"GREEN SHEET"

Meeting dates:	February 4-6, 2010, Commission Meeting
Agenda item #8:	Puget Sound Chinook Salmon Harvest Management Plan – Briefing
Staff Contact:	Pat Pattillo—Intergovernmental Resource Management
Presenter(s):	Pat Pattillo—Intergovernmental Resource Management

Background:

This briefing is the result of a Commission request to the Department. The Puget Sound Chinook Harvest Management Plan (Plan) defines limits to fishing levels and impacts of fishing activities on Puget Sound Chinook salmon listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). As a joint state/tribal resource management plan, the Plan exempts tribal and state-managed Puget Sound salmon fisheries from take prohibitions of the ESA consistent with limit six of the salmon 4(d) rule. The current Plan provided the basis for a 4(d) rule exemption for these fisheries beginning in 2004 and will expire at the end of April 2010. The current Plan was reviewed under both the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes prior to implementation.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) and the Puget Sound tribes submitted a draft revision of the current Plan to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in November, proposing that the Plan would provide the basis for continuing exemption to ESA take prohibitions for these fisheries for a five year period (through April 2014). NOAA provided initial feedback on the Plan in late December 2009 that recommended clarification of Plan elements and requested additional information to substantiate the scientific basis of the Plan. The Department and tribes are now considering a range of improvements to the Plan that comport with NOAA's initial response, with the goal of receiving approval from NOAA on the revised Plan.

The goal of the Plan is to ensure that fishing is sufficiently constrained to provide for the recovery of Chinook salmon in concert with successful conservation plans addressing habitat and hatchery operations. The Plan sets specific limits on allowable levels of harvest-related mortality, in the form of Exploitation Rate (ER) ceilings. The Plan sets ER ceilings for Puget Sound Chinook populations or groups of populations (management units) derived using the best available information on the current productivity of each population. Fisheries in the southern United States are designed annually so that the ER ceilings on natural-origin Chinook will be below the Plan's ER ceilings, after considering the anticipated impact on Puget Sound Chinook in Canadian and Alaskan fisheries.

The Plan also establishes Low Abundance Thresholds (LAT) for each population that trigger more restrictive limits ("critical" exploitation rate ceilings) if extremely low spawning escapement levels are forecast.

One important objective of the Plan is to provide opportunity to harvest hatchery Chinook, as well harvestable sockeye, pink, coho, and chum salmon, while protecting depressed wild Chinook populations. The Plan does not specify fishing regulations however, such as hatchery selective Chinook fisheries, but fishery managers attempt to maximize the harvest of healthy stocks and species within the impact limits defined for wild Chinook. Consistent with the Fish and Wildlife Commission's (Commission) Hatchery and Fishery Reform Policy, the Plan allows directed fishing on wild Chinook only in cases where the populations substantially affected by the fishery are meeting spawner objectives.

Conservation objectives (listed in the table below) in the new Plan are identical to those from the previous Plan for most populations, with three notable exceptions – the Nisqually, Skokomish, and Lake Washington units. In the previous Plan, there were no total ER ceilings established for the Nisqually or Skokomish units. The new Plan calls for immediate reduction in the total ER on Skokomish natural Chinook to 50 percent, and a stepped reduction in total ER on Nisqually natural Chinook to 47 percent over the next five years. For the Nisqually unit, in addition to the reduction in exploitation rate, an experimental weir will be used to limit the contribution of hatchery-origin adults to natural spawning. Finally, the revised Plan allows for the potential of directed fishing on hatchery production in Lake Washington, if spawner and ER objectives for Cedar River natural Chinook will be met.

Exploitation Rate Ceilings and Abundance Thresholds for Puget Sound Chinook Management Units.

Management Unit	Exploitation Rate Ceiling	Upper Management Threshold	Low Abundance Threshold	Critical Exploitation Rate Ceiling
Nooksack North Fork South Fork		4,000 2,000 2,000	 1,000 1,000	7% / 9% SUS
Skagit summer / fall Upper Skagit Sauk Lower Skagit	50%	14,500	4,800 2200 400 900	15% SUS even years 17% SUS odd years
Skagit spring Upper Sauk Upper Cascade Suiattle	38%	2,000	576 130 170 170	18% SUS
Stillaguamish North Fork Summer South Fk & MS Fall	25%	900 600 300	650 500 N/A	15% SUS
Snohomish Skykomish Snoqualmie	21%	4,600 3,600 1,000	2,800 1745 521	15% SUS
Lake Washington Cedar River	20% SUS	 1,680	 200	10% PT SUS
Green	15% PT SUS	5,800	1,800	12% PT SUS
White River spring	20%	1,000	200	15% SUS
Puyallup fall	50%	500 (S.P. Cr.)	500	12% PT SUS
Nisqually	47%			
Skokomish	50%	3,650	1,300	12% PT SUS
Mid-Hood Canal	15% PT SUS	750	400	12% PT SUS
Dungeness	10% SUS	925	500	6% SUS
Elwha	10% SUS	2,900	1,000	6% SUS
Western JDF	10% SUS	850	500	6% SUS

The scope of NOAA's evaluation of the Plan will include all marine and freshwater salmon fisheries in the Puget Sound area (including the Strait of Juan de Fuca) that take listed Puget Sound Chinook. In addition to the evaluation of risk to the Puget Sound Chinook Evolutionary Significant Unit (ESU), NOAA's biological opinion will assess effects of the Plan on other listed species, including other salmon and steelhead ESU's, Southern resident killer whales, Puget Sound rockfish, marbled murrelets, bull trout, and green sturgeon. The Plan identifies conservation objectives for Puget Sound Chinook, but does not directly address effects of Puget Sound salmon fisheries on those other species, or prescribe measures to protect those other species. Specific actions for protection of other listed species have been or will be developed in conservation/management plans for those species.

The Plan acknowledges that the status and productivity of Chinook populations are constantly changing, as is our knowledge and understanding of those parameters, and so the Plan includes provisions for monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of performance, with a commitment to reassess management objectives, and to make adjustments to those objectives in response to new data or changes in productivity of populations.

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

N/A

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The Department hosted two public workshops in 2009 to provide the public with information on and to take input on the Plan. The draft Plan has been available to the public on the Department's website www.wdfw.wa.gov since its submission to NOAA in November.

Action requested:

N/A

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A

Communications Plan:

N/A

Form revised 10/16/2008 - sdy