

**JOINT STAFF REPORT  
WHITE STURGEON FACT SHEET  
Joint State Sport Hearing  
June 29, 2004**

<b>PURPOSE:</b>	To review the lower Columbia River sport sturgeon fishery and consider modifications to currently adopted fishing regulations.
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**MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES**

- During 2003-2005, a Joint State Sturgeon Fishery Management Agreement adopted by the Oregon and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissions and the Columbia River Compact, as has been the case since 1997, guides sturgeon fisheries between the Columbia River mouth and Bonneville Dam. The major tenets of the Joint State Agreement include:
  - ✓ Sturgeon fisheries are managed on an 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.
- Sport fishery regulations include; size limits of 42"-60" for white and green sturgeon, one sturgeon per day, and barbless hooks required. A ten fish per year catch limit was changed to a five fish per year limit in 2004.
- In conjunction with the re-adoption of all major tenets of the Joint State Sturgeon Fishery Management Agreement, the Oregon and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissions also directed staff to develop sport fishing regulations that are consistent with the following objectives:
  - ✓ Minimize emergency in-season action.
  - ✓ Balance catch between estuary and non-estuary fisheries and maintain a diverse array of sturgeon fishing opportunity.
  - ✓ Maintain fishery monitoring and management capabilities.
- The states also developed a Joint State fishery plan for management of the lower Columbia River sport fishery in 2004. The Joint State fishery plan is consistent with aforementioned sport fishery management objectives with established area specific catch quotas and expected seasons as follows:
  - ✓ Quota management of lower Columbia River sport fisheries in the estuary (downstream of the Wauna power lines) and gorge (upstream of the Wauna power lines) areas split 60% and 40%.
  - ✓ The minimum size limit for the estuary fishery was increased from 42 inches to 45 inches for 2004, which required reducing the harvest target from 18,000 fish to 15,000 fish.
  - ✓ The harvest target for the gorge fishery remained at 12,000 fish for 2004.
  - ✓ Managing for a catch of 27,000 white sturgeon provides a 1,800 fish buffer for fishery management needs.

## FISHERY UPDATE

- At a Joint State meeting on January 15, 2004 seasons were adopted that prohibited retention of sturgeon in sport fisheries downstream of the Wauna power lines, including Youngs Bay, during May 1-14 and during July 24 – December 31. Additional regulations included an increase in the minimum size limit from 42 inches to 45 inches during the May 15-July 23 retention season. Regulations for fisheries above the Wauna power lines, including all Washington tributaries and the Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls, allowed for retention of sturgeon on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only from February 1 – July 31 and from October 1- December 31. Retention was prohibited August 1 - September 30.

<i>Sturgeon Catch and Effort Through August in the Lower Columbia River Sport Fishery, 1994-2004</i>				
<u>Year</u>	<u>Angler Trips</u>	<u>Legals Kept</u>	<u>CPUE Kept/Trip</u>	<u>Regulation Enacted</u>
2004				One fish bag all year, 5 fish annual limit enacted January 1 in Oregon and May 1 in Washington. <u>Downstream of Wauna power lines:</u> Retention prohibited May 1-14 and July 24 - December 31. Minimum size 45 inches May 15 - July 23. <u>Upstream of Wauna power lines:</u> Retention prohibited Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday during February 1 - July 31 and October 1 - December 31 and all days from August 1 - September 30.
2003	46,600	18,400	0.395	<u>Downstream of Wauna power lines:</u> Retention prohibited June 28 - December 31 (originally proposed for July 10 – September 30). <u>Upstream of Wauna power lines:</u> Retention prohibited March 24 - June 30 (and November 1 – December 31).
2002	96,300	13,600	0.141	
2002	139,600	36,200	0.259	One fish bag all year, retention prohibited Sunday and Monday during March 3-May 13 and all days during July 25-September 30, and October 1-November 22.
2001	149,000	33,900	0.228	One fish bag all year, retention prohibited entire river during August and September.
2000	161,300	32,300	0.200	One fish bag all year, retention prohibited in estuary during April.
1999	156,900	33,200	0.212	One fish bag all year.
1998	173,000	35,700	0.206	One fish bag all year.
1997	168,200	33,600	0.200	One fish bag all year.
1996	154,100	37,200	0.241	Two fish bag (1 & 1 rule) prior to 4/1/96 and one fish bag thereafter.
1995	188,300	45,100	0.240	Two fish bag (1 & 1 rule) all year, retention prohibited during September 1-December 31 downstream of Bonneville Dam.
1994	135,300	23,700	0.175	Two fish bag (1 & 1 rule) all year.

- The preliminary catch estimate through June 27 in sport fisheries downstream of the Wauna power lines totals 13,400 white sturgeon as compared to the catch target of 15,000 white sturgeon.

- The preliminary catch estimate through May 31 in sport fisheries upstream of the Wauna power lines totals 4,130 white sturgeon as compared to the catch target of 12,000 white sturgeon.
- January through February an estimated 3,500 white sturgeon were landed in the Willamette River below Willamette Falls. This amounts to 350% of normal harvest (1,000 fish) for the period.

## FISHERY PROPOSALS

<i>Recommendation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modify currently adopted sport sturgeon fishing regulations for the estuary area of the lower Columbia River. The Joint Staff is proposing three management options as follows:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Option 1: Prohibit retention of white sturgeon in the Columbia River from the Wauna power lines downstream to Buoy 10, including Youngs Bay, during July 3 through December 31. Annual Catch Estimate = 14,700</li> <li>✓ Option 2: Prohibit retention of white sturgeon in the Columbia River from the Wauna power lines downstream to Buoy 10, including Youngs Bay, during July 4 through December 31. Annual Catch Estimate = 15,500</li> <li>✓ Option 3: Prohibit retention of white sturgeon in the Columbia River from the Wauna power lines downstream to Buoy 10, including Youngs Bay, during July 5 through December 31. Annual Catch Estimate = 16,200</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- ✓ Angling effort and catch per day are expected to remain at or exceed current levels during the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday weekend with catch possible reaching 750-800 white sturgeon per day.
- ✓ Option 1 maintains catch within the 15,000 fish annual target for the estuary fishery.
- ✓ Option 2 may require allocating a portion of the 1,800 fish buffer to the estuary fishery.
- ✓ Option 3 may require allocating the majority of the 1,800 fish buffer to the estuary fishery.
- ✓ The options are consistent with the Joint State Sturgeon Management Agreement, sport fishery objectives adopted by the OFWC and the WFWC, and the Joint State fishery plan.
- ✓ The options ensure that total catches below Bonneville Dam remain within the annual 28,800 white sturgeon catch guideline, which is equivalent to the 32,000 white sturgeon catch guideline when size limits are set at 42-60 inches.
- ✓ The Joint Staff expects no need for further in-season emergency action under any option.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
July 29, 2004