

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 5
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
February 24, 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 online. The most recent reports are the 2021 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 14, 2021) and the 2021 Spring/Summer salmon, steelhead, and other species report (February 4, 2021) available at:

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

RIVER CONDITIONS

- The current five-day average outflow at Bonneville Dam is 171 kcfs compared to a five-year average outflow of 209 kcfs. The current water temperature at Bonneville Dam as reported by USACE is 37.9 °F compared to a five-year average temperature of 39.0 °F. Visibility is 3.1 feet which is less than the five-year average of 7.5 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

2021 Columbia River Research-Level Commercial Smelt Fisheries

- 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.
- During the Compact Hearing on January 26, 2021, the states set nine commercial smelt fishing periods, running two days per week (Mondays and Thursdays) starting Thursday, January 28 and ending Thursday, February 25.
- Eulachon were detected in the Columbia River in early January. Upon opening the commercial fishery, smelt presence appear to decline and few fish were harvested during the first three weeks of the commercial retention period.
- Observations of smelt activity picked up over this past weekend (February 20-21) and commercial landings on Monday increased significantly. For 2021, a summary of commercial landings to date is reported in the table below.

Date	Pounds Landed	Average Pounds Per Delivery
1/28	59	30
2/1	0	0
2/4	5	5
2/8	100	100
2/11	22	11
2/15	0	0
2/18	6	6
2/22	4,247	708
Total Landings	4,439	

- Due to the apparent increase in abundance, staff is recommending an extension to the research-level commercial fishery. The extension would maintain the conservative approach used in the 2021 smelt fishery and would continue to provide biological and run-strength data as well as some fishing opportunity.

Recommendation: 2021 Mainstem Commercial Smelt Fishery

Season:	Mondays and Thursdays (5 AM to 5 PM) from March 1 through March 11 (4 periods)
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 days per week and hours match the earlier 2021 season structure,
- 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 and following discussions with county public health officials regarding coronavirus concerns.

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

- The treaty tribes will continue to monitor catches in their winter gillnet fisheries and may request a Compact hearing on Tuesday March 9, 2021 to consider additional periods.