

**11. Proposed Updates to Columbia River Sturgeon Management Policy
C-3001 – (Briefing and Public Hearing)**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Decision Page (Green Sheet)	1 of 6
Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management updated Policy C-3001	5 of 6

“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting dates:	January 8-9, 2010 Meeting (briefing)
Agenda item #11:	Proposed Updates to Columbia River Sturgeon Management Policy C-3001 – Briefing and Public Hearing
Staff Contact:	Pat Frazier, Region 5 Fish Program Manager (Fish Program)
Presenter(s):	Pat Frazier, Region 5 Fish Program Manager (Fish Program) Bill Tweit, Columbia River/Distant Waters Lead (IRM Program)

Since 1996, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission have guided lower Columbia River sturgeon management through Commission POL-C3001. The current 1-year policy is due to expire in December 2009 and needs to be renewed for 2010 (Attachment 1). This policy is intended to provide direction during development of joint state fishery management accords with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and includes conservation principles, regulation consistency with Oregon, sport and commercial allocation, and specific fishery management objectives.

Concurrent with renewal of POL-C3001, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and ODFW have negotiated a series of joint state fishery management accords that establish total allowable harvest, allocation between sport and commercial fisheries, specific sport and commercial fishery regulations, and population monitoring programs. These management accords have included a series of fishery adjustments in response to updated population status information. The accords have been developed to respond to essential population trend data to guide fishery management for the period.

The primary fishery management objective is to ensure there is adequate escapement of legal-sized immature sturgeon into the non-legal sized mature population to maintain and increase abundance of the spawning segment of the populations. The secondary objective is to set fishery levels that can achieve the primary objective while providing stable and sustainable sport and commercial fisheries. The joint state management accords are developed with the intention of achieving these two objectives. The 2006-2008 Accord was extended through 2009 to allow time for development of state sturgeon management plans. The total allowable harvest and consideration for increased protection for the spawning population are two key issues that will need to be addressed in the joint state management Accord for 2010.

For the last 20 years the total allowable harvest has been set to limit harvest rates on younger age fish so that the spawning size segment of the population maintains or increases over time. Determination of the total allowable harvest is dependent on the status of different segments of the population. While the total allowable harvest is most strongly driven by the abundance of the legal size segment of the population, adequate recruitment from the sublegal size segment to the legal size segment is necessary to maintain that same total allowable harvest over time. Additionally, changes in the status of the spawning size segment of the population will also impact the total allowable harvest.

The joint staff monitoring data has indicated that the abundance of the legal size segment of the population, and recruitment to the spawning population, grew significantly during 1991-1995 and remained relatively stable through 2007; however, the estimate for 2008 represents a significant decline. The sublegal size segment of the population had been steadily increasing in the early 2000's, and peaked in abundance in 2004. Since that time, the data indicates the sublegal size segment has also declined. In recent years a new mortality source, predation by sea lions, has begun to impact all segments of the population, including direct predation on

spawning size fish. Increased predation mortality on spawning fish could be reflected in reduced abundance of younger age fish (ages 3-5) in the sublegal size segment of the population. The changes in legal and sub-legal abundance, along with the recent impact from sea lion predation, are indicators that a significant reduction in the total allowable harvest for 2010 is necessary to achieve the primary fishery management objective to provide adequate recruitment to the spawning population. The current total allowable harvest of 40,000 white sturgeon between 42"-60" has been in effect since 2003.

The Joint Staff (WDFW and ODFW) have met through several different forums to discuss changes in Columbia River sturgeon management that will be necessary in 2010, and one of the prominent topics has been the total allowable harvest. Joint Staff has met with the Columbia River sport and commercial advisory groups several times. Additionally, the Joint Staff has held public meetings in both Vancouver, Washington and Astoria, Oregon. In all cases the Joint Staff has presented three possible alternatives changes to the total allowable harvest:

1. Reduce total allowable harvest proportional to recent decline in abundance of legal size segment of population (12%-24% reduction)
2. Reduce total allowable harvest for recent declines in abundance of legal and sublegal size segments of the population (16%-35% reduction)
3. Reduce total allowable harvest for recent declines in abundance of legal and sublegal size segments of the population and to account for uncertainty in stock status of spawning size segment of population (>35% reduction)

Joint staff has agreed that if this is a situation of a short term decline in recruitment from the sublegal size segment to the legal size segment over the next couple of years then a 35% reduction would be appropriate for 2010. WDFW staff also recognizes that if there is a longer term productivity decline then it would be reasonable to consider a higher level of reduction beginning in 2010.

The long term health of the lower Columbia River white sturgeon population is dependent on adequate numbers of spawning fish. In past management the key strategy has been to ensure that recruitment from sublegal size segment through legal size segment to spawning size segment is adequate to maintain or increase the number of fish in the spawning size segment of the population. During 2006-2007, WDFW and ODFW staff documented the predation on fish in the spawning size segment of the population by sea lions. Since 2006, U.S Army Corps of Engineers have documented predation on all size segments of the population by sea lions.

The increased mortality from sea lion predation will need to be accounted for in future management actions. Reduction of the total allowable harvest is one method of accounting for this new mortality source; however, part of the impact takes the form of direct predation on spawning size fish, which may require additional actions beyond the reduction in the total allowable harvest. Options presented at the advisory board and public meetings include:

1. Extend the duration of the current sanctuary into April and/or August
2. Extend the lower boundary of the sanctuary downstream
3. Prohibit the use of shad for bait to reduce the effectiveness of the catch and release fishery targeting spawning size fish
4. Establish a spawning sanctuary in the Willamette River

WDFW is also investigating additional actions to address this source of mortality.

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

Adopt a one-year lower Columbia River sturgeon management policy for 2010 that is similar to the existing Policy C-3001 for 2009 (attachment 1). Provide policy guidance to the WDFW Director for negotiation with ODFW to develop a one-year joint state sturgeon management agreement. Policy guidance should confirm management objectives and guide lines for white and green sturgeon inhabiting the lower Columbia River.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

- Development of past joint state agreements concerning Columbia River white sturgeon management has a good track record of high levels of public involvement. Several opportunities will be provided for public involvement, including testifying at Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings, testifying at Columbia River Compact hearings and attending public meetings. Additionally, staff will work closely with the Columbia River sport and commercial advisory groups in developing the joint state management accord. Notification of public meetings will occur through standard media channels. To date the following meetings have occurred with the general public and the Columbia River sport and commercial advisory groups:
 - November 5, 2009 - Public meeting in Vancouver, Washington
 - November 10, 2009 - Public meeting in Astoria, Oregon
 - November 18, 2009 - Columbia River Recreational Advisor Group meeting
 - November 19, 2009 - Columbia River Commercial Advisor Group meeting
- The public will be provided with information regarding stock status, possible changes in fish available for harvest and possible impact to existing fisheries. The key area that WDFW is looking to receive input from the public is how the fisheries will be structured for the upcoming year. WDFW will also seek to gain input regarding the number of fish available for harvest and other tenants of the joint state management agreement.
- Public input from general public meetings and advisory board meetings has been considered in developing staff options regarding the total allowable harvest and additional actions necessary to protect and enhance the spawning size segment of the population. In general, public reaction was positive for option 3 regarding the total allowable harvest. For additional protection to spawning size fish the reaction was mixed for options 1 & 2, not supportive of option 3 and supportive of option 4

Action requested:

None at this meeting. Action will be requested at the February meeting on this subject.

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A

Form revised 10/25/07

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION POLICY DECISION

POLICY TITLE: Lower Columbia
Sturgeon Management

POLICY NUMBER: C-XXXX

Cancels: POL – C-3001
Adopted _____

Effective Date: January 1, ~~2010~~
Termination Date: December 31, ~~2010~~

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Deleted: 2009

See Also:

Approved by: _____
Chair, Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management Policies:

- Manage lower Columbia River sturgeon through a one-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 2010:

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- 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); and
 - 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.

- 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 one-year ~~(2010)~~ Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management Plan that is consistent with these policies and objectives.

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