

Summary Sheet

Meeting dates: June 1, 2018 – Conference Call

Agenda item: Electronic Catch Reporting Systems for Recreational Fisheries – Briefing

Presenter(s): Michele Culver, Intergovernmental Policy Manager

Background summary:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) employs various data collection and catch reporting systems for recreational fisheries, which vary by fishery and area. Some recreational fisheries (e.g., Pacific halibut, coastal bottomfish, coastal salmon) are managed federally with catch limits or quotas and some (e.g., Puget Sound and Columbia River salmon, Columbia River steelhead, lower Columbia River and Zone 6 sturgeon) are managed at the state level with catch limits or quotas that require inseason catch reporting for quota-monitoring purposes.

For quota-monitored fisheries, WDFW has a rigorous port sampling program in place and staff conduct angler interviews and collect biological information. The Ocean, Puget Sound, and Columbia River Sampling Programs use tablets or handheld devices in the field and record sampling data using an app. This allows catch data to be summarized and provided to fishery managers within one to two days, whereas the previous process that used paper forms would take up to a week.

For salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and halibut, anglers are required to report their catch annually on a catch record card (CRC). These CRCs are valid for the license year (April 1 – March 31 of the following year), and are mailed in at the end of the license year. Staff enter CRC data as it comes in and randomly sub-sample a portion of the returned cards; however, given that the CRCs are not due until April 30th of the following year, there is often a year delay in generating a catch estimate from the CRCs for these species.

Puget Sound crab has its own dedicated CRC with two seasonal deadlines for submittal—October 1 for the summer season and February 1 for the winter season. The Puget Sound harvestable surplus of crab is shared with the Puget Sound Treaty Tribes and the state's recreational catch is accounted for prior to opening the state's commercial crab fishery.

To facilitate quicker reporting, WDFW created an online CRC system for crabbers to report their Puget Sound crab catch. The online CRC system is voluntary, and some harvesters continue to submit paper CRCs. Other Puget Sound recreational shellfish harvest estimates are obtained through creel, vessel and flight surveys. Approximately 50 percent of the crab CRCs are reported, and about 80 percent of these reports are submitted through the online CRC system. This allows catch data to be summarized and provided to fishery managers within a few weeks after the October 1 deadline, compared to a year for the other CRC species with a paper card.

WDFW plans to expand its online CRC reporting capability through the WILD system to include the other species that have a CRC requirement, and will follow up with a proposed rulemaking through the Commission process later this year. This expansion of the online CRC system could provide for a shorter turnaround for catch estimates, depending on the fishery and the number of anglers who use the online reporting method.

It is important to note that those fisheries with federal catch limits or quotas (i.e., ocean salmon and Pacific halibut) would continue to be managed inseason with quota-monitoring port sampling programs even though angler catch is also required to be recorded on the CRC. Collecting CRC data in addition to port sampling allows us to compare results and verify trends and, in the case of halibut, allows us to monitor attainment of the annual bag limit.

At the meeting, staff will brief the Commission on the current catch reporting systems, plans for the online CRC reporting system, and other ideas that have surfaced during internal conversations, and solicit input from the Commission on our plans and ideas.

Staff recommendation:

Staff would welcome Commission input and guidance on our immediate plans for expansion of the online CRC reporting system, as well as ideas and plans for the future.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

No major policy issues identified at this time.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

There would be relatively minor costs associated with implementing the expansion of the online CRC reporting system and anticipated cost savings resulting from a decreased need to enter data from paper CRCs.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Staff have not had a formal public process specific to this topic, but have received input and comments from fishery advisory groups, through the Wild Future Initiative, and stakeholder correspondence about the desire for online catch reporting systems and shorter turnaround times for CRC-generated catch estimates. There will be a public hearing on the expansion of the online CRC reporting system as part of that rulemaking process.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

None – briefing only

Draft motion language:

N/A

Post decision communications plan:

Staff will continue to communicate to fishery advisory groups and key stakeholders regarding online catch reporting and will have a public hearing through the rulemaking process for expansion of the online CRC reporting system.