

Proposed in-river 48" maximum leader length fact sheet

Background: Recreational fisheries in Puget Sound marine areas and rivers are limited by the encounters with wild, ESA listed Chinook. Current freshwater sport fishing regulations for the Nisqually, Puyallup, and Skokomish Rivers, require the release of fish hooked in any location behind the forward margin of the gill plate (aka foul-hooked). Creel surveys conducted on the Nisqually and Skokomish Rivers (2010-2012) indicate that anglers are releasing approximately one hatchery Chinook for each hatchery Chinook harvested. According to anglers, WDFW Biologists, and Enforcement Officers, the most common reason for releasing hatchery Chinook is due to foul-hooking. Data also suggests that the rate of foul hooking increase with increasing leader length. According to WDFW enforcement, leader lengths in excess of 12ft on the Nisqually, Puyallup and Skokomish Rivers are common.

1) What is the problem?

Currently sport anglers are not permitted to retain wild (unmarked) Chinook but these fish are encountered and released by anglers who are targeting abundant hatchery Chinook. Approximately 10% of these released fish will die. These mortalities of wild fish are estimated using computer models and these impacts are used to structure and limit our sport fisheries. The overall encounters and subsequent mortalities of both hatchery and wild fish increases when anglers release foul-hooked fish and continue fishing.

2) What are the objectives?

- To preserve the current recreational seasons.
- To reduce the impacts to unmarked wild Chinook.
- To reduce the release of hatchery Chinook.
- To document the reduction in impacts that could possibly lead to increase recreational opportunity.

3) How will this affect current harvest?

A reduction in unmarked encounters could result in more time on the water and more hatchery fish harvested.

4) How will we define a "leader"?

Other rules already specify the distance from weight to lure or bait. In this case "Weights may not be attached below or greater than 48" above the lure or bait".

5) What species are covered with this regulation?

This regulation will apply to all salmon anglers fishing during the period Chinook are in these systems, typically through October.

6) If adopted, where would this rule apply?

If this rule is adopted, leader length would be limited to 48 inches or less during salmon seasons in the following river systems: Nisqually, Skokomish, and Puyallup.