

1.0 Executive Summary

1.7 Conclusions

The intent of the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy C-3622 was to provide fishery managers with general guidance and management objectives for salmon management in Willapa Bay. The purpose of Policy C-3622 as stated is to achieve restoration of wild salmon and avoid ESA designation of any salmonid species within Willapa Bay. Within these conservation principles, the policy seeks to maintain or enhance the economic well-being and stability of the fishing industry, both recreational and commercial, through an appropriate distribution of fishing opportunities. Lastly, the Policy provides guidance to enhance transparency and information sharing with the public of salmon management in Willapa Bay along with improving the technical rigor of fishery management tools. These actions in total were meant to restore and maintain public trust and support of salmon management in Willapa Bay. To date, the implementation of Policy C-3622 has resulted in limited improvement in achieving the conservation objectives, expressed in terms of spawning escapement goals, but has failed to maintain economic viability of salmon fisheries within Willapa Bay and has not resulted in improved public trust and support for the Department's management of Willapa Bay salmon fisheries.

The implementation and performance of Policy C-3622 has produced mixed results. Pre-season fisheries planning has been shaped to meet outlined objectives in the Policy, and the Department has increased fisheries monitoring and the technical rigor of fishery management tools. The Department has taken steps to increase the transparency and information sharing with the public. Natural origin spawning escapements for Chinook salmon and chum have shown improvement over pre-policy levels. However, total terminal abundances of coho stocks have been severely depressed likely resulting from poor ocean conditions.

The commercial fishery has seen a dramatic reduction in catch and corresponding declines in ex-vessel value. This has contributed to a significant drop in effort. This trend has been exacerbated by the recent poor returns of coho as well as limitations to chum harvest (i.e. 10% impact rate cap). Also, the reduction in impact rate cap to 20% for wild Chinook salmon and returns from decreased hatchery Chinook salmon production will further limit commercial fishery opportunity and harvest in the coming years.

The effect on recreational fishing from the Policy's implementation has been less severe in phase one. The removal of commercial fishing opportunity in August, more robust bag limits, opening of historically closed freshwater areas, and implementation of the impact rate caps has resulted in increased harvest allocation proportion for recreational fisheries for Chinook salmon and coho. Changes in the hatchery production paradigm, both in numbers of fish released as well as location, will negatively impact marine recreational fisheries in future years. The management actions resulting from policy implementation has led to enforcement challenges in terms of disorderly fisheries in some freshwater areas.