

Columbia River Sturgeon Update – (Briefing and Public Hearing)

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Summary

Meeting date: April 10, 2015

Agenda item: Lower Columbia River Sturgeon (Briefing and Public Hearing)

Presenter: Guy Norman , Region 5 Director

Background summary:

Information regarding Lower Columbia River (LCR) white sturgeon population status was presented to the Commission on December 13, 2014 and January 9, 2015. Population status indicators are mixed. A significant positive indicator is a doubling of legal-size abundance over the past 4 years. Areas of concern are depressed spawner-size abundance and a lack of improvement in juvenile production.

Currently, retention of white sturgeon is prohibited in recreational and non-Indian commercial fisheries in the lower Columbia River downstream of Bonneville Dam, the Oregon and Washington coasts, Puget Sound, and their tributaries. With retention prohibited in 2014, angler participation in the Columbia River estuary sport sturgeon fishery declined by 90% from 2013 levels and by 82% elsewhere in the LCR. The significant reduction in participation in the fishery has resulted in a negative impact to the businesses in the lower Columbia River, in particular during the late spring period prior to the opening of ocean salmon fisheries. There has been some interest from the public to see conservative retention fisheries reinstated in 2015.

Columbia River Staff from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) have continued to seek input from the public regarding their view of conducting a very conservative level retention fishery in the Columbia River estuary during the May-June time frame in 2015.

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

Staff will discuss with the Commission the rationale for a conservative level harvest, including a maximum rate of harvest (less than 6% of the legal-sized abundance) in 2015 that staff concludes is consistent with the conservation objectives of the Commission Policy. Staff will present to the Commission sturgeon fishery options that were presented to the public at Columbia River North of Falcon meetings on March 16 and April 6 and summarize the feedback received from the public.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Staff met with members of both the Columbia River Recreational and Commercial Advisory groups on December 4, 2014. Staff received a mix of responses from Recreational advisors that included both support and opposition to retention fisheries in 2015, with others reserving their opinion for what staff ends up recommending.

Staff presented scaled down estuary fishery options to Columbia River recreational and commercial interests at North of Falcon meetings on March 16 and April 6. All options reduced the estuary fishery legal-size slot from the current 41-54 inches, in order to provide days of recreational fishing opportunity while reducing the proportion of fish handled that could be retained to keep the harvest rate low. A commercial fishery harvest was included in the analysis at the 20 percent of total harvest level as per the Commission Policy.

At the March 16 public meeting, staff again received a mix of support for a conservative level of harvest in 2015 and those that would prefer no retention this year. A number of letters supporting a 2015 fishery option were received following the March 16 meeting and are attached to this summary. Also attached is a letter the Commission received from the Coastal Conservation Association regarding sturgeon management.

Action requested:

Staff is recommending that the Commission support a conservative level retention harvest for white sturgeon in the Columbia River estuary during the May-June time frame in order to entice more angler trips to the area to plug an economic gap that impacted the local communities in 2014 when no retention was allowed. This recommendation would include a commercial harvest retention level that equates to 20% of the total harvest as per Commission Policy C3001. Staff is asking the Commission to affirm the Director's authority to negotiate details of a retention sturgeon fishery with the Oregon Director, consistent with the objectives outlined in this summary and the conservation objectives of the Commission Policy.

Draft motion language: The Commission affirms the Director's delegated authority (in Policy C3001) to negotiate with the Oregon Director to establish a conservative level sturgeon retention fishery in the Columbia River in 2015 that is less than a 6% harvest rate on the legal-sized abundance of 138,200.

Justification for Commission action: Restores lost economic benefits in the lower Columbia River communities while maintaining conservation objectives, including increasing abundance of brood stock sized fish.

Communications plan: Continue to work with constituents to develop specifics of final options and implement through a Columbia River Compact public hearing. Work with public affairs and local media to ensure adequate notice of a fishery.

Form revised 12/5/12

Table 1. Estimated abundance of lower Columbia River white sturgeon, 2010-2014, and projected 2015 legal-size abundance.

Year	Sublegal (82-95cm FL)	Legal-size (96-137cm FL)	Oversize (>137cm FL)	(Adults) (>164cm FL)
2010	225,630	100,200	14,960	(11,030)
2011	156,720	80,500	9,480	(3,040)
2012	97,890	72,700	6,380	(2,220)
2013	178,610	114,200	9,080	(3,250)
2014	121,220	130,990	14,770	(3,690)
2015		138,200		

Table 2. Size-slot scenario modeling results for consideration of an estuary white sturgeon sport fishery in 2015, with corresponding exploitation rate estimates.

Slot limit	Projected number daily angler trips (June) ¹	Projected daily sport catch (estuary)		Season length 15 days, both May & June				Season length 20 days, both May & June			
		May	June	Harvest		Exploitation rate		Harvest		Exploitation rate	
				Estuary sport	Sport & commercial	Simple	Broodstock equivalent	Estuary sport	Sport & commercial	Simple	Broodstock equivalent
<u>38-54 inch size slot (previous above Wauna size slot)</u>											
	550	72	408	6,540	8,175	5.9%	5.9%	8,720	10,900	7.9%	7.9%
	850	111	630	11,115	13,894	10.1%	10.1%	14,820	18,525	13.4%	13.4%
	1,150	150	853	15,045	18,807	13.6%	13.6%	20,060	25,075	18.1%	18.1%
<u>41-54 inch size slot (previous estuary size slot)</u>											
	1,067	109	398	<i>2004-2007 averages for estuary (years when abundance ranged from 123,400 - 136,900 fish)</i>							
	550	46	259	4,170	5,213	3.8%	4.9%	5,560	6,950	5.0%	6.6%
	850	71	401	7,080	8,850	6.4%	8.4%	9,440	11,800	8.5%	11.1%
	1,150	96	543	9,585	11,981	8.7%	11.3%	12,780	15,975	11.6%	15.1%
<u>43-54 inch size slot (previous commercial size slot)</u>											
	550	30	171	2,730	3,412	2.5%	3.2%	3,640	4,550	3.3%	4.3%
	850	47	264	4,665	5,831	4.2%	5.5%	6,220	7,775	5.6%	7.3%
	1,150	63	357	6,300	7,875	5.7%	7.4%	8,400	10,500	7.6%	9.9%
<u>46-52 inch size slot</u>											
	550	15	84	1,335	1,669	1.2%	2.3%	1,780	2,225	1.6%	3.1%
	850	23	130	2,295	2,869	2.1%	4.0%	3,060	3,825	2.8%	5.4%
	1,150	31	175	3,090	3,862	2.8%	5.4%	4,120	5,150	3.7%	7.2%
<u>42-50 inch size slot</u>											
	550	32	181	2,895	3,619	2.6%	2.9%	3,860	4,825	3.5%	3.9%
	850	49	280	4,935	6,169	4.5%	5.0%	6,580	8,225	6.0%	6.7%
	1,150	67	378	6,675	8,344	6.0%	6.8%	8,900	11,125	8.0%	9.0%
<u>44-50 inch size slot</u>											
	550	21	117	1,875	2,344	1.7%	2.3%	2,500	3,125	2.3%	3.1%
	850	32	181	3,195	3,994	2.9%	3.9%	4,260	5,325	3.9%	5.2%
	1,150	43	244	4,305	5,381	3.9%	5.3%	5,740	7,175	5.2%	7.0%

¹ The modeled range in daily number of estuary angler trips in June is based on the following: 355 – 768 trips from 2010-2013 and 1,034 – 1,218 trips from 2006-2009.

Attachment 1

Lower Columbia River White Sturgeon Stock Assessment and Fishery Management 2014 Update

Summary Prepared by

**Joint Columbia River Management Staff
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
*Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife***

December 1, 2014

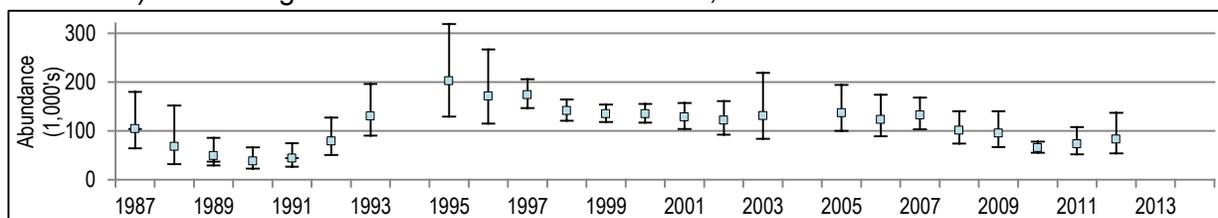
Table 1. Estimated and projected abundance of 38-54 inch FL white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River, 2008-2015.

Year	Historic method estimate ¹	Setline method ¹		Harvest guideline
		Estimate	Projection	
2008	101,200	N/A	N/A	40,000
2009	95,000	N/A	N/A	40,000
2010	65,300	100,200	N/A	24,000
2011	72,800	80,500	77,000	17,000
2012	83,400	72,700	65,000	10,400
2013	--	114,200	74,300	10,105
2014	--	130,990 ²	131,700	--
2015	--	--	138,200 ²	--

¹ Historic method is the number of fish present at the start of July (2008-09) or May (2010-2012), while the setline method is the number of fish present at the start of the year.

² Preliminary.

Figure 1 and Table 2. Estimated abundance, using the historic method, of 38-54 inch FL (42-60 inch TL) white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River, 1987-2012.



Tag year ¹	Abundance by length interval				
	38-43 FL (42-48 TL)	43-54 FL (48-60 TL)	38-54 FL (42-60 TL)	Lower CI	Upper CI
1987	75,900	28,100	104,000	63,900	179,500
1988	34,400	33,700	68,100	32,600	152,000
1989	31,900	16,800	48,700	29,000	86,100
1990	25,800	12,000	37,800	22,900	65,700
1991	32,500	11,700	44,200	27,400	75,500
1992	70,400	8,700	79,100	51,500	127,400
1993	115,500	14,200	129,700	89,300	195,200
1994	N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A
1995	143,200	59,000	202,200	129,000	319,400
1996	137,100	33,500	170,600	114,600	266,100
1997	146,600	27,700	174,300	147,200	205,800
1998	116,800	23,900	140,700	120,500	163,700
1999	116,800	17,700	134,500	117,800	153,100
2000	117,300	17,400	134,700	117,100	154,500
2001	102,200	25,300	127,500	103,500	156,000
2002	87,400	34,200	121,600	91,800	160,600
2003	85,000	46,200	131,200	84,400	219,600
2004	N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A
2005	106,900	30,000	136,900	99,600	194,200
2006	88,100	35,300	123,400	89,500	174,300
2007	101,800	29,900	131,700	103,100	168,000
2008	69,800	31,400	101,200	74,100	140,100
2009	65,000	30,000	95,000	67,000	140,200
2010	39,100	26,200	65,300	55,000	77,900
2011	46,300	26,500	72,800	51,900	107,300
2012	52,600	30,800	83,400	54,700	137,000
2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2014	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

¹ Tagging is conducted from May-June and/or July each year. Tag recover information is collected through fishery sampling well into the following year, consequently, 2012 is the most recent "tag year" with enough information to estimate abundance using the historic method.

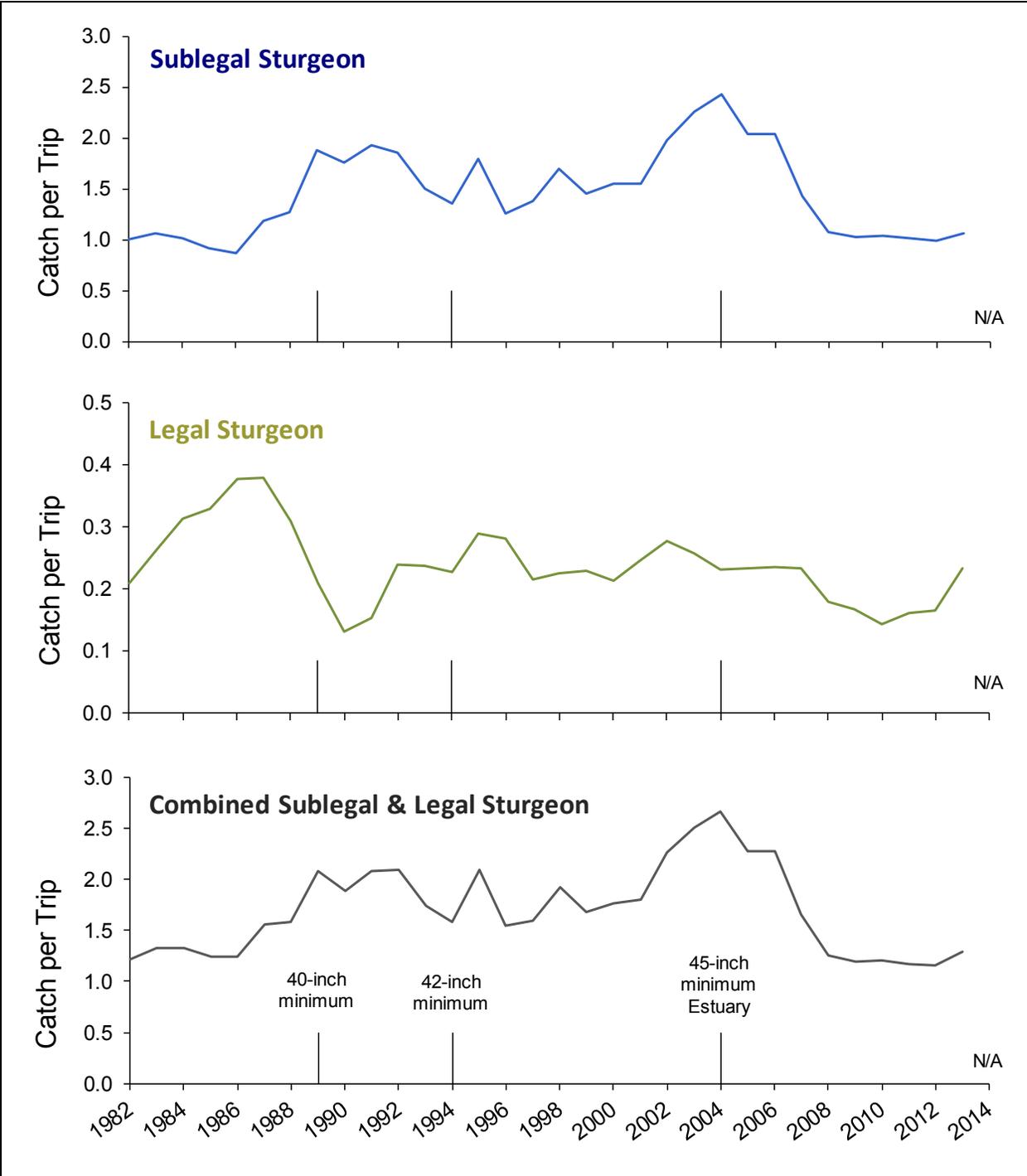
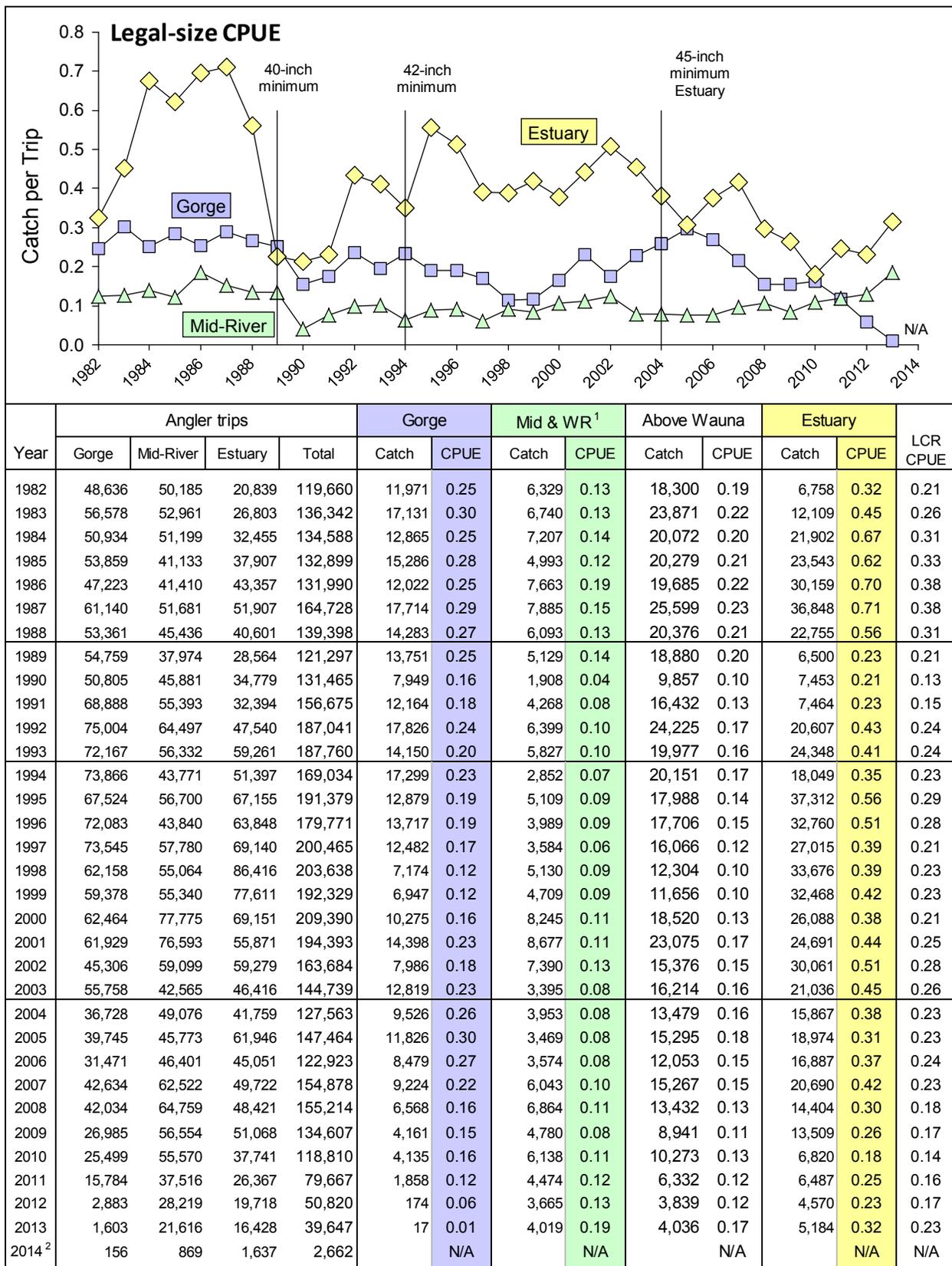


Figure 2. Catch rates of sublegal, legal-size, and combined sublegal and legal-size white sturgeon in lower Columbia River recreational fisheries, 1982-2013. Includes data from sampling the lower Willamette River recreational fishery for 2000-2013. No retention fishery in 2014.

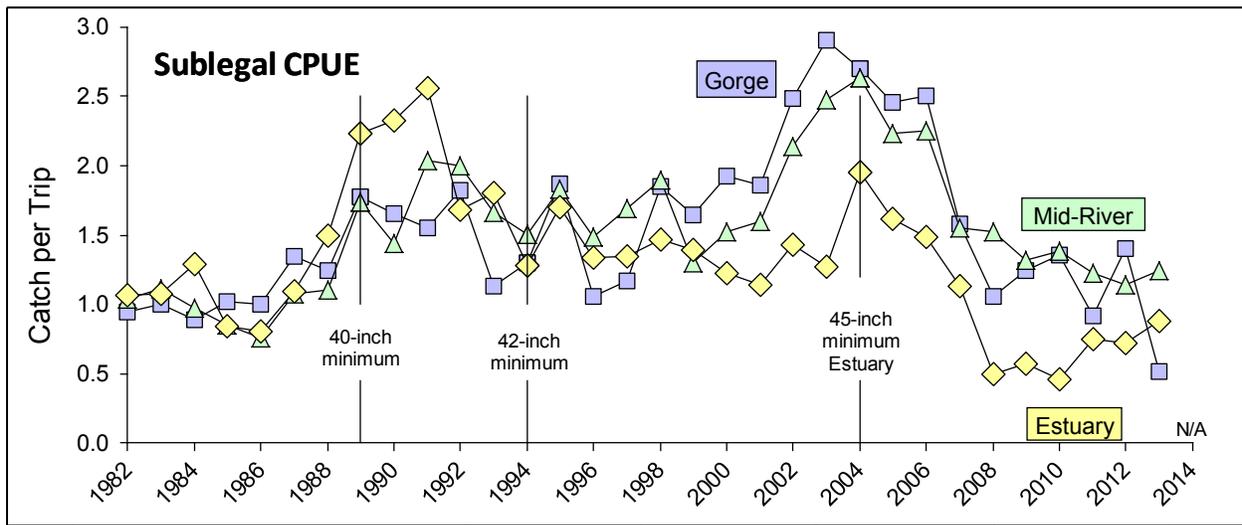
Figure 3 and Table 3. Catch rates by area of legal-size white sturgeon in lower Columbia River recreational fisheries, 1982-2014. No retention fishery in 2014.



¹ Includes Willamette River sampling for 2000-2013.

² Preliminary.

Figure 4 and Table 4. Catch rates by area of sublegal white sturgeon in lower Columbia River recreational fisheries, 1982-2014. Comparable data unavailable in 2014 due to very low angling effort.



Year	Angler trips				Gorge		Mid & WR ¹		Above Wauna		Estuary		LCR CPUE
	Gorge	Mid-River	Estuary	Total	Catch	CPUE	Catch	CPUE	Catch	CPUE	Catch	CPUE	
1982	48,636	50,185	20,839	119,660	46,008	0.95	52,038	1.04	98,046	0.99	22,305	1.07	1.01
1983	56,578	52,961	26,803	136,342	56,753	1.00	59,083	1.12	115,836	1.06	28,875	1.08	1.06
1984	50,934	51,199	32,455	134,588	45,388	0.89	49,788	0.97	95,176	0.93	41,772	1.29	1.02
1985	53,859	41,133	37,907	132,899	54,744	1.02	35,196	0.86	89,940	0.95	32,059	0.85	0.92
1986	47,223	41,410	43,357	131,990	47,456	1.00	31,497	0.76	78,953	0.89	35,004	0.81	0.86
1987	61,140	51,681	51,907	164,728	82,569	1.35	55,448	1.07	138,017	1.22	56,807	1.09	1.18
1988	53,361	45,436	40,601	139,398	66,161	1.24	50,160	1.10	116,321	1.18	60,610	1.49	1.27
1989	54,759	37,974	28,564	121,297	97,504	1.78	65,980	1.74	163,484	1.76	63,921	2.24	1.87
1990	50,805	45,881	34,779	131,465	83,991	1.65	66,212	1.44	150,203	1.55	80,903	2.33	1.76
1991	68,888	55,393	32,394	156,675	106,807	1.55	113,022	2.04	219,829	1.77	82,878	2.56	1.93
1992	75,004	64,497	47,540	187,041	136,558	1.82	129,229	2.00	265,787	1.91	80,094	1.68	1.85
1993	72,167	56,332	59,261	187,760	81,618	1.13	93,648	1.66	175,266	1.36	106,678	1.80	1.50
1994	73,866	43,771	51,397	169,034	96,256	1.30	66,076	1.51	162,332	1.38	65,998	1.28	1.35
1995	67,524	56,700	67,155	191,379	126,255	1.87	103,933	1.83	230,188	1.85	113,994	1.70	1.80
1996	72,083	43,840	63,848	179,771	76,031	1.05	65,184	1.49	141,215	1.22	85,534	1.34	1.26
1997	73,545	57,780	69,140	200,465	85,769	1.17	97,690	1.69	183,459	1.40	92,972	1.34	1.38
1998	62,158	55,064	86,416	203,638	114,905	1.85	104,270	1.89	219,175	1.87	126,935	1.47	1.70
1999	59,378	55,340	77,611	192,329	97,715	1.65	72,003	1.30	169,718	1.48	108,445	1.40	1.45
2000	62,464	77,775	69,151	209,390	120,078	1.92	118,766	1.53	238,844	1.70	84,948	1.23	1.55
2001	61,929	76,593	55,871	194,393	114,976	1.86	122,706	1.60	237,682	1.72	63,779	1.14	1.55
2002	45,306	59,099	59,279	163,684	112,625	2.49	126,693	2.14	239,318	2.29	84,772	1.43	1.98
2003	55,758	42,565	46,416	144,739	161,788	2.90	105,259	2.47	267,047	2.72	58,927	1.27	2.25
2004	36,728	49,076	41,759	127,563	99,179	2.70	129,158	2.63	228,337	2.66	81,439	1.95	2.43
2005	39,745	45,773	61,946	147,464	97,815	2.46	102,410	2.24	200,225	2.34	100,047	1.62	2.04
2006	31,471	46,401	45,051	122,923	78,852	2.51	104,328	2.25	183,180	2.35	67,112	1.49	2.04
2007	42,634	62,522	49,722	154,878	67,504	1.58	96,896	1.55	164,400	1.56	56,082	1.13	1.42
2008	42,034	64,759	48,421	155,214	44,632	1.06	98,474	1.52	143,106	1.34	24,184	0.50	1.08
2009	26,985	56,554	51,068	134,607	33,524	1.24	74,748	1.32	108,272	1.30	29,229	0.57	1.02
2010	25,499	40,486	37,741	103,726	34,547	1.35	56,048	1.38	90,595	1.37	17,236	0.46	1.04
2011	15,784	37,516	26,367	79,667	14,530	0.92	46,082	1.23	60,612	1.14	19,667	0.75	1.01
2012	2,883	28,219	19,718	50,820	4,046	1.40	32,275	1.14	36,321	1.17	14,244	0.72	0.99
2013	1,603	21,697	16,428	39,728	834	0.52	26,939	1.24	27,773	1.19	14,458	0.88	1.06
2014 ²	156	869	1,637	2,662		N/A		N/A		N/A		N/A	N/A

¹ Includes Willamette River sampling for 2000-2013.

² Preliminary.

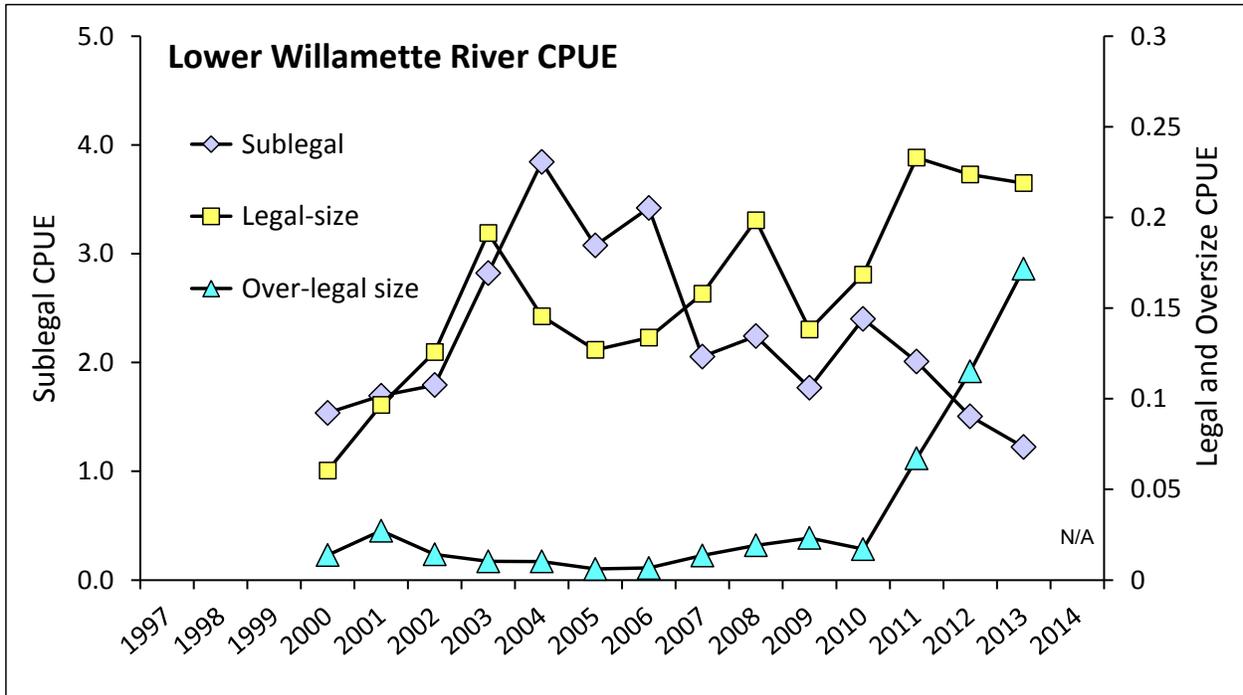


Figure 5. Catch rates of white sturgeon in the lower Willamette River recreational fishery, March-June 2000-2009, January-June and November 2010, February-March 2011, February 2012, and July and October 2013. No retention fishery in 2014.

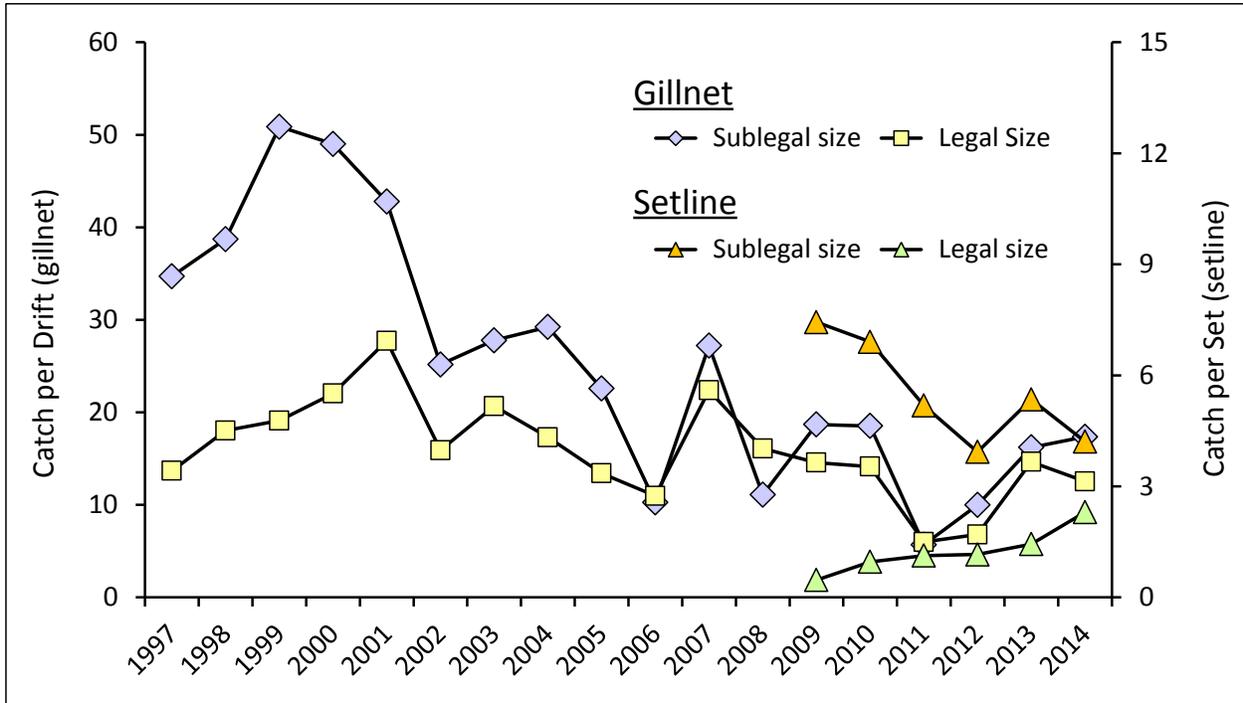


Figure 6. Catch per drift (gillnet) and catch per set (setline) of sublegal and legal-size white sturgeon during lower Columbia River sturgeon tagging and stock assessment projects, 1997-2014.

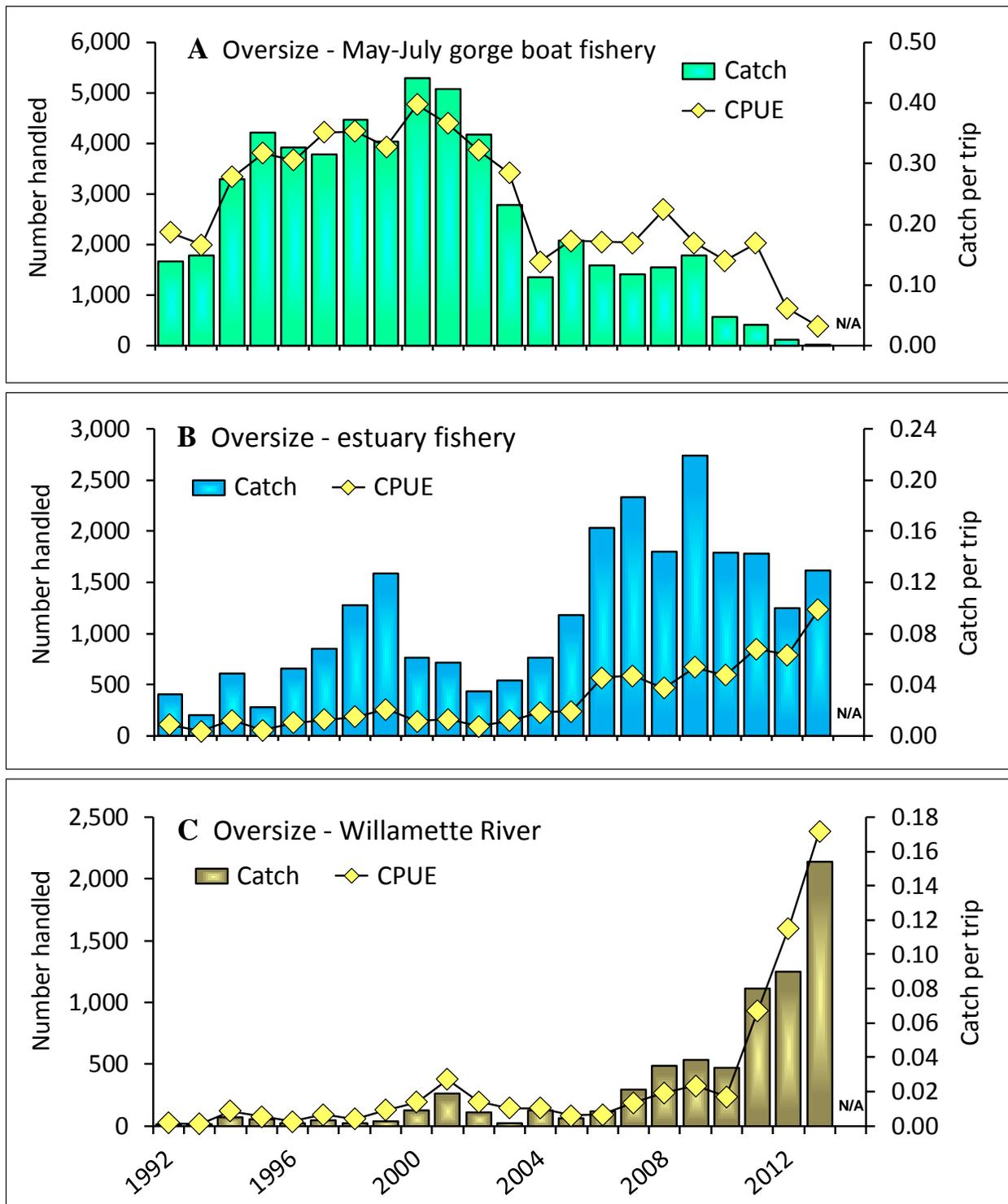


Figure 7. Catch and catch rates of oversize (>66" TL 1995-1996; >60" TL 1992-2008; >54" FL 2009-2013) white sturgeon in: (A) gorge boat fishery; (B) estuary fishery; and (C) Willamette River, 1992-2013. Comparable data is not available for 2014 due to very low angling effort. Note the difference in scale between the three charts.

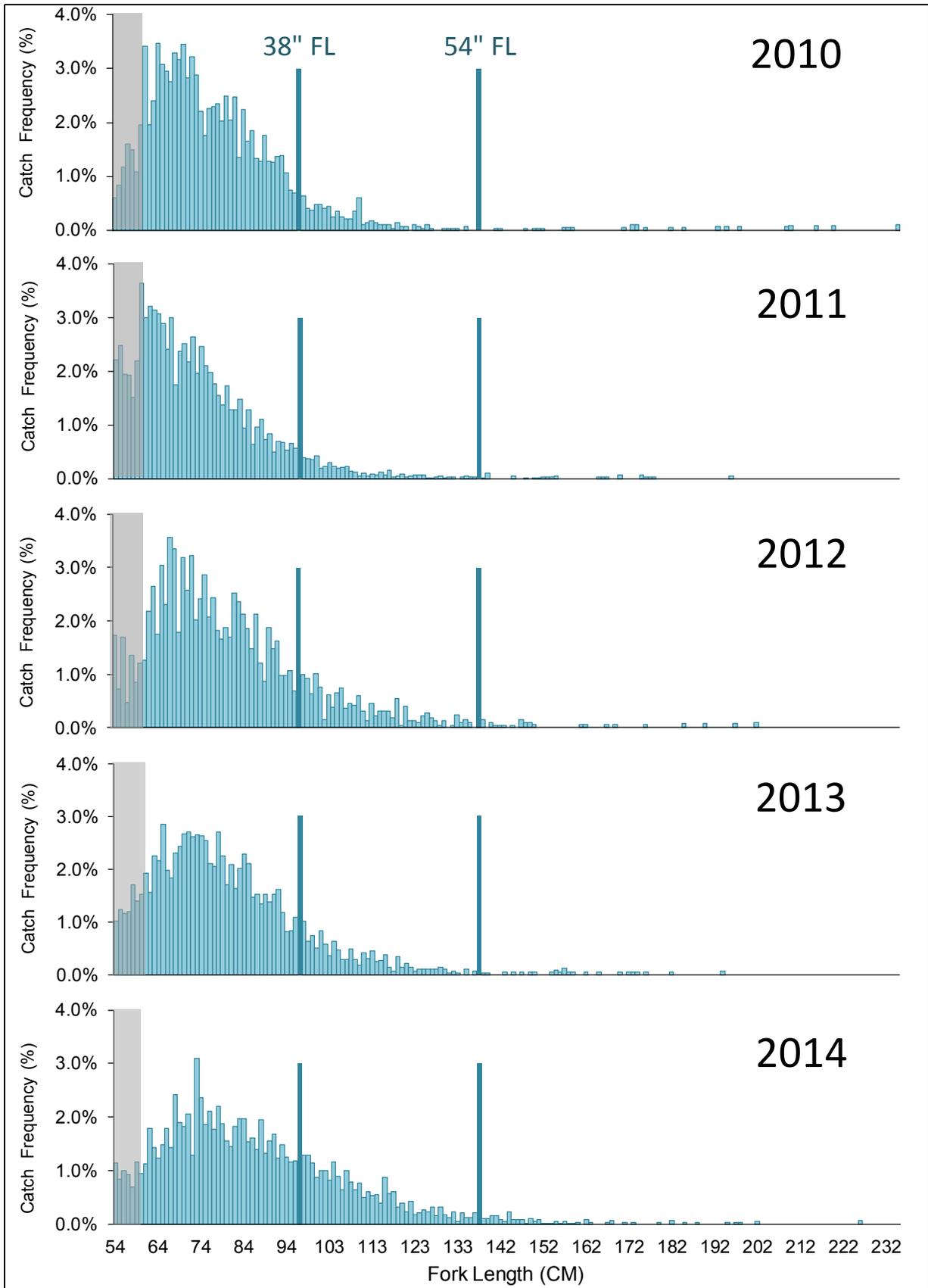
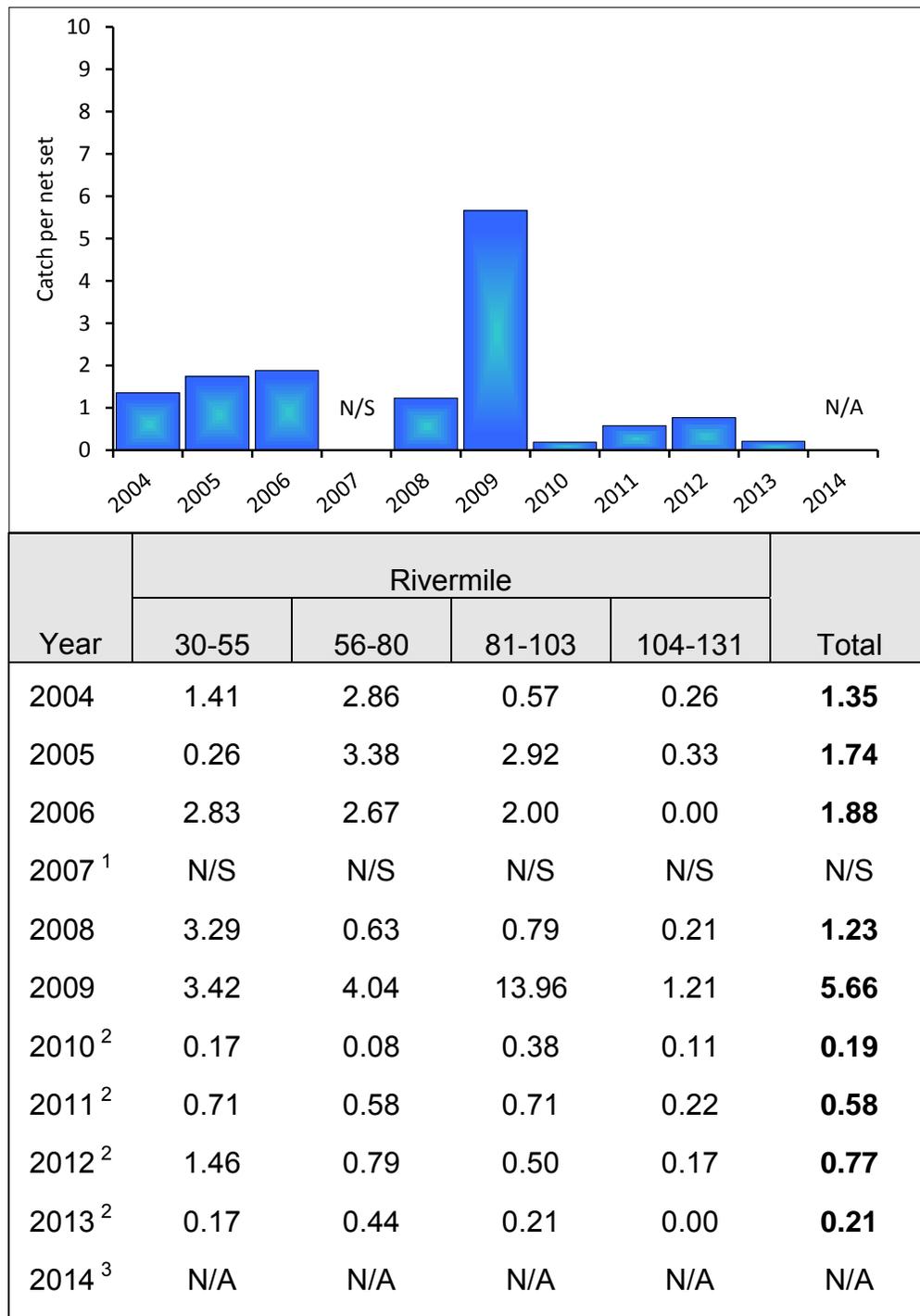


Figure 8. Frequency (percent) by 1 cm size intervals of white sturgeon captured in the lower Columbia River using research setlines, 2009-2014. Preliminary data for 2014. Fish smaller than about 60cm (shaded area) may be under-represented due to the gear.

Figure 9 and Table 5. Catch per set of Age-0 white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River, 2004-2014.



¹ Sampling for Age-0 white sturgeon was not conducted in 2007.

² Preliminary assessments based on length frequency examinations.

³ The 2014 survey is ongoing. Results should be available in late December.

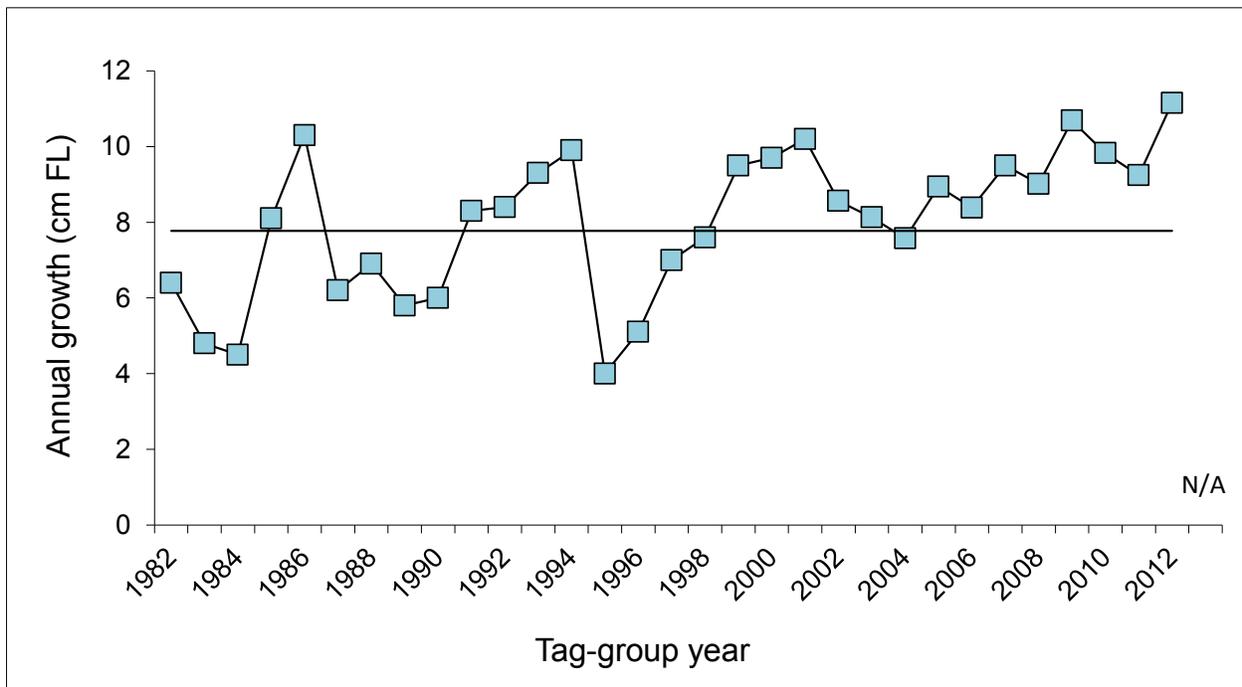


Figure 10. Annual growth rates of lower Columbia River white sturgeon tag groups at large at least one year, 1982-2012 (example: the 1982 data point is of fish tagged in May-June 1982 and re-measured from May-June 1983 through May-June 1984). Data has not been analyzed for the 2013 data point. The solid line is the average (mean) 1982-2012 growth rate.

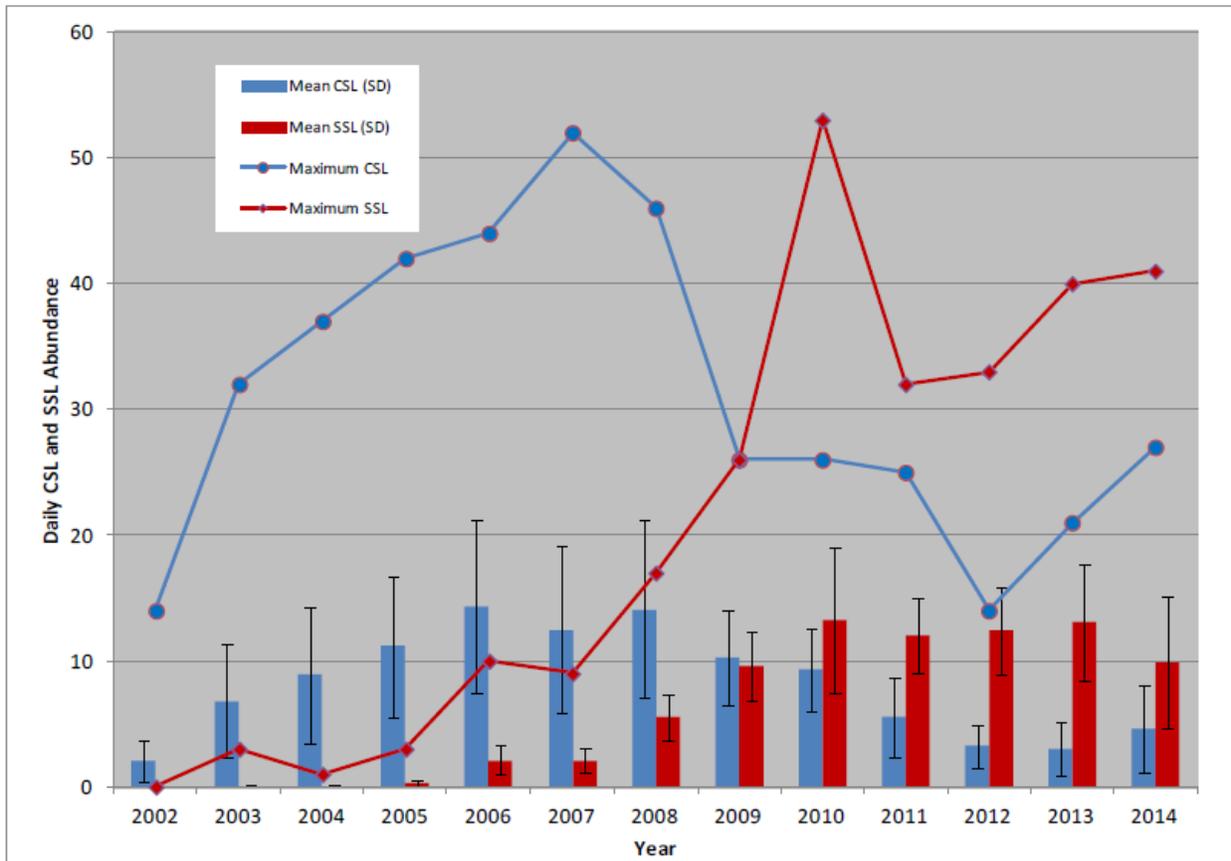


Figure 11. Mean (and SD) and maximum daily estimated number of California sea lions (CSL) and Steller sea lions (SSL) present at Bonneville Dam between January 1 and May 31, 2002 to 2014. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) data.

Table 6. Consumption of white sturgeon by CSL and SSL observed during USACE monitoring of the Bonneville Dam tailrace, 2005-2014. Adjusted estimates include a proportion of the total unidentified catch.

Year	Total hours observed	Observed sturgeon catch	Sturgeon catch per hour observed	Expanded sturgeon catch estimate	Adjusted sturgeon catch estimate
2005	1,108	1	0.001	--	--
2006	3,647	265	0.073	315	413
2007	4,433	360	0.081	467	664
2008	5,131	606	0.118	792	1,139
2009	3,455	758	0.219	1,241	1,710
2010	3,609	1,100	0.305	1,879	2,172
2011	3,315	1,353	0.408	2,178	3,003
2012	3,404	1,342	0.394	2,227	2,498
2013	3,247	314	0.097	552	635
2014	2,947	79	0.027	127	147

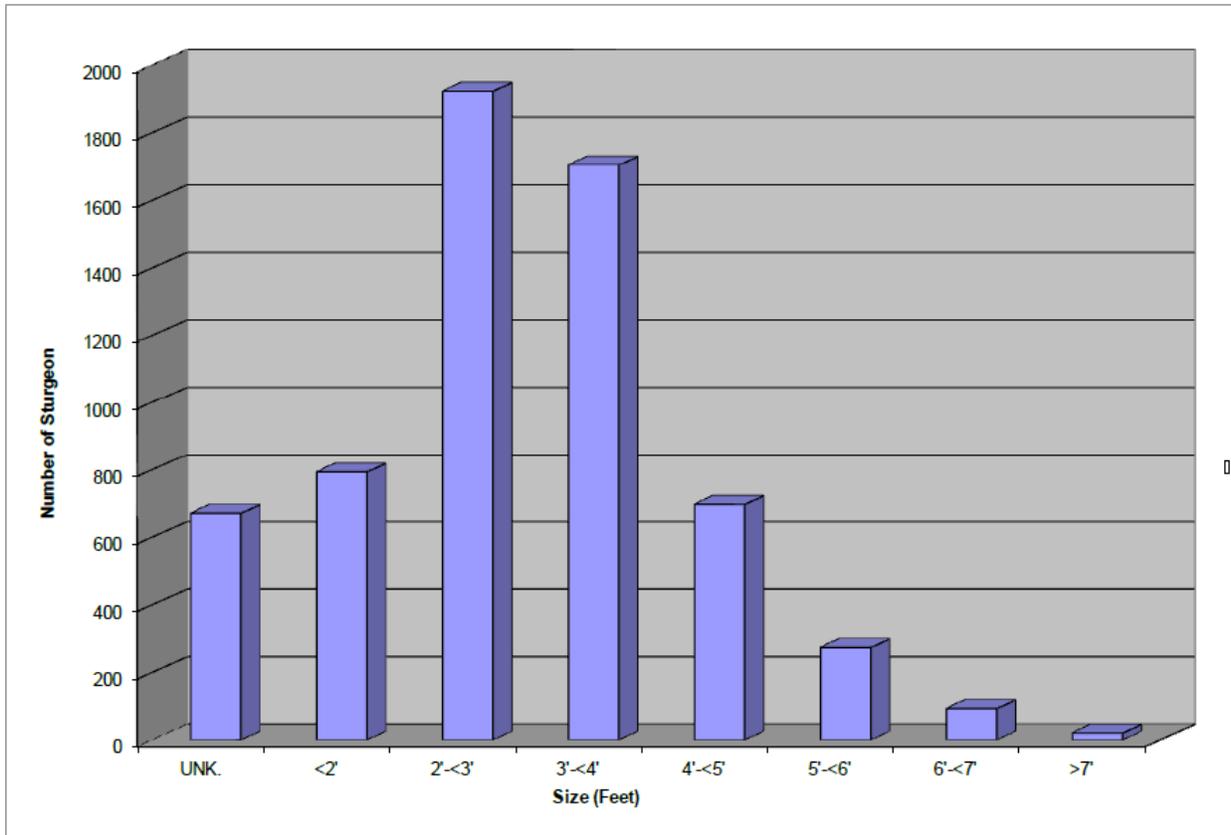


Figure 12. Estimated total lengths of white sturgeon consumed by Steller and California sea lions at Bonneville Dam from January 1 through May 31, 2006-2014. USACE data.

Appendix

Harvest and Monitoring Data

Appendix Table 1. Annual recreational catch of white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River and comparisons to catch guidelines, 1993-2014¹.

Year	Below Wauna ¹		Above Wauna ¹		Combined		
	Catch	Guideline ²	Catch	Guideline ³	Catch	Guideline	Percent
1993	20,107	N/A	17,780	N/A	37,900	N/A	
1994	15,578	N/A	17,893	N/A	33,500	N/A	
1995	29,714	N/A	15,423	N/A	45,100	N/A	
1996	27,694	N/A	15,068	N/A	42,800	N/A	
1997	24,511	N/A	13,646	N/A	38,200	53,840	71%
1998	30,303	N/A	11,293	N/A	41,600	53,840	77%
1999	29,238	N/A	10,561	N/A	39,800	40,000	100%
2000	24,267	N/A	16,238	N/A	40,500	40,000	101%
2001	21,619	N/A	19,597	N/A	41,200	39,500	104%
2002	26,234	N/A	12,045	N/A	38,300	38,300	100%
2003	18,367	19,200	13,565	12,800	31,932	32,000	100%
2004	15,050	16,000	10,519	12,800	25,569	28,800	89%
2005	17,911	17,783	11,891	11,560	29,802	29,343	102%
2006	15,726	16,000	8,545	12,800	24,271	28,800	84%
2007	19,131	16,274	10,675	13,852	29,806	30,126	99%
2008	13,614	13,143	7,959	12,387	21,573	25,530	85%
2009	13,109	15,529	4,599	11,430	17,708	26,959	66%
2010	6,491	9,600	4,831	4,835	11,322	14,435	78%
2011	6,117	6,800	2,908	3,410	9,025	10,210	88%
2012	4,466	4,160	1,859	2,080	6,325	6,240	101%
2013	4,559	4,042	1,942	2,021	6,501	6,240	107%
2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A

¹ Recreational catch estimates for 1993-2002 are above and below the western tip of Puget Island (RM 38).

² The switch to a 45-inch min. (TL) size limit in 2004 required a 17% reduction in the base guideline.

³ Actual in-season guidelines were different than represented here. Beginning in 2010, the guideline for the area above Wauna excludes the separate Willamette guideline.

Appendix Table 2. Annual recreational catch of white sturgeon in the lower Willamette River and comparisons to catch guidelines, 2003-2014.

Year	Estimated annual catch ¹	Baseline ²	Catch in excess of baseline ³	Guideline ³	Percent of Guideline
2003	1,142	1,225	0	Na	
2004	4,099	1,225	2,874	Na	
2005	2,327	1,225	1,102	Na	
2006	3,348	1,225	2,123	Na	
2007	6,555	1,225	5,330	Na	
2008	9,148	1,225	7,923	Na	
2009	7,346	1,225	6,121	Na	
2010	3,529	735	2,794	2,865	98%
2011	2,690	520	2,170	2,030	107%
2012	1,535	520	1,015	1,248	81%
2013	1,410	520	890	1,213	73%
2014	0	0	0	0	N/A

¹ Harvest estimates revised November 2011 based on updated punch card and existing creel information.

² Baseline harvest levels for the lower Willamette River were based on average harvest during 1986-1996 (1,225 fish). The lower Willamette River baseline was decreased to 735 fish in 2010 and 520 fish in 2011 consistent with reductions in the overall harvest guideline.

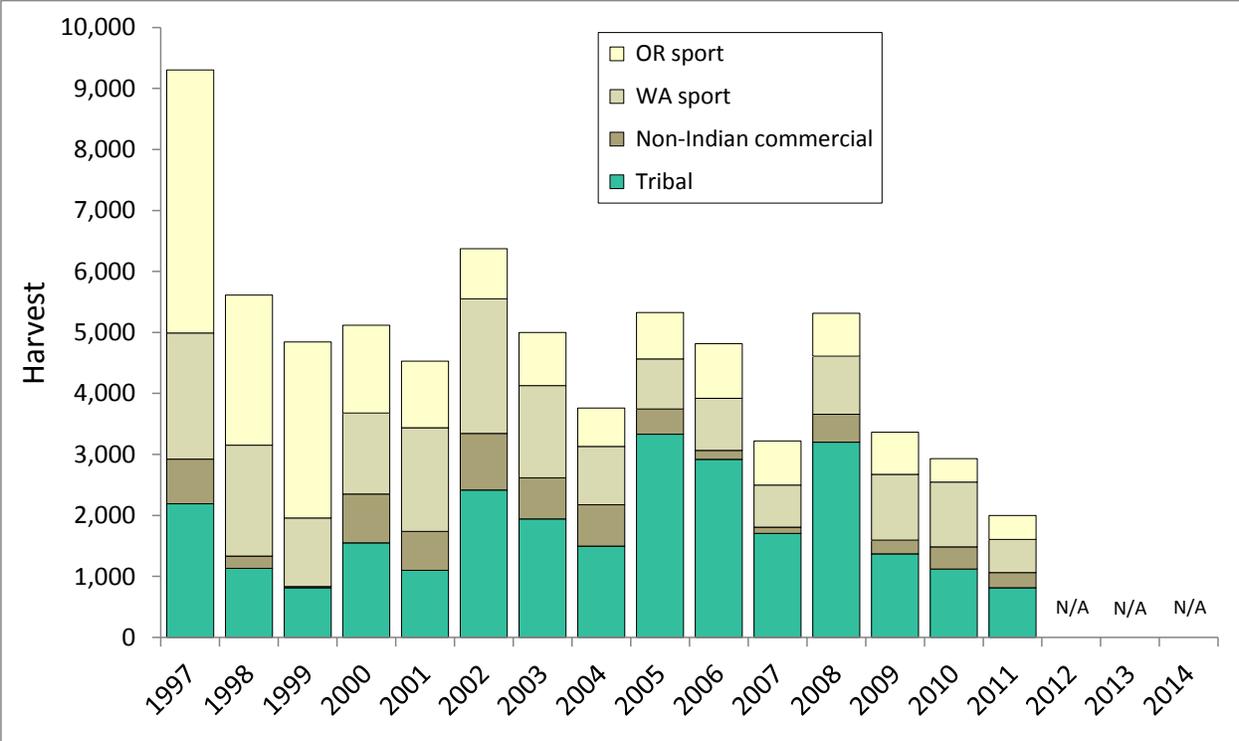
³ During 2003-2009, harvest in excess of the baseline was applied to the above Wauna recreational harvest guideline. Beginning in 2010, a separate harvest guideline was established for the lower Willamette River.

Appendix Table 3. Commercial catch of white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River by season, annual commercial catch, and comparisons to catch guidelines, 1993-2014.

Year ¹	Mainstem							Select Area			Grand Total	Guide-line	%
	Winter Sturgeon ²	Winter Salmon	Summer	Early August	Late August	Late Fall	Total	Spring/Summer	Fall	Total			
1993	990			0	0	7,010	8,000	30	20	50	8,050	6,000	134%
1994	2,990			0	0	3,380	6,370	30	0	30	6,400	6,000	107%
1995	0			0	0	5,980	5,980	110	70	180	6,160	8,000	77%
1996	800			0	330	6,580	7,710	580	110	690	8,400	8,000	105%
1997	2,710			1,740	140	7,790	12,380	350	100	450	12,830	13,460	95%
1998	2,680			2,540	90	8,060	13,370	360	170	530	13,900	13,460	103%
1999	1,780			2,770	60	4,180	8,790	520	190	710	9,500	10,000	95%
2000	2,260			2,490	300	5,130	10,180	540	160	690	10,870	10,000	109%
2001	3,060			4,720	1,020	0	8,800	490	20	510	9,310	9,100	102%
2002	2,720			1,340	380	4,200	8,640	650	330	980	9,620	9,800	98%
2003	1,490	27		2,170	410	3,430	7,527	250	170	420	7,947	8,000	99%
2004	1,696	174	9	1,550	917	3,219	7,565	184	117	301	7,866	8,000	98%
2005	473	70	1,369	1,129	965	3,793	7,799	279	74	353	8,152	8,200	99%
2006	288	1,651	544	1,548	363	3,492	7,886	317	109	426	8,312	8,000	104%
2007	1,424	47	414	2,646	91	2,734	7,356	257	148	405	7,761	7,850	99%
2008	869	17	523	2,706	103	3,170	7,388	337	134	471	7,859	7,927	99%
2009	1,697	21	624	2,213	756	2,001	7,312	311	114	425	7,737	8,000	97%
2010	518	28	289	1,578	297	1,348	4,058	211	116	327	4,385	4,800	91%
2011	50	125	504	967	353	1,187	3,186	201	0	201	3,387	3,400	100%
2012	40	14	281	592	410	344	1,681	225	0	225	1,906	2,080	92%
2013	15	274	326	0	719	324	1,658	254	100	354	2,102	2,021	100%
2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A

¹ Data since 2003 preliminary.

² Prior to 2003, values reflect all winter fisheries.



Appendix Figure 1. Estimated annual harvest of white sturgeon from Oregon coastal estuary and river recreational fisheries, Washington coastal estuary and river recreational and commercial fisheries, and from Puget Sound recreational fisheries, 1997-2011. Comparable data is unavailable or has not been analyzed for certain fisheries in 2012, 2013, and 2014.

Ilwaco Charter Association

P. O. Box 9
Ilwaco, WA 98624

March 16, 2015

The Ilwaco Charters Assoc. is in full support of a limited take sturgeon season in 2015 starting Mid-May and lasting until quota. The coastal communities are dependent on all fishing seasons and with the closer of sturgeon in 2014 the lower coastal communities lost approx. 10 million dollars in revenue to our towns on the lower river. When I testified before the commission in December 2014 I showed them a picture of the Port of Ilwaco on Memorial Weekend Saturday of last year (2014) there were three sport boats where there should have been 200. This port and others cannot continue without raising our relatively low rates that all of you like when you fish down here, as well as the other amenities. With Coastal towns dependent on fish dollars this kind of loss has started to cost supporting businesses their ability to keep their doors open. We have already lost all but one of our 4 restaurants at the port from last year, and our live bait business that is so vital to everyone for salmon, sturgeon, and tuna has had to now rethink his business plans and might have to be looking to have frozen bait only in the future and fish for other species because it is hard for anyone raising a family and making payments to have just 2 ½ month seasons. I can tell from many years of experience there is no one waiting in line to step into this business which is a thankless job where you work about 19 hrs a day 7 days a week. So as you can see things that everyone likes about using the coastal ports are already disappearing, one more year of no retention will be devastating. We are asking for a small harvest, conservation minded season that will help all us make it to the summer salmon season. We are glad there will be a robust spring Chinook season followed by a pretty good run of summer Chinook, but as you all know these fishery's don't contribute in any meaningful way to the estuary like it does in other parts of the river. So we are in full support of a small harvest rate of the 140,000 sturgeons in the keep able size range. We realize the guideline will be small that's why we need to start the season in mid-may to get the most fishing days a small quota will provide.

Thank you,

Butch Smith

Pres. ICA,



Coastal Conservation Association

TEXAS • LOUISIANA • MISSISSIPPI • ALABAMA • FLORIDA • GEORGIA
SOUTH CAROLINA • NORTH CAROLINA • VIRGINIA • MARYLAND • NEW YORK
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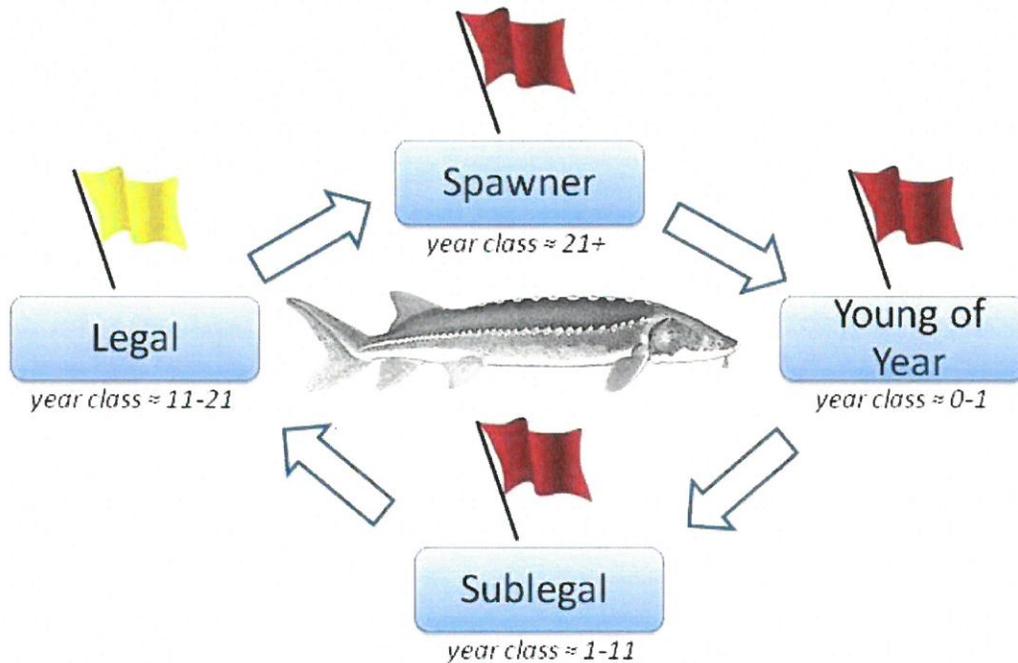
December 22, 2014

Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission
4034 Fairview Industrial Drive SE
Salem, OR 97302

Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission
600 Capitol Way North
Olympia, WA 98501

Dear Commissioners:

CCA Oregon and CCA Washington have been heavily involved in Lower Columbia River sturgeon management issues over the past six years. Our members have frequently testified at Commission meetings and we continue to be concerned with the overall health of the sturgeon population. After reviewing the most recent sturgeon population data, we would like to offer comments based on the four different age classes for which data has been provided. As the visual below suggests, data shows that three out of four age classes are in trouble and the fourth age class should be managed with caution. We hope you will consider this information and our recommendations as you consider any changes to sturgeon management in 2015.



Spawning Population

We believe that special attention should be placed on the overall health of this important age class. Unfortunately the estimate for the spawning population has fallen below the conservation threshold of 3,900 fish for three years in a row. According to the Lower Columbia White Sturgeon Conservation Plan, which was adopted by both states, this should trigger actions to address the decline. Conservation objectives outlined in WDFW’s 2014-2018 Lower Columbia River Sturgeon Management Policy (C-3001) also established guidelines to “increase the abundance of the spawning population” and harvest management to achieve “full representation of each age class within the population.”

We believe greater attention must be given to the impact of non-sturgeon fisheries on the oversized, spawning population. Scientific studies have shown that stress induced by both angling and gillnetting can result in increased cortisol levels that in turn can cause egg absorption and poor spawning success. For the recreational fishery, the suspension of a retention fishery in 2014 has dramatically reduced the handle of sturgeon of all sizes, including the spawner population. However, the handle of spawner sized sturgeon has recently increased due to the intensive gill net fishery targeting fall Chinook in zones 4 and 5. Policy C-3001 requires WDFW to provide information related to Sturgeon by-catch in all fisheries as part of an annual review, but we are unaware of any official estimates from the agency.

However, in the 2012 fall Columbia River commercial gill net fisheries bycatch observation study by Holowatz and McHugh, an estimated 660 spawner size sturgeon were ensnared in zones 4 and 5 over 18 fishing days. In 2013 there were 29 fishing days in these zones which would have resulted in 1,063 spawner size sturgeon being unnecessarily handled. In 2014 there were 31 fishing days in zones 4 and 5 which would have resulted in 1,137 spawner size sturgeon handled as by-catch. It is likely that many of these sturgeon are caught in gillnets and released multiple times. In order to protect this critically important spawning population, we strongly recommend that the Commissions fast track the removal of gillnets from zones 4 and 5 and drastically reduce bycatch of sturgeon in 2015 and 2016 (note: the Columbia River Fishery Reform Policy currently allows gillnets to be used until 2017). Testing of alternative, selective commercial fishing gears have shown significantly lower encounters with sturgeon.

Young-of-the-Year (YOY)

Based on YOY test results, poor spawning productivity has occurred over the last four years. YOY testing has been in place for ten years below Bonneville Dam. Potential causes are from increased sea lion predation in recent years and impacts of stress from handle as mentioned above. As you may know, recent research by NOAA fisheries has suggested that sea lion predation on spring Chinook may be far greater than previously estimated. There are similar questions about the effect predation is having on sturgeon populations in the lower Columbia River.

Sublegal

A review of the Frequency by Length Histograms depicts a declining percentage of sublegal sized fish in the 54-60cm class. Naturally, as these fish mature, we would begin to see the effect of these lower numbers in the form of inadequate recruitment to the legal age classes then subsequently to the spawning age class.

Legal

The 2014 legal population estimate using the ODFW set line method was 131,000 fish which is a dramatic increase from both 2012 estimate of 72,700 and the 2013 estimate of 114,000. This may be the one bright spot within the four different age classes, although a level of caution should be taken as there is a confidence interval of +/-60% with this data.

We applaud the steps you have taken in recent years toward the proper conservation of the struggling Columbia River sturgeon populations. We particularly commend Brad James (WDFW) and Chris Kern (ODFW) for their expertise on the topic. In order to preserve the long term health of this important fishery, it is our hope that the Commissions implement reforms to minimize, or eliminate, the unnecessary handle of sturgeon, particularly spawner size sturgeon, in commercial salmon fisheries. Moreover, we encourage the Commissions to continue taking a precautionary approach to managing this fishery due to uncertainties in population parameters and continued predation. If managed properly, it is our belief that we can rebuild this population and once again experience vibrant sturgeon fisheries in the lower Columbia River.

Sincerely,



Chris Cone, Executive Director
CCA Oregon



Nello Picinich, Executive Director
CCA Washington



March 16th, 2015

Kelly Short Outdoors is in full support of a limited keeper retention season on lower Columbia River white sturgeon.

Lower coastal communities in Oregon and Washington depend on tourism dollars during summer months starting in May of each year.

With the closure in 2014 rural communities lost large amounts of revenue to restaurant, bait tackle shops, camp grounds, hotels, harbors and ports with launch & Moorage fees, these revenue are a must and a big part of their income. They can't not make it on just a three week to four week salmon season. The revenues lost were in the 9.2 to 13.7 million dollars last year in 2014.

With the 140,000 keeper size white sturgeon available in the lower Columbia River we are hoping you will see the importance this is to these rural communities for revenue they depend on local and out of state tourism dollars.

And with the large numbers of legal size fish available we are seeking and asking for a small percentage of the amount above out of the 140,000 available size for a season in May and June of this year 2015

They can't not go through 2 years of loss revenue business rely on tourism a two year closer will crush some of these business and revenue lost to the states will more than likely double.

We realize the guidelines will be small but the communities depend on this revenue in May and June to get to late July and August summer season for their revenue for the year they strongly rely on and need a 4 month summer season.

We also strongly support and agree with the Ilwaco Charter Association recommendations in this matter as well.

Kelly Short Outdoors
Pres./owner Kelly R Short

CLANCYS GUIDED SPORTFISHING

CLANCY & RON HOLT

Clancysfishing.com

clancysfishing@localaccess.com

Clancy Holt 360-880-0409

Ron Holt 360-520-3107

Ron and I believe according to the research done by WDFW and ODFG there are reasonable numbers of keeper size sturgeon to allow a restricted retention season in 2015 in the estuary of the Columbia River. Something like one fish per angler for the year 2015. Our clients would participate in a season structured something like this. They will not participate in a fishery totally catch and release. We have the month of June totally reserved, clients from all over the USA for two boats, if the clients can keep one sturgeon a year. If this does not happen **All, yes I mean every one** of these clients are going to cancel their fishing and motel reservations. They will not be eating in the restaurants or spending the other money associated with a fishing outing. The town of Naselle where we base our sturgeon season will flourish during a limited sturgeon retention season. If not the motels, restaurants, bars and all the other businesses will suffer. We will not move our fifth wheel trailers down. Our customers are not interested in a catch and release season. Under last years rules I did not fish sturgeon in the estuary at all. Ron fished four clients one day. This really hurt us financially. According to your research the numbers show a limited retention season is possible. **We feel it is your responsibility to provide the fishing public a limited retention season in the estuary in 2015.**

Thank You

Clancys Guided Sportfishing

Clancy & Ron Holt

Dated March 19, 2015

March 19th 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I've been avid fisherman my whole life, but in 1990 I got introduced to sturgeon fishing in the estuary. Since then we've made so many cut backs in fishing for sturgeon to last year catch and release.

I've seen what has happened to the small coastal towns with no sturgeon fishing. Its been divesting. Business's closing up and or moving to a different location. These small towns cannot survive another year of catch and release sturgeon. A small well-managed sturgeon season would keep that small family business open for another year.

There is so many people that rely on this early fishery to kick start their year. Whether it is the Bait dock, or the cannery that processes the catch.

Please do not make choices for these people that they wouldn't otherwise make. These are people that I've done business with for years and want to continue doing business with. Consider their business before you make it another catch and release year of sturgeon.

Thank you for you time and consideration.

Lorrie Watts
18485 SW Pacific Dr. 132
Tualatin, Or 97062
503-625-4740

March 23, 2015

Darryl Christianson
PO Box 1432
Long Beach, WA 98631

To Whom it may concern,

According to the state biologists there seems to be a fair amount of interest (Biologist Interest) to open a very small quota of sturgeon based on size limitations, I would support and encourage such a limited sturgeon opening on the Columbia river estuary.

It would definitely help the coastal communities financially as it would show very great support and would be a lifeline to the cities that are dependant on fishing.

Thank you,

Darryl Christianson

I am writing on behalf of the over 9000 members of Puget Sound Anglers and the 60 members of PSA Ocean Anglers to express our support for and ask for your support for a Lower Columbia River retention fishery for white sturgeon this year. The sturgeon population has increased 3 years in a row and all indications are that it is healthy and viable stock. Many of communities along the lower river rely on this fishery for many reasons and all support it. All scientific evidence supports the ability to reopen this fishery because the conservation objectives are being met

Thank you

--

Kevin Lanier
President PSA Ocean Anglers and Puget Sound Anglers State Board Vice
Westport, Wa
425-328-8558 C



120 First Avenue North
PO Box 548 • Ilwaco, WA 98624
Phone: 360.642.3145
Fax: 360.642.3155
info@ilwaco-wa.gov
www.ilwaco-wa.gov

Department of Fish and Wildlife
Natural Resources Building
1111 Washington St. SE
Olympia, WA 98501
360-902-2200

March 23, 2015

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing today on behalf of City of Ilwaco to ask for your reconsideration to reopen the sturgeon fishing season for this spring/summer 2015. In short, river conditions are better, smelt runs are way up, and the shad have come roaring back. All this equals to sturgeon making a comeback into the system. When the season was called off the decision was made based on a 2 year-old stock assessment and it showed a keeper sturgeon population of 65,000 to 70,000 not the best, but not bad overall. The new stock assessment, recently released shows a population size of 140,000. This is substantially higher than the assessment used in the earlier decision making process. Therefore, if we fish at last year's level on this year's abundance that would equal a 7% harvest rate. The harvest rate we have been using under the Oregon Conservation Plan is 13 to 15%. You have an Adaptive Management Policy that if used in this case will allow us to fish in 2015. I ask you to reconsider your previous decision on sturgeon fishing in the lower Columbia River. Losing this upcoming fishing season would be detrimental to the local economy here in Ilwaco. Not only does the fishing season directly affect the fishermen and their lively-hood; but it also affects many other business owners and community members. This fishing season is imperative to the health and growth of the towns along the lower Columbia River.

Thank you for your time,

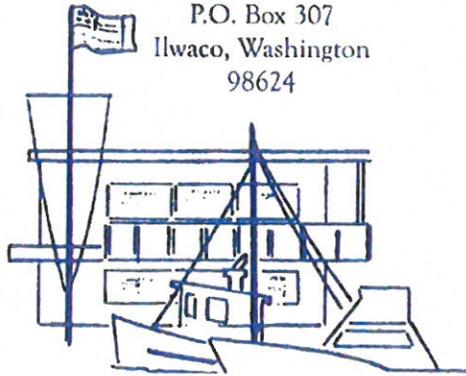
Mayor, Mike Cassinelli

Commissioners

Dave Nichols
Butch Smith
Bob Hamilton

PORT OF ILWACO

P.O. Box 307
Ilwaco, Washington
98624



Guy Glenn, Jr.
Manager

Area Code 360
Phone 642-3143
FAX 642-3148
www.portofilwaco.org

March 19, 2015

Guy Norman
WDFW - Regional Director
2108 Grand Boulevard
Vancouver, WA 98661

Director Norman:

The Port of Ilwaco supports a limited take sturgeon season this year (2015). The economy of our rural coastal community is highly dependent on fisheries, such as the sturgeon fishery. We understand this fishery needs to be sustainable. Our local businesses rely on revenue generated from fisheries and tourism. A limited take season would allow fishermen to participate while providing for a sustainable fishery long term.

We join the Ilwaco Charter Association in their shared support of this season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Guy Glenn, Jr.", written over a horizontal line.

Guy Glenn, Jr.
Manager, Port of Ilwaco

March 23rd 2015

Gary W. Abramson
E-Z Tackle Company, Inc.
PO Box 1451
Clackamas, OR. 97015

To whom it may concern;

I am writing in support of a limited retention Sturgeon fishery in the lower Columbia River. I own a small tackle manufacturing company that has felt the financial impact of catch and release only Sturgeon fishery in the Columbia River estuary in 2014. More important I come from a family of sportsman that have moored a boat and fished out of the Port of Ilwaco since the early 70's. I currently reside in a suburb of Portland Oregon but have a vacation home in Ocean Park Washington. I have seen the good and the bad and there is no question the elimination of Sturgeon retention in the estuary last year was devastating to the local economy and communities that rely on sports fishing dollars to sustain their businesses. Everyone supports proper fisheries management but the question becomes why the Columbia Sturgeon management plan cannot allow for retention opportunities in all regions and not just a select few? I am confident data would support the financial impact allowing Sturgeon harvest in the Columbia estuary, regardless of the duration, has an overwhelming positive financial impact to this region more than any other. The lower Columbia River is a destination fishery like none other in the world. There are no other sports fishing draws to this area prior to the start of the ocean Salmon season which typically has been mid to late June. A mid-May Sturgeon limited retention fishery makes the most sense to give sportsman motivation to travel to this northwest favorite fishery. A Sturgeon fishery in 2015 would no doubt be a huge boost towards the loss recovery from last year's decision to be catch and release only. Thank you for considering my comments concerning this matter.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary Abramson', written in a cursive style.

Gary Abramson
President



Greetings Commissioners,

As the Executive Director of the Long Beach Peninsula Visitors Bureau I represent nearly 300 businesses in Pacific County that are tourism dependent. The sturgeon fishing regulations have a tremendous impact on our early tourism season for our rural coastal communities. While I realize the priority is the management of the species, I would ask that the best, most current information be used to make these highly impactful decisions. *Please reconsider your policy using the most current stock assessment.*

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andi Day".

Andi Day,

Executive Director,

Long Beach Peninsula Visitors Bureau

To whom it may Concern.

My name is Jay Johnstone owner of Wraptor Custom Rods.

I'm writing you to ask for a small retention of Colombia river Sturgeon that starts in mid May and would last until a small retention was met.

This would help the businesses on the coast that my product and others are in, It would generate fish dollars that would add to the economy of Astoria and Ilwaco that are struggling to survive being that they mainly survive on fishing dollars. Please don't over look this season step up and do what is right for the coastal communities and make this year better for all who are struggling.

Thanks

Wraptor Custom Rods

Jay Johnstone