

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 1a
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
January 26, 2021

<i>Fisheries under consideration:</i>	Non-treaty mainstem research-level commercial smelt fishery
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Detailed information on stock status and management guidelines for Columbia River fisheries are presented in Joint Staff Reports, which are produced annually and available on-line. The most recent report is the 2021 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 14, 2021) available at:

*<https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/management/columbia-river/reports> or
<https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM/jsmreports.asp>*

The 2021 Winter/Spring/Summer Staff Report is scheduled to be distributed prior to the February 16 Compact hearing which will address Select Area commercial spring Chinook and treaty fisheries.

RIVER CONDITIONS

- As of January 22, Columbia River discharge and turbidity at Bonneville Dam are similar to the five year averages for this time in January, but the current water temperature of 42° F is much warmer than the five year average of 38.4° F. The outflow is 174.5 kcfs (including 0.7 kcfs spill), which is slightly higher than the recent 5-year average of 167.1 kcfs. Visibility is 5.5 feet which is less than the five year average of 6.6 feet. The river stage at Vancouver is currently 4.89 feet and is forecasted to continue to recede throughout the week to 4.41 feet on January 25 (Action Stage is 15.0 feet and Flood Stage is 16.0 feet).

STOCK STATUS

Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)

- Columbia River smelt (Eulachon) return annually to the Columbia River to spawn in the mainstem and several of its tributaries downstream of Bonneville Dam. The fish typically begin to enter the Columbia River in December and peak tributary abundance is usually in February. Columbia River smelt are listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Eulachon abundance increased steadily from 2011 to 2014, reaching an estimated recent peak abundance of 16.6 million pounds in 2014, followed by a decline to 370,000 pounds in 2018. The 2019 return improved to an estimated 4.2 million pounds. Due to sampling constraints imposed by COVID-19, the 2020 run-size could not be determined directly from larval sampling but is estimated to be similar to the 2019 return at approximately 3.8 million pounds.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)

- Beginning in 2001, the Washington and Oregon Eulachon Management Plan (WOEMP) provided guidance in structuring smelt fisheries. The plan identified three levels of fisheries based on expected adult run size, juvenile production, and ocean productivity. Level 1 fisheries are the most conservative and Level 3 are the most liberal.
- In response to the ESA listing in 2010, the states discontinued commercial and recreational

smelt fisheries during 2011-2013. Since 2014, the states have worked closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to conduct research-level smelt fisheries that provide biological data and pounds per landing (CPUE) data so that smelt status and run strength can be better assessed.

2021 NON-TREATY FISHERIES

Zone 6 Recreational White Sturgeon Fisheries

- Under permanent regulations, the area from Bonneville Dam upstream to McNary Dam opens January 1 each year for white sturgeon retention. Since 2019, all three Zone 6 reservoirs (including Bonneville Pool) have been managed to remain open until pool-specific guidelines are met.
- Effort and catch rates were high as soon as the season started resulting in The Dalles Pool closing effective January 5 and Bonneville Pool effective January 8.
- Current recreational sturgeon guidelines and harvest estimates for 2021 Zone 6 recreational fisheries are summarized below:

2021 Zone 6 Recreational Sturgeon Guidelines and Harvest			
Pool	Guideline	Harvest (thru Jan 21)	% of guideline
Bonneville	500	655	131%
The Dalles	190	235	124%
John Day	105	48	46%

- Catches in John Day Pool have averaged about 16 fish per week. At this time, staff is unable to project when the guideline will be met. Staff will continue to monitor recreational harvest in John Day Pool and recommend a closure dates when appropriate.

2021 Columbia River Research-Level Commercial Smelt Fisheries

- During 2014–2018 and 2020, limited commercial research fisheries occurred primarily in February each year to help evaluate run strength and provide biological data. Fishing was limited to two days per week for 4-5 weeks, annually. Fishing hours were expanded from 7 to 12 hours per day in 2020 to allow fishers access to at least one fishable tide daily.
- Mainstem Columbia River commercial landings averaged approximately 9,200 pounds (range 110–18,560 pounds) annually during 2014-2018 and 2020, and averaged an estimated annual exploitation rate of 0.16% (range 0.03-0.31%).
- Abundance indicators for the 2021 smelt return suggest a stronger return of age-3 and age-4 smelt and a weaker return of all other age-classes. The 2021 run is expected to be moderate in size, similar in magnitude to the estimated returns of 3.8-4.2 million pounds the last two years.
- The Columbia River has consistently run above 40°F throughout January 2021, well within the preferred temperature range for Eulachon spawning runs. Eulachon have been detected in the Columbia River in recent days and provide supporting evidence for the run expectations.

- After discussion with NMFS, and considering the mutual desire to continue a conservative management approach to smelt fisheries, staff is recommending a research-level commercial fishery for 2021 that will continue to provide biological and run-strength data as well as some fishing opportunity.

<i>Recommendation: 2021 Mainstem Commercial Smelt Fishery</i>	
Season:	Mondays and Thursdays (5 AM to 5 PM) from January 28 through February 25.
Area:	Zones 1-3
Gear:	Gillnet only. Mesh size may not exceed two inches stretch measure. Nets may not exceed 1,500 feet in length along the cork line.
Allowable Sales:	Smelt
Misc. Regulations:	Multiple net rule in effect. Nets not specifically authorized for use in this fishery may be onboard the vessel if properly stored. A properly stored net is defined as a net on a drum that is fully covered by a tarp (canvas or plastic) and bound with a minimum of ten revolutions of rope with a diameter of 3/8 (0.375) inches or greater. 24-hour quick reporting required for Washington buyers, pursuant to WAC 220-352-315. Oregon buyers are required to electronically submit fish receiving tickets pursuant to OAR 635-006-0210. Electronic fish tickets must be submitted within 24 hours of closure of the fishing period, or within 24 hours of landing for fishing periods lasting more than 24 hours.

- The proposed fishery will continue the historic index of run strength (pounds/landing) and provide an indication of freshwater abundance to inform tributary recreational fishery management decisions, while providing a small harvest opportunity.
- The proposed season structure, being restricted to three zones and nine days, is similar to the conservative season structure used in 2014-2018 and 2020.
- The proposed hours match the longer duration periods requested by industry in 2020 to increase the likelihood that a suitable tide will occur within the fishing period.
- Landings will be sampled to collect biological data.

2021 Tributary Research-Level Recreational Smelt Fisheries

- During 2014-2017 and 2020, limited recreational fisheries occurred in the Cowlitz River. The fishery was restricted to 1-5 days annually (5-6 hours per day). The Sandy River was only open in 2014 and 2015 (2-4 days annually; 6 hours per day). Annual recreational harvest averaged 134,256 pounds (range 541–290,770) with an average exploitation rate of 1.50% (range 0.03-2.77%). There was no recreational fishing opportunity in 2018 and 2019.
- At this time, Washington and Oregon are not recommending recreational smelt fisheries in the Cowlitz or Sandy rivers. Washington and Oregon staff will determine if fisheries are warranted after additional freshwater abundance indicators become available.

2021 Tribal Ceremonial & Subsistence Smelt Fisheries

- Minor tribal fisheries may occur in the Cowlitz River for ceremonial and subsistence (C&S) use only, using traditional hand-held dip nets fished from shore.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- A Compact hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 16, 2021 via teleconference to consider Select Area (winter-summer) and treaty commercial fisheries.
- A Joint State hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 23, 2021 via teleconference to consider mainstem Columbia River recreational spring Chinook fisheries.