

8. Columbia River Sturgeon Management—BRIEFING

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GREEN SHEET

Meeting dates:	November 7-8, 2008, Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting
Agenda item:	Columbia River Sturgeon Management—BRIEFING
Staff Contact:	Cindy LeFleur, Columbia River Policy Coordinator, IRM
Presenter(s):	Bill Tweit, IRM— Columbia River/Distant Waters Policy Lead Pat Frazier, Region 5—Fish Program Manager Brad James, Fish Program—Sturgeon Biologist

Background:

In 2006, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) adopted a policy for lower Columbia sturgeon management (POL-C3001) for 2006-2008 (attachment 1). This was the fourth consecutive policy guiding sturgeon management in the Columbia River; the first policy was adopted in 1996. The current policy, which expires December 2008, was adopted to guide development of fishery management agreements with Oregon's Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and includes conservation principles, regulation consistency with Oregon sport and commercial allocation, and specific fishery management objectives. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and ODFW have negotiated a series of three-year fishery management measures, which include total allowable harvest, specific sport and commercial fishery regulations, and population monitoring programs (attachment 2). These three-year management agreements have provided fishery stability within the annual management process and coincide with the ability to assess population trends in order to make recommendations for management adjustments.

In 2008, WDFW staff members initiated development of a statewide white sturgeon management plan for Washington state waters. WDFW will work jointly with ODFW to complete that portion of the plan that includes the lower Columbia River. ODFW, in cooperation with WDFW, are in the process of developing an Oregon White Sturgeon Management and Conservation Plan (WSMCP) for the lower Columbia River. ODFW's intent for the WSMCP is to examine factors and threats that are limiting the abundance and productivity of lower Columbia River white sturgeon and to identify critical unknowns and data gaps pursuant to these factors and threats. Population goals and objectives will be refined and strategies and actions will be developed to address the limiting factors and threats. The planning process will involve public input. A preliminary draft of the ODFW WSMCP is due to be completed April 2009. WDFW and ODFW staff members are recommending that the current three-year sturgeon management agreement between WDFW and ODFW be renewed for one year while the ODFW WSMCP is being developed, and the two agencies jointly develop an agreement for long-term sturgeon management.

Stock Status

- Legal-size population appears to be stable in the short-term
- Concern with lack of growth of the legal-size population
- Concern with predation of over-size fish – effectiveness of hazing program
- Concern with reduction in sub-legal catch rates
- Expect fishery reduction as result of conservation plan
- Conservation plan will provide direction for additional population assessments
- One-year extension of current agreement does not present a conservation risk for the population

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

Adopt a one-year Lower Columbia Sturgeon Policy for 2009 similar to existing Policy C-3001 (attachment 1). Provide policy guidance to the WDFW Director for negotiation with ODFW to develop a one-year extension of the current joint agreement on sturgeon management. Policy guidance should confirm white and green sturgeon management objectives and guidelines for white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River for 2009.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Staff members from WDFW and ODFW will meet with the Columbia River Commercial and Recreational Advisory Groups October 2008 to present updated stock status information and solicit input on lower Columbia River sturgeon management plan and harvest strategies.

Action requested:

None, briefing only at this meeting, with decision scheduled for December.

Draft motion language:

Not Applicable

Justification for Commission action:

Not Applicable

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION POLICY DECISION

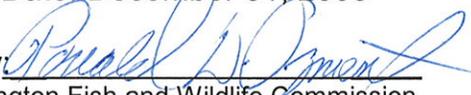
**POLICY TITLE: Lower Columbia
Sturgeon Management**

POLICY NUMBER: C-3001

Cancels: POL – C-3001
Adopted January 1, 2003

Effective Date: January 1, 2006
Termination Date: December 31, 2008

See Also:

Approved by: 
Chair, Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management Policies:

- Manage lower Columbia River sturgeon through a three-year agreement with Oregon, with the ability to reopen policy discussions if there is a substantial change to population abundance or significant new biological information.
- Provide adequate recruitment and regulatory protection to safeguard the broodstock population.
- Manage for optimal sustainable yield (OSY) by setting a combined sport and commercial harvest rate for the legal-sized population.
- Maintain concurrent Washington and Oregon regulations in the Columbia River.
- Maintain viable and diverse recreational and commercial fishing opportunities.
- The base period for determining viability and diversity for recreational opportunity among geographic areas should be calculated using recent years (e.g., 1995-2000).
- Manage sturgeon harvests outside the mainstem lower Columbia River consistent with lower Columbia River sturgeon conservation and management needs.
- Limit incidental impacts on other species needing conservation protection during fisheries directed at white sturgeon.

Management Objectives for 2006-2008:

- Manage for an annual combined sport and commercial harvest of white sturgeon to provide population growth towards OSY.
- Maintain the 80/20 sport/commercial harvest allocation.
- 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; and
 - 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; and
 - No green sturgeon target fisheries.
- Provide sufficient sturgeon spawning sanctuaries or other protection measures where appropriate to ensure adequate recruitment to the population.
- Provide appropriate added protective measures to prevent further decline of green sturgeon.

Policy Number C-3001

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- Conduct all practical research to assess broodstock abundance and to quantify impacts of commercial and recreational fisheries on broodstock abundance.
- Delegate negotiation and adoption authority to the Director for a new three-year (2006-2008) Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management Plan that is consistent with these policies and objectives.



Joint State Accord on 2006-2008 Columbia River Sturgeon Fishery Management



The Oregon and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife agree on the following management measures for sturgeon fisheries in the Columbia River and in coastal streams. These fishery regulations shall be in effect in Oregon and Washington boundary waters upstream from McNary Dam, in the lower Columbia River and tributaries, in marine areas, and in coastal basins. Sturgeon fisheries between Bonneville and McNary dams will be managed under agreements negotiated by *U.S. v Oregon* parties.

I. Management Policies

- A. Provide regulatory protection to safeguard the current broodstock population and ensure adequate recruitment of broodstock sturgeon in subsequent years.
- B. Manage for optimal sustainable yield (OSY), by regulating the combined sport and commercial harvest rate for the legal sized population.
- C. Maintain concurrent Washington and Oregon regulations in the Columbia River.
- D. Maintain viable and diverse recreational and commercial fishing opportunities.
- E. Manage the harvest of sturgeon in fisheries outside the mainstem lower Columbia River consistent with lower Columbia River sturgeon conservation and management needs.
- F. Limit incidental impacts of other species needing conservation protection during fisheries directed at white sturgeon.

II. White Sturgeon

A. *Harvestable Number Below Bonneville Dam*

The annual average harvestable number of white sturgeon for 2006-08 will be 40,000 legal-sized individuals. This number is based on current stock assessments and is intended to provide population growth towards OSY. This number may be changed based on new biological information or analyses/theory.

B. *Fishery Allocation Below Bonneville Dam*

The harvestable number of white sturgeon in the Columbia River downstream from Bonneville Dam will be allocated 20% to commercial fisheries and 80% to recreational fisheries.

C. Sport Fishery Regulations

Sport fishery regulations will be consistent with the following objectives:

- Minimize emergency in-season action
 - Balance catch between the estuary and non-estuary fisheries and maintain a diverse array of sturgeon fishing opportunity
 - Maintain fishery monitoring and management capabilities
 - Reduce fishing-related mortality of "oversize" sturgeon
1. Size limit: 42 inches – 60 inches. May use more restrictive size limits to manage within specific areas (e.g. the size limit for the summer (post-April) fishery below the Wauna power lines is 45-60 inches.)
 2. Catch limits: 1 per day and 5 per year. Allow catch and release fishing after retention of the daily or annual catch limit, except in the sturgeon spawning sanctuary downstream from Bonneville Dam where no fishing is allowed from May 1 through July 31.
 3. Hook requirement: Require one single-point barbless hook.
 4. Areas: Manage recreational fisheries downstream from Bonneville to annually provide 60% of the harvest to the area downstream of the Wauna powerlines, and 40% to the area upstream.
 5. Retention Seasons: Modify as necessary so that average harvest for the 3-year period of this agreement is no greater than the prescribed sport harvestable number. May use different season structures for areas upstream and downstream from Wauna power lines to accomplish the catch-by-area objectives for the two areas.
 6. Miscellaneous regulations: Maintain in effect the miscellaneous sturgeon fishery regulations as described in Oregon and Washington sport regulation pamphlets.
 7. Spawning Sanctuary: Close the Columbia River, from Navigation Marker 85 on the Washington shore upstream to Bonneville Dam, to angling for sturgeon from May 1 through July 31 to protect broodstock.
 8. Oversize Catch and Release Fishery Downstream from Bonneville Dam: Manage the oversize catch and release fishery in this area to safeguard sturgeon broodstock, because this fishery has a higher impact on the broodstock population than other segments of the fishery. Specifically encourage participants in this fishery to follow "Best Fishing Practices" protocols including, but not limited to the following measures:
 - Limit catch to one oversize sturgeon per angler per day
 - Minimize the amount of handling time per oversize fish
 - Keep the fish in the water while being photographed and released
 - Use and maintain proper gear to minimize break-offs, limit handling stress, improve reproductive success and reduce mortality

Best Fishing Practices protocols and the purpose of the program shall be posted on informational signs at boat launches used by participants in the fishery.

D. *Commercial Fishery Regulations*

Commercial fishery regulations will optimize economic value and spread harvest opportunity throughout the year.

1. Size limit: 48 inches – 60 inches.
2. Landing limits: May implement landing limits per vessel per fishing period as necessary to spread harvest opportunity and optimize economic value.
3. Seasons: Allow sturgeon fishing outside salmon fishing seasons as necessary to access allocation and optimize economic benefit, consistent with conservation objectives for other species. Allocate the commercial share of white sturgeon among seasons annually in coordination with the Columbia River Commercial Fishery Advisory Group.
4. Miscellaneous regulations: Maintain in effect the miscellaneous sturgeon fishery regulations in effect since 1996.

E. *Fishery and Population Monitoring Measures*

The following programs will be continued:

1. The Sport Fishery Statistical Sampling Program
2. The Tagging Program to Estimate Abundance of Legal-Sized Sturgeon
3. ODFW's Young-of-the-Year Sturgeon Surveys
4. WDFW's Sturgeon Carcass Surveys and Autopsies
5. WDFW and MSU's Sturgeon Maturation Study (including continued encouragement of the fishing-guide community to cooperate with investigators)
6. Monitoring of Marine Mammal Predation (incidental to other field activities)

With respect to monitoring broodstock, continue efforts to assess and quantify impacts of commercial and recreational fisheries on broodstock abundance, including conducting research as necessary and practical.

III. Green Sturgeon

A. *Sport Fisheries*

Sport fishery regulations will be identical to those for white sturgeon. Daily and annual individual angler catch limits will apply to the combined total of green and white sturgeon.

B. *Commercial Fisheries*

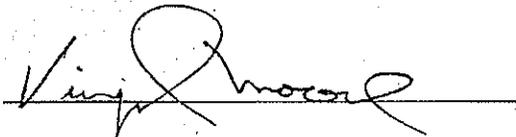
1. Size limit: 48 inches – 60 inches.
2. Seasons: May take green sturgeon when white sturgeon take is allowed, except when estimates of green sturgeon harvest exceed the range in apparent harvest rates observed in the past. Green sturgeon target seasons shall not be allowed.

C. Stock Status

Stock status and management of green sturgeon will continue to be reviewed with regional co-managers and NOAA Fisheries consistent with the recent listing of the Southern Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of green sturgeon. Fishery modifications consistent with current green sturgeon stock status and the Southern DPS listing will be considered based on new biological information or analysis/theory. Appropriate added protective measures will be provided to prevent further decline of green sturgeon.

IV. Ocean and Coastal Fisheries

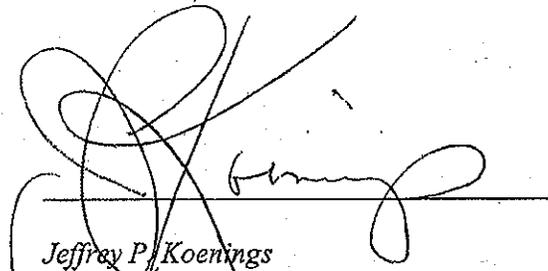
Harvest in sturgeon fisheries outside the mainstem Columbia River will be managed consistent with lower Columbia River sturgeon conservation and management needs.



Virgil Moore

Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife

8/28/06
Date



Jeffrey P. Koenigs

Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife

8/15/06
Date