

**OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**  
**JOINT STAFF REPORT - FALL FACT SHEET NO. 2b**  
**Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing**  
**August 18, 2022**

<b><i>Fisheries under consideration:</i></b>	Recreational white sturgeon upstream of Wauna powerlines
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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 online. The most recent report relevant to these fisheries 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**

- Current river conditions are presented in Fall Fact Sheet #2a.

### **STOCK STATUS**

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

- Stock status information for white sturgeon was presented in Winter Fact Sheets #5a and #8.
  - Abundance estimates for white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River (LCR) are derived from annual mark/recapture studies. Recent abundance estimates for the traditional legal-size slot (38-54 inches fork length (FL)) declined to a low of 72,700 in 2012 but increased steadily through 2016, reaching a peak of 224,000 fish. Since 2016, the abundance estimate of this size group has declined with a 2021 estimated abundance of 122,395 legal-size fish (95% CI: 66,322–181,468). Catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) data provide supporting evidence of a decreasing trend in legal-size abundance since 2016.
  - Abundance metrics for other size groups of white sturgeon in the LCR remain mixed. The current three-year running average abundance of adult-sized fish ( $\geq 167$  cm FL) is 11,064 fish, which exceeds the desired status threshold identified in the Oregon White Sturgeon Conservation Plan. However, the proportion of juvenile fish in the population (56% in 2021) remains below the conservation status threshold of 60% juveniles for the third consecutive year.

### **MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES**

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

- For years when white sturgeon retention is allowed downstream of Bonneville Dam, current Commission guidance on white sturgeon management includes:
  - 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 WSCP is utilized.
  - Washington Commission guidance requires that we manage with a precautionary approach due to uncertainties in population parameters.

- Earlier this year, staff provided updates on the LCR white sturgeon status to each state’s Commission and the Columbia River Fishery Advisor groups, which all supported implementing sturgeon retention fisheries in 2022 similar to what occurred in 2017–2021.
- To maintain a cautious approach, staff assumed the following when initially modeling 2022 LCR sturgeon fisheries:
  - Continued use of the new standardized legal slot of 44-50 inches FL for all LCR fisheries to facilitate management and provide escapement of larger-size white sturgeon by excluding them from harvest.
  - Modeled a conservative 4.0% harvest rate using the narrower 44-50 inch FL (equivalent impact to broodstock escapement of a 4.8% 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 harvest-adjusted 2022 abundance projection of 100,014 fish (38-54 inch FL), a total of 4,000 white sturgeon (44-50 inch FL) would be available for harvest downstream of Bonneville Dam.

Estimated Legal Abundance	100,014
Annual Harvest Guideline	4,000
Commercial (20%)	800
Recreational (80%)	3,200
Estuary	1,920
Above Wauna	800
Lower Willamette River	480

## **2022 NON-TREATY FISHERIES**

### ***Recreational White Sturgeon Fisheries***

- In the Columbia River estuary (downstream of Wauna powerlines), a retention fishery was open for 11 days between May 11 – June 11. During this time, anglers harvested 1,292 fish from approximately 12,000 angler trips. The kept catch represents 67% of the 1,920 fish harvest guideline for this fishery. This season had variable weather and river flows were higher and cooler than recent years, which may have contributed to the lower-than-expected angler effort and catch rates.
- Joint State staff are not recommending an additional sturgeon retention season for the Columbia River estuary at this time.
- No white sturgeon fishery has been set for the lower Willamette River in 2022. Oregon staff are not recommending a sturgeon retention season for the Willamette River at this time.

Upstream of Wauna powerlines

- Generally, catch rates in this river section are highest during the spring and early fall months. In 2021, anglers made approximately 10,100 angler trips during a six-day retention season upstream of Wauna powerlines in September, harvesting 866 white sturgeon on the mainstem Columbia River and an estimated 18 white sturgeon on the Cowlitz River. Throughout the season, there was a steep decline in both angler effort and catch rates.
- Results of the 2017-2021 retention fisheries upstream of the Wauna powerlines provided useful data for designing the 2022 fishery, but modeling this fishery remains challenging due to uncertainty in predicting effort. However, staff believes the following fishery proposal represents a reasonable approach for this year.

<i>Recommendation: 2022 Recreational Sturgeon Fishery for Upstream of Wauna Powerlines</i>	
<b>Season:</b>	Saturday, September 10, Wednesday September 14, and Saturday September 17 <span style="float: right;">3 days</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 800 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) Daily bag limit: One fish Annual bag limit: Two fish Retention of green sturgeon is prohibited

- The proposed fishery is based on several modeling assumptions. The duration of the retention season will likely need to be adjusted if catch rates and effort are much different than projected. If a significant catch balance remains after the proposed fishery, staff may consider additional days on a Wednesday/Saturday rotation.
- The expected kept catch for the 3-day season is approximately 747 fish (93% of the guideline).
- Green sturgeon are unlikely to be encountered in this stretch of river during this time of year, therefore, no impacts are anticipated.
- Per permanent regulations, catch and release fishing is allowed year-round, 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.

**FUTURE MEETINGS**

- A Compact hearing is scheduled for 1 PM on Thursday September 8, 2022 to consider Treaty commercial gillnet fisheries.