

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 8
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
March 13, 2024

<p><i>Fisheries under consideration:</i> John Day Pool recreational white sturgeon Non-treaty mainstem research-level commercial smelt</p>

Detailed information on stock status and management guidelines for Columbia River fisheries are presented in Joint Staff Reports, which are produced annually and available online. The most recent report relevant to these fisheries is the 2024 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 12, 2024); Joint Staff Reports are 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 March 11, the recent five-day average outflow at Bonneville Dam is 127.3 kcfs compared to a five-year average of 149.0 kcfs. The five-day average water temperature at Bonneville Dam is 42°F compared to a five-year average of 39°F.

STOCK STATUS

White Sturgeon

- White sturgeon stock status for populations upstream of Bonneville Dam was presented in Winter Fact Sheet #1, dated October 31, 2023.

Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)

- Columbia River smelt (Eulachon) stock status was presented in Winter Fact Sheet #3, dated January 23, 2024.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

White Sturgeon

- Management guidelines for sturgeon fisheries upstream of Bonneville Dam were presented in Winter Fact Sheet #1 and updated in Winter Fact Sheet #6.

Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)

- Smelt management guidelines were presented in Winter Fact Sheet #3, dated January 23, 2024.

2024 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 harvest guidelines.

- At a Joint State Hearing on October 31, 2023 the states modified the Bonneville and The Dalles pools’ fisheries for 2024 by adopting a limited days-per-week retention fishery. John Day Pool retention fisheries opened under permanent rules on January 1, 2024.
- At a Joint State Hearing on January 3, 2024, the states closed Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool to sturgeon retention effective 11:59 pm on Wednesday, January 3, 2024. Higher than average angler effort and catch rates meant these fisheries were likely to exceed their respective harvest guidelines if they proceeded as originally scheduled.
- At a Joint State Hearing on February 21, 2024 the states adopted two additional days of retention in The Dalles Pool after an update to the harvest guideline left a balance of fish available for harvest.
- Current recreational sturgeon guidelines and harvest estimates for 2024 Zone 6 recreational fisheries are summarized below (as of March 11):

Pool	Angler Trips	Harvest	Recreational Guideline	Percent of Guideline
Bonneville	1,364	692	675	103%
The Dalles	935	271	275	99%
John Day	3,246	90	105	86%

- Projections indicate that the John Day Pool harvest guideline will be reached soon if action is not taken to close retention. Staff recommend the following closure to stay within the harvest guidelines.

Recommendation: 2024 John Day Pool Recreational Sturgeon Fishery

Effective 11:59 PM Thursday, March 14 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 John Day Pool through Thursday, March 14 is 99 fish (94% of the guideline).
- 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. Daily and annual sturgeon bag limits apply to all fisheries statewide.

Columbia River Commercial Smelt Fishery

- The pre-season framework provided by the Washington and Oregon Eulachon Management Plan (WOEMP), which considers recent trends and abundances of run sizes as well as expectations for the upcoming run, placed state-managed fisheries within Harvest Phase 2, with a 2% harvest rate.
- At the Compact Hearing on January 24, 2024, the states set 23 commercial smelt fishing periods, running three days per week (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays) starting Wednesday, January 24 and ending Thursday, March 14.

- A total of 36 pounds were harvested during January. Between February 5–7, landings increased to over 1,000 pounds per day. This triggered an upgrade into Harvest Phase 3, which entails an increase to a 5% harvest rate for all state-managed fisheries. To date, 11,655 pounds have been harvested in the mainstem Columbia River commercial smelt fishery.
- Landings and participation declined during the latter half of February but increased during the first week of March with two days exceeding 1,000 pounds landed.
- Due to the continued presence of smelt in the mainstem Columbia River and the need for continued run monitoring data, staff is recommending an extension to the commercial fishery. The extension would maintain the conservative approach used to stay within harvest limits prescribed in the WOEMP and would continue to provide smelt for the markets as well as biological and run-strength data.

<i>Recommendation: 2024 Mainstem Commercial Smelt Fishery</i>	
Season:	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays (5 AM to 5 PM) March 18 through March 28 (6 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 commercial harvest opportunity.

Tributary Recreational Smelt Fisheries

- After smelt were observed in the Cowlitz River, Washington set a recreational fishery that took place on February 15, 2024. A total of 54,000 pounds were harvested.
- Monitoring indicated a decrease in the presence of smelt in the Cowlitz River during the latter half of February. Abundance appeared to increase at the end of the month and Washington set an additional recreational fishery on March 5, 2024. Catch rates were very low and 1,200 pounds were harvested.

- Smelt were observed in the Sandy River beginning on Friday March 1, 2024. Their presence continued over that weekend and into early the following week; however, abundance appeared to decline fairly quickly. Oregon did not open a recreational fishery for smelt in the Sandy River.
- Currently, there are no recreational smelt fisheries scheduled in the Cowlitz River or Sandy River. If smelt return in adequate abundance to these tributaries again this year, the respective states will evaluate the potential for recreational fisheries at that time.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- No Compact or Joint State hearings are scheduled at this time. Joint staff will monitor fisheries and recommend additional hearings as needed.