

Washington's Wild Future

A Partnership for Fish and Wildlife

Vancouver Regional Forum

October 14, 2015

The following public comments were offered by participants at an open forum on fish and wildlife issues sponsored by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) at the Water Resources Education Center in Vancouver. Approximately 100 participants attended the event, one of six regional forums conducted around the state.

Agency management

- Partner with volunteers.
- Need dedicated funds for projects that sell WDFW's mission.
- Convey to Legislature the economic impact of hunting, fishing and wildlife watching in Washington. Request more funds to support.
- Reestablish Dingell-Johnson funds for kids' outreach projects.
- More cooperation with conservation groups and organizations.
- Keep improving "customer focus" when delivering services.
- Treat city ports as a stakeholder and partner.
- Work with other regulatory agencies to deliver consistent and efficient service delivery.
- Continue collaboration with Chehalis Basin Flood Authority.
- Provide incentives for volunteers e.g. preference points.
- Collect emails from hunters and fishers and share with conservation partners.
- Increase volunteer opportunities with salmon and steelhead projects.
- Like forum format. Continue to collect feedback like this in the future.
- Continue support for RFEG program. Publicize!
- Need seamless communication between department and RFEGs.
- Share data when available.
- Create more partnerships with large land owners in headwaters. (i.e. Weyerhaeuser and Fish enhancement groups)
- More diversity /outreach. Too Puget Sound oriented. Increase citizen science opportunities in SW Washington.

Enforcement

- Increase enforcement at Merrill Lake.
- Increase wildlife officer presence during the hunting seasons.

- Make it easier to pay for certain Fish and Wildlife tickets instead of going to court (i.e. snagging).
- Share enforcement with other agencies to solve funding problems. Share resources.
- Increase patrols to prevent snagging in low-flow conditions.
- Compliments to commercial fishery management staff for summer and fall.
- Methods used in plunking should be banned and enforced. Creates debris and ruins salmon habitat.

Fish management

- Increase lead time on emergency regulation changes.
- Simplify sport fishing rules
- Tell the sport fishers what you are going to do for the fee increases. The last proposal was discriminatory of people who are older than 70
- Support fee increase for sport and commercial licenses without any qualifiers
- Want limited sturgeon retention season in the estuary in May-June. The population size has increased to allow it and it would provide an economic boost to coastal communities. Also called for complete closure of sturgeon during September thru November – including catch and release – when high/warm water temperatures increase mortality.
- We are over-harvesting sturgeon.
- If gillnets are being used for salmon, then sport fishers should be able to fish with barbed hooks – fall season only
- There should be a point in time where barbed hooks are allowed (i.e. run updates/escapement goals met. Use as an in-season management tool
- Recycle steelhead on the Kalama
- Region 5 needs to not have a bias towards commercial fishers
- Give sport fishers preference for all fish species
- Treat the sport industry based on percentage of money brought in (i.e. \$32 million versus \$2 million for commercial)
- Wants all sturgeon fishing closed, including catch and release fishing. Concerned about effect on broodstock females
- EF Lewis – lots of Chinook in there now. Should have a low water closure; fish are hanging out in deep pools and being snagged
- Low water – close all fishing
- Supports mandatory retention of steelhead. Should consider using barbed hooks to facilitate harvest
- Continue sturgeon closure – including no catch and release
- Need to understand what impacts are to handling over-size sturgeon in the commercial salmon fishery

- Summer Chinook: Continue mark-selective fisheries for sport, but prohibit commercial fishing unless it can be mark-selective
- Slow implementation of the Columbia River Policy, since missed the first year of seining
- Focus seines above the Lewis River as well as below.
- Columbia River chapter of NW Steelheaders wants to volunteer for salmon and steelhead work, including fin clipping, stream surveys, habitat improvements. Catch and release tagging of wild steelhead on the Wind River.
- OK to keep sturgeon closed for near term
- Salmon Creek Fly Club would like monetary support from WDFW for habitat improvements. Has connections with other groups like Friends of the EF Lewis
- Wants to know what it takes to keep wild fall Chinook in the Cowlitz River
- Recycle all summer steelhead on the Cowlitz River
- Could WDFW use the weir boards on the Kalama River for the barrier at the upper falls?
- Explore issues around the low return of spring Chinook in the North Fork Lewis River.
- Concerned about the decline of Bull Trout in upper Lewis River.
- Establish an aggressive nutrient enhancement program with paid staff.
- More collaboration on salmon and steelhead habitat projects on the front end to improve chance for success for grant funding from the state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO).
- Question: Has the closure on the East Fork Lewis river increased the population of steelhead that returned in late March and early April? Test for gene bank designation.
- Restrict gillnetting on rivers.
- Spending on recreational and commercial fishing should be proportionate to revenue from them and the economic benefit to the state from each, and impact on fish populations and future generations.
- Kalama River: Manage the lower half for hatchery fish, and the upper half for wild fish. Stop killing wild fish in the trap.
- Lower Columbia River gillnets should be removed within a year.
- Concerned about the loss of fishing opportunity for hatchery fish now that the glacier has shut down South Fork and Toutle rivers. This is a risk for any of the rivers that drain from mountain.
- Focus on supporting Regional Fish Enhancement Groups (RFEG).
- Manage Kalama River in 2 sections 1. Above 2. Below Klamath Falls Hatchery.
- New trap on the Kalama River is killing fish and diverting funds from repairing trap at hatchery. WDFW is not following through on promises to fix older trap.
- Prohibit using artificial means to run lures out while bank fishing (hand casting only). Oregon and Washington need to have the same rules.

- Increase hatchery production to boost recreational opportunity.
- Promote more catch-and-release fishing to reduce hatchery costs.
- Change “Stream Strategy”: Instead of unlisted streams being closed, make them catch-and-release only. This will create more opportunities for kids to become interested in fishing.
- Maintain Kitzhaber plan to move gillnets off mainstem Columbia River.
- Need more effective implementation of Columbia River Policy. Follow through with test seine fishery plans.
- Aggressively consider gillnet buyout.
- Would like to see Oregon and Washington eliminate barbless hooks on Columbia and its tributaries. Talked to both states and there was no evidence that it has increased catch-and-release mortality.
- Should be able to retain wild summer Chinook. Only recreational fishers have to release them.
- Allow fishermen to keep the first coho they catch.
- Eliminate barbless hooks.
- Implement a fish canvas program and sell the eggs to China.
- No spring Chinook return on North Fork of Lewis River; why is this a problem?
- Utilizing partnership with regional fish enhancement groups (i.e. tributary information).
- Make commercial and recreational fishing boundaries the same as much as possible on the Columbia River (i.e. Warrior Rock).
- Enact the Columbia River 5-year policy on time, 2017.
- Make wild fish a priority and make sure habitat is improved for spawning. Use less-than-favorable habitat for hatchery fish.
- There’s been a decline in catch rates above I-205 on the Government Island side mainstem about 1 mile. Why? Fall upriver brights.
- More volunteer opportunities for steelhead and salmon.
- Need more clarity on how we estimate catch numbers.
- What’s the status of Cathlamet Channel as an off-river fishery?
- Need more boat ramps in Washougal River and other rivers in area.
- Begin a non-biased relationship with recreational fishermen in Region 5.
- The Coweeman should be a gene-bank river, instead of the Green River.
- 40,000 Chinook were killed at the capture facility below Modrow. Check genetics to determine if hatchery or wild is different.
- Move fish traps further upstream to allow more opportunity for harvest.
- Regional summer steelhead estimates: Use RFEGs and/or volunteers to help with on the ground surveys.
- Keep fishing opportunities in the steelhead, gene bank, rivers.

- Raise hatchery coho production back 22 million smolts per year. Good coho fishing puts “butts in boats.” Mitigate highs and lows of variable marine conditions.
- Close fisheries when there are critical conditions (i.e. drought/high temperatures)
- Increase mark-selective mark fisheries (leave wild fish alone)
- Generally doing a good job, but fishing regulations are a little bit screwed up.
- What happened to the large coho runs on the Washougal in the 1970s?
- Concerns about Kalama River fall Chinook management:
 - Nutrient loss (put carcasses in river)
 - Fishing opportunity loss
 - New trap (Modrow mortality)
 - Wild steelhead handled twice
 - No opportunity above weir, constrained to below weir
- Fix Kalama Falls Hatchery, including barrier.
- Ban lead fishing weights to protect environment.
- Columbia River Policy needs to be implemented on time. Commercial fishery should be seine/mark selective. Buy back licenses
- Put priority on recreational fishing. If asking for fee increases, the Columbia River Policy should be implemented on time.
- No harvest option for sturgeon for population recovery.
- Need to understand impacts of sturgeon bycatch by commercial fishery (i.e. egg absorption)
- Continue mark-selective fisheries for summer Chinook. (NOAA just listed under-escaped species).
- No commercial fishing for summer Chinook unless mark selective.
- Limit daily guide trips in Buoy 10 during fall salmon fisheries. (Tongue Point to Buoy 10) to reduce lower river tules.
- Region 5 should improve relationships with recreational fishers and not be biased with commercial.
- Want to know what WDFW will do for recreational fishers if there is a fee increase.
- Eliminate barbless hooks to win back relationships with recreational users.
- Recreational fishers provide revenue 16:1 to commercial fishers.
- What is wrong with spring Chinook fishery on North Fork Lewis River?

Wildlife management

- Enhance elk habitat. Partner with federal government (USFS).
- Increase predator control to increase deer numbers.
- Concerned about aerial spraying on commercial timber lands and its negative effects on wildlife.

- Applaud the agency on the Western Washington pheasant program.
- More enforcement to address poaching.
- Get rid of sea lions using lethal methods. They don't belong in WA waters and are killing fish.
- Get rid of wolves and grizzlies.
- Allow dogs during fall turkey season.
- More hunting access, especially for disabled.
- Outreach to non-traditional hunting/recreating groups: Be transparent about hunting. Do some messaging about the conservation value of hunting
- Assure that Weyco portion of game management unit (GMU) 568 remains FREE to hunt.
- Fall turkey hunting, why not with dogs?
- Revisit hunter check stations, specifically GMU 524.
- Remove eastern Washington elk tag regulations. More deer opportunities, especially weekends, Klickitat, and late hunt opportunities.
- Concern with Weyco contracts. Do not work with Weyco until land opened back up.
- Open landlocked state lands to public hunting.
- Work with private timber companies to open free access.
- Open goose season with duck season in the future.
- Keep westside pheasant program intact and expand eastside program.
- Private timber companies charging for access.
- Concern about decline in blacktailed deer in Region 5.
- Consider change in bear seasons opening dates for Region 5.
- What are we doing about avian predation?

Habitat management

- Address encroachment in meadows and open timber.
- Concerned about herbicides and the affect to vegetation and water quality.
- Pursue the Merrill Lake land acquisition/habitat enhancement for wintering elk.
- Mineral prospectors must be included in development of WDFW regulations. Contact by email.
- Need more Habitat Program staff capacity to review critical area ordinances.
- Improve (dredge) channel from the Wind River boat launch to the railroad bridge.
- Reduce herbicide use on public and private forestland. Revisit 1974 Forest Practice act.
- Increase efforts in urban wildlife habitat.
- Help increase awareness of East Fork Lewis habitat issues. Set up meeting.

- Improve coordination and collaboration in rule making and guidance document development for Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) process.
- Streamline environment permitting for habitat restoration projects.
- Help with minor modifications to HPA to allow work to occur outside of published work timing.
- RFEG programs need support. Maintain and increase habitat improvements.

Licensing and fees

- Issue special permits soon/immediately after the draw.
- Reduce license fees for seniors.
- Provide free hunting and fishing licenses to wounded vets.
- Pursue license fee reciprocity with adjacent states (i.e. all non-resident licenses should be the same.)
- Review Master Hunter exam and simplify requirements.
- Be proactive with email notices.
- Why don't we increase fees for commercial fishermen?
- Consolidate land access pass along with state/federal/local lines. Add disabled and senior discounts. Fee percentage increase should be proportional for all users. Seniors currently get hit harder.
- Offer higher number of points, similar to Oregon. Improve odds for point holders for big game hunts.

Other

- Continue to push for use of prescribed burning.
- Improve/streamline/speed up data management in GIS database and make it available.
- WDFW is too Puget Sound centric, need more focus on regions.
- Not enough support for citizen science especially in local office. Staff in Olympia and Region 5 not responsive enough or not getting back to me.
- Need a region-based outreach person with science and bio background. Not a PR person.
- Thank you for doing "Rugged Justice."
- Glad to have open format. Good way to connect with public on their issues.
- Langsdorff Landing parking lot lines need to be diagonal along with improved lighting.
- Recruit young people. Create scholarships for grad students interested in fish and wildlife management.
- Need central database to share data between partners.

- Increase focus on supporting RFEG program and funding. Need long-term stable funding.
- Make process and protocols more supportive of work getting done.
- Streamlined permit process is critical – don't apply "one size fits all" scope and scale.
- Instead of encouraging anglers to clean up fish guts, encourage putting them back into water to restore nutrients.