

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - SPRING FACT SHEET NO. 1 (revised)
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
May 31, 2017

<i>Fisheries under consideration:</i>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Estuary Recreational Sturgeon- Bonneville Pool Recreational Sturgeon |
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Detailed information on stock status and management guidelines for Columbia River fisheries are presented in Joint Staff Reports, which are produced annually and available on-line. The most recent report is the 2017 Joint Staff Report Concerning Stock Status and Fisheries for Sturgeon and Smelt (January 30, 2017). <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/crc/>

WHITE STURGEON STOCK STATUS

Abundance estimates for white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River are derived from annual mark/recapture studies. Recent abundance estimates for legal-size fish (38-54 inches fork length (FL)) declined to a low of 72,700 fish in 2012 but have increased annually since then. The 2015 legal-sized abundance estimate was 143,900 fish which increased to 224,000 in 2016. The projected abundance for 2017 is 237,900.

Alternatively, a more conservative estimate based on the 2010-2015 relationship between research setline catch rates of legal-size white sturgeon and mark-recapture abundance estimates would be 155,900 fish for 2016 with a projection of 165,600 for 2017. Modeling of future recruitment to legal size results in slight net growth in legal abundance by 2020 under a no-harvest scenario and a moderate decrease under various harvest scenarios.

Abundance metrics for other size groups of white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River (LCR) are currently mixed. The abundance of adult-sized fish (≥ 167 cm FL) appears to be increasing, with the 2014-16 average abundance (4,230) exceeding the Oregon White Sturgeon Conservation Plan (WSCP) conservation status threshold (3-year average of 3,900 adults). However, lower Columbia River (LCR) sub-yearling production has remained low for the 7th consecutive year yet production has improved in the lower Willamette River.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

- For years when white sturgeon retention is allowed downstream of Bonneville Dam, current Commission guidance on white sturgeon management assumes;
 - A 10% conservation buffer will be utilized if the maximum harvest rate (16%) identified in WSCP is utilized.
 - Assign 80% of the white sturgeon available for harvest to recreational fisheries and 20% to commercial fisheries.

2017 WHITE STURGEON FISHERIES

- Due to the decline of legal-size fish and other indicators during 2008-2012, retention fisheries downstream of Bonneville Dam were closed during 2014-2016.
- Angler participation decreased by over 90% following the retention closures.
- Earlier this year, staff provided updates on the LCR white sturgeon status to both Commissions and also to the Columbia River Advisor groups. Support for a retention fishery from the Advisor Groups was mixed.
- Based on the recent increasing trend for legal-size white sturgeon in the LCR, there has been some renewed interest in a retention fishery. During February commission meetings both Commissions heard public testimony requesting support for a small-scale estuary fishery in the spring of 2017.
- Staff have evaluated options to re-initiate retention fisheries, with an initial focus on Estuary opportunity. Recently, both Commissions were updated on a potential approach for a small-scale 2017 estuary retention fishery, which received support.
- To maintain a cautious approach, staff assumed the following when modelling 2017 LCR sturgeon fisheries:
 - Applied the most conservative 2017 legal-size abundance forecast.
 - Standardized the legal slot for all LCR fisheries to 44-50 inches to facilitate management and provide immediate escapement of larger-size white sturgeon by excluding them from harvest.
 - Modeled a conservative 3.8% harvest rate on 44-50 inch fish (equivalent impact to broodstock escapement of a 4.5% harvest rate on the traditional 38-54 inch size slot).
 - Used the previous harvest allocation distribution for recreational fisheries of 48% Estuary, 20% Above Wauna, and 12% in the lower Willamette River.
- Based on the abundance forecast for 2017 of 165,600 legal-size fish, a total of 6,235 white sturgeon would be available for harvest downstream of Bonneville Dam.

Estimated Legal Abundance	165,600
Annual Harvest Guideline	6,235
Commercial (20%)	1,245
Recreational (80%)	4,990
Estuary	3,000
Above Wauna	1,245
L. Willamette	745

Recreational White Sturgeon Fisheries

Below Wauna Powerlines (Estuary)

- Given the reduced harvest guideline, desire for a somewhat protracted fishery, expected high effort, and limited recent fishery information, staff modeling assumptions for a 2017 Estuary fishery included:
 - A days-per-week approach to slow catch rates and provide staff the opportunity to review fishery performance on a weekly basis.
 - The narrower legal size slot (44-50 inch FL) will reduce catch rates relative to a broader size-slot.
 - Daily effort will be similar to averages observed in 2010-13, but significant effort shift will occur due to fewer retention days-per-week.
 - June catch rates (kept/angler day) will be approximately three times the 2005-13 average, given the higher abundance of legal size fish.
 - The timing of the fishery would occur sometime from late-May through mid-June, prior to peak summer catch months (July-August).
- Although predicting the results of the Estuary sturgeon retention fishery is confounded by multiple issues (lack of recent fishery data, higher abundance of legal-sized fish, a modified size slot, current river conditions, and unknown effort), staff believes the following fishery proposal represents a reasonable approach for re-opening this fishery.

<i>Staff Recommendation - 2017 Sturgeon Recreational Fishery for Below Wauna</i>	
Season:	Monday June 5 – Wednesday June 7 , 2017 3 days Monday June 12 – Wednesday June 14 , 2017 3 days Saturday June 17 , 2017 1 day
Area:	Mainstem Columbia River from the Wauna powerlines downstream to the mouth at Buoy 10, including Youngs Bay, and all adjacent Washington tributaries
Allowable Catch:	Up to 3,000 white sturgeon. Legal size: 44-inch minimum and 50-inch maximum fork length (Fork length is measured in a straight line from the tip of the nose to the fork in the caudal fin (tail) with the fish laying on its side on a flat surface, with the tape measure/ruler positioned flat under the fish). Daily bag limit: One fish Annual bag limit: Two fish Retention of green sturgeon is prohibited
Additional Regulations:	On days open to white sturgeon retention, angling for sturgeon is prohibited after 2 PM , including catch and release.

- The proposed fishery is based on many modeling assumptions. The duration of the retention season will likely need to be adjusted if catch rates and effort are much different than projected.
- The proposed season largely avoids overlap with arrival of the Rose Festival fleet (June 7-8) which County and State enforcement have identified as a potential issue this year. Fleet departure (June 12) does coincide with the fishery but sturgeon angling effort near the main shipping channel should be minimal.
- To avoid issues related to validation of kept fish, the proposed fishing dates are not concurrent with free fishing weekends scheduled for June 3-4 in Oregon and June 10-11 in Washington.
- The expected kept catch for the seven day season is 2,580 fish (86% of the 3,000 fish guideline).
- Per permanent regulations, catch and release fishing is allowed all year (except as noted in Additional Regulations).

Above Wauna Powerlines

- Staff is not prepared to recommend a season structure for the area upstream of the Wauna Powerlines at this time.
- Generally, catch rates in this river section are better during the spring and late fall months; therefore opportunity for a retention fishery exists during the fall season. This approach would also provide an opportunity to evaluate preliminary results from the 2017 stock assessment prior to setting a retention season.
- Per permanent regulations, catch and release fishing is allowed all year, except angling for sturgeon is prohibited May 1 through August 31 from Bonneville Dam downstream to a line crossing the Columbia River at Navigation Marker 82 on the Oregon shore westerly to a boundary marker on the Washington shore upstream of Fir Point.

Lower Willamette River

- Similar to the Above Wauna fishery, Oregon staff is not prepared to recommend a sturgeon retention season for the lower Willamette River.
- Given the reduced quota available for this fishery, a fall season would likely be considered after preliminary results from the 2017 stock assessment are available.
- Per permanent regulations, catch and release fishing is allowed all year, except angling for sturgeon is prohibited May 1 through August 31 from the Lake-Oswego-Oak Grove Railroad Bridge upstream to Willamette Falls.

Bonneville Dam upstream to McNary Dam (Zone 6)

- Under permanent rule, the 2017 Zone 6 (Bonneville Dam upstream to McNary Dam) recreational white sturgeon fisheries opened for retention effective January 1. The fishery in Bonneville Pool is managed for a split winter/summer season; however, the reduced guideline implemented in 2016 has made that goal more challenging. The Bonneville Pool winter season closed to retention on February 8. Fishery status for all pools are as follows:

2017 Preliminary Recreational Sturgeon Harvest in Zone 6				
	Guideline	Catch	Balance	Season
Bonneville Pool	325	96	229	Winter
The Dalles Pool	100	84	16	Closed March 25
John Day Pool	105	127	-22	Closed March 30

- Kept catch during the Bonneville winter season was 96 fish, or 29.5% of the 325 fish guideline leaving a balance of 229 sturgeon for a summer retention season.
- Since split seasons began in 2011, summer harvest rates have ranged from 80-229 fish per day. Harvest in 2016 was 189 fish for a 1-day season.
- Considering the balance of harvestable sturgeon remaining on the Bonneville Pool guideline and expected catch rates, staff proposes the following season recommendation:

<i>Staff Recommendation: 2017 Bonneville Pool Recreational White Sturgeon Fishery</i>	
Season:	Saturday June 10 (1 retention day)
Area:	Mainstem Columbia River from Bonneville Dam upstream to The Dalles Dam, including adjacent tributaries.
Sanctuary:	Angling for sturgeon prohibited during May through July from The Dalles Dam downstream 1.8 miles to a line from the east (upstream) dock at the Port of The Dalles boat ramp straight across to a marker on the Washington shore.
Allowable Catch:	White sturgeon between 38-inches and 54-inches fork length.

- The proposal minimizes the likelihood that the guideline will be exceeded. Consideration of additional opportunity may be considered if sufficient fish remain after the initial retention period.
- Catch and release continues to be allowed, except in the spawning sanctuary closure area.

Commercial White Sturgeon Fisheries

- Staff intends to address 2017 commercial retention opportunity in the near future, possibly after further discussion with the Columbia River Commercial Advisory Group.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- The Joint Staff has not set additional Compact hearings at this time. Staff recommends a Joint State hearing be scheduled for Thursday June 15 to review the Estuary sturgeon fishery.