

Joint-State Columbia River Fishery Policy Review Committee

Analysis of Results of Policy Issues, Alternatives under Consideration

August 1, 2019

Following are is analysis of the results associated with implementation of possible policy changes to spring Chinook Issue 4 as part of the Oregon-Washington review of Columbia River salmon and steelhead fishery management under consideration by the Joint-State Columbia River Fishery Policy Review Committee (PRC) process. Issues and options previously removed from the list are excluded.

Spring Chinook

Issue 4: Provide improved season stability for upriver spring Chinook recreational fisheries

For the past 15 years, WDFW has heard from southeast Washington stakeholders about the perceived inequity of spring Chinook fisheries above Bonneville Dam and the Snake River compared to below Bonneville Dam. The stakeholders believe they have compelling reasons why WDFW/ODFW and the Fish and Wildlife Commissions should reconsider the current 75%/25% below/above Bonneville recreational allocation policy that guides recreational spring Chinook fisheries in the Columbia River. On July 17, 2018 WDFW staff, IDFG staff (Lance Hebdon), ODFW Staff (Chris Kern), WDFW staff (i.e., Bill Tweit, Ryan Lothrop, Chris Donley) and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissioners Graybill and Thorburn met with a group of stakeholders in Kennewick, Washington. The meeting focused on discussing methods to increase the number of spring Chinook allocated to above Bonneville Dam fisheries. The input heard at the meeting and resulting correspondence generated the list of concepts presented below. In the end, southeast Washington stakeholders are seeking increased access to spring Chinook above Bonneville Dam with assurances that there is a reasonable recreational fishery above Bonneville Dam every year.

Option 3: Apply buffer only to fisheries below Bonneville Dam

Results:

Since the available allocation by area is partly driven by run size, this concept would increase Upriver spring Chinook mortalities available to recreational fisheries upstream of Bonneville Dam prior to the run update. As a result, the recreational fishery downstream of Bonneville Dam would need to be managed to a larger run buffer (and fewer available Upriver mortalities) prior to a run update in order to maintain the collective 30% buffer provision in the *U.S. v OR* Management agreement. This would result in a shorter recreational season below Bonneville prior to the run update, and the potential for a longer pre-update fishery in the mainstem Columbia River above Bonneville Dam. If this were to be instituted, it would increase the risk of the Zone 6 fishery exceeding its portion of the above Bonneville allocation, resulting in a possible fishery closure within other areas, including the Snake River. Excluding the increased risk by the Zone 6 fishery exceeding its allocation, the Snake River fishery would not likely be affected since the fishery is typically managed to the actual run-size due to later timing unless the above Bonneville allocation used.

Option 4: Establish a set season above Bonneville Dam

Results:

Although this approach would in theory provide more season stability, adopting seasons without consideration of the annual run size is not done in other mainstem seasons. Fixed

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seasons above Bonneville Dam would increase the likelihood of fisheries exceeding their allocation of available impacts, which could negatively affect post-update fisheries in other areas, and potentially exceed available recreational shares in the event of a significant run downgrade, triggering effects on commercial fisheries. Differential migration timing makes it difficult to offer consistent dates for fishing in the Snake River that will occur during times when the fish are present and attractive to anglers. Snake River fisheries are structured around when the fish arrive in the Snake River to ensure that anglers will have meaningful harvest opportunity and the fishery is not extended over a protracted period of time to prevent over-expenditure of a limited creel survey budget. Estimating catch and release numbers for this fishery is required under the *U.S. v. OR* Management Agreement. Fishery days cannot be offered without fishery monitoring. Lastly, if the risk of exceeding the above Bonneville allocations are properly accounted for, the set seasons might be quite small and would even then need to be cancelled or adjusted if the run size did not materialize as to forecasted level, so as to accomplish the conservation goals in place; thus season stability could not be assured even with a “set” season.

Option 5: Remove the Catch Balance requirements for fisheries above Bonneville Dam

Results:

This option was removed from consideration by the PRC at the March 14 meeting due to Catch Balancing being a requirement of U.S. v. Oregon. Removing the catch balance requirement for any non-treaty fishery would be inconsistent with the terms of the US v Oregon Management Agreement.

Staff note:

This option from the public may have assumed that if Catch Balance were not applied to upriver fisheries, the lower river fisheries would need to make up the difference in order to meet the *U.S. v Oregon* requirements. This concept is similar to Option 3 described above. If this option were in place, other fisheries, presumably the recreational fishery downstream of Bonneville Dam, would need to be further reduced to compensate for the additional harvest allowed upstream of Bonneville Dam in order to meet the collective Catch Balance provision required in the Management Agreement. Fisheries management would be further complicated in that the amount needed to be removed from lower river fishing opportunity would be difficult to estimate. Further, the in-season adjustment if run sizes exceed forecast are such that the allocation to upriver fisheries would likely be exceeded every year this occurs.

Option 6: Limit lower river seasons to five days per week

Results:

This concept only addresses how the below Bonneville allocation can be used, not the allowed allocation, therefore it would have no impact on recreational fisheries above Bonneville Dam. This option, or versions of, has been used in the past years to manage the lower river fishery. Limiting the fishery below Bonneville to five days per week may extend the fishery somewhat, but the fishery would still be managed to the same pre-update

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allocation. A days-per-week approach would theoretically slow the fishery, and might reduce the likelihood of the recreational fishery downstream of Bonneville Dam exceeding its pre-update allocation. However, the difference between five and seven days per week is minimal due to angler effort shift, resulting in more angler trips and higher catch per day when the season is constrained. However if effort shift did not occur, any reduction in days per week of fishing would translate into more opportunity later in the season.

Staff Note: Staff recommends this item be removed from further consideration since it will not address the objective of Issue 4 (provide improved season stability for Upriver spring Chinook recreational fisheries).

Option 7: Measure benefit based on harvest instead of economic value

Results:

No analytical results provided at this time.

Staff Note:

It is unclear what this proposal actually entails, and how such measurements would be made. Therefore staff are uncertain how to proceed.

Option 8: No lower river extension beyond pre-season plan

Results:

Proponents of this option intended for no fishery extension in the lower river prior to a run update. This concept would have no impact on recreational fishery allocation for below and above Bonneville Dam, but could affect how much of the lower river pre-update allocation is used, depending on how it was implemented. Spring Chinook fisheries are typically managed in-season based on area-specific sub-allocations. Prior to the run-update, each fishery is generally allowed access to its impact share which is then adjusted after the run-update. If mainstem Columbia River fisheries (below and above Bonneville Dam) have not reached their allocation by the end of the fishery planned preseason, they are generally provided extensions. This concept would prohibit recreational season extensions below Bonneville which could result in fewer fish landed in the initial season, potentially providing a larger buffer in the event of a run-size downgrade. This could help prevent emergency closures for fisheries above Bonneville in years with a significant run downgrade. Stakeholders above Bonneville view this concept as a conservative way to ensure that exceeding the lower river allocation on the above Bonneville allocation will not occur. However, not extending the lower river fishery to its pre-update allowable catch can result in the fishery not being able to access its allocation after the run-update (and prior to June 15) since the majority of the run has crossed Bonneville Dam. This has become more of an issue with later run timings observed in recent years. In response to these later returns, the agencies have managed the pre-update lower river fishery more conservatively in the early season, generally setting projected pre-update closure dates to be relatively early in the season. Once catches are assessed for the early portion of the fishery, decisions are made about adding additional days, generally in small amounts (1-3 days) to remain well under the pre-update allowances. In the past, managers had frequently used a different approach,

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with either a less conservative (later) projected closure date, or no closure date projection, and in-season action was taken to close the fishery when it was projected to attain its allocation. If this past strategy were reinstated, extensions of the fishery would not occur, no changes in allocation would occur, but risk of the lower river exceeding its pre-update allocation would likely increase.

Option 9: Annual payback to upriver fisheries for lower river fishery overage the year prior

Results:

This concept could affect the current fixed percentage allocations within the recreational fishery. It proposes to alter each year's allocation percentage based on the previous year's results for the fishery downstream of Bonneville Dam. In years when the below Bonneville Dam fishery exceeds its sub-allocation and cuts into the above Bonneville Dam sub-allocation, the lower river recreational allocation in the following year would be reduced and shifted to upriver fisheries as compensation. Typically, exceedances have occurred in years where the run is substantially over predicted, resulting in reduced in-season catch and/or ESA limits. This can result in reduced harvest or a complete fishery closure above Bonneville Dam. This does not occur often but it has occurred enough that upriver stakeholders are concerned that these types of fishery interruptions will continue into the future. The 30% run forecast buffer was put into place to prevent this and other over exploitation scenarios from occurring. The buffer has been effective in remaining within area-specific sub-allocations, except in 2017, which was the latest spring migration timing on record and the run was far below forecast. This approach could become complicated since upriver Catch Balance allocations change annually based on the Upriver run size. A small 5% overage on a larger run year could equate to a much larger percent payback requirement the following year, if the available allocation is reduced. Decisions would also need to be made on what the units of payback are, number of fish, percentage of allocation, or other.

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Option 10: Annual payback to lower river fishery for foregone opportunity resulting from implementing strategies intended to safeguard upriver fisheries

Results:

This option would increase allocation to the lower river fisheries following a year when the upriver fisheries did not fully utilize their Catch Balance share. Since annual run size and corresponding Catch Balance allocations differ annually, the un-equal payback issue described in Option 9 would apply here also. In years when the above Bonneville Dam fishery does not use its sub-allocation, the lower river recreational allocation in the following year would be increased. Typically, unused allocations have occurred in years where the run is substantially under predicted or poor fishing conditions, resulting in reduced in-season catch and/or ESA limits. Increasing allocation to the lower river on a one-year basis would initially provide the lower river fishery increased opportunity, and if not used, could be then transferred to upriver fisheries in-season if unused. This approach could become complicated since upriver Catch Balance allocations change annually based on the Upriver run size. Decisions would also need to be made on what the units of payback are, number of fish, percentage of allocation, or other.