

JOINT STAFF REPORT
STURGEON SPORT FISHERY FACT SHEET
Joint State Sport Hearing
January 15, 2004

PURPOSE: To consider sturgeon sport fishing seasons in the Columbia River downstream of Bonneville Dam.

WHITE STURGEON FISHERY MANAGEMENT

- 2004 will be the eighth consecutive year in which a Joint State Agreement is used to guide Columbia River sturgeon fishery management.
- For 2003-2005, the Oregon and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissions readopted most of the major tenets of the past Management Agreements that were in effect during 1997-2002.

Major Tenets of 2003-2005 Sturgeon Fishery Management

- ✓ Sturgeon fisheries are managed on optimum sustained yield approach which, absent a significant update, results in an annual harvestable number of 40,000 white sturgeon for 2003-2005.
- ✓ The harvestable number is to be allocated 80% (32,000 fish) sport and 20% (8,000 fish) commercial.
- ✓ The plan may be modified in-season if new information suggests a change is warranted.
- ✓ Commercial target seasons are allowed, as necessary, to access allocation and maximize economic benefit consistent with conservation objectives for other species.
- ✓ Green sturgeon-only commercial seasons are not allowed; however, green sturgeon may be taken concurrently during other commercial seasons provided the green sturgeon catch does not exceed levels observed in past fisheries.
- ✓ Commercial size limits are 48"-60" for white sturgeon and 48"-66" for green sturgeon.
- ✓ Sport fishery regulations include; size limits of 42"-60" for white and green sturgeon, one sturgeon per day and 10 sturgeon per year catch limits, and barbless hooks required.

- Sport sturgeon fishery management for 2003-2005 was considered at public meetings in October, 2003 and is being considered at several meetings of the Oregon and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissions during September, 2003 through February, 2004.
- The Oregon and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissions have provided the following guidance to the ODFW and WDFW regarding 2003-2005 sturgeon fishery management.

Commissions' Guidance Regarding 2003-2005 Lower Columbia River Sturgeon Sport Fishery Management

- ✓ Develop sport fishery regulations consistent with the following objectives:
 - Minimize emergency inseason action
 - Balance catch between estuary and nonestuary and maintain a diverse array of sturgeon fishing opportunities
 - Maintain monitoring and management capabilities
- ✓ Annual catch quota of 32,000 white sturgeon with a 30,000 fish management goal in effect to allow for inseason flexibility and to minimize need for inseason regulations changes.
 - Allocate 60% (18,000 fish) of the sport catch guideline to the area downstream of the Wauna powerlines
 - Allocate 40% (12,000 fish) of the sport catch guideline to the area upstream of the Wauna powerlines

WHITE STURGEON STOCK STATUS

- The lower Columbia River white sturgeon population is healthy.
- Indicators for sublegal (<42”) and oversize (>60”) abundance remain good.
- During 1995-2001 abundance estimates for 42”-60” white sturgeon declined by an average of 4% annually.
- The abundance estimates for 2002 and 2003 are not complete at this time.
- Other indices of abundance, such as growth rates and catch per unit effort data, suggest that the declining trend in 42”-60” abundance estimates reversed beginning in 2002.

<i>Estimated Abundance of Harvestable White Sturgeon in the Lower Columbia River, 1989-2001.</i>			
Year	Total Length Interval (inches)		
	42-48	48-60	42-60
1989	32,500	16,800	49,300
1990	26,100	12,000	38,100
1991	32,900	11,700	44,600
1992	59,900	8,700	68,600
1993	85,000	14,200	99,200
1994	N/A	N/A	N/A
1995	143,200	59,000	202,200
1996	131,700	33,500	165,200
1997	123,700	33,400	157,100
1998	161,600	24,700	186,300
1999	116,800	17,600	134,400
2000	119,200	17,000	136,200
2001	100,200	22,400	122,600

WHITE STURGEON SPORT FISHERIES

- During 2003-2005 sport fisheries in the lower Columbia River will be managed for a total catch of 96,000 white sturgeon, (approximately 32,000 fish annually).
- Catch rates during 2003 exceeded preseason catch expectations which resulted in inseason management action being required for fisheries occurring in both areas, above and below the Wauna powerlines.

<i>White Sturgeon Lower Columbia River Sport Catch and Effort, 2000-2003</i>		
Year	Angler Trips	Kept Catch
2000	200,000	40,500
2001	185,000	41,200
2002	155,800	38,300
2003	142,900	31,900

<i>Lower Columbia River White Sturgeon Sport Fisheries During 2003</i>		
<u>Area</u>	<u>Initial Retention Seasons</u>	<u>Final Retention Seasons</u>
Above Wauna	January 1-March 23 July 1-December 31	January 1-March 23 July 1-October 31
Below Wauna	January 1-July 8 October 1-December 31	January 1-June 27
➤ Sturgeon retention was allowed seven days per week during retention seasons.		
<u>Area</u>	<u>Angler Trips</u>	<u>Kept Catch</u>
Above Wauna	96,300	13,565
Below Wauna	46,600	18,367
Entire River	142,900	31,932

FISHERY PROPOSALS

- The current sport sturgeon fishery is open seven days per week year-round with legal size limits of 42"-60".
- Oregon implemented a five fish per year catch limit effective January 1, 2004 and Washington will implement a five fish per year catch limit effective April 1, 2004. A 10 fish per year catch limit is currently in effect in Washington.
- The currently adopted permanent regulations would result in a catch of 50,000 white sturgeon kept (32,200 estuary and 17,800 nonestuary).
- A public meeting was held on November 11, 2003 to consider sport fishery options for 2004.
- Based on the input received at the November 11, 2003 public meeting the Joint Staff developed eight fishery options for OFWC consideration and the Commission supported the following options:
 - 1) Above the Wauna powerlines allow sturgeon retention three days per week during January 1-July 31 and October 1-December 31.
 - 2) Below the Wauna powerlines allow sturgeon retention seven days per week during January 1-April 30 and May 15-June 27.
 - 3) Below the Wauna powerlines allow sturgeon retention seven days per week during January 1-April 30 and June 8-July 11.
- In February 2003 the WFWC recommended sturgeon retention seasons that would remain in effect for a 3-year timeframe (2003-2005) and retention seasons adopted in 2003 were consistent with the Commissions' recommended season structure.
- Based on the results of the November 11, 2003 public meeting and guidance from the Oregon and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissions, the Joint Staff developed the following fishery options.

Fishery Options for Above Wauna

- The Joint Staff is recommending the following options for modifying the ongoing sport sturgeon fishery in the lower Columbia River.

Area:	Mainstem Columbia River from the Wauna powerlines upstream to Bonneville Dam, all adjacent Washington tributaries, and the lower Willamette River upstream to Willamette Falls, including Multnomah Channel.
Season Option 1	Allow retention of sturgeon seven days per week during January 1-February 29 and September 15-December 31 (167 days).
Season Option 2:	Allow retention of sturgeon three days per week (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) during February 1-July 31 and October 1-December 31 (149 days).
Other Restrictions:	As per permanent regulations.
Expected effort and catch:	Option 1 = 90,600 angler trips = 12,000 white sturgeon kept Option 2 = 90,400 angler trips = 12,200 white sturgeon kept

- ✓ Both options are consistent with the Joint State Agreement and Commission guidance for 2003-2005 fisheries.
- ✓ Both options are expected to maintain catches to within the 12,000 fish catch guideline for fisheries upstream of the Wauna powerlines.
- ✓ Both options are supported by portions of the sport fishing industry; however, consensus could not be reached on any single option.
- ✓ Option 1 is preferred by the WFWC while Option 2 is preferred by the OFWC.
- ✓ Extending Option 2 to maintain a three-day per week fishery during August and September would require 3,000 white sturgeon to be transferred from the area below Wauna to the area above Wauna.

Fishery Options for Below Wauna

- The Joint Staff is recommending the following options for modifying the ongoing sport sturgeon fishery in the lower Columbia River.

Area:	Mainstem Columbia River from the Wauna powerlines downstream to the mouth at Buoy 10, including Youngs Bay, and all adjacent Washington tributaries.
Season Option 1	Allow retention of sturgeon seven days per week during January 1-April 30 (121 days) and May 15-June 27 (44 days).
Season Option 2:	Allow retention of sturgeon seven days per week during January 1-April 30 (121 days) and June 8-July 11 (34 days).
Other Restrictions:	As per permanent regulations.
Expected effort and catch:	Option 1 = 38,600 angler trips = 18,100 white sturgeon kept Option 2 = 39,200 angler trips = 18,000 white sturgeon kept

- ✓ Modifying the size limit from 42-60" to 45-60" for the second retention season would reduce the allowable catch to 15,000 and result in the following modifications to the second retention seasons.

Option 1: Allow sturgeon retention during May 15-July 23 (70 days).

Option 2: Allow sturgeon retention during June 8-August 29 (82 days).

- ✓ All options are consistent with the Joint State Agreement and Commission guidance for 2003-2005 fisheries.
- ✓ All options are expected to maintain catches to within the 18,000 fish catch guideline for fisheries downstream of the Wauna powerlines.
- ✓ All options are supported by portions of the sport fishing industry; however, consensus could not be reached on any single option.
- ✓ Either option is consistent with previous WFWC guidance regarding 2003-2005 fisheries and is supported by the OFWC.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- The next Compact hearing is scheduled for Thursday, February 5, 2004 at 10 AM at the Museum of the Oregon Territory in Oregon City, Oregon to review salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and smelt stock status; consider fishing options in the mainstem Columbia River and Select Areas; and consider miscellaneous regulations for Columbia River commercial fisheries.
- A Joint State meeting to consider spring chinook sport fisheries in the mainstem Columbia River is scheduled to occur immediately following the February 5, 2004 Compact hearing.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
January 15, 2004