OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 1
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
January 28, 2020

Fisheries under consideration:	Zone 6 treaty commercial fisheries Zone 6 non-treaty recreational sturgeon fisheries Non-treaty mainstem research-level commercial smelt fishery

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 2020 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 16, 2020) available at:

https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-01/2020_or_wa_jsr_sturgeon-smelt.pdf *or*
https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM//reports/20_reports/2020_wssjsr.pdf

The 2020 Winter/Spring/Summer Staff Report is scheduled to be distributed prior to the February 11 Compact hearing which will address Select Area commercial spring Chinook and treaty fisheries.

RIVER CONDITIONS

- The current outflow at the John Day Dam has ranged from approximately 124 kcfs to 159 kcfs in the past five days. The 5-year average flow in this time period is approximately 143 kcfs.
- The current temperature in the John Day Dam tailrace is 38.8°F. which is near the 5-year average temperature of 39.4°F. USCOE temperature data are available at: http://pweb.crohms.org/tmt/documents/ops/temp/202001.lcol.html

STOCK STATUS

Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)

- Columbia River smelt (Eulachon) return annually to the Columbia River to spawn in the mainstem and several of its tributaries downstream of Bonneville Dam. The fish typically begin to enter the Columbia River in December and peak tributary abundance is usually in February. Columbia River smelt are listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Eulachon abundance increased steadily from 2011 to 2014, reaching an estimated recent peak abundance of 16.6 million pounds in 2014, followed by a decline to 370,000 pounds in 2018. The 2019 return improved to an estimated 4.2 million pounds.

Zone 6 Sturgeon

- Each year, a stock assessment is conducted in one of the Zone 6 reservoirs. Stock assessments are done cooperatively by the states and tribes and rotate between reservoirs each year. The most recent survey (2019) was conducted in the John Day Pool and indicated a slight increase in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (43–54 inch FL), as well as the overall 33-65 inch FL population.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)

- Beginning in 2001, the Washington and Oregon Eulachon Management Plan (WOEMP) provided guidance in structuring smelt fisheries. The plan identified three levels of fisheries based on expected adult run size, juvenile production, and ocean productivity. Level 1 fisheries

are the most conservative and Level 3 are the most liberal.

- In response to the ESA listing in 2010, the states discontinued commercial and recreational smelt fisheries during 2011-2013. Since 2014, the states have worked closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to conduct research-level smelt fisheries that provide biological data and pounds per landing (CPUE) data so that smelt status and run strength can be better assessed.

Zone 6 Sturgeon

- The Sturgeon Management Task Force (SMTF), a joint state/tribal body, met on January 22, 2020 and recommended new harvest guidelines for 2020-2022 in the John Day Pool (315 fish total guideline, 210 for treaty commercial and 105 for recreational) which the states and tribes have adopted based on the improved legal-size population estimate.
- The SMTF did not modify 2020 harvest guidelines for Bonneville (500 each for treaty and recreational) or The Dalles (415 for treaty and 135 for recreational) pools.
- There is not a specific harvest guideline for the treaty subsistence catch of sturgeon, but these catches are accounted for and used in population assessments. Subsistence harvest typically occurs in association with fisheries targeting other species and is generally low. The preliminary 2019 subsistence harvest estimate is 140 fish for all three Zone 6 reservoirs combined.

2020 TREATY INDIAN WINTER FISHERIES

- A setline fishery occurs each January in all three Zone 6 pools under permanent regulations. This fishery generally has low effort and catch. This year's catches are slightly above average, but within past ranges. Current catch estimates for the season are shown in the table below. These include both ticketed landings and direct to public sales.

	January Setline	Winter Gillnet	Total	Guideline	Remaining	% of guideline
Bonneville	87	0	87	500	413	17%
The Dalles	83	0	83	415	332	20%
John Day	31	0	31	210	179	15%
Total	201	0	201			

- The tribes are setting initial gillnet openings in the two upper pools based on past catch rates. Catch rates generally start out slow and increase over time as water temperature and effort increase.
- Average past catch rates indicate the John Day Pool guideline may be reached in about 10-11 days. The fishery guideline in The Dalles Pool may be reached in about 15-19 days. Predicted catch rates will be adjusted as the fishery proceeds. As a precautionary approach, the initial plan is for a 7.5 day fishery.
- In 2019, both fisheries were extended beyond their initial openings.

- Steelhead caught upstream of The Dalles Dam from November 1-June 30 are counted as part of the A/B-Index summer steelhead return. There are no specific harvest limits for steelhead in winter season fisheries but the steelhead catch is low in the winter season averaging 69 fish annually in The Dalles and John Day pools combined since 2001 with no recorded catch during the winter gillnet fishery in the past seven years. The highest observed catch since 2001 was 306 in 2008. Because of generally low steelhead harvest in the winter gillnet fishery, no specific management actions regarding steelhead are expected to be needed. No Chinook are expected to be present during the winter gillnet fishery.
- Steelhead caught in the Bonneville Pool from November 1 through March 31 are counted as winter steelhead. There is no specific harvest limit for winter steelhead but harvest is generally low. Winter steelhead harvest has averaged 110 fish per year since 2001. Because harvest is generally low, no specific management actions regarding steelhead are expected to be needed. No Chinook are expected to be harvested in the Bonneville Pool during the winter gillnet fishery.

- The four Columbia River treaty tribes will adopt regulations consistent with the following:

2020 Treaty Indian Winter Season Commercial Gillnet Fishery	
Season:	6 AM Saturday February 1 to 6 PM Saturday February 8
Area:	The Dalles and John Day pools only
Gear:	Gillnets with no minimum mesh size restriction
Sanctuaries:	Closed areas include standard closed standard dam and river mouth areas applicable to gillnet gear
Allowable Sales:	Salmon (any species), steelhead, shad, yellow perch, bass, walleye, catfish, and carp may be sold or retained for subsistence. Sturgeon from 43 to 54 inches fork length in The Dalles and John Day pools may be sold or kept for subsistence purposes. Fish landed during the open periods are allowed to be sold after the period concludes.
Additional:	24-hour quick reporting required for Washington buyers, pursuant to WAC 220-352-315 except that landings must be reported within 24-hours of completing the fish ticket.

2020 Treaty Indian Winter Platform and Hook and Line Fishery	
Season:	6 AM Saturday February 1 to 6 PM Saturday March 21
Area:	All of Zone 6
Gear:	Hoop Nets, Dip Nets, Hook and Line
Sanctuaries:	Closed areas include standard closed standard dam and river mouth areas applicable to platform and hook and line gear
Allowable Sales:	Salmon (any species), steelhead, shad, yellow perch, bass, walleye, catfish, and carp may be sold or retained for subsistence. Sturgeon from 38-54 inches fork length in the Bonneville Pool and from 43 to 54 inches fork length in The Dalles and John Day pools may be sold or kept for subsistence purposes. Sturgeon within the legal size limit and caught in the platform and hook and line fishery may only be sold if caught during the open period and open pool of an open gillnet fishery. Fish landed during the open periods are allowed to be sold after the period concludes.
Additional:	24-hour quick reporting required for Washington buyers, pursuant to WAC 220-352-315 except that landings must be reported within 24-hours of completing the fish ticket.

- The intent of the platform fishery regulation is to allow any sturgeon caught incidentally with platform or hook and line gear to be sold if they are caught in a pool with an open commercial gillnet fishery and to allow the sale of any steelhead that may be caught.
- Catch will be monitored to ensure the tribal fisheries remain within management limits. The tribes expect to set additional fishing time after this period or may extend this period if appropriate. The tribes will take action to close fisheries early if harvest limits are projected to be met early.

2020 NON-TREATY FISHERIES

Zone 6 Recreational White Sturgeon Fisheries

- Under permanent regulations, the area from Bonneville Dam upstream to McNary Dam opens January 1 each year for white sturgeon retention. For 2020, each of the three pools are scheduled to remain open until pool-specific guidelines are met.
- From 2011-2018, the Bonneville Pool recreational fishery was managed to provide retention opportunity during winter and summer seasons, with the guideline being shared to provide opportunity in both seasons. The reduced harvest guidelines in place since 2016 for Bonneville Pool have made it difficult to execute both the winter and summer seasons, so beginning in 2019, the fishery was managed for a winter season only.
- Current recreational sturgeon guidelines and harvest estimates for 2020 Zone 6 recreational fisheries are summarized below:

2020 Zone 6 Recreational Sturgeon Guidelines and Harvest			
Pool	Guideline	Harvest (thru Jan 26)	% of guideline
Bonneville	500	265	53%
The Dalles	135	97	72%
John Day	105	32	31%

- Catches in the past week have been low which complicates staff's ability at this point in time to project when pool-specific guidelines may be met. Staff will continue to monitor recreational harvest in Zone 6 and recommend closure dates when appropriate.

2020 Columbia River Research-Level Commercial Smelt Fisheries

- During 2014-2018, limited commercial research fisheries occurred primarily in February each year to help evaluate run strength and provide biological data. Fishing was limited to eight 7-hour periods over 4-5 weeks, annually. There was no commercial fishing opportunity in 2019.
- Mainstem Columbia River commercial landings averaged 9,030 pounds (range 110–18,560 pounds) annually during 2014-2018, and averaged an annual exploitation rate of 0.14% (range 0.03-0.32%). However, due to the poor return and corresponding low fishing effort in 2018, only 110 pounds were landed.
- Abundance indicators for the 2020 smelt return are mixed but indicate a run similar to the estimated return of 4.2 million pounds in 2019 is expected.

- After discussion with NMFS, and considering the mutual desire to continue a conservative management approach to smelt fisheries, staff is recommending a research-level commercial fishery for 2020 that will continue to provide biological and run-strength data as well as some fishing opportunity.

Recommendation: 2020 Mainstem Commercial Smelt Fishery	
Season:	Mondays and Thursdays (7 AM to 5 PM) from February 3 through February 27.
Area:	Zones 1-3
Gear:	Gillnet only. Mesh size may not exceed two inches stretch measure. Nets may not exceed 1,500 feet in length along the cork line.
Allowable Sales:	Smelt
Misc. Regulations:	Multiple net rule in effect: Which means nets not specifically authorized for use in this fishery may be onboard the vessel if properly stored. A properly stored net is defined as a net on a drum that is fully covered by a tarp (canvas or plastic) and bound with a minimum of ten revolutions of rope with a diameter of 3/8 (0.375) inches or greater. 24-hour quick reporting required for Washington buyers, pursuant to WAC 220-352-315. Oregon buyers are required to electronically submit fish receiving tickets pursuant to OAR 635-006-0210. Electronic fish tickets must be submitted within 24 hours of closure of the fishing period, or within 24 hours of landing for fishing periods lasting more than 24 hours.

- The proposed fishery will continue the historic index of run strength (pounds/landing) and provide an indication of freshwater abundance to inform tributary recreational fishery management decisions, while providing a small harvest opportunity.

- The proposed season structure, being restricted to three zones and eight days, is similar to the conservative season structure used in 2014-2018.

- Longer duration periods were requested by industry to increase the likelihood that a suitable tide will occur within the open hours. Staff does not anticipate the increased hours will significantly increase overall harvest.

- Landings will be sampled to collect biological data.

2020 Tributary Research-Level Recreational Smelt Fisheries

- During 2014-2017, limited recreational fisheries occurred in the Cowlitz and Sandy rivers. The recreational fishery in the Cowlitz River was restricted to 1-5 days annually (5-6 hours per day) while the Sandy River was only open in 2014 and 2015 (2-4 days annually; 6 hours per day). Annual recreational harvest averaged 159,060 pounds (range 540 – 290,770), and averaged an annual exploitation rate of 1.65% (range 0.03-2.77%). There was no recreational fishing opportunity in 2018 and 2019.

- At this time, Washington and Oregon are not recommending recreational smelt fisheries in the Cowlitz or Sandy rivers. Washington and Oregon staff will determine if fisheries are warranted after additional freshwater abundance indicators become available.

2020 Tribal Ceremonial & Subsistence Smelt Fisheries

- Minor tribal fisheries may occur in the Cowlitz River for ceremonial and subsistence (C&S) use only, using traditional hand-held dip nets fished from shore.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- A Compact hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 11, 2020 via teleconference to consider Select Area (winter-summer) and treaty commercial fisheries.
- A Joint State hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 19, 2020 at the Shilo Inn (11707 NE Airport Way, Portland, OR) to consider mainstem Columbia River recreational spring Chinook fisheries.