AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Management of fisheries for wild fall Chinook in Oregon coastal rivers is guided by ODFW conservation plans, specifically the Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) for rivers from the Elk River northward and the Rogue Fall Chinook Conservation Plan for rivers south of the Elk River.

The CMP established a tiered sliding scale approach for managing Chinook fisheries by geographic units (North Coast, Mid-Coast, Umpqua, Mid-South Coast), such that based upon the prior year's return and the current year's forecast, daily and seasonal bag limits may be reduced or increased for a set of rivers within the same geographic area. From the time of adoption of the CMP through 2018, conditions in most of these areas were considered to be in the "average" tier, and modifications to seasons and bag limits were generally unnecessary. This began to change in 2019, when the effects of poor ocean conditions began to carry over into reduced returns to many rivers. ODFW began implementing management changes based on the fall Chinook sliding scale in 2019.

The CMP also separately established a low threshold number of returning fish (conservation threshold) for each river system independently; when the average of the prior year's return and the current year's forecast fall below this threshold, the CMP specifies a closure of wild Chinook harvest in that river. Under the CMP, ODFW is directed to conduct annual reviews of fish populations, and not to wait until a critical level has been reached to adjust the management for a population including considering reduced retention limits, shorter seasons, or other measures to prevent a declining population from falling to its critical level.

For areas south of the Elk River, including the Rogue basin, fall fishery objectives and management approaches are established by the Rogue Fall Chinook Conservation Plan (RFCP). Like the CMP, the RFCP also specifies management objectives and regulatory measures scaled to abundance relative to plan objectives, though the specifics of these provisions differ in some ways between the two plans.

In 2023, the Commission adopted rules for the 2024 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations that specified that regulations for harvest of wild Chinook salmon will be determined annually. This rulemaking process is intended to satisfy this requirement and provide clarity to the public on regulations for the fall salmon season.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Department did not conduct any 2024 public meetings prior to the June Commission meeting. Proposed regulations are similar to those implemented in 2023, and the Department had substantial public involvement including a webinar, survey, and individual meetings, prior to implementation of those rules.

The public will have the opportunity to provide input leading up to and during the June Commission meeting. District Fish Biologists may have had informal discussions with members of the public prior to the Commission meeting.

ISSUE 1

2024 coastal fall Chinook salmon fisheries

ANALYSIS

The harvest provisions of the CMP were set out to guide the Department's management of coastal fall Chinook fisheries, and to increase public transparency regarding how management decisions would be made. However, while the CMP identified key research needs, it explicitly recognized that adaptive management was necessary due to unavoidable uncertainty and therefore included multiple references to adaptive management within the plan. These adaptive management provisions are also included in the Oregon Administrative Rule implementing the enforceable elements of the CMP. The CMP further specifies that fishery managers will apply a weight of evidence approach utilizing all available information, including the professional opinions of local biologists, to determine the appropriate harvest regulations.

In 2023, the Departments annual analysis identified several issues that warranted a change in approach. These issues included, but are not limited to the following:

Forecast uncertainty

In 2023, the Department evaluated the performance of forecasts that are used to inform annual angling regulations and noted multiple instances when observed returns were far below the forecasted run size. This situation was of course a known potential issue when the CMP was developed, and the CMP does not rely upon assumptions of perfect forecast accuracy. However, as part of a weight of evidence approach, increasing uncertainty, trends of poorer accuracy, or other similar factors can be a concern. Chinook forecasting techniques are usually based upon long time series and essentially assume that future relationships between Chinook abundance and environmental conditions will either be similar to the past, or will change relatively slowly, such that changing responses can be observed and incorporated into forecast models. Rapid climate and ocean change is undermining these assumptions and increasing forecast uncertainty.

Population performance

The sliding scale developed under the CMP classified populations at two geographic scales. The first is at the individual population level. At this level, management actions could be taken for a specific population based upon its own status, essentially independent of the status of neighboring populations. Under the CMP, individual population status was primarily tied to concerns over very low abundances which may lead to increased concerns over the health of that population. This situation has occurred in multiple rivers since adoption of the CMP. The second and most commonly applied scale for determining regulations is the stratum scale, where several

rivers are grouped together into an aggregate, and the performance of that aggregate is tied to management actions. Given that rivers within similar geographies may experience similar freshwater conditions, and that we expect them to also be exposed to similar marine conditions, it was reasonable to look at aggregates in this manner. Aggregates also provided more consistency in angling regulations across neighboring populations. However, over the last several years, the Department has observed multiple instances where individual populations performed substantially differently (positively or negatively) than their neighbors within the aggregates. As a result of this breakdown, the Department is recommending that sliding scale responses be applied at the population scale, not the aggregate.

The Department has also been examining long-term trends in spawner abundance for fall Chinook in coastal rivers. All populations show large variability across years, as expected. Some populations have no real apparent trend over the period 1986 to current, meaning that, while abundance varies significantly from year-to-year, the long-term average appears to be fairly stable or even slightly increasing. Examples include the Yaquina, Alsea, Nehalem, and Coos (actually a slightly increasing trend) rivers. Other rivers, for example the Siuslaw and Nestucca, show a generally downward trend in escapement over the period 1986 to current, though again, with significant interannual variability. Eleven of the 14 populations managed under the CMP for which a critical threshold metric is available have had one or more years since adoption of the CMP in which spawner abundance was at or below the critical threshold. Exceptions to this are the Sixes, Yaquina and Nestucca rivers. The Department believes that these trends and the increased incidences of populations reaching critical thresholds contribute to a need for more conservative management.

Increasing Freshwater Harvest Rate

In the spring of 2023, the Department prepared an analysis of trends in ocean and freshwater harvest rates for coastal fall Chinook stocks as part of agency comments to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as NMFS was considering a petition to list coastal Chinook under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). That analysis indicated that freshwater harvest rates have been generally increasing over time in some, but not all, basins, while ocean harvest rates have been generally decreasing. The latter response is an expected outcome of modifications to the Pacific Salmon Treaty which have reduced the harvest rates applied to aggregate abundance scales in SE Alaska and British Columbia, as well as long-term declines in harvest rates in Pacific Fishery Management Council area fisheries associated with weak-stock management responses. In contrast, managers did not generally expect increasing harvest rates in freshwater fisheries because fishing opportunity (e.g., bag limits, season dates, etc.) has not increased significantly over this time scale. Increased rates could be a result of increased angling participation or success rates, or they could be tied to changes in environmental conditions which might affect fish behavior in a way that increases their vulnerability to harvest. Regardless of the cause, the CMP presumed that harvest rates would remain relatively similar in years after plan adoption to those in years prior to adoption. The Department believes these factors contribute to a need to consider more conservative management.

As a result of its analysis, in 2023 the Department adopted temporary rules, subsequently approved by the Commission, which enacted reductions in daily and seasonal bag limits in several rivers, compared to what had been done under similar circumstances in prior years. Because the underlying issues have not changed and forecasts and observed conditions this year are similar to 2023 (see Table 1.1), the Department is recommending a similar response for fall

Chinook regulations for 2024 (see Table 1.2), with a few exceptions as outlined in the staff presentation.

Table 1.1. Population status and decision criteria for CMP-area wild fall Chinook populations.

	Abundance			Wild Harvest Closure Criteria	
Population	2023 Escapement	2024 Forecast	Decision metric	Closure threshold	Closure decision
Nehalem	12,491	8,438	10,465	5,369	
Tillamook	3,978	3,232	3,605	2,745	
Nestucca	6,435	4,890	5,663	2,066	
Salmon	2,346	1,619	1,983	363	
Siletz	14,490	12,157	13,324	3,471	
Yaquina	4,759	6,344	5,552	1,564	
Alsea	11,601	8,074	9,838	3,846	
Siuslaw	7,406	4,912	6,159	3,987	
Umpqua	8,399	3,360	5,880	3,197	
Coos	5,434	2,897	4,166	2,531	
Coquille	633	366	500	2,833	closed
Floras	135	159	147	100	
Sixes	3,855	2,494	3,175	712	
Elk	624	541	582	690	closed

Table 1.2. Proposed 2024 regulations for harvest of wild fall Chinook.

Population	Proposed Bag Limit (per day/season)	Other
Necanicum	1 / 2	Closed in December
Nehalem	1 / 5	Closed in December
Tillamook	1 / 2	Closed in December
Nestucca	1 / 5	Closed in December
Salmon	2 / 10	
Siletz	2 / 10	1 / 2 prior to Aug 1 (permanent rule)
Yaquina	2 / 10	
Alsea	2 / 10	
Yachats	1 / 2	
Siuslaw	1 / 2	
Umpqua	1 / 5	
Coos	2 / 10	
Coquille	Closed	
Floras	1 / 1	
Sixes	1 / 1	
Elk	Closed	Hatchery Chinook open

As part of these proposed regulation changes, the Department is also recommending inclusion of a rule modification for the Coquille River to allow the use of bait while angling and to allow use of spears or spear guns for harvesting smallmouth bass. The fall Chinook population in the

Coquille River remains severely depressed, and predation by smallmouth bass remains the presumptive primary driver of this situation. These modifications will liberalize the take of smallmouth bass from this system.

Under the RFCP, annual regulation changes may be implemented in response to observed status changes for the populations covered by the plan. Under the provisions of the RFCP, bag limits for these populations are proposed to be the same as in 2023, with a few exceptions (See Table 1.3). Hunter Creek is proposed to be closed for wild Chinook, and due to reduced returns to the Winchuck River, ocean terminal fisheries for wild Chinook in the Chetco River "bubble" fishery are proposed to be closed for 2024.

Table 1.3. Population status and decision criteria for RFCP-area wild fall Chinook populations and proposed 2024 regulations for wild fall Chinook.

	2023 Escapement	2024 Forecast	Conservation Status	Conservation Status Criteria	Proposed Bag Limits (per day/season)
Rogue Aggregate	29,555	46,519	38,037	20,400	SW Zone rules
L. Rogue	1,503	1,978	1,572	1,500	SW Zone rules
Chetco	5,643	2,159	3,901	1,440	1 / 5
Winchuck	691	202	447	300	1 / 5
Hunter	137	46	112	300	closed
Pistol	1,988	546	1,105	540	1 / 5

OPTIONS

1. Adopt proposed modifications to angling regulations in the NW and SW zones as proposed in Attachment 3.

2. Modify staff proposals.

3. No action (regulations remain as published in the 2024 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations).

BACKGROUND

Since 2009, the Department has been able to provide limited harvest opportunities for wild coho in selected coastal streams in some years, depending on the performance of the runs. These fisheries have proven to be successful and popular, while meeting conservation and recovery needs for the wild coho populations.

Preseason ocean abundances of Oregon Coastal Natural (OCN) coho were low from 1996 to 2000, averaging 52,800 adults (Figure 2.1). The annual average ocean abundance for the next decade increased to 201,000 adults, and beginning in 2009, the Department implemented wild coho fisheries in select coastal rivers. However, from 2015 through 2018, wild coho abundances averaged 76,000 adults, and no open fishing seasons occurred from 2015-2020. From 2019-2023, abundances averaged 175,000 adults. The 2023 ocean abundance was 185,000 fish and the 2024 forecasted abundance is 233,000.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Department did not conduct any 2024 public meetings prior to the June Commission meeting. Proposed regulations are similar to those implemented in 2023, and the Department had substantial public involvement including a webinar, survey, and individual meetings, prior to implementation of those rules.

The public will have the opportunity to provide input leading up to and during the June Commission meeting. District Fish Biologists may have had informal discussions with members of the public prior to the Commission meeting.

ISSUE 2

2024 wild coho salmon fisheries

ANALYSIS

Harvest fisheries on healthy populations of wild coho are identified as a desired management approach in the State of Oregon's Coastal Coho Conservation Plan (Coho Plan), which was approved by the Commission in 2007. The Coastal Multi-Species Plan (CMP) adopted by the Commission in 2014 also provides guidance on the establishment of wild coho fisheries.

Annual approval from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is required to conduct these fisheries, because Oregon Coast Natural (OCN) coho remain ESA-listed. NMFS' review of annually proposed fisheries occurs following submission of ODFW reports summarizing the prior year's fisheries and proposed fisheries. This process typically occurs in July and adoption

of the 2024 wild coho regulations by the Commission will precede this; thus, implementation of these fisheries will be contingent upon NMFS' approval. Amendment 13 of the Pacific Fisheries Management Council's (PFMC) Fishery Management Plan provides harvest control rules for OCN coho. It also forms the basis of the NMFS Endangered Species Act (ESA) fisheries consultation standard for OCN coho. NMFS authorizes ESA impacts for freshwater fisheries that, when combined with ocean fisheries, will not exceed those allowed under Amendment 13. For annual ocean fisheries, this limit is based upon the weakest performing of the three OCN population sub-aggregates, specifically, the North, North-Central, and the South-Central sub aggregate.

The PFMC's Pacific Coast Salmon Management Plan, Amendment 13 (A-13) harvest matrix, compares parental escapement and predicted survival to determine an allowable harvest level. Escapement levels in 2021, the first year since 2015 in which freshwater fisheries were allowed again, were in the "High" category (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Amendment 13 OCN harvest matrix. Bolded values represent 2024 criteria.

	Marine Survival Index (model-predicted[1])			
	Extremely Low	Low	Medium	High
Parental Escapement (y – 3)	<2%	2% – 4.5%	>4.5% – 8%	>8%
High (>75%)	≤8%	≤15%	**≤30%**	≤45%
Medium (>50 – ≤75%)	≤8%	≤15%	≤20%	≤38
Low (>19 – ≤50%)	≤8%	≤15%	≤15%	≤25%
Very Low (>4/mi – ≤19%)	≤8%	≤11%	≤11%	≤11%
Critical (≤4 spawners/mi)		0 – 8%		

[1] Model incorporates biologic and oceanographic factors to predict marine survival of adult coho.

Fisheries were not proposed by ODFW for the period 2016-2020, due to reduced abundances during some of these years. However, OCN coho have responded to slightly improved conditions with much improved returns. Recent returns, and the 2024 forecasted returns, are similar to some of the highest observed returns on record (Figure 2.1).

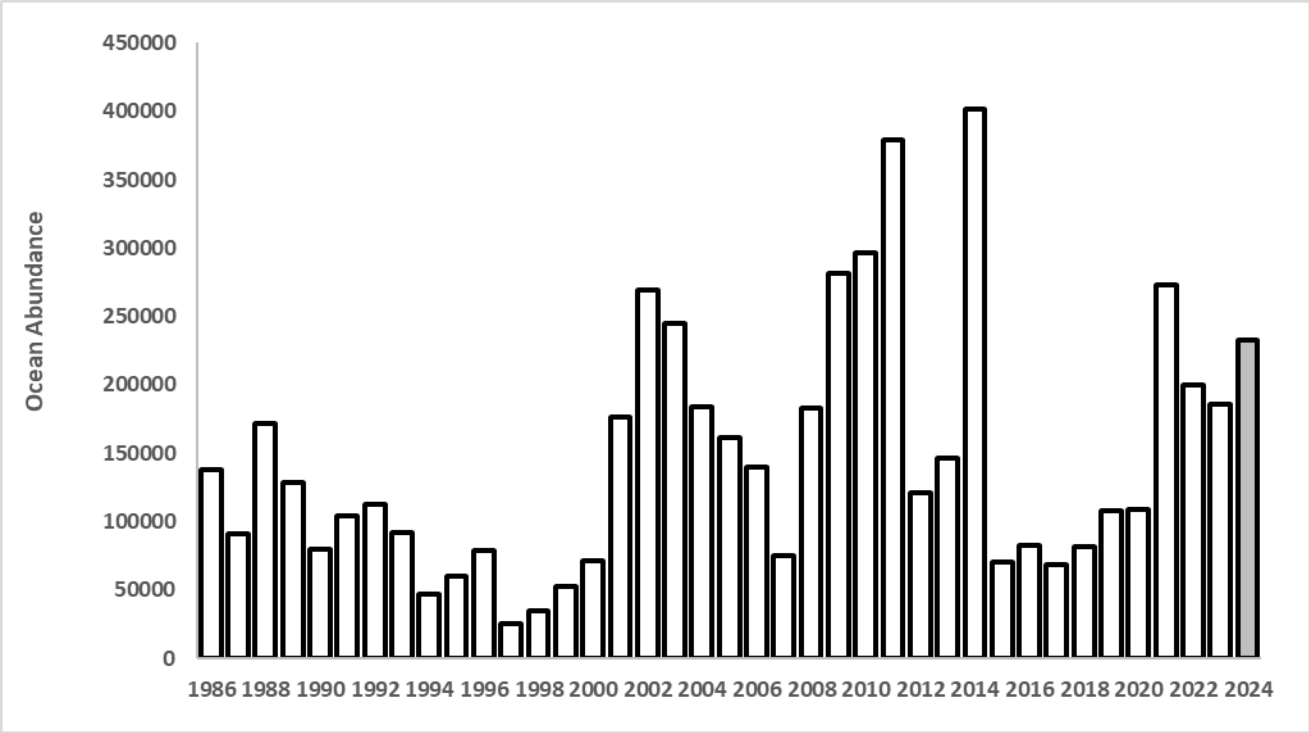

Figure 2.1. Pre-fishery ocean abundance of OCN coho by year (2024 forecasted).

In assessing estimated catch for proposed fisheries, staff examines harvest rates and abundances from past fishery years, including adjustments needed to account for differences in bag limits and open season dates over time. Adjusted harvest rates are applied to projected population abundances to project expected catch. These result in projected fishing impacts that are below the population-specific ESA limits. The balance of remaining impacts provides a buffer for uncertainty in the catch estimate and the realized run size.

The proposed fisheries are precautionary in nature, but provide fishing opportunity in rivers that traditionally have limited opportunity for harvest of coho. As previously stated, this is consistent with past and existing policies. Moreover, providing such opportunities, when appropriate, is an important tool to encourage engagement of local stakeholders in the importance of salmon recovery in their areas. Even when very limited, such opportunities are generally treasured by the angling public, particularly those who reside in coastal areas. Staff recommends that harvest fisheries for wild coho be implemented in the areas shown in Table 2.2. Projected harvest, total projected exploitation rate for all fisheries (marine and freshwater), and projected post-fishery spawning escapement are shown in Table 2.3.

Permanent rules limit the coastwide seasonal bag limit for adult coho to no more than five fish across all open areas in the NW and SW Zones.

Table 2.2. Proposed 2024 wild coho seasons.

Basin	Dates open	Bag Limit (per day/season)
Nehalem	9/7-10/23 (We & Sa only)	1 / 2
Tillamook	9/7-10/23 (We & Sa only)	1 / 2
Nestucca	9/7-10/23 (We & Sa only)	1 / 2
Siletz	9/14-11/15	1 / 3
Yaquina	9/14-10/15	1 / 3
Beaver Creek	11/1-11/30	1 / 3
Alsea	9/14-10/15	1 / 3
Siuslaw	9/14-10/15	1 / 3
Umpqua	9/14-10/15	1 / 3
Coos	9/14-10/10	1 / 3
Coquille	9/14-10/10	1 / 3
Floras	11/1-11/30	1 / 3
Siltcoos, Tahkenitch, and Tenmile lakes	10/1-12/31 (permanent rules)	1 / 5 (permanent rules)

Table 2.3. Projected 2024 in-river harvest, exploitation rates (total for all fisheries), and spawning escapement for populations with proposed wild coho fisheries.

Population	Harvest	Total ER (allowable)	Spawning Escapement
Nehalem	900	19.9% (30%)	20,700
Tillamook	1,100	24.2% (30%)	10,500
Nestucca	240	18.7% (30%)	8,600
Siletz	1,650	26.2% (30%)	12,375
Yaquina	1,475	28.5% (30%)	8,700
Beaver Creek	150	24.0% (30%)	1,700
Alsea	1,100	23.3% (30%)	12,600
Siuslaw	3,200	25.9% (30%)	25,250
Umpqua	3,700	26.4% (30%)	27,000
Coos	2,600	29.1% (30%)	14,500
Coquille	900	20.9% (30%)	16,200
Floras	60	21.6% (30%)	950
Siltcoos	550	28.9% (30%)	3,200
Tahkenitch	175	23.3% (30%)	1,900
Tenmile	120	17.9% (30%)	7,000

OPTIONS

1. Adopt proposed modifications to angling regulations in the NW and SW zones as proposed in Attachment 3.

2. Modify staff proposals.

3. No action (regulations remain as published in the 2024 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations); wild coho fisheries in rivers remain closed, those in permanent rules for lakes remain open.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: ISSUE 1

Option 1: Adopt proposed modifications to angling regulations in the NW and SW zones as proposed in Attachment 3.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: ISSUE 2

Option 1: Adopt proposed modifications to angling regulations in the NW and SW zones as proposed in Attachment 3.

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to adopt the staff recommendations for the 2024 fall salmon seasons on the Oregon Coast and smallmouth bass in the Coos-Coquille district as proposed by staff in Attachment 3.

Effective Date: *Upon Filing*