

Management of North Coastal Steelhead Populations

WDFW is inviting further public comment on a package of proposals developed by the North Coast Steelhead Advisors Group (NCSAG). This group was formed to assist with developing a more comprehensive package of proposals for steelhead fishing regulations, rather than using a piecemeal approach. There was considerable compromise from all members to achieve this package. As such, this package does not necessarily represent a consensus of opinion among the NCSAG members, but rather a meeting place somewhere in the middle. The steelhead stocks considered for these management proposals are the wild steelhead in the Quillayute system (Quillayute, Sol Duc, Bogachiel, Calawah, and Dickey), the Hoh River and South Fork Hoh River, and the Clearwater River.

Summary of proposals:

1. Require barbless hooks at all times and in all waters of the North Coast Rivers, and allow only one hook with up to 3 points.
2. Limit the use of bait to those times and river segments where an angler can expect to encounter returning hatchery steelhead (generally Oct. 1 through February 15, see proposed dates in table below).
3. Require the release of all wild (unclipped) steelhead and rainbow trout.
4. Prohibit fishing from floating devices on the Hoh River above Morgan's Crossing.
5. Prohibit the use of internal combustion motors on all North Coast Rivers.

Proposed Areas and Dates When Bait Would Be Allowed

Proposed: When hatchery steelhead are available and during salmon fisheries:				Reduction
River	Location	Bait Allowed:	Dates Open	(months)
Quillayute System				
Quillayute River	Outside ONP	Year around	Year around	0
Dickey River	above Forks	No Bait	1st Sat in June - April 30	
	below Forks	October 1 - February 15	1st Sat in June - April 30	6.5
Bogachiel River	Above Hwy 101	No Bait	1st Sat in June - April 30	
	Below Hwy 101	October 1 - February 15	1st Sat in June - April 30	6.5
Calawah River	Above Hwy 101	No Bait	1st Sat in June - April 30	
	Below Hwy 101	October 1 - February 15	1st Sat in June - April 30	6.5
Sol Duc River	above Hatchery	No Bait	1st Sat in June - April 30	
	below hatchery	October 1 - February 15	Year around	7.5
Hoh River	Above Oxbow boat launch incl. South Fork	Oct. 16 - Nov. 30	1st Sat in June - April 15	
	Below Oxbow boat launch	October 1 - February 15	May 16 - April 15 2015: August 1 - April 15	6.5
Clearwater River	Above Snahapish	No Bait	1st Sat in June - Oct 31	
	Below Snahapish	October 1 - February 15	1st Sat in June - April 15	6
= reduction in bait			Total:	39.5

Context of proposals:

1. *Require barbless hooks at all times and in all North Coastal Rivers, and allow only one hook with up to three points.* Barbless hooks will facilitate the release, and consequently reduce the stress/impairment/mortality of the wild steelhead being handled. The advisors' experience suggests that treble hooks are generally not taken as deeply as single hooks are sometimes taken, and consequently cause less severe damage upon removal.
2. *Limit the use of bait in the North Coast **steelhead fisheries** to those times and river segments where an angler can expect to encounter returning hatchery steelhead.* This is expected to lessen the stress/impairment/mortality on wild steelhead hooked with bait and released. Bait would still be allowed for salmon fisheries; bait dates are generally October 1 through February 15. Times and areas where bait would be allowed are attached below.
3. *Require the release of all wild (unclipped) steelhead and rainbow trout.* This is intended to increase the number of wild steelhead escaping to spawn, and resident rainbow available to contribute to the spawning numbers. However, an increase in spawning escapement will only be realized if the co-managers agree to manage their fisheries to target no more than 50% of the harvestable wild steelhead. Consequently, it is important that the Fish and Wildlife Commission, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the treaty tribes pursue clarity in the treaty/non-treaty sharing principles of wild steelhead.
4. *Prohibit fishing from floating devices on the Hoh River above Morgan's Crossing.* This method of reducing the number of steelhead handled is controversial within this advisors group because it is allocating river (and fishing opportunity) away from some angling methods. Adopting this recommendation will create a trial area for this approach to reducing catch. Though it would be difficult to track a change in steelhead numbers resulting from this regulation, the pattern of use in the stretch by different angler types can be examined, leading to a greater understanding of the impact and value of this type of regulation.
5. *Prohibit fishing from floating devices equipped with internal combustion motors at all times on all North Coast Rivers.* This proposal would maintain the status quo. Internal combustion motors are not currently being used in the sport fisheries on North Coast rivers, with the one exception being the lower Hoh near the Park, where several anglers use power to access the river below the lowest take-out point (Barlow's, river mile 1.2).

Additional comments:

- *Educate the angling public to encourage proper handling of fish.* The existing regulation requiring that any steelhead to be released must not be completely removed from the water is intended to reduce handling stress and related mortality. There remains, however, much room for improvement in how anglers handle fish to be released. The NCSAG concluded that the enforcement of further handling laws would be difficult and

potentially arbitrary, and that the best approach would be through further educating of the angling public. WDFW should look for opportunities to demonstrate and encourage proper handling of fish; for example, produce videos and pamphlets demonstrating how to best release steelhead in various scenarios. These videos and pamphlets could be made available to fishing clubs and organizations, and shown at sportsmen's shows.

- Do not require mandatory retention of hatchery steelhead. Maintain an angler's choice of whether to keep a fish. Instead, continue to educate anglers to the benefits of removing hatchery steelhead from spawning populations. Put a notice in the regulation pamphlet.
- Do not open unlisted streams that are currently closed to fishing. These streams were closed because they support rearing anadromous fish. Remain willing to consider proposals from the public to open individual streams.
- Do not create a special "wild steelhead tag" that would be required to retain wild steelhead. This idea conflicts with proposal number 3 above.
- Limit the number of guides that are allowed to operate on the North Coast rivers. Guided anglers catch at a rate well above other anglers, and at times comprise most of the boats on crowded rivers. Limiting their numbers or access to the rivers will reduce overall steelhead encounters, and may improve the angling experience for all. The means to limit the number of guides has not been determined, so this proposal requires more work, and may require legislative action.