



**STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**

Mailing Address: 600 Capitol Way N – Olympia, Washington 98501-1091 – (360) 902-2200, TDD (360) 902-2207
Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building – 1111 Washington Street SE – Olympia, WA

DETERMINATION OF NONSIGNIFICANCE (DNS)

Name of Proposal: WASHINGTON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION POLICY ON COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN SALMON MANAGEMENT

Description of Proposal:

The intent of the policy is to implement an alternative management framework for non-tribal Columbia River recreational and commercial fisheries. The framework is intended to enhance the economies of Oregon and Washington as a whole, ensure the long-term viability of recreational and commercial fisheries and those communities that rely on them, and contribute to fish conservation and recovery. In the off-channel fishing areas it may expand existing seasons, boundaries, increase production or provide new production and allow increased harvest where the likelihood of impacting ESA-listed stocks is lower than the mainstem.

The restructuring of sport fisheries and the development and implementation of selective alternative gear such as purse seines and beach seines in the mainstem would optimize area-specific opportunity to target harvest on abundant hatchery stocks, reduce the number of hatchery-origin fish in some natural spawning areas, and provide commercial fishing opportunities. The Department does not anticipate significant adverse environmental impacts from the reallocation and restructuring of fisheries

The physical component of this proposal involves the expansion of the current net pen sites in both Oregon and Washington. Net pens are non-permanent floating structures used to hold fish for several months, for feeding and monitoring, until they reach sufficient size and are released to enhance public sport and commercial fishing in lakes, rivers and marine areas. The construction and operation of net pens may have impacts on the environment, but as described below, such impacts are not anticipated to be significant.

The construction of new pens is not anticipated to cause significant adverse environmental impacts. Most net pen structures consist of a narrow wood or metal frame that rests on floats on the surface of the water with a mesh net extending into the water. There is minimal shading of the water surface below. Some net pens have net covers to reduce avian predation of juvenile fish. While it's possible that wildlife could get entangled in the netting, current operations and past experience suggest this rarely occurs. Net pens are secured by attaching directly to a dock, pilings or other

floating structure, with cables attached near the shore or, in a few cases, by anchoring directly to the bed of the water body. Most net pens are incorporated into an existing dock structures so any additional navigational or safety hazards would be minimal. An individual net pen would encompass no more than 400 ft² (20' x 20') of surface area with a net no deeper than 20 ft. These net pens aim to acclimate and release spring Chinook and coho as part of increased off channel production for harvest opportunity).

Proposed net pens for spring Chinook may be located in Cathlamet Channel or another area in the Lower Columbia River. This project would potentially include up to 10 net pens for the release of 250,000 spring Chinook.

The operation of the net pens and restructuring of the fisheries is not anticipated to cause significant adverse environmental impacts because the Department already performs the following measures to manage the fisheries and production, including net pen releases:

- Status reviews occurring since 1991 have resulted in the majority of Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead stocks being listed under the ESA. The *U.S. v Oregon* TAC has prepared Biological Assessments (BAs) for combined fisheries based on relevant *U.S. v Oregon* management plans and agreements. The TAC has completed BAs for ESA-listed stocks for all mainstem Columbia River fisheries since January 1992.
- The current Biological Assessment (BA) concerns Columbia River treaty Indian and non-Indian fisheries, as described in the “2008-2017 *U.S. v Oregon* Management Agreement for upriver Chinook, sockeye, steelhead, coho, and white sturgeon” (2008-2017 MA). The BA was submitted during the spring of 2008, and a Biological Opinion (BO) was subsequently issued by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) later that year. The current BO expires December 31, 2017, concurrent with the 2008-2017 MA.
- The parties to *U.S. v Oregon* are currently operating under the 2008-2017 Management Agreement (MA). This agreement provides specific fishery management constraints for upriver spring, summer, and fall Chinook, coho, sockeye and steelhead.
- Columbia River fisheries downstream from Bonneville Dam are sampled and monitored by the Joint Staff of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Sport fisheries are sampled nearly seven days per week and commercial fisheries are sampled nearly each day of the fishery.
- All fisheries are managed to remain within the ESA constraints and analysis of impacts to ESA-listed stocks are conducted throughout the fishery to ensure fisheries are managed consistent with ESA standards.
- All hatchery programs are operated consistent with ESA requirements.
- Technical information on fishery management is reviewed by the *U.S. v Oregon* Technical Advisory Committee, which is made up of representatives from the four treaty tribes, NMFS, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the state of Oregon.
- Test fisheries are conducted during the spring Chinook fishery prior to the start of any commercial opening.
- Additional test fishing will occur to help determine the site of the new net pens. Test fishing will occur in the spring of 2013 in the Cathlamet Channel.
- Water quality issues are not expected – see checklist for information on Deep River net pens

- Spring Chinook fisheries below Bonneville Dam are managed to provide a 30% buffer to the run size. This buffer is in place to provide assurance that fisheries upstream from Bonneville Dam are not denied access to the share of the harvest that has been allocated. This includes sport and tribal fisheries in Washington, Oregon and Idaho.
- The policy under review includes an adaptive management section. The fishery plans will be reviewed as the season progress and on an annual basis to ensure the policy and plans are consistent with the objectives.

Reference

Parties to *U.S. v Oregon*. 2008. 2008-2017 Management Agreement. Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission. Portland, OR.

Proponent/Applicant: Washington Department of Fish Wildlife (WDFW)

600 Capitol Way N

Olympia, WA 98501-1091

Contact: Cindy LeFleur, Region 5 Fish Program Manager – 360-906-6708

Location of Proposal, including street, if any: Lower Columbia River and Off -Channel Areas in Oregon and Washington

Lead Agency: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

WDFW has determined that this proposal will likely not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, state law¹ does not require an environmental impact statement (EIS). WDFW made this determination of non-significance (DNS) after we reviewed the environmental checklist and other information on file with us.

We issued this DNS according to state rules.² We will **not act on this proposal for 14 days** from the date we issued the DNS. Agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on this proposal or DNS. We must receive your comments within 14 days of the date of this letter. This means we must receive your comments by **January 3, 2013**.

Method of Comment:

The following procedures shall govern the method to comment on agency SEPA proposals. Comments received through these procedures are part of the official SEPA record for this proposal.

You can submit your comments any one of the following ways:

- Email to SEPAdesk2@dfw.wa.gov
- Online at the WDFW SEPA website comment link at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/sepa/>
- Fax to (360) 902-2946;
- Mail to the address below.

Responsible Official: Bob Zeigler

Position/Title: SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, WDFW Regulatory Services Section

Address: 600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, WA 98501-1091

After the comment period closes, applicants may view the updated status of this proposal on the WDFW SEPA website: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/sepa/>. Once the status is posted as final, applicants and permittees may take action on the proposal. When a proposal is modified or withdrawn, notice will be given in accordance with state law.¹

If you have questions about this DNS or the details of the proposal, contact Bob Zeigler at the address, e-mail, or fax number above; you can also call him at (360) 902-2578.

DATE OF ISSUE: December 19, 2012

SIGNATURE:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Zeigler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'Z'.

Footnotes

1. RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c)
2. WAC 197-11-340(2).

SEPA Log Number: 12 -084. dns