

**OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**  
**JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 2a**  
**Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing**  
**January 25, 2022**

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| <b><i>Fisheries under consideration:</i></b> Zone 6 recreational white sturgeon<br>Non-treaty mainstem research level commercial smelt |
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*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 is the 2022 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 14, 2022) 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 January 24, Columbia River current water temperature at Bonneville Dam (38°F) is similar to the five-year average for this time in January (39°F). The outflow is about 200 kcfs (including 0.6 kcfs spill), which is higher than the recent 5-year average of 163.7 kcfs. Visibility is 5 feet which is less than the five-year average of 6.8 feet.

### **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 are rotated between the three Zone 6 reservoirs on an annual basis. The 2021 survey was conducted in Bonneville Pool and indicated a 22% increase in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (38–54 inch fork length), but a 13% decline in the overall population (fish greater than 21 inch fork length).
- The Dalles and John Day pools white sturgeon stock status were presented in Winter Fact Sheet #1.

#### ***Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)***

- Columbia River smelt (Eulachon) return annually to the Columbia River to spawn in the mainstem and several of its tributaries downstream of Bonneville Dam. The fish typically begin to enter the Columbia River in December and peak tributary abundance is usually in February or March. Columbia River smelt are listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Eulachon abundance increased steadily from 2011 to 2014, reaching an estimated recent peak abundance of 16.6 million pounds in 2014, followed by a decline to 370,000 pounds in 2018. The 2019 return improved to an estimated 4.2 million pounds. Due to sampling constraints imposed by COVID-19, the 2020 run-size could not be determined directly from larval sampling but is estimated to be similar to the 2019 return at approximately 3.8 million pounds. The 2021 return of 9.0 million pounds is the highest return since 2015.

## MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

### *White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6*

- The Sturgeon Management Task Force, a joint state/tribal body, met on January 19, 2022 and recommended new harvest guidelines for 2022–2024 in Bonneville Pool (1,350 fish total guideline: 675 for treaty commercial and 675 for non-treaty recreational) based on the improved legal-size population estimate. The states and tribes have adopted these guidelines:

Table 1. Current sturgeon harvest guidelines in Zone 6 reservoirs.

| Pool       | Recreational Guideline | Treaty Guideline | Total Guideline |
|------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Bonneville | 675                    | 675              | 1,350           |
| The Dalles | 190                    | 560              | 750             |
| John Day   | 105                    | 175              | 280             |

### *Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)*

- Beginning in 2001, the Washington and Oregon Eulachon Management Plan (WOEMP) provided guidance in structuring smelt fisheries. The plan identified three levels of fisheries based on expected adult run size, juvenile production, and ocean productivity. Level 1 fisheries are the most conservative and Level 3 are the most liberal.
- In response to the ESA listing in 2010, the states discontinued commercial and recreational smelt fisheries during 2011–2013. Since 2014, the states have worked closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to conduct research-level smelt fisheries that provide biological data and pounds per landing (CPUE) data so that smelt status and run strength can be better assessed.

## 2022 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. Since 2019, all three Zone 6 reservoirs (including Bonneville Pool) have been managed to remain open until pool-specific guidelines are met.
- At the Joint State Hearing on December 15, 2021 the states modified The Dalles Pool fishery by adopting a limited days-per-week retention fishery (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays January 1–26) due to retention fisheries lasting less than a month in recent years under a seven days-per-week retention fishery schedule. Bonneville and John Day pool retention fisheries opened under permanent rules on January 1, 2022.
- Current recreational sturgeon guidelines and harvest estimates for 2022 Zone 6 recreational fisheries are summarized below:

Table 2. Current sturgeon harvest estimates in Zone 6 reservoirs through January 23, 2022.

| Pool       | Angler Trips | Harvest | Recreational Guideline | Percent of Guideline |
|------------|--------------|---------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Bonneville | 3,004        | 471     | 675                    | 70%                  |
| The Dalles | 729          | 60      | 190                    | 32%                  |
| John Day   | 1,141        | 14      | 105                    | 13%                  |

- Catch rates in Bonneville Pool have increased recently, and projections indicate that the guideline will be reached soon. Staff recommend the following closure to stay within the harvest guidelines.

| <i>Recommendation - 2022 Bonneville Pool Recreational White Sturgeon Fishery</i>   |
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| Effective 11:59 PM Sunday, January 30 the retention of sturgeon is prohibited in the mainstem Columbia River from Bonneville Dam upstream to The Dalles Dam (Bonneville Pool), and all adjacent tributaries. |

- The projected kept catch through January 30, 2022 is 633 fish (94% of the guideline).
- The Dalles Pool guideline still has fish available for harvest. Therefore, staff is recommending the following fishery proposal to extend The Dalles Pool sturgeon retention season. Staff intend for this fishery to be closed to retention after the recommended extension date.

| <i>Recommendation - 2022 The Dalles Pool Recreational White Sturgeon Fishery</i> |  |         |
|--|--|---------|
| <b>Season:</b>   | Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays January 29 – February 28  | 14 days |
| <b>Area:</b>   | Mainstem Columbia River from The Dalles Dam to John Day Dam, and all adjacent tributaries  |         |
| <b>Allowable Catch:</b>  | Up to 190 white sturgeon<br>Legal size: 43-inch minimum and 54-inch maximum fork length<br>(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)<br>Daily bag limit: One fish<br>Annual bag limit: Two fish |         |

- The expected kept catch through February 28, 2022 is 188 fish (99% of the guideline). The proposed fishery is based on a modeled projection incorporating in-season catch rates and prior seasons catch and effort. This harvest projection assumes an effort increase after the closure of the Bonneville Pool retention fishery.
- 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.

- Given John Day Pool has additional catch remaining on the guideline, and current catch rates are low, this fishery can remain open at this time. Staff will monitor harvest closely and will recommend management action when needed.
- 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.

### ***Columbia River Research-Level Commercial Smelt Fisheries***

- During 2014–2018 and 2020–2021, limited commercial research fisheries occurred primarily in February each year to help evaluate run strength and provide biological data. Fishing was limited to two days per week for 4–7 weeks, annually. Fishing hours were expanded from 7 to 12 hours per day in 2020 to allow fishers access to at least one fishable tide daily.
- Mainstem Columbia River commercial landings averaged approximately 9,470 pounds (range 110–18,560 pounds) annually during 2014–2018 and 2020–2021, and averaged an estimated annual exploitation rate of 0.15% (range 0.03-0.31%).
- Abundance indicators for the 2022 smelt return suggest a strong return of the predominant age classes (age-3, age-4, and age-5). The 2022 run is expected to be larger in magnitude than the estimated returns of 9 million pounds in 2021.
- Eulachon have been detected in the Columbia River since late-November, providing supporting evidence for the run expectation.
- After discussion with NMFS, and considering the mutual desire to continue a conservative management approach to smelt fisheries, staff is recommending a research-level commercial fishery for 2022.
- The biological data collected during the commercial fishery allow staff to investigate the structure of the annual Eulachon run into the Columbia River. Landings data from the commercial fishery also help to provide an in-season monitoring tool to inform whether the run can support sustainable recreational dipping opportunities. Therefore, due to a history of low exploitation rates and the valuable information collected by this fishery, staff recommend increasing the commercial fishing retention periods from two to three days per week.

***Recommendation: 2022 Mainstem Commercial Smelt Fishery***

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|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Season:</b>            | Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (5 AM to 5 PM) January 26 through February 28. 15 days  |
| <b>Area:</b>              | Zones 1-3  |
| <b>Gear:</b>              | Gillnet only. Mesh size may not exceed two inches stretch measure. Nets may not exceed 1,500 feet in length along the cork line.   |
| <b>Allowable Sales:</b>   | Smelt  |
| <b>Misc. Regulations:</b> | 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.<br>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 a small harvest opportunity.
- The proposed season structure, being restricted to three zones and 15 days, is similar to the conservative season structure used in recent years and allows for better in-season run monitoring.
- The proposed hours match the longer duration periods requested by industry in 2020 to increase the likelihood that a suitable tide will occur within the fishing period.
- Landings will be sampled to collect biological data.

***Tributary Research-Level Recreational Smelt Fisheries***

- During 2014–2017 and 2020–2021, limited recreational fisheries occurred in the Cowlitz River. The fishery was restricted to 1–5 days annually (5–6 hours per day). The Sandy River was only open in 2014 and 2015 (2–4 days annually; 6 hours per day). Annual recreational harvest averaged 127,100 pounds (range 541–290,770) with an average exploitation rate of 1.40% (range 0.03–2.77%). There was no recreational smelt fishing opportunity in 2018 and 2019.
- At this time, Washington and Oregon are not recommending recreational smelt fisheries in the Cowlitz or Sandy rivers. Washington and Oregon staff will determine if fisheries are warranted after additional freshwater abundance indicators become available.

***Tribal Ceremonial & Subsistence Smelt Fisheries***

- Minor tribal fisheries may occur for ceremonial and subsistence (C&S) use only, using traditional hand-held dip nets fished from shore.

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

- A Compact hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 15, 2022 to consider Select Area (winter-summer) and treaty commercial fisheries.
- A Joint State hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 23, 2022 to consider mainstem Columbia River recreational spring Chinook fisheries.