



Sturgeon Sport Fishing Regulation Updates

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting

Laura Heironimus, R5 Sturgeon, Smelt, Lamprey Unit Lead

William Tweit, Special Assistant

Regulation Updates

1. Update Columbia River sturgeon spawning sanctuaries
2. Address retention fisheries upstream of McNary Dam
3. Address night fishing in the Chehalis River
4. Improve clarity on sturgeon catch-and-release regulations
5. Define oversize sturgeon
6. Simplify and clarify statewide sturgeon regulations (WAC 220-316-010)

Long-term Vision

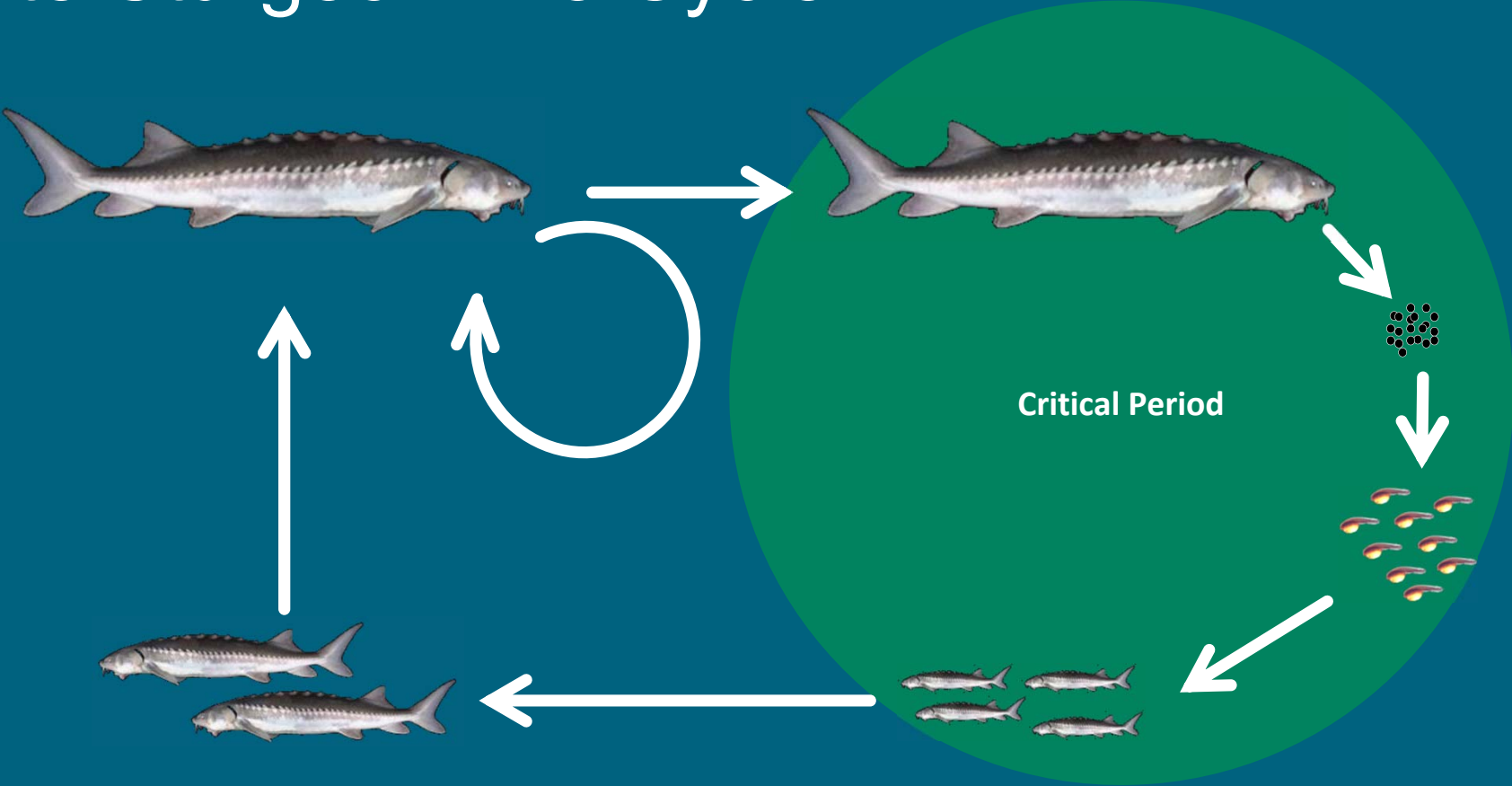
- Conservation of the White Sturgeon population
 - Improve abundance of spawning adult sturgeon
 - Enhance future fisheries
 - Ensure long-term viability of the population



Policy Guidance C-3001

- New Policy adopted January 25, 2019.
- “...to provide consistent management guidelines that promote a healthy population and provide sustainable fisheries.”
- Conservation Objectives:
 - Increase abundance of spawning population
 - Manage with a precautionary approach
 - Population monitoring (within available resources)
- Fishery Management Objectives:
 - Quantify impacts of fisheries on sturgeon abundance
 - Consider projected recruitment and mortality sources
 - Monitor and manage fisheries

White Sturgeon Life Cycle



White Sturgeon picture by Rene Reyes, USBR

Conceptual model adapted from Klimley et al. 2015

CR Spawning Sanctuaries

- Lower Columbia River, adopted in 1996.
 - Area: From navigation marker 82/Fir Point upstream to Bonneville Dam.
 - Since 2010: closed May 1-Aug 31, 9.0 miles.
- Willamette River, adopted in 2010
 - Area: From the Lake Oswego/Oak Grove Train Bridge upstream to Willamette Falls.
 - Closed May 1- Aug 31, 6.5 miles.

CR Spawning Sanctuaries

- **Bonneville Reservoir, adopted in 2014.**
 - Area: From the dock at the Port of The Dalles boat ramp upstream to The Dalles Dam.
 - Closed May 1-July 31, 1.8 miles
- **The Dalles Reservoir, adopted in 2006.**
 - Area: From the west end of the grain silo at Rufus, Oregon upstream to John Day Dam.
 - Closed May 1-July 31, 2.4 miles.
- **John Day Reservoir: adopted 2006.**
 - Area: From the Highway 82 (395) Bridge upstream to McNary Dam.
 - Closed May 1-July 31, 1.5 miles.

CR Spawning Sanctuaries

- Hanford Reach, adopted in 2011.
 - Area: From the boundary marker 400 ft downstream of Jackson Creek upstream to Priest Rapids Dam.
 - Closed May 1-July 31, 2.5 miles.
- Lower Snake River, adopted in 2011.
 - Area: From the downstream end of Goose Island upstream to Ice Harbor Dam downstream.
 - Closed May 1- July 31, 1.5 miles.

Young of the Year Surveys

Recruitment Index Value

- $E_p = 0$ means “no measureable recruitment (red).
- Higher values equate to higher densities of age-0 fish (green).



	BON	TDA	JDA	MCN
1997	0.82	0.74	0.53	---
1998	0.68	0.73	0.08	---
1999	0.61	0.67	0.22	0.08
2000	0.12	0.14	0.00	0.00
2001	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2002	0.17	0.17	0.00	0.06
2003	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00
2004	0.12	0.06	0.00	0.00
2005	0.06	0.03	0.00	0.03
2006	0.69	0.05	0.13	0.06
2007	0.31	0.14	0.00	0.06
2008	0.59	0.31	0.00	0.06
2009	0.51	0.42	0.13	0.06
2010	0.34	0.36	0.08	0.00
2011	0.41	0.61	0.46	0.26
2012	0.08	0.53	0.10	---
2013	0.18	0.19	0.00	---
2014	0.37	0.14	0.00	---
2015	0.00	0.00	0.00	---
2016	0.10	0.00	0.00	---
2017	0.26	0.47	0.00	---
2018	0.21	0.08	0.00	---
Mean	0.31	0.27	0.08	0.05

Sturgeon Mortalities

- Reported sturgeon mortalities associated with extreme environmental conditions tend to occur in July-August which affect a disproportionate number of oversize sturgeon.



Proposed Sturgeon Sanctuary Rule Changes

- All current sanctuaries: Extend time of spawning sanctuary through August 31.
 - Full closed period would be May 1-August 31.
 - Aligns with sanctuary rules below Bonneville Dam.
 - Minimizes handling stress in oversize sturgeon during post-spawn period.
- John Day Reservoir and Hanford Reach: Extend area of spawning sanctuary further downstream.
 - Options to follow.



**JOHN DAY RESERVOIR STURGEON SANCTUARY BOUNDARY
CURRENT BOUNDARY AND PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES**

WASHINGTON

Current Boundary:
Hwy 82/395 Bridge
(RM 290)

Proposed Alternative:
Irrigon Hatchery (RM 279)

McNary Dam

Umatilla

COLUMBIA RIVER

Irrigon

OREGON



**JOHN DAY STURGEON SANCTUARY BOUNDARY
ALTERNATIVE: IRRIGON HATCHERY (RM 279)**

Sign on WA Shore
Northeasterly of
Irrigon Hatchery

WASHINGTON

Umatilla Hatchery

Sign at Irrigon Hatchery
Outlet

COLUMBIA RIVER

Irrigon Hatchery

OREGON


John Day – Telemetry Movements

- Two – Year, BPA-Funded Movement Study
- Target: Tag 30 broodstock White Sturgeon (15 male and 15 female) per Year
 - 2018: 15 ripe males, 10 ripe females, 1 mature female
- Track throughout year

John Day – Telemetry Movements

Effect of extending John Day spawning sanctuary in time and/or space

Sex	Current Sanctuary	Expand Time	Expand Location	Expand Both
Male	92.1%	88.0%	99.7%	99.7%
Female	78.6%	83.4%	82.6%	86.8%



HANFORD REACH STURGEON EGG SURVEY:
COLLECTION LOCATIONS

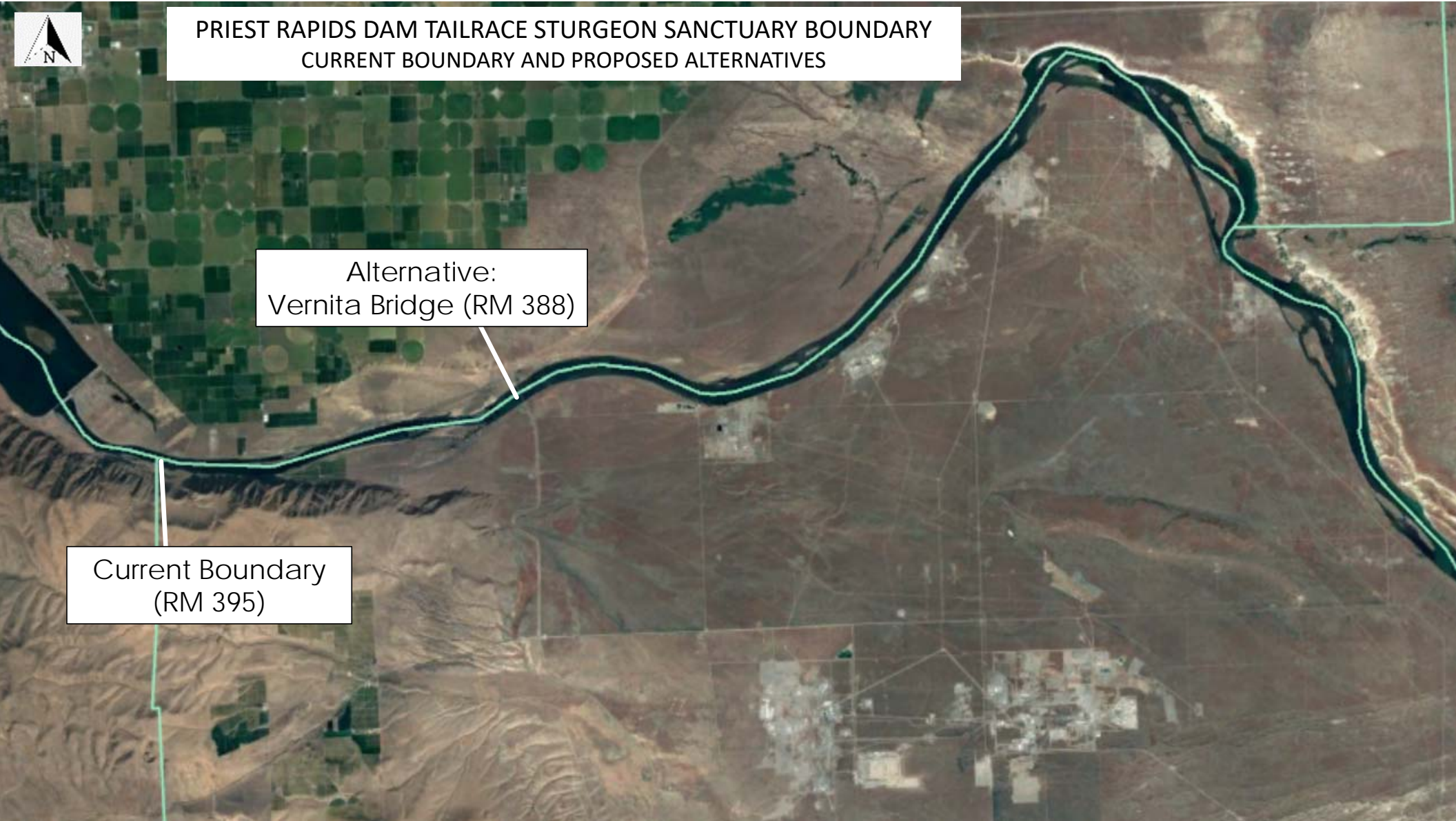
Approximate locations
of sturgeon eggs
collected during surveys
in 1994 and 1995



PRIEST RAPIDS DAM TAILRACE STURGEON SANCTUARY BOUNDARY
CURRENT BOUNDARY AND PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

Alternative:
Vernita Bridge (RM 388)

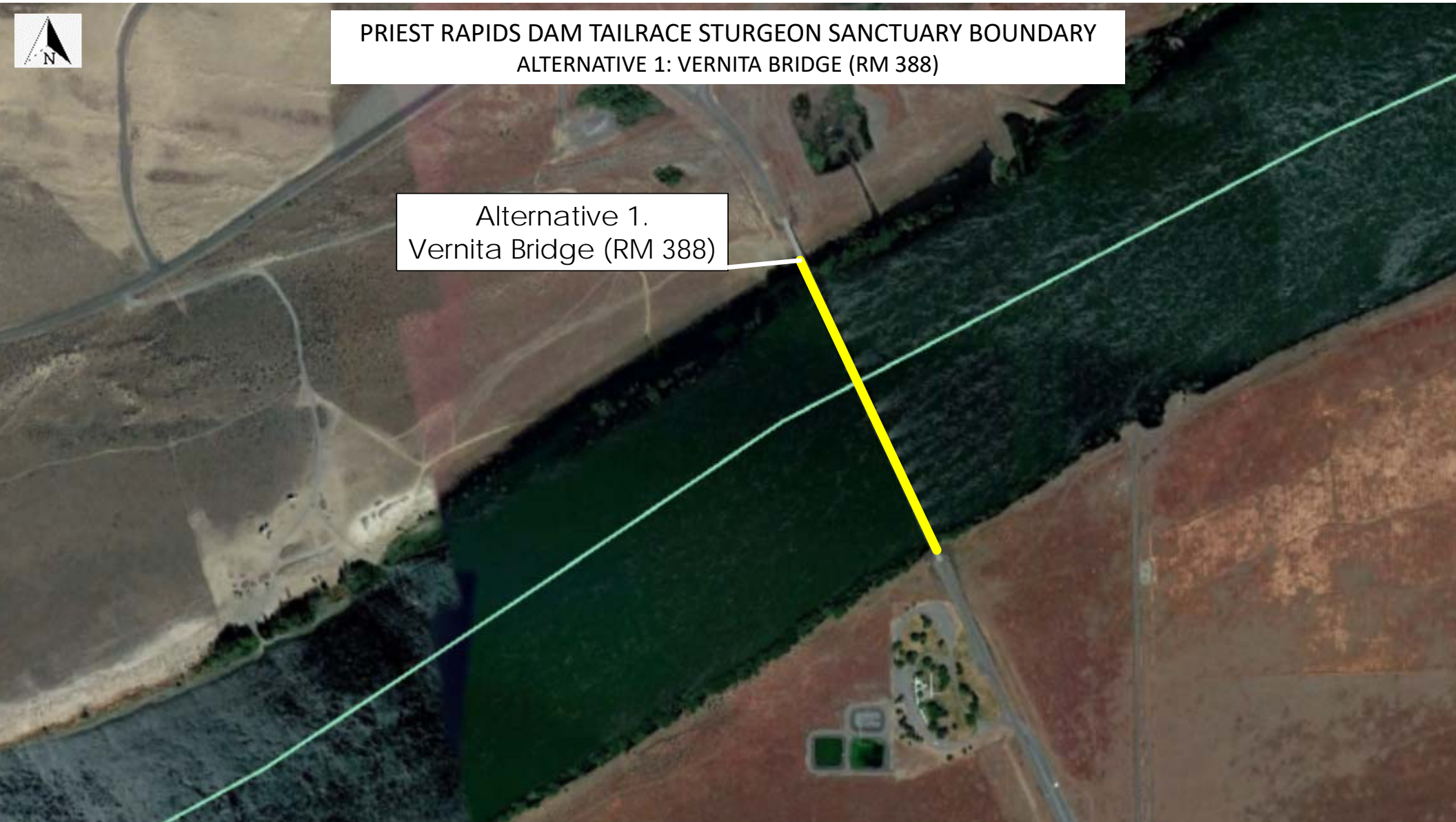
Current Boundary
(RM 395)





PRIEST RAPIDS DAM TAILRACE STURGEON SANCTUARY BOUNDARY
ALTERNATIVE 1: VERNITA BRIDGE (RM 388)

Alternative 1.
Vernita Bridge (RM 388)



Proposed Sturgeon Sanctuary Rule Changes

- All current sanctuaries: Extend time of spawning sanctuary through August 31.
 - Full closed period would be May 1-August 31.
 - Aligns with sanctuary rules below Bonneville Dam.
 - Minimizes handling stress in oversize sturgeon during post-spawn period.
- John Day Reservoir and Hanford Reach: Extend area of spawning sanctuary further downstream.
 - Improve protection of adult spawning sturgeon.

Proposed Changes to Retention Fisheries Upstream of McNary Dam

- Current Regulations
 - White sturgeon retention is allowed February 1–July 31 in the Columbia River and tributaries, from McNary Dam upstream to Priest Rapids Dam, and the Snake River, from the mouth to Ice Harbor (excluding sanctuary areas/periods).
- Proposed Changes
 - Catch and release fishing for white sturgeon will be allowed.
- Rationale:
 - Precautionary approach due to lack of recent available monitoring data, consistent with policy guidelines.

Chehalis River: Night Fishing

- Current Language:
 - “It is unlawful to fish for or possess sturgeon from freshwater, except the Chehalis River, from one hour after official sunset to one hour before official sunrise.”
- Proposed Language:
 - “(10) Statewide night closure for white sturgeon fishing.”
- Goals:
 - Improve monitoring and protection of the overall population.
 - Meet conservation objectives outlined in F&W Commission Policy.
 - Increase survival of immature fish to reach mature broodstock size.
 - Simplify statewide rules for sturgeon fishing.

Policy Guidance: C-3001

“Consideration of fisheries outside the Lower Columbia River must take into account the ability to monitor and manage those fisheries and be consistent with Lower Columbia River sturgeon conservation objectives.”



Catch-and-Release Regulations

- Current Language:
 - “(b) It is unlawful to fail to release undersize or oversize sturgeon immediately.”
- Proposed Language:
 - “(3) Any sturgeon that cannot lawfully be retained must be released immediately.”
- Goal:
 - To provide clarity of what fish must be released in all areas regardless of whether a slot-limit is in effect.

Oversize Sturgeon

- Proposed Language:
 - “(4) It is unlawful to totally or partially remove oversized sturgeon from the water. Oversized sturgeon are defined as: Any sturgeon larger than 55 inches fork length.”
- Rationale:
 - Aligns with definition for take of an illegal-size sturgeon in RCW 77.15.370.
- Goal:
 - To improve clarity on the definition of “Oversize Sturgeon” for anglers, fishery managers, and enforcement personnel.

Simplification of Sturgeon Regulations

- Simplification: Aligns with other state rule simplification standards
 - Directionality, rules read in the upstream direction.
 - Section breaks, aligns with GIS layers associated with the Fish Washington App.
 - Organization, improving readability and clarity.



Regulation Updates - Recap

1. Expand Columbia River sturgeon spawning sanctuaries
 - All closed through August 31
 - Expand area of sanctuaries below McNary Dam and Priest Rapids Dam
2. Close retention fisheries upstream of McNary Dam
 - Shift to catch & release fishing only
3. Close night fishing in the Chehalis River
4. Improve clarity on sturgeon catch-and-release regulations
5. Define oversize sturgeon (greater than 55" Fork Length)
6. Simplify and clarify statewide sturgeon regulations (WAC 220-316-010)

Public Meetings

- The Dalles, OR – May 22, 2019
 - Public Attendance: 11 members
 - No specific recommendations from the public. They appeared to understand the situation and there were no objections raised at this meeting regarding the proposed changes explained by staff.
- Kennewick, WA – June 11, 2019
 - Public Attendance: 26 people (mix of guides and recreational anglers)
 - Frustration over lack of recent data in McNary Pool.
 - Strong support for establishing a volunteer program with anglers and guides that would help the department gather the necessary data to better understand the population.
 - Concerned with the impact of tribal gillnet fisheries in John Day Pool.
 - Concerned about loss of oversize sturgeon catch-and-release fishing opportunity.
 - Recommendation for electronic catch-report-cards to improve catch monitoring.

Public Meetings

- Hermiston, OR – June 12 , 2019
 - Attendance: 11 participants (including 1 youth)
 - Concern that anglers are being “punished” for environmental conditions they have no control over.
 - Concerned with the impact of tribal gillnet fisheries.
 - Concern over broodstock collection efforts for hatchery supplementation upstream, and recommendations for a hatchery program in John Day.
- Montesano, WA – June 13, 2019
 - Attendance: 7 participants
 - Not in favor of closing night fishery, considers it lost opportunity.
 - Recommended listing White Sturgeon as endangered to improve managing the fishery.
 - Concern with the impact of tribal gillnet fisheries.
 - Petition Received – 129 signatures submitted opposing closing night fishing.

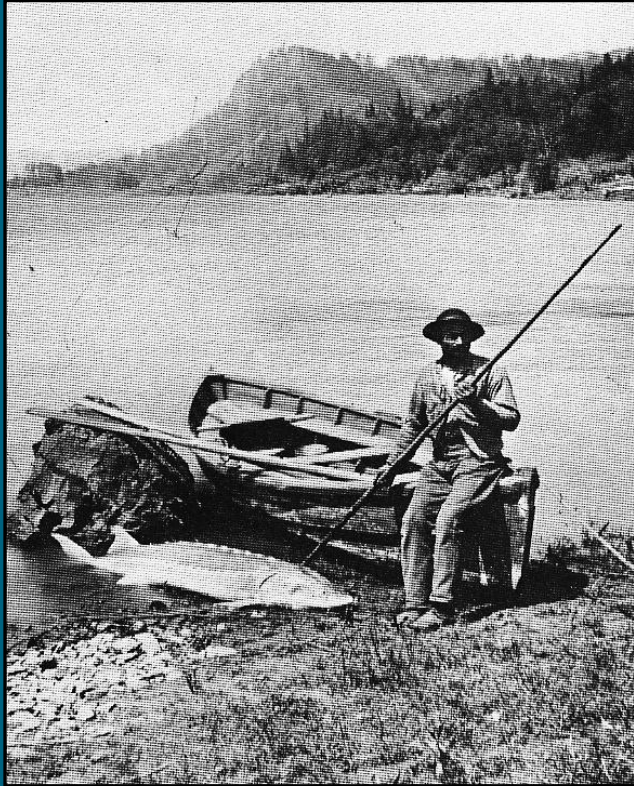
Submitted Comments

- 26 online comments received by Oct 1st (public comment open until Oct 17th)
 - 8 people gave comments not relevant to proposed rules.
- 18 people gave comments relevant to proposed rules:
 - 10 comments pertained to retention in McNary.
 - All against proposed rules to close to retention.
 - Most expressed frustration over lack of data/recent monitoring and requested additional monitoring to “prove” the fish are available.
 - Some expressed an interest in citizen science or voluntary monitoring programs.
 - 7 comments pertained to Chehalis River night closure
 - 6 against - Most expressed frustration over a loss of fishing opportunity and a need for additional retention.
 - 1 for - One believed we should cut back seasons to improve the population.
 - 2 comments pertained to sanctuary rules
 - 1 against – Did not believe in the low recruitment numbers in John Day and concern over hatchery broodstock program.
 - 1 for – Supported fishing during a period less stressful to fish health.
 - 1 general comment to support all of the proposed rules, with the request for additional days of retention on the lower river.

Next Steps

- Commission Briefing/Decision – December 13, 2019





Thank you



Questions?

