

## **Minimum Size Limit Reduction Proposal Puget Sound winter Chinook MSFs**

**Background:** The minimum size limit for Chinook retention has varied widely during the history of the Puget Sound sport fishery. The minimum size limit was 12" in the 1930's, there was no size limit in the 1970's, a size limit of 20" was implemented in the late 1970's, and a size limit of 22" was implemented in 1983 (and has remained in place).

The idea of reducing the Chinook minimum size limit has been proposed by anglers for many years with options ranging from year-round size limit reductions to reductions only within winter blackmouth and/or mark-selective fisheries (MSF). The majority of the support received during WDFW's public process has been for winter MSFs only, therefore: ***WDFW is proposing a reduction in the minimum size limit from 22" to 20" in winter MSFs beginning in 2015.***

### **Modeling of size limit changes has been technically scrutinized**

In 2013, the Pacific Fishery Management Council approved the changes necessary to properly model size limit changes in the Fishery Regulation Assessment Model (FRAM).

### **Size limit reductions are expected to have a very small impact on ESA-listed Chinook**

Preliminary modeling indicates that reducing the minimum size limit from 22" to 20" during winter MSFs will not measurably increase ESA impacts, because these are mark-selective, hatchery-directed fisheries (the treatment of unmarked Chinook will not be altered).

### **Recreational fisheries will see an increase in the number of legal-size encounters**

The abundance and size structure of fish present in Puget Sound in any given year is variable, but preliminary modeling suggests reducing the size limit to 20" will translate into ~33% increase over all areas (5-13) in legal size encounters during winter MSFs.

### **Released fish have a very low chance of being caught again**

The estimated loss of future access to larger Chinook (age 4-5) due to the increased harvest of small blackmouth (mostly age 2) is minimal due to the natural mortality that occurs (e.g., 50% chance of surviving from age 2 to 5 in the absence of fishing and maturation), combined with the relatively small contribution to total fishery-related mortality arising from current fisheries.

### **Fisheries will continue to be sampled and monitored so that changes are well understood**

Given that it has been over 30 years since the minimum size limit was less than 22", WDFW suggests continued monitoring at a level that's sufficient to measure changes in total fishing effort, angler behavior (e.g., compliance, voluntary release), catch success, sub-legal encounters, and stock exploitation patterns. The sampling programs already in place for 'intensively monitored' mark-selective fisheries are sufficiently rigorous to provide this insight, but new approaches could also be considered.

## Winter Mark-Selective Fisheries

## Landed Catch

Fishery	22" Size Limit		20" Size Limit		Landed Catch Increase
	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked	
Area 7	6094	20	6333	22	4%
Area 5	339	5	397	7	18%
Area 8	731	27	974	42	34%
Area 9	965	6	1215	8	26%
Area 6	1404	22	1441	24	3%
Area 10	190	3	330	6	74%
Area 11	369	3	443	4	20%
Area 12	470	4	549	5	17%
Area 13	81	1	163	3	101%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10642</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>11845</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>33%</b>

## AEQ Mortality

Fishery	22" Size Limit		20" Size Limit	
	Marked	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked
Area 7	5702	382	5836	379
Area 5	368	49	402	49
Area 8	1005	434	1140	426
Area 9	1238	174	1374	171
Area 6	1297	92	1318	92
Area 10	337	104	416	102
Area 11	395	53	437	52
Area 12	477	48	523	47
Area 13	150	18	197	19

## Encounters

Fishery	22" Size Limit		20" Size Limit	
	Legal	Sublegal	Legal	Sublegal
Area 7	9052	3586	9433	3206
Area 5	498	956	601	853
Area 8	1298	4676	1812	4163
Area 9	1428	3554	1808	3175
Area 6	2064	597	2128	532
Area 10	333	2192	568	1958
Area 11	598	1099	716	981
Area 12	669	1142	793	1018
Area 13	109	1025	220	915