

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 3a
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
January 24, 2023

<i>Fisheries under consideration:</i> Zone 6 recreational white sturgeon Non-treaty mainstem research-level commercial smelt
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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 2023 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 13, 2023) available at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/management/columbia-river/reports> or <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM/jsmreports.asp>

RIVER CONDITIONS

- As of January 23, Columbia River current water temperature at Bonneville Dam (38°F) is similar to the five-year average for this time in January (40°F). The outflow is about 126.7 kcfs (including 0.7 kcfs spill), which is lower than the recent 5-year average of 174.6 kcfs. Visibility is 7 feet which is similar to the five-year average of 6.6 feet.

STOCK STATUS

White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6 (Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam)

- White sturgeon stock status for populations upstream of Bonneville Dam was presented in Winter Fact Sheet #1, dated November 9, 2022.

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 or March. Columbia River smelt are listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- Eulachon abundance increased steadily from 2011 to 2014, reaching a peak abundance of 16.6 million pounds in 2014, followed by a decline to 370,000 pounds in 2018. Since 2018, Eulachon abundance has again increased steadily to the recent peak of 18.3 million pounds in 2022, which is the highest return recorded since 2011 when the states began producing more reliable estimates.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6

- Management guidelines for sturgeon fisheries upstream of Bonneville Dam were presented in Winter Fact Sheet #1.

- The Sturgeon Management Task Force, a joint state/tribal body, met on January 19, 2023 and recommended maintaining the same harvest guidelines for 2023–2025 in John Day Pool (315 fish total guideline: 210 for treaty commercial and 105 for non-treaty recreational). The states and tribes have adopted these guidelines:

Table 1. 2023 sturgeon harvest guidelines in Zone 6 reservoirs.

Pool	Recreational Guideline	Treaty Guideline	Total Guideline
Bonneville	675	675	1,350
The Dalles	190	560	750
John Day	105	210	315

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.

2023 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. Upon opening for retention, all three Zone 6 reservoirs are managed to the pool-specific guidelines.
- At the Joint State Hearing on November 9, 2022 the states modified the Bonneville and The Dalles pools’ fisheries by adopting a limited days-per-week retention fishery. The season set in Bonneville Pool allowed retention on Sunday January 1, and Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays from January 2 through March 22. Similarly, the season set in The Dalles Pool includes retention on Sunday January 1, and Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays from January 2 through March 4. John Day pool retention fisheries opened under permanent rules on January 1, 2023.
- At the Joint State Hearing on January 10, 2023, the states closed Bonneville Pool to sturgeon retention effective 11:59 pm on Wednesday, January 11, 2023. High angler effort and catch rates meant this fishery would have exceeded the harvest guideline if the fishery was allowed to proceed as scheduled.
- Current recreational sturgeon guidelines and harvest estimates for 2023 Zone 6 recreational fisheries are summarized below:

Table 2. Current sturgeon harvest estimates in Zone 6 reservoirs through Monday, January 23, 2023.

Pool	Angler Trips	Harvest	Recreational Guideline	Percent of Guideline
Bonneville	2,183	600	675	89%
The Dalles	1,211	171	190	90%
John Day	2,191	80	105	76%

- All three Zone 6 pools have experienced higher than average effort and catch rates, and projections indicate that the guidelines in The Dalles and John Day pools will be reached soon. Staff recommend the following closures to stay within the harvest guidelines.

Recommendation - 2023 The Dalles Pool Recreational White Sturgeon Fishery

Effective 11:59 PM Wednesday, January 25 the retention of sturgeon is prohibited in the mainstem Columbia River from The Dalles Dam upstream to John Day Dam (The Dalles Pool), and all adjacent tributaries.

- The projected kept catch in The Dalles Pool through January 25 is 184 fish (97% of the guideline).

Recommendation - 2023 John Day Pool Recreational White Sturgeon Fishery

Effective 11:59 PM Sunday, January 29 the retention of sturgeon is prohibited in the mainstem Columbia River from John Day Dam upstream to McNary Dam (John Day Pool), and all adjacent tributaries.

- The projected kept catch in the John Day Pool through January 29 is 101 fish (96% of the guideline).
- Although there is a balance of 75 fish on the Bonneville Pool harvest guideline, staff are not comfortable recommending an additional day of retention fishing. Average weekday harvest in-season was 40 fish per day and weekend catches averaged 175 fish per day. Given enough advanced notice, staff feel that angler effort on an additional weekday fishing period would likely resemble a weekend day and therefore put the likelihood of exceeding the guideline at an unacceptable level of risk.
- Permanent regulations allow for catch-and-release sturgeon angling all year, except angling for sturgeon is prohibited May 1 through August 31 within the sanctuary areas designated below each of the dam tailraces.

Columbia River Research-Level Commercial Smelt Fisheries

- During 2014–2018 and 2020–2022, limited commercial research fisheries occurred primarily in February each year to help evaluate run strength and provide biological data. Fishing was limited to two days per week for 4–7 weeks, annually.
- Due to declining participation in the commercial fishery, fishing hours were expanded from seven to 12 hours per day in 2020 to allow fishers access to at least one fishable tide daily. Fishing was also expanded to three days per week for eight weeks in 2022, to improve in-season monitoring and provide additional flexibility for fishers.

- Mainstem Columbia River commercial landings averaged approximately 11,700 pounds (range 110–27,398 pounds) annually during 2014–2018 and 2020–2022 and averaged an estimated annual exploitation rate of 0.15% (range 0.03–0.31%).
- Abundance indicators for the 2023 smelt return suggest a moderate to strong return of the predominant age classes (age-3, age-4, and age-5). The 2023 run is expected to be similar to or slightly lower in magnitude than the 2022 return of 18.3 million pounds.
- After discussion with NMFS, and considering the mutual desire to continue a conservative management approach to smelt fisheries, staff are recommending a research-level commercial fishery for 2023.
- The biological data collected during the commercial fishery allow staff to investigate attributes of the annual Eulachon run into the Columbia River. Landings data from the commercial fishery also help to provide an in-season monitoring tool to inform whether the run can support recreational harvest opportunity. Therefore, due to a history of low exploitation rates and the valuable information collected by this fishery, staff designed the 2023 recommendation using a similar approach to the 2022 commercial fishery.
- Staff reviewed the recommendations with the Columbia River Commercial Advisory Group and heard that Friday fishing periods pose a challenge for processors’ ability to bring fish to market. Therefore, staff recommend the 2023 schedule include fishing periods on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

<i>Recommendation: 2023 Mainstem Commercial Smelt Fishery</i>	
Season:	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays (5 AM to 5 PM) January 25 through March 16. 23 periods
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. 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 23 periods, is similar to the

conservative season structure used in 2022 and allows for better in-season run monitoring.

- The proposed hours match the longer duration periods requested by industry in 2020 to increase the likelihood that a suitable tide will occur within the fishing period.
- Landings will be sampled to collect biological data.

Tributary Research-Level Recreational Smelt Fisheries

- During 2014–2017 and 2020–2022, limited recreational fisheries occurred in the Cowlitz River. The fishery was restricted to 1–5 days annually (5–6 hours per day). During this timeframe, the Sandy River was only open in 2014 and 2015 (2–4 days annually; 6 hours per day). Annual recreational harvest averaged 133,153 pounds (range 541–290,770) with an average exploitation rate of 1.35% (range 0.03–2.77%). There was no recreational smelt fishing opportunity in 2018 or 2019.
- At this time, Washington and Oregon are not recommending recreational smelt fisheries in the Cowlitz or Sandy rivers. Staff will determine if fisheries are warranted after additional freshwater abundance indicators become available.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- A Compact Hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 14, 2023 via teleconference to consider Select Area (winter-summer) and treaty commercial fisheries.
- A hybrid Joint State Hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 22, 2023 to consider mainstem Columbia River recreational spring Chinook fisheries. The meeting will be held at the WDFW Ridgefield office (5525 S. 11th Street, Ridgefield, Washington 98642) and a teleconference call-in option will be available.

COLUMBIA RIVER INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 3b
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
January 24, 2023

Fisheries under consideration:

Zone 6 treaty commercial fisheries

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<https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/management/columbia-river/reports> and <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM/jsmreports.asp>

RIVER CONDITIONS

- The river temperature at The Dalles Dam has averaged 39 degrees over the past 5 days which is close to the 5-year average.
- The recent 5-day average outflow at The Dalles Dam is 137 kcfs which is not unusual for this time of year.

STOCK STATUS

Zone 6 Sturgeon

- The states and tribes work cooperatively to complete white sturgeon stock assessments, which are rotated between the three Zone 6 reservoirs on an annual basis. The 2022 survey was conducted in the John Day Pool and indicated a 12% decrease in the abundance of legal sized sturgeon (43–54 inch fork length), and a 6% decline in the overall population (fish greater than 21 inch fork length). The population of over-legal fish (greater than 54 inches) increased by 80%. Lack of successful spawning rather than fisheries is presumed to be the primary cause of the population decline.

Steelhead and Salmon

- From November 1 through January 22, a total of 703 winter steelhead, including 311 unclipped, have been counted at Bonneville Dam (44% unclipped). The total count is the second lowest to date in the last 10 years and the total unclipped count is the third lowest to date in the last 10 years. There are normally no dam counts available this time of year for The Dalles, John Day, or McNary Dams. This year is one of the periodic years where counts are being made at The Dalles and McNary Dams. Since January 1, a total of 32 summer steelhead (10 unclipped) have been counted at The Dalles Dam and 186 summer steelhead (69 unclipped fish) have been counted at McNary Dam. These fish are from the 2022-23 run year.
- Chinook counts at Bonneville Dam in January total one fish which may have actually been a fall Chinook.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Zone 6 Sturgeon

- The Sturgeon Management Task Force which is a joint state tribal body reviews stock assessment information and harvest guidelines for one of the Zone 6 reservoirs each year. This

year the Task Force recommended continuing the target average exploitation rate of 5% which equates to the same harvest guidelines in use over the past three years.

- The harvest guidelines in place for 2023 are shown in the table below.

Pool	Treaty Commercial Guideline	Recreational Retention Guideline	Total
Bonneville	675	675	1,350
The Dalles	560	190	750
John Day	210	105	315
Total	1,445	970	2,415

- There is no 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 2022 subsistence harvest estimate is 192 fish in the Bonneville Pool, 71 fish in The Dalles Pool, and 12 fish in the John Day Pool.

Steelhead and Salmon

- 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 averaging 51 fish annually in The Dalles and John Day Pools combined since 2008 with no recorded catch during the winter gillnet fishery in the past nine years, although there has been some harvest in spring fisheries. 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.
- 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 104 fish per year since 2001 and was 40 fish in 2021. Because harvest is generally low, no specific management actions regarding steelhead are expected to be needed.
- Chinook are not expected to be present during the winter gillnet fishery.

2023 TREATY INDIAN WINTER FISHERIES

- A setline fishery occurs each January in all three Zone 6 Pools under permanent regulations through January 31. This fishery generally has low effort and catch. This year’s catches to date are below average in the Bonneville and John Day pools, and near average in The Dalles Pool; however, they are within past ranges. Current sturgeon catch estimates for the season are shown in the table below. These include both ticketed landings and direct to public sales. The tribes expect additional catches in the January setline fishery of 40 sturgeon in the Bonneville Pool, 10 sturgeon in The Dalles Pool, and 15 sturgeon in the John Day Pool. Salmon and steelhead are not harvested in setline fisheries.

Reservoir	January Setline to Date	Expected Additional Setline catch	Total Setline	Modeled Gillnet Catch	Total after Planned Fisheries	Guideline	Remaining	% of Guideline Harvested
Bonneville	97	40	137	0	137	675	538	20.3%
The Dalles	34	10	44	210	254	560	306	45.4%
John Day	16	15	31	146	177	210	33	84.3%
Total	147	65	212	356	568			

- Gillnet 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 20 days and the fishery guideline in The Dalles Pool may be reached in about seven days. As a precautionary approach, the initial plan is for a 2.5-day fishery in The Dalles Pool and a 12.5-day fishery in the John Day Pool. Actual catch rates are impacted by weather, river conditions, and effort. If there are remaining available fish after the planned opening, then additional fishing time will be scheduled. For any additional fisheries, expected catch rates will be adjusted based on actual fishery performance.
- In 2022, The Dalles Pool saw relatively high catch rates while catch rates in the John Day Pool were modest. There have been overages in The Dalles Pool which is why a more precautionary approach is being taken this year. The total guideline in the John Day Pool has only been reached in two out of the last seven years.
- Decisions on Bonneville Pool sturgeon fisheries will be made later.
- Estimates of steelhead harvest in platform fisheries are not available yet and will be reported when available. Normally, catches and effort are very low in the winter.

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

<i>2023 Treaty Indian Winter Season Commercial Gillnet Fishery</i>	
Season:	6 AM Wednesday February 1 to 6 PM Monday February 13 (12.5 days)
Area:	The John Day Pool 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 John Day Pool 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. Oregon buyers are required to electronically submit fish tickets.

<i>2023 Treaty Indian Winter Season Commercial Gillnet Fishery</i>	
Season:	6 AM Saturday February 4 to 6 PM Monday February 6 (2.5 days)
Area:	The Dalles Pool 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 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. Oregon buyers are required to electronically submit fish tickets.

<i>2023 Treaty Indian Winter Platform and Hook and Line Fishery</i>	
Season:	6 AM Wednesday February 1 to 6 PM Saturday March 18
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 to 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 kept for subsistence purposes. Sturgeon within the legal-size limit and caught in the platform and hook and line fishery may only be sold only 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. Oregon buyers are required to electronically submit fish tickets.

- 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.
- The expected sturgeon catch in the Dalles Pool fishery at the end of the planned opening is 254 fish based on last year’s catch rates which were higher than normal. The expected sturgeon catch at the end of the John Day Pool fishery is 177 based on recent average catches per day (2020-2022). The expected catch of steelhead is zero.
- 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.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- The tribes request a Compact Hearing on February 8 or 9 if there is an opportunity for remaining fish on The Dalles Pool guideline or if adjustments are needed John Day Pool fishery.