

# Commission's policy guidance on 2018 Willapa Bay salmon fishery

March 2018

In a Feb. 16 conference call, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission unanimously provided guidance to WDFW in implementing the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy during the 2018 season. That guidance focuses on achieving the fall chinook fishery conservation objective and implementing catch priorities established in the plan for recreational and commercial fisheries during the 2018 fishing season.

## Background

- A primary goal of the policy, adopted in 2015, is to conserve and restore wild salmon in Willapa Bay and avoid the listing of any salmon species under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- To meet this goal, the policy established a 20% limit on the annual incidental mortality rate on wild chinook in Willapa basin fisheries through 2018.
- The policy also seeks to “maintain or enhance the stability of commercial and recreational fishing” and support “an appropriate distribution of fishing opportunities” in the bay.
- Catch-sharing guidelines in the policy give recreational fisheries priority in harvesting hatchery chinook salmon, while prioritizing harvest of coho and chum salmon for commercial fisheries. Due to the return timing of these various salmon runs, both fisheries intercept wild chinook while pursuing their prioritized species.
- WDFW staff requested the commission's guidance in balancing those priorities relative to wild chinook impacts, because implementing them will require tradeoffs in developing fishing seasons for Willapa Bay fisheries in 2018.

## The challenge in 2018

The challenge facing state salmon managers is that actual impact rates on wild chinook have been considerably higher than anticipated than when the policy was adopted in 2015.

- In both 2015 and 2016, impact rates on wild chinook averaged 23%, exceeding the limit established by the policy each year; 2017 is presumed to have also exceeded the limit.
- In each of those years, the recreational fishery has accounted for approximately 15% of the annual impacts, compared to a rate of 3.2% prior to the time the policy was adopted.

- Current impact rates in the recreational fishery, coupled with a 6% set-aside for alternative fishing gear, could exceed the fishery conservation objective and leave no wild chinook impacts available to conduct commercial coho and chum fisheries in 2018.

### **Commission guidance**

The Commission provided the guidance to WDFW in developing 2018 fishing seasons in Willapa Bay. The motion passed that provides the guidance is attached below. A summary of this guidance is as follows.

#### General guidance

- Meeting policy goals for one fishery should not result in eliminating fishing opportunities for another type of fishery.
- WDFW should actively manage chinook fisheries in Willapa Bay to avoid exceeding the 20% limit for wild chinook.
- This guidance applies only to 2018; the Willapa Bay Policy remains in effect except as modified by this guidance.

#### Recreational fishery

- The department should consider reducing the current daily limit of four adult hatchery chinook salmon in the recreational fishery, and curtail~~ing~~ sport fisheries during high-catch periods in June, July and early August.
- Implement mark-selective recreational fisheries wherever practical.
- Design the recreational fishery to avoid exceeding the 20% total impact rate, after accounting for incidental impacts needed to conduct commercial fisheries (see below).
- Actively monitor the Willapa Bay fishery prior to Sept. 30, and take steps to curtail the fishery if it appears likely its pre-season expected impact rate for wild chinook will be exceeded.

#### Commercial fishery

- WDFW will assume a 9% impact rate on wild chinook in developing commercial fishing seasons for coho, chum, and hatchery chinook species in 2018.
- The 9% rate represents a combination of the previous 6% set-aside impact rate for alternative fishing gear and a 3% rate for traditional gillnets. The 6% rate set-aside would no longer necessarily be reserved for alternative gear (e.g. tangle nets or pound nets), which has not been widely used in the commercial fishery.

However, with a lower impact rate, alternative gear would provide for more commercial fishing days.

- The Commission expects WDFW to actively manage the commercial fishery to keep total impacts on wild chinook within the 20% limit, recognizing that the actual incidental impact by the commercial fleet may be higher or lower than the 9% pre-season assumption. This will depend on the in-season strength of coho an chum salmon runs and any left-over impacts from the recreational fishery catches.

### **Key dates**

Three public meetings, all open to the public, are currently planned to discuss development of 2018 fishing seasons for Willapa Bay:

- March 22 – Advisory group meeting, 6 p.m., WDFW Region 6 Headquarters, Montesano.
- March 29 – Public meeting, 6 p.m. Raymond Elks Club.
- April 12 – Advisory group meeting, 6 p.m., WDFW Region 6 Headquarters, Montesano.

For more information, contact WDFW Reg. 6 Fish Manager Annette Hoffmann at 360-249-1201.

### **The adopted motion language is as follows:**

<b>Commission Guidance on Implementation of Policy C-3622 in 2018</b>
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#### **General Guidance**

Policy implementation in 2018 to achieve priorities or goals for one fishing sector should not result in eliminating the opportunity of any fishing sector.

#### **Chinook Fishery Management**

Willapa Bay chinook fisheries should be actively managed to not exceed the 20% cap in 2018.

#### **Recreational Fishery**

- In achieving a priority for the recreational fishery for chinook salmon, design the 2018 fishery
  - after exploring a reduction in the 4 adult salmon bag limit;

- to curtail high catch periods in June, July and early August if necessary to conform to this guidance;
- to focus on mark selective fishing where ever practical;
- to not exceed 20% impacts after accounting for incidental impacts needed in commercial fisheries (see below); and
- to include active monitoring of the bay fishery prior to September 30 and active management of the bay fishery if the total fisheries impact ceiling of 20% on natural origin fish is in reasonable jeopardy of being exceeded.

### **Commercial Fishery**

- The natural origin chinook salmon 6% impact “set-aside” for commercial fishing with alternative gear, together with 3% impacts relating to historic impacts, shall be used in pre-season planning to cover chinook incidental impacts in all commercial fisheries – targeting coho, chum, or hatchery chinook salmon. Active management is expected in-season, and it may be that more or less than the 9% level ultimately occurs – within the constraint of the 20% impact rate cap and the provisions of this guidance.

### **Status of Policy C-3622**

- Policy C-3622 is to remain in effect in 2018, except as clarified or modified by this guidance; this guidance applies only to 2018.