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Evaluations of Options for Increasing Opportunities to Commercially Harvest Salmon in Existing Select Areas

In 2010, ODFW conducted test fishing during the winter season in Knappa Slough and Tongue Point to determine which stocks of salmon are present and assess whether commercial fishing during this time period would be biologically and economically feasible. In 2011 and 2012, ODFW plans to test fish during the fall season in Grant Slough/Prairie Channel, which is adjacent to the existing Blind Slough/Knappa Slough Select Area site, to evaluate the biological and economic feasibility of expanding commercial fishing opportunity at the site.

ODFW Policies

Additional Gear: ODFW supports efforts to determine if the commercial harvest of hatchery-produced salmon in the lower Columbia River can be increased by expanding the types of gear fishers can use. The intent is not to replace gill nets as a method of commercial harvest, but to provide managers and fishers additional options for increasing access to harvestable stocks and species of salmon. These options may include structuring future seasons to fish specific gear at certain times and in certain areas depending on the mix of fish species and stocks present.

If ODFW, in consultation with WDFW and the Columbia River commercial fishing industry determines that a gear is economically viable and that the mortality (immediate and long-term) of non-target fish stocks and species handled by the gear is sufficiently low to avoid significant harm to their populations, it would consider the gear to be a viable candidate for implementation in addition to, not instead of the existing gill net fishery.

If ODFW determines that one or more types of gear are viable for implementation, additional steps would have to be taken for implementation to occur. The first step would be revising current statutes prohibiting the use of gear other than gill nets for the commercial harvest of salmon in the Columbia River. Other steps would include determining how to permit the use of the new gear and how the incidental-take of ESA-listed fish would be managed.

At this time ODFW has not taken a policy stand regarding when and how implementation of gear other than gill nets should occur. Such a policy would be informed by conversations with WDFW, the Columbia River commercial fishing industry, and others about the biological, economic and social implications of various implementation options.

Select Areas: ODFW is committed to continue working with WDFW and the Columbia River commercial fishing industry on ways to increase opportunities to commercially harvest salmon in Select Areas in the lower Columbia River. Expanded opportunity in the Select Areas would be in addition to, not instead of opportunity in the mainstem, assuming the incidental mortality of ESA-listed fish handled in expanded Select Area fisheries does not exceed the current allocation for those fisheries.

TO bankruptcy

States fail to expand

commercial fishing options

2-7-14

People on the lower Columbia River are fans of Select Area Fishery Enhancement areas such as the salmon net pens in Young Bay. So it was good news, on a superficial level, when Washington state recently said it will create a new SAFE area in the channel between Puget Island and the mainland near Cathlamet.

These net pens hold young salmon in bays and side channels. The salmon come to associate these waters as home and return there to be harvested after two to four years in the ocean. The acronym "SAFE" recognizes that rearing salmon in these places ensures wild fish migrating through the main channel of the Columbia are safe from being netted.

Expanding the number of SAFE areas is a key promise made to gillnet fishermen as a sop for banning them from the main stem of the river. From the start, commercial harvesters regarded this as a mostly empty promise by Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber. There aren't many suitable places to locate them. Aside from the new Cathlamet Channel net pens, one of the few others is the Multnomah Channel/Willamette Slough area — which will run into objections from the same urban sport fishermen who pushed the main-stem gillnet ban.

The lack of obvious SAFE options is very much in keeping with the overall slipshod decision to mandate a sudden end to generations of gillnet fishing on the Columbia. This extends to other big issues, such as providing adequate funding from both states to facilitate a hypothetical switch to seine nets. Oregon at least did in 2013 pass a new surcharge on recreational fishing licenses to aid the transition, but Washington state's existing license surcharge is already fully committed to other management goals. There has been a deplorable lack of progress by both states in terms of helping develop alternative types of harvest.

Astoria-based Salmon For All published a useful report in December 2013 that details the deep gap between reality and Kitzhaber's vision. The report makes it clear how well the existing gillnet fishery functions in terms of avoiding harvest of wild salmon protected by the Endangered Species Act, while providing salmon for Pacific Northwest kitchens and

jobs for local people.

"The commercial fishery stayed within its impacts and guidelines, thus meeting both state and federal conservation standards," Salmon For All says. "The commercial fishery's success was achieved by use of selective gillnets operated under time/area/mesh size regulations, and by tangle nets. Sports participation in terms of angler trips was reduced from both 2011 and 2012 seasons, and stayed within its impacts on ESA listed species."

Despite the expressed desire for more salmon for sport fishing, angler trips declined to 367,200 in 2013 from 387,500 in 2012 and 427,000 in 2011. This calls into question one of the fundamental underlying arguments for axing gillnets. "Not only has the policy not succeeded in increasing angler trips, it has discouraged both processor and fisher investment in counties where economic investment is much needed," Salmon For All observes.

About 101,000 salmon and sturgeon worth more than \$3.2 million were caught on the Columbia in 2013, compared with about 74,000 fish with a value of \$2.1 million from existing SAFE areas. SAFE harvests would have to increase by more than 1 1/2 times to make up for loss of main-stem fishing — an expansion that is out of the question, considering lack of appropriate additional places for net pens.

"Put simply, there will be nowhere for fishermen to fish" in Washington, Salmon For All concludes. "Similarly, at this time, in Oregon, no future expansion plans for Select Areas have yet been made public."

Unless the states get busy and put real money where their mouths are, the commercial fishermen of the lower Columbia will find themselves unable to gillnet on the river and with no way to make up that income. From there, it will be a short way to bankruptcy for a cherished heritage of fishing in our region.

For spring Chinook, using the last 20 years seemed like a good comparison due to catches before 2000 being very low and not really comparable.

For coho, I had the last 30 years handy so I used it since 2018 was 2nd worst.

For fall Chinook, I used the last 17 years from 2002 onward. We started having better catches in 2002; prior to 2002 fall Chinook catches ranged mostly from a few hundred to around 3,000 (except in 1989 where it was around 6,000).

Select Area Spring Chinook (2019 compared to the last 20 years 2000-2019).

--2019 catch of 3,134 was 2nd worst out of the last 20 years, since 2000.

(The worst year for Select Area Spring Chinook was 2005 at 2,549).

--2019 was 27% of the recent 5-yr (2014-18) average of 11,484.

--2019 was 27% of the recent 10-yr (2009-18) average of 11,577.

Select Area Coho (2018 compared to the last 30 years 1989-2018).

--2018 catch of 12,111 was 2nd worst out of the last 30 years, since 1989.

(The worst year for Select Area coho was 2007 at 10,496).

--2018 was 19% of the recent 5-yr (2013-17) average of 62,204.

--2018 was 21% of the recent 10-yr (2008-17) average of 56,644.

Select Area Fall Chinook (2018 as compared to the last 17 years 2002-18).

2018 catch of 6,604 was 3rd worst out of the last 17 years, 2002-18 (behind 2006=4,389 & 2007=4,532)

(In other words, 2018 was 15th best out of the last 17 years from 2002-18.)

2018 was 36% of the recent 5-yr (2013-17) average of 18,195.

2018 was 36% of the recent 10-yr (2008-17) average of 18,424.

2019 Fall Selects - Chinook 3,134 Coho 13,007 (9-24-19)