

Lower Columbia River White Sturgeon Population Status Update

Supplemental Public Correspondence

Received from February 5, 2018 to February 7, 2018

**1 Individual submitted the attached letter
(*List Attached*)**

WHITE STURGEON HEALTH CONCERNS

We continue to be very concerned over the health of the Lower Columbia River White Sturgeon population and will provide comments regarding the Conservation Plan metrics.

Legal Abundance - The legal abundance point estimates suggest a population that is above what was observed in 2010 through 2015. However, the 95% confidence interval is plus/minus 65,000 fish, which is very large. The setline Cpues show a continuing improvement from 2010. However, the recreational Cpues from the October fishery were the lowest on record for both the Gorge and above Wauna. The fishery occurred in late October when catch rates are lower than early October, but not at this very low level.

Adult Abundance - The adult abundance population three year running average was 6,450 fish which is above the Conservation Threshold of 3,900. This follows four years where three years were below the Threshold and 2016 where the three year average was just above the Threshold. A major concern is that the error bars were calculated at only plus/minus one standard deviation. This means that the estimate of 6,450 adults has a 67

percent probability of being within plus/minus one standard deviation and a 33 percent probability of being outside plus/minus one standard deviation. There is considerable risk in putting too much faith in this number. Due to the very small sample size (only 30 adults caught on the set lines), it was not possible to calculate the normally accepted confidence interval of plus/minus 95 percent. It is a difficult calculation to catch only 30 fish and then expand that number to 6,450.

Population Structure - A healthy white sturgeon population, as defined in the Conservation Plan, has 95 percent juveniles. In 2010, there were 90 percent juveniles in the population. Unfortunately, as illustrated in the Length Frequency Trend (2010-2017), the percentage of juveniles has decreased dramatically, and is now at 62 percent of the population. The Conservation Threshold is 60 percent. The Plan requires action if the Threshold is broken, OR if the trend suggests that it will be broken in the near future. The change in structure is dramatic and suggests serious productivity issues. A simple interpretation is that the population has lost most of its bench strength.

Recruitment Index - The main stem Columbia River, where the majority of the spawning occurs, has had very

low sub yearling production indexes for every year from 2010 through 2016, with the exception of 2012. The 2017 index improved substantially, which is good news. However, one good year does not compensate for many years of poor spawning success. Several years of good production are necessary to demonstrate a trend.

Fisheries - The 2017 recreational fishery was successful in the estuary, both in terms of angler effort and catch rate. There were 3,235 fish taken for 14,844 angler trips. The recreational fishery above Wauna received good effort(10,164 trips), but very poor catch rates(430 fish).

I am concerned about the choice of employing a narrow(44 to 50 inch) slot limit that targets only the larger and older fish. Many of these fish are 10 to 15 years old. Considering the poor observed spawning success, would it not make more sense to not target these older fish, let the move into the protected over 54 inch class, and then in several more years, contribute to spawning? Taking the guideline of 5,490 fish from that narrow slot two years on a row should be reconsidered.

Legal Size Abundance Forecasts - Legal sized abundance forecasts are presented on slide 15 of the WDFW Commission Presentation. Legal population

estimates are depicted out through the year 2021 for three harvest levels: no harvest, 3% harvest, and 5% harvest. For the no harvest option, the legal abundance is projected to decrease from 200,000 to about 185,000, for the 5% harvest, the legal abundance is projected to decrease from 200,000 to about 160,000, or 20 percent.

It is recognized that the Commission is charged with meeting conservation goals while providing harvest opportunity where possible. Due to the uncertainties in the data, unknowns regarding pinned predation, and a juvenile percentage of the population that is approaching the Conservation Threshold, we think that a conservative approach is appropriate.

Respectfully,

Harry Barber

From: hab30a@netzero.net
To: odfw.commission@state.or.us
Subject: White Sturgeon Health Concerns 2017
Date: Monday, February 5, 2018 9:41:02 PM
Attachments: [White Sturgeon Health Concerns 2017.docx](#)

Dear Commissioners, Please consider these concerns when you discuss a possible retention season for lower Columbia River White Sturgeon for 2018. I urge you to take a cautious and conservative approach. Harry Barber

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