

10. Review of Lower Columbia River Sturgeon Management Policy C-3001 (Policy Decision)

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Summary

Meeting dates: February 7-8, 2014

Agenda item: Review of Lower Columbia River Sturgeon Management Policy C-3001 – (Policy Decision)

Presenter(s): Cindy LeFleur, Region 5 Fish Program Manager (Fish Program)

Background summary:

The 2011-2013 Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management Policy (C-3001) states that given the uncertainty about the current state of the Columbia River white sturgeon population, the Commission is adopting a precautionary approach to management. Additionally, the policy requires an annual review for the Commission, as an essential component of this precautionary approach. Department staff provided the Commission with the annual update at the December meeting as well as a draft new policy covering the period 2014-2018.

Additional Information

Sturgeon retention closed in the lower Columbia River, the Washington coast, Puget Sound and associated tributaries beginning January 2014.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

The previous policy, C-3001 (Attachment 1), expired December 31, 2013. Staff developed a draft policy for consideration (Attachment 2). This draft policy has been available for public comment.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The draft policy was posted on the agency website and the public was invited to send comments to the commission email. A summary of comments was presented at the January Commission briefing. Comments did not directly address draft Policy C-3001. Instead, comments referenced the retention prohibition that took effect January 1 and either supported retaining the prohibition or requested that the Commission reconsider the decision and allow for retention fisheries in 2014.

Action requested:

Adopt a five-year policy for lower Columbia River sturgeon management (2014-2018).

Draft motion language:

I move that we adopt Commission Policy C-3001 as presented by staff in Attachment 2 for the time period of March 1, 2014 through December 31, 2018.

Justification for Commission action:

Provides policy guidance to the Director and staff for white sturgeon management downstream of Bonneville Dam.

Communications plan:

Results of commission decision will be shared with co-managers and appropriate constituents.

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

POLICY DECISION

**POLICY TITLE: 2011-2013 Lower Columbia
Sturgeon Management**

POLICY NUMBER: C-3001

Supersedes: 2010 Lower Columbia
Sturgeon Management C-3001

Effective Date: January 1, 2011
Termination Date: December 31, 2013

See Also: C-3608

Approved by: *Miranda Wecker*, CHAIR
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission, 01/21/2011

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for management of the Lower Columbia River white sturgeon population and fisheries.

Definition and Intent

The Lower Columbia River white sturgeon population inhabits the waters of the Columbia River and tributaries downstream of Bonneville Dam and migrates into ocean and coastal estuaries. The intent of the policy is to provide consistent management guidelines that promote a healthy population.

General Policy Statement

Manage the Lower Columbia River white sturgeon population with conservation and fishery management objectives that are consistent with a healthy population.

Policy Guidelines

Lower Columbia Sturgeon Conservation Objectives:

- Provide recruitment and regulatory protection to increase the abundance of the spawning population.
- Manage with a precautionary approach due to uncertainties in population parameters.
- Manage for an annual combined sport and commercial harvest of white sturgeon to provide measurable population growth to achieve the goals of: (1) fully seeded habitats and (2) full representation of each age class within the population.
- Population Monitoring:
 - Continue young-of-the-year (YOY) sampling to track spawning success.
 - Evaluate legal-size abundance methodology to improve accuracy of estimates.
 - Continue to monitor sea lion predation for incorporation into stock status evaluations.

Fishery Management Objectives:

- Manage Lower Columbia River sturgeon fisheries through a three-year agreement with Oregon for 2011-2013.
- Maintain concurrent Washington and Oregon regulations in the Columbia River.

- Manage fisheries over the next three years in a manner that takes into consideration projected recruitment, with the objective of increasing abundance of the legal size segment, and increasing escapement into the spawning segment of the population. Management should be based on consideration of all mortality factors, including sea lion predation and both recreational and commercial fishery related mortalities.
- The harvest level for 2011-2013 fisheries will be reduced from the 2010 level to the extent that the reduction:
 - Addresses the downward trend in legal size abundance expected through 2011.
 - Accounts for increased predation by sea lions.
 - Addresses uncertainty in expected increased recruitment to legal-size in the near term (2012-2014).
 - Addresses expected low recruitment to legal-size beginning in 2015-2016.
 - Provides for fishery stability.
- Maintain the 80/20 sport/commercial harvest allocation.
- Maintain viable and diverse recreational and commercial fishing opportunities.
- Develop sport fishery regulations consistent with the following objectives:
 - Minimize emergency in-season action.
 - Balance catch between estuary and non-estuary fisheries and maintain a diverse array of sturgeon fishing opportunity.
 - Maintain fishery monitoring and management capabilities.
- Develop commercial fishery regulations consistent with the following objectives:
 - Optimize economic value (adjust to market needs).
 - Spread harvest opportunity throughout the year.
 - Minimize impacts to green sturgeon listed under the Endangered Species Act.
- Provide sufficient sturgeon spawning sanctuaries or other protection measures where and when appropriate.
- Conduct research, within available resources, to assess spawner and sublegal abundance and to quantify impacts of commercial and recreational fisheries on these abundances.
- Manage sturgeon harvests outside the mainstem lower Columbia River consistent with Lower Columbia River sturgeon conservation and management needs.
- Provide appropriate added protective measures to prevent further decline of green sturgeon.
- Limit incidental impacts on other species.

Annual Review

Given the degree of uncertainty about the current state of the Columbia River white sturgeon, including the impact of population stress factors such as increased predation and decreased food base, the Commission is adopting a precautionary approach to management. The Director will provide an annual review for the Commission, as an essential component of this precautionary approach, to include updated information on:

- stock status;
- predation rates;
- review of in-season management actions;
- accounting of fish left unharvested;
- review of sturgeon harvest in areas outside the mainstem lower Columbia River;
- by-catch in all fisheries;
- recommended management changes; and
- other pertinent information.

Delegation of Authority

The Commission delegates the authority to the Director to develop and negotiate a new three-year (2011-2013) Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management Accord that is consistent with these policies and objectives. Additionally, the Commission delegates the authority to the Director, through the Columbia River Compact, to set seasons for recreational and commercial fisheries in the Columbia River, and to adopt permanent and emergency regulations to implement these fisheries. The Director shall work with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to achieve implementation of this Commission action in a manner that results in concurrent regulations between the two states. The Director shall consult with the Commission Chair if it becomes necessary to deviate from the Commission's policy to achieve concurrent regulations with Oregon.

DRAFT December 9, 2013
FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION
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Sturgeon Management**

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- Limit incidental impacts on other species.

When Retention Fisheries are Allowed:

- Manage Lower Columbia River sturgeon fisheries through an agreement with Oregon.
- Maintain concurrent Washington and Oregon regulations in the Columbia River.
- Manage fisheries in a manner that takes into consideration projected recruitment, with the objective of increasing abundance of the legal size segment, and increasing escapement into the spawning segment of the population. Management should be based on consideration of all mortality factors, including sea lion predation and both recreational and commercial fishery related mortalities.
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