

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 1
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
November 8, 2024

<i>Fisheries under consideration:</i> Zone 6 recreational white sturgeon

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 relevant to these fisheries is the 2024 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 12, 2024) available at:

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

STOCK STATUS

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

- The states and tribes work cooperatively to complete white sturgeon stock assessments, which rotate among the three Zone 6 reservoirs on an annual basis. Young-of-year surveys are completed annually in all three reservoirs.
- The most recent stock assessment information available for each pool is summarized below:
 - Bonneville Pool—The 2021 survey indicated a 22% increase in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (38–54 inch fork length) and an 18% increase in the overall 38–65 inch fork length population. Young-of-year surveys indicate measurable recruitment on an annual basis over the past ten years, except 2015. The results for the 2024 stock assessment in Bonneville Pool will be available in January 2025.
 - The Dalles Pool—The 2023 survey indicated a 76% increase in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (43–54 inch fork length) and a 72% increase in the overall 38–65 inch fork length population. Since 2014, measurable recruitment has been detected in seven out of 10 years; however, recruitment has been lower in recent years and the juvenile portion of the population (21–37 inch fork length) continues to decline.
 - John Day Pool—The 2022 survey indicated a 12% decrease in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (43–54 inch fork length) and a 11% decrease in the overall 38–65 inch fork length population. Since 2013, measurable recruitment has only been detected once, during 2019. The spatial coverage of the spawning sanctuary was extended in 2019 to further protect reproductive adults and improve future recruitment.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

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

- The *U.S. v. OR Sturgeon Management Task Force*, a joint state/tribal body, met on January 18, 2024 and recommended increasing the harvest guidelines for 2024–2026 in The Dalles Pool. The states and tribes adopted these guidelines (see Table 1). The Task Force will meet in January 2025 to review the results of the stock assessment done in Bonneville Pool and will consider updating those harvest guidelines at that time.

Table 1. Current white sturgeon harvest guidelines in Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day reservoirs.

Pool	Recreational Guideline	Treaty Commercial Guideline	Total Guideline
Bonneville	675	675	1,350
The Dalles	275	825	1,100
John Day	105	175	280

- 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.

PAST RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

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

- Over the past 5-year period (2020–2024), total harvest guidelines have increased in Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool, but have remained constant in John Day Pool.
- Bonneville Pool—Season length has averaged 16 days during the previous 5-year period but has been quite variable with a low of two days and a high of 44 days (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of recreational sturgeon retention periods and harvest in Bonneville Pool.

Year	Retention Period(s)	Total Retention Days	Total Guideline	Recreational Harvest	Proportion of Guideline Harvested	Average Fish Kept Per Day
2020	1/1–2/13	44	500	431	86%	10
2021	1/1–1/7	7	500	655	131%	94
2022	1/1–1/19 & 3/9	20	675	622	92%	31
2023	1/1–1/11*	6	675	600	89%	100
2024	1/1-1/3*	2	675	692	103%	346

*Three-days-per-week retention schedule (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays).

- The Dalles Pool—Season length has averaged 21 days during the previous 5-year period but has also been variable with a low of four days and a high of 48 days (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of recreational sturgeon retention periods and harvest in The Dalles Pool.

Year	Retention Period(s)	Total Retention Days	Total Guideline	Recreational Harvest	Proportion of Guideline Harvested	Average Fish Kept Per Day
2020	1/1–2/17	48	135	205	152%	4
2021	1/1–1/4	4	190	235	124%	59
2022	1/1–3/21*	35	190	204	107%	6
2023	1/1–1/25*	12	190	188	99%	16
2024	1/1–1/3, 2/24, 2/28*	4	275	271	99%	68

*Three-days-per-week retention schedule (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays).

- John Day Pool—Season length has averaged 64 days over the past 5-year period and has been both longer and more consistent relative to season lengths in Bonneville and The Dalles pools (Table 4).

Table 4. Summary of recreational sturgeon retention periods and harvest in John Day Pool.

Year	Retention Period(s)	Total Retention Days	Total Guideline	Recreational Harvest	Proportion of Guideline Harvested	Average Fish Kept Per Day
2020	1/1–3/9	69	105	102	97%	1.5
2021	1/1–3/18	77	105	98	93%	1.3
2022	1/1–3/9	68	105	94	90%	1.4
2023	1/1–1/29, 2/11, 2/15, 2/18	32	105	95	90%	3.3
2024	1/1–3/14	74	105	96	91%	1.3

- Catch rates and season length have been highly variable in Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool due to several factors, including water temperature, weather, and on-the-water conditions. In order to moderate this variability in retention season duration, the states have recently adopted a days-per-week approach in Bonneville Pool (2023 and 2024) and The Dalles Pool (2022–2024).
- In contrast, catches in the John Day Pool tend to accrue more slowly, resulting in relatively consistent season lengths. Four of the previous five seasons have been between 68–77 days long.
- In all pools, catch rates can be low at the start of the year and then rapidly increase within a very short window, such as a day or weekend. The states’ catch monitoring program provides catch estimates in a timely manner. However, some lead time is necessary to take appropriate management action and provide notice to the public.

2024 NON-TREATY FISHERIES

Recreational White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6

- Given the limited harvest guidelines and successful management of these fisheries in recent years, staff recommend modifying the permanent seven-day-per-week retention fishery structure in Bonneville and The Dalles pools again for 2025.
- Due to the lower risk of exceeding the guideline in John Day Pool within a short timeframe, staff are not recommending any changes at this time. Per permanent regulations, this fishery is scheduled to begin January 1 and remain open to retention seven days per week until the harvest guideline is met. Staff will monitor harvest closely and will recommend management action when needed.
- Modeling assumptions for the 2025 white sturgeon recreational fisheries included:
 - An early January start when catch rates are generally lower to provide for a longer retention season and for consistency with past years.
 - Use of the days-per-week approach to aide in extending the duration of the season and provide staff the opportunity to review fishery performance on a weekly or daily basis.
 - Daily effort is expected to be higher on holidays and weekends than weekdays.
- Prioritizing the traditional start date of January 1, staff developed the following recommendations for the 2025 sturgeon retention fisheries in Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool.

<i>Recommendation - 2025 Bonneville Pool Recreational Sturgeon Fishery</i>	
Season:	Wednesdays and Saturdays; January 1–29 9 days
Area:	Mainstem Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to The Dalles Dam, and all adjacent tributaries
Allowable Catch:	White sturgeon Legal size: 38-inch minimum and 54-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

<i>Recommendation - 2025 The Dalles Pool Recreational Sturgeon Fishery</i>	
Season:	Wednesdays and Saturdays; January 1–29 9 days
Area:	Mainstem Columbia River from The Dalles Dam to John Day Dam, and all adjacent tributaries
Allowable Catch:	White sturgeon Legal size: 43-inch minimum and 54-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 <u>under</u> the fish) Daily bag limit: One fish Annual bag limit: Two fish

- The expected kept catch in Bonneville Pool is 626 fish (93% of the guideline) and the expected kept catch in The Dalles Pool is 261 fish (95% of the guideline).
- Alternatively, staff explored delaying the opening day for these fisheries until Saturday, January 4 and a three-day-per-week structure (Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday). Due to the high effort and catch that typically occurs on January 1, this option would be expected to allow for 12 retention days in Bonneville Pool (between January 4–29) and 13 retention days in The Dalles Pool (between January 4 – February 1). The expected catch with this approach is 668 fish Bonneville Pool (99% of the guideline) and 257 fish in The Dalles Pool (93% of the guideline).
- The 2025 harvest projections incorporate the recent 3-year average catch rates and daily angler effort. These estimates were partially drawn from seasons when retention was open seven days per week, therefore, staff acknowledge that a days-per-week approach may increase the daily angler effort and catch rates.
- Angler effort in these fisheries has been generally increasing over the last three years. The duration of the retention seasons will be adjusted if catch rates and effort are much different than projected, based on pool-specific catch guidelines. The recommended days-per-week approach will allow staff sufficient time to produce and monitor daily harvest estimates and recommend action necessary to stay within the harvest guidelines. If harvest is lower than projected, additional retention days may be considered during future hearings.
- Green sturgeon are not present upstream of Bonneville Dam and therefore are not expected to be handled during these fisheries.
- 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 downstream of the dam tailraces. Daily and annual sturgeon bag limits apply to all fisheries statewide.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- No additional Compact or Joint State hearings are scheduled at this time.