fish contribute substantially to sport and commercial fisheries, but they have been tagged sporadically, leaving biologists with sparse management data. In 2007, the California Dept. of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission began a new program to provide a consistent rate of marking and tagging.

The Constant Fractional Marking program requires all 32 million fall Chinook to be brought into one of four AutoFish Systems (left) for counting. About 25% of the fish also have their adipose fin clipped and a Coded Wire Tag injected into their snout. Coded Wire Tags are tiny pieces of stainless steel wire (1.1 mm long) etched with a numeric code. In the first year, over 8 million Chinook salmon were marked and tagged, with >99% tag retention.

Tag recoveries will provide critical data for determining the status of wild and hatchery salmon and steelhead in the Sacramento River Basin. These data are essential for evaluating the hatchery programs, monitoring restoration efforts, stock recovery planning, and managing water projects and harvest.

We congratulate these agencies on the successful implementation of their program. Please contact us if we can help with your tagging needs.

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