

**OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**  
**JOINT STAFF REPORT - FALL FACT SHEET NO. 14**  
**Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing**  
**October 7, 2019**

<b><i>Fisheries under consideration:</i></b>	Above Wauna recreational white sturgeon fishery
--	---

*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 pertaining to white sturgeon is the 2019 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 18, 2019). Links to the on-line Joint Staff Reports are:*

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

### **RIVER CONDITIONS**

- The Columbia River flows at Bonneville Dam are currently 81.1 kcfs, which is less than the recent ten-year average for this date.
- Water temperature at Bonneville Dam is currently 63°F which is lower than the recent 10-year average (64°F) for this date.

### **STOCK STATUS**

#### ***White Sturgeon***

- Abundance estimates for white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River (LCR) are derived from annual mark/recapture studies. Recent abundance estimates for legal-size fish (38-54 inches fork length (FL)) declined to a low of 72,700 fish in 2012 but increased steadily through 2016, reaching a peak of 224,000 fish. Since 2016, the legal-sized abundance estimate has declined to 162,200 in 2018. The 2019 projected abundance is 164,100. Modeling of future recruitment to legal size results in slight net growth in legal abundance by 2020 under a no-harvest scenario and a moderate decrease under various harvest scenarios.
- Abundance metrics for other size groups of white sturgeon in the LCR remain mixed. The abundance of adult-sized fish ( $\geq 167$  cm FL) in 2019 is 6,100 fish, with the 2016-18 average abundance (7,493) now between the conservation status threshold (3-year average of 3,900 adults) and the desired status level (3-year average of 9,250 adults) identified in the Oregon White Sturgeon Conservation Plan (WSCP). Sub-yearling production in the LCR during 2018 indicates a reduction compared to 2017; however, sub-yearling catch rates in the lower Willamette River were the highest ever measured. The proportion of the population comprised of juvenile and sub-legal fish (63% in 2018) remains near the conservation status threshold (60% juveniles) indicating population productivity and recruitment issues.

### **MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES**

#### ***White Sturgeon***

- For the years when white sturgeon retention is allowed downstream of Bonneville Dam, current Oregon and Washington Commission guidance on white sturgeon management assumes;

- Assign 80% of the white sturgeon available for harvest to recreational fisheries and 20% to commercial fisheries.
- Oregon Commission guidance requires that a 10% conservation buffer be applied if the maximum harvest rate (16%) identified in the Oregon White Sturgeon Conservation Plan is utilized.

## **2019 RECREATIONAL FISHERIES**

### *Recreational White Sturgeon Fisheries*

- Due to the decline of legal-size fish and other indicators during 2008-2012, retention fisheries downstream of Bonneville Dam were closed during 2014-2016; however, based on the increasing trend for legal-size white sturgeon in the LCR during that timeframe, both Commissions approved limited retention fisheries starting in 2017, and again in 2018.
- Earlier this year, staff provided updates on the LCR white sturgeon status to both Commissions and the Columbia River Advisor groups. Both Commissions supported implementing sturgeon retention fisheries in 2019 similar to what occurred the previous two years. Input from the Advisor groups generally supported implementing 2019 fisheries in a similar fashion to what occurred in 2018. For the area upstream of Wauna powerlines, there was some support for delaying the fishery until late-September or early-October.
- To maintain a cautious approach, staff assumed the following when modeling 2019 sturgeon fisheries:
  - Continued use of the standardized legal slot of 44-50 inches fork length (FL) for all LCR fisheries to facilitate management and provide escapement of larger-size white sturgeon by excluding them from harvest.
  - Modeled a conservative 3.8% harvest rate on 44-50 inch fish (equivalent impact to broodstock escapement of a 4.6% harvest rate on the traditional 38-54 inch size slot).
  - Used the previous harvest allocation distribution for recreational fisheries of 48% Estuary, 20% Above Wauna, and 12% in the lower Willamette River.
- Based on the 2019 abundance forecast of 160,250 fish (38-54 inch FL), a total of 6,160 white sturgeon (44-60 inch FL) are available for harvest downstream of Bonneville Dam.

Estimated Abundance (38-54 inch FL)	160,250
Annual Harvest Guideline	6,160
Commercial (20%)	1,230
Recreational (80%)	4,930
Estuary (spring fishery)	2,960
Above Wauna (fall fishery)	1,230
Lower Willamette River	740

Estuary (spring fishery)

- The 2019 Estuary fishery (below Wauna powerlines) consisted of 11 retention days during May 13 through June 5 resulting in 2,838 kept fish (96% of the 2,960 fish guideline) from 22,102 angler trips.

Above Wauna Powerlines (fall fishery)

- Generally, catch rates in this river section are better during the spring and late fall months. The 2019 season to date has consisted of two retention days on Saturdays in mid-September (21st and 28th). For the first fishing period, catches were similar to expectations with approximately 525 fish kept from approximately 5,100 angler trips. Angler success decreased for the second period with approximately 115 fish kept from about 4,350 angler trips. In addition, approximately 50 sturgeon were kept in the Cowlitz River.
- The combined kept catch for the Above Wauna retention fishery is estimated at 688 fish, leaving 542 fish available for harvest.
- Staff believes the following fishery proposal represents a reasonable approach for additional opportunity in 2019.

<i>Recommendation - 2019 Sturgeon Recreational Fishery for Above Wauna</i>	
<b>Season:</b>	Saturday October 12 <span style="float: right;">1 day</span>
<b>Area:</b>	Mainstem Columbia River from the Wauna powerlines upstream to Bonneville Dam, including the Cowlitz River
<b>Allowable Catch:</b>	Up to 540 white sturgeon Legal size: 44-inch minimum and 50-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)
<b>Additional Regulations:</b>	Daily bag limit: One fish Annual bag limit: Two fish Retention of green sturgeon is prohibited

- The proposed fishery is a precautionary approach due to limited data available for modeling catch and effort during this time of year. This option also leaves open the potential for future opportunity, which could include weekday openers to address a recent public request.
- The expected kept catch for the additional 1-day opener is approximately 150 fish, which would bring the total kept catch to 838 fish, or 68% of the guideline.

- Per permanent regulations, catch and release fishing is allowed all year, except angling for sturgeon is prohibited May 1 through August 31 from Bonneville Dam downstream to a line crossing the Columbia River at Navigation Marker 82 on the Oregon shore westerly to a boundary marker on the Washington shore upstream of Fir Point. In addition, anglers are reminded the use of barbless hooks is required when angling for sturgeon.

#### Lower Willamette River

- Oregon staff is not prepared to recommend a sturgeon retention season for the lower Willamette River at this time.
- Per permanent regulations, catch and release fishing is allowed all year, except angling for sturgeon is prohibited May 1 through August 31 from the Lake Oswego-Oak Grove Railroad Bridge upstream to Willamette Falls.

#### **FUTURE MEETINGS**

- Staff will continue to monitor the fisheries and stock status and recommend additional hearings as needed.