

2017 Salmon Season Setting NORTH of FALCON



Puget Sound Chinook minimum size limit reduction

Background:

The minimum size limit for Chinook retention has varied widely during the history of the Puget Sound sport fishery. It was 12" in the 1930's, no size limit in the 1970's, size limit of 20" in the late 1970's, and has remained 22" (today's limit) since 1983. The current size limit (22") was designed to help achieve 50:50 harvest sharing between state and tribal fisheries. Reducing the size limit for winter mark-selective fisheries has received the most support, while some would like to see the change made for summer fisheries to help catch jacks in terminal areas.

Some of the reasons for reducing the size limit to 20 inches, include:



More successful angler trips and helping to reduce the number hatchery fish on the spawning grounds

Reducing the minimum size limit to 20" will allow for more successful trips for those who choose to keep 20-22" fish. It will allow anglers to access a more hatchery fish that they help to fund through license fees, while simultaneously reducing the number of hatchery strays on spawning grounds. Increased harvest will help restore 50:50 sharing of allowable catch.

Modeling of the size limit change has been approved

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 will have a negligible impact on protected Chinook

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.

Recreational fisheries will see an increase in the number of allowable encounters

The abundance and size structure of fish present in Puget Sound in any given year is variable, but on average reducing the size limit to 20" may translate into

a about 30% increase in what's considered to be legal to keep during winter MSFs and a about 10% increase during summer fisheries. Mid and South Puget Sound areas would likely see the largest increase in catch during the winter.

Shouldn't decrease the number of larger chinook available in the fishery

Dropping the minimum size limit to 20" would not result in a noticeable decrease in the number of Chinook that grow to larger sizes (ages 4-5). There is a very low chance of catching the same fish twice in marine recreational fisheries. These odds are further reduced due to the mortality rates of released fish combined with the expected natural mortality, which is about a 50 percent chance of surviving from age 2 until maturing to an adult salmon ready to return to rivers.

Monitoring fisheries will continue so that changes are well understood

Given that it has been nearly 20 years since the minimum limit was less than 22," it will be necessary to monitor fisheries to measure changes in fishing effort, angler behavior (e.g., compliance, voluntary release), catch success, and stock exploitation patterns. The sampling programs already in place for "intensively monitored" mark-selective fisheries are sufficiently rigorous to provide this insight.