

Proposed Rule Change Refresher:

Puget Sound commercial and recreational surf smelt fishery



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Presentation Outline



- **Brief background: policy, ecological importance, and fisheries**
- **Rationale for rule review/change**
- **Proposed rule-change options**
- **Public input options and feedback to date**

Policy C3012 and Ecological Role



- **Forage Fish Management Policy states that:**
 - Maintaining healthy populations is primary goal
 - Must consider role of forage fish in marine ecosystem
 - If insufficient information exists or resource condition is poor, a conservative approach will be taken
 - The achievement of maximum yield shall not be a goal
- **Surf smelt:**
 - Are a food source for diverse marine and terrestrial species, some of which are ESA-listed, at various life stages
 - Serve as conduit between plankton and higher consumers
- **Forage fish are recognized by Puget Sound Partnership as indicator of Puget Sound health**

Commercial Smelt Fisheries

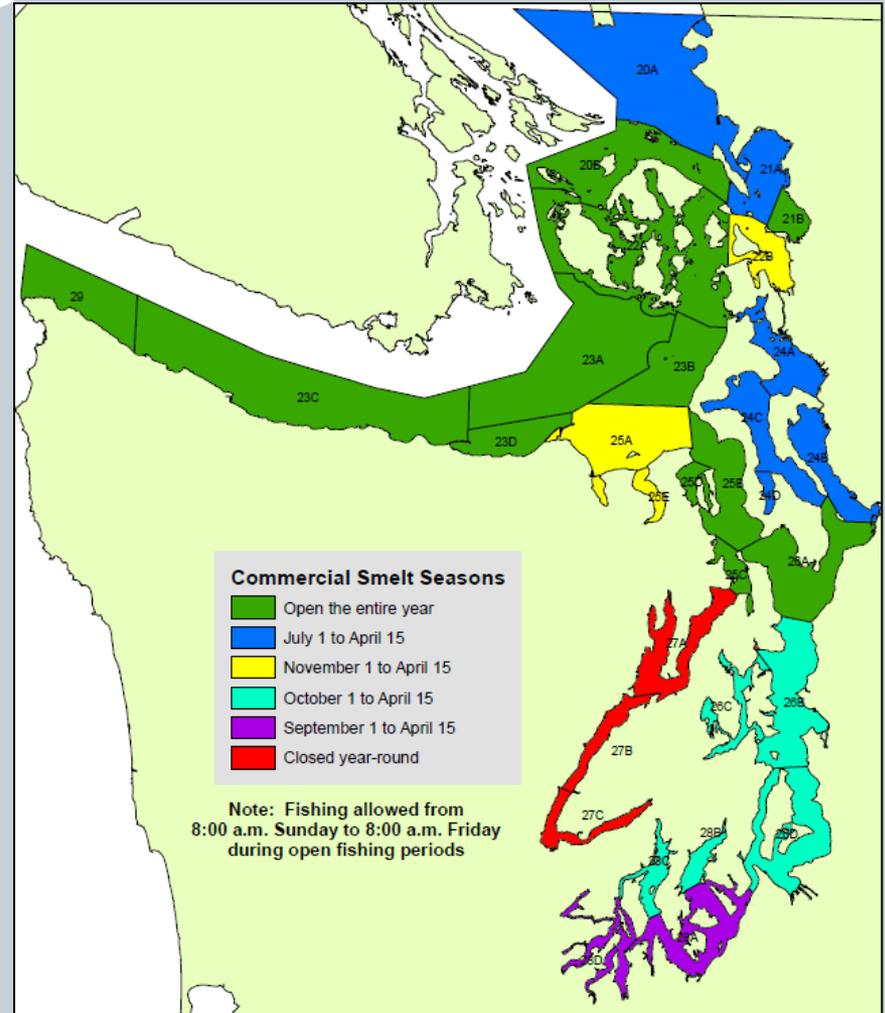


- Drag net (beach seine) currently sole capture method being used
- Purse seine and dip bag net open, but not fished
- Open access fishery (no limit on licenses)



Commercial Smelt Fisheries

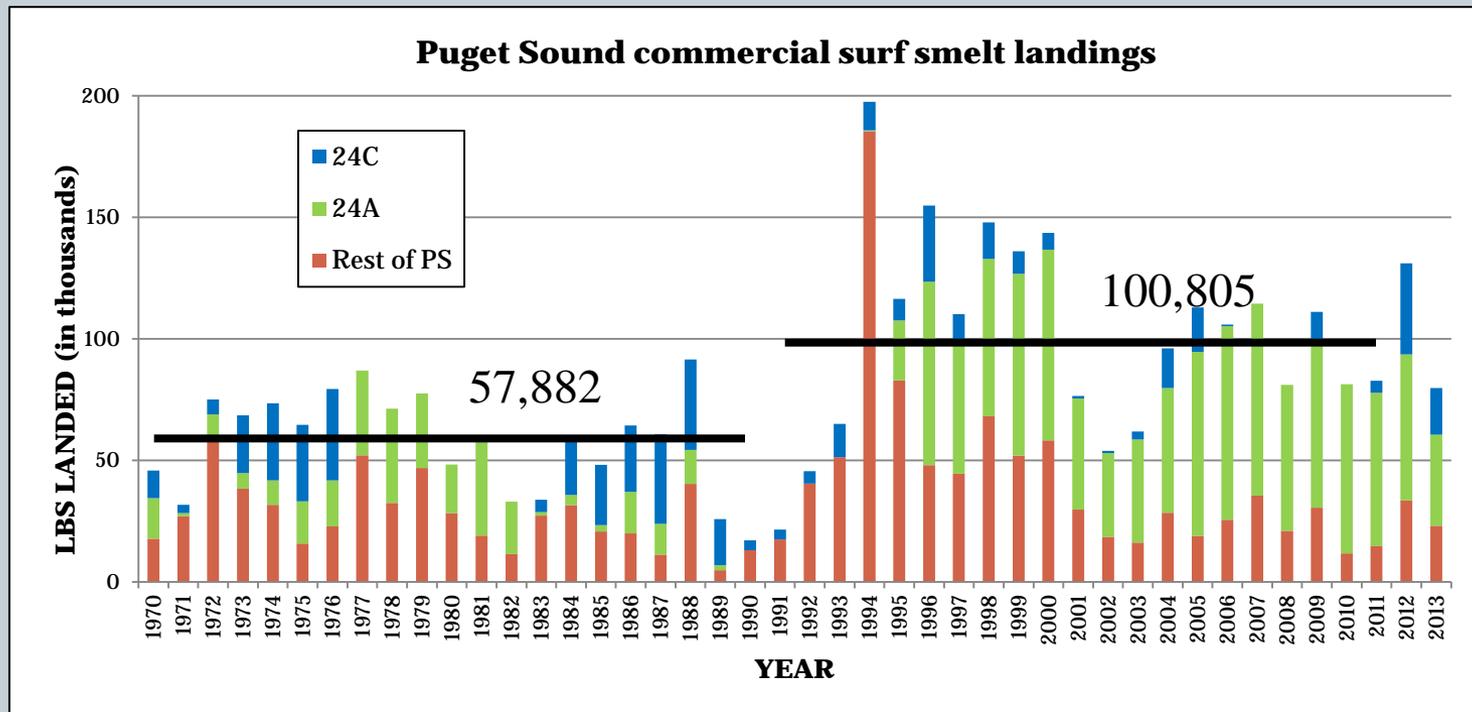
- Commercial seasons vary by region
 - Designed to protect early spawning period
 - Provides exclusively recreational fisheries in summer
- Hood Canal closed year-round
- Closed Fri. and Sat. in all areas



Commercial Smelt Fisheries



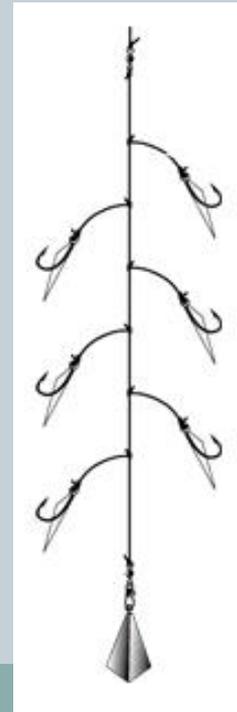
- Average annual harvest in Puget Sound has increased 74%, comparing 1970-80s to 1990-2000s
- Most harvest comes from northern Camano Is.



Recreational Smelt Fisheries



- Dipnet gear – mostly for human consumption
- Jig gear – for both consumption and salmon bait
- Harvest and effort unknown. License not required



Recreational Smelt Fisheries



- **Season**
 - Open year-round, Sound-wide, except Hood Canal
 - Closed Wed.+Thurs. for dipnetting. Open 7 days/wk for jig
- **Daily limit = 10 combined lbs of all forage fish species**
- **All smelt caught must be retained**
 - High mortality due to handling stress
 - Females generally larger than males at a given age

Rationale for Review/Change



- **Ensure meeting Commission Policy guidance**
- **Ecological role of smelt in Puget Sound**
- **Increase in commercial harvest since 1970-80s**
- **Recreational effort and harvest remain unknown**
- **Conflicts between fishers and landowners in specific areas**

Option 1



- **Status quo**
- **Maintains the current commercial and recreational fishing regulations**
 - Commercial beach seining and recreational dip netting allowed 5 days per week; recreational jigging all days
 - Commercial season varies by area; Recreational season open year-round
 - Fishing can occur during any hour on open days
 - Hood Canal remains closed to fishing

Option 2



- **Close commercial fishery on Sundays. Implement 10PM-6AM “night closure” on remaining open days**
- **Implement “night closure” for recreational fishery on each open day (Fri-Tues)**
- **Close inactive commercial smelt gear types**
 - Purse Seine
 - Dip bag net
- **Could reduce harvest by approximately 40%**
 - Assumes no change in fishing behavior

Option 3



- **Close all commercial smelt fishing in Puget Sound**
- **Implement “night closure” for recreational fishery on each open day**
- **Close inactive commercial smelt gear types**
 - Purse Seine
 - Dip bag net
- **Would result in significant reduction in overall harvest of smelt in Puget Sound**

Public Comment Options and Feedback



- Meeting with fishing industry Jan. 30th, 2014
- Public Comment period open Feb. 24th – May 30th
- Public meeting Mar. 21st to discuss proposed alternatives
- Commission public hearing April 12, 2014
- Written public comments received to date:
 - 937 comments received online and via emails:
 - ✦ Option 1: 32.6%
 - ✦ Option 2: 3.7%
 - ✦ Option 3: 60.9%
 - ✦ Other: 3.0%

Public Comments: Biomass Estimate



- **Wildermuth (1993) pilot study to test egg deposition model for biomass estimation**
 - Measured egg density at Ross Pt. over spawning season and estimated how many fish were needed to generate the eggs
 - ✦ Method also used in Canada (Therriault and Hay 2005)
 - Makes several assumptions for mathematical ease that are refuted by biological data
- **Expansion of method to Puget Sound at large in 1995 generated estimate of commercial harvest rate**
- **Constitutes a pilot effort abandoned due to concern about assumptions and lack of key underlying data**

Public Comments Received: Option 1



- **Maintain current fisheries – don't see a problem with the resource**
- **There is not adequate data to justify a reduction in harvest**
- **The commercial smelt fishery on Lopez Is. is a community event – don't close this fishery**
- **If there is a problem with homeowners address the problem in that location**

Public Comments Received: Option 2



- Reduce fishing until a better understanding of the Puget Sound population is known
- Support a more conservative approach to provide smelt as food for other species
- Prefer night fishing, if needed only close N. end Camano Is.

Public Comments Received: Option 3



- **Conserve smelt for other species in the food chain**
- **Protect smelt to assist with restoration of salmon, steelhead and other species**
- **Adopt option 3 to prevent overfishing of smelt**
- **Concern for substantial drop in smelt numbers from historical levels**

Public Comments Received: Other



- **Recommend a recreational license for smelt to fund studies**
- **Limit the number of commercial licenses to stabilize the harvest**
- **Reopen harvest of smelt in Hood Canal**
- **Close all commercial and recreational fishing to provide food for other species**

Questions?

