

2021 Willapa Bay North of Falcon Public Meeting
Via Zoom Platform
April 5, 2021 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Marlene Wagner –

- Welcome opening statements, call logistics and ground rules
- PowerPoint presentation
 - NOF Process overview
 - Model fisheries to determine which stocks are the constraints, harvestable surplus, and predict catch
 - Negotiate with treaty tribes depending on area
 - Public meeting schedule
 - April 5 – Willapa Bay Fisheries Discussion
 - April 6 – Grays Harbor fisheries discussion
 - April 6-9, 12-15 – PFMC
 - All meetings are online and documents for this meeting are also on the WDFW website

Mark Baltzell takes over presentation

- 2021 PFMC Ocean Alternatives for Chinook and Coho
 - State and tribal on-going discussions have been taking place for weeks. We still have a long way before things are finalized at the end of PFMC.
 - There is a zero-fishing option for both chinook and coho for consideration. We have several poor returns expected. This would have a downstream affect to inside fisheries. We wouldn't likely want to start on July 1, concerned with effort shifts and LCN's in Columbia River.
- 2021 Management Objectives
 - Chinook
 - Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) adopted interim guidance on March 12, 2021 for Willapa Bay
 - Actively manage not to exceed 20% natural origin Chinook impact rate in Willapa and Naselle rivers
 - Suspend time and area restrictions for comm fisheries south of commercial area 2T
 - Determine daily limits for recreational fisheries for Chinook and coho
 - Continue to development and implementation of test fisheries and in-season update models
 - Coho
 - Achieve aggregate spawner goal for natural origin coho
 - Prioritize commercial fishing opportunities Sept 16 – Oct 14
 - Provide recreational fishing opportunities
 - Chum
 - Achieve aggregate spawner goal for naturally spawning chum
 - Provide commercial fishing opportunities
 - Provide recreational fishing opportunities

Jody Pope – takes over presentation:

- Prior to this meeting today, we found a calculation error in the modeling for the recreational harvest rates. The effects equate to a decrease in chinook natural origin impacts and an increase in natural origin coho escapement.
- We will fix the error and send out the fishery proposals we received again
- We are looking to set another meeting next week and will let everyone know when that date is determined.
- Walked through Willapa chart of areas and fisheries
- TAMM – Terminal Area Management Model used to model Willapa Bay fisheries
 - Model A is our starting model, NALF (New Abundances, Last year's Fisheries)
 - Management objectives met for all species
 - All models B – D has the same recreational fisheries package as Model A
 - 2 fish daily limit for recreational fisheries
 - Model B – commercial proposal #1
 - Meets management objectives for all species
 - 20 days of commercial fishing,
 - Tangle nets weeks 34 – 38 south of Leadbetter point in 2N and 2M
 - Model D- Commercial proposal #2
 - Management objectives met for all species
 - 22 days of commercial fishing
 - Tangle nets weeks 34 – 38 south of Leadbetter
 - Model C – Staff recommendation to encourage conversation
 - Management objectives met for all species
 - 23 days of commercial fishing
 - No fishing in week 34 but tangle nets in weeks 35 - 38
 - Model E
 - Management objectives met for all species
 - 11 days of commercial fishing
 - No 2T fishing
 - No fishing in 2N, 2M and 2U until October 1
 - Increases daily limit on the Nemah from 2 to 3 fish
 - Open Naselle section below weir from Hwy 4 to attraction channel starting Aug 16 instead of Oct 16

Mark Baltzell –We are here to take comments regarding these proposals or other proposals for staff to consider.

Public comment

Ross Barkhurst

- Correction for Model E, which was my proposal – the increase bag limit in Nemah has strings attached. Should be 3 adult hatchery chinook with only one being a hen.
- There were about 8000 males surplus last year

Eric Williamson

- For systems with closures especially North River, it concerns him when there is ample commercial opportunity but freshwater systems get closed. It's a lightly fished river. An outright closure is troubling.
- I would appreciate you reconsidering some opener with maybe some restrictions

Tim Hamilton

- We have gradually eliminated the freshwater fisheries to the point where there is little opportunity.
- Snagging problem in Naselle River
- People want to close the river due to garbage
- You wanted it closed because you couldn't put the impacts on the hatchery fish and still give opportunity to the recreational fishers.
- You've set seasons where you are killing 33% of the escapement
- In-season management will equal to closures of freshwater systems not the commercial or marine recreational fisheries
- Go back to the style when you had transparency, so we, the public, can appeal to a higher authority

Lance Gray

- Question: As we have not made natural coho escapement for the last five years, how do we justify a 2 fish wild coho take in August 1 when coho aren't in the bay in August? Are these coming from the ocean? Maybe by Sept 1 we could allow that once they have entered our systems.

James Losee – the release mortality associated with coho in the marine area is extremely high.

Lance G. – if it's not allowed in the ocean or even Grays Harbor, why can we keep wild coho in this marine area when no one else is keeping them?

Ross Barkhurst

- Ocean coho have a terrible mortality rate
- Concerned with Models A – D – if we do not improve these models and fisheries, there will not be fish for later generations

Mark Baltzell – We received guidance to stay within certain management objectives to appeal to all sectors. We do get in-season information to help guide in-season decisions or adjustments

Ross B. – Harvestable fish in the river means that if we are going to be above goal, then it's ok to kill down to the goal. I don't think there are extra wild fish anywhere.

Mark B. – We do accept certain level of impacts to prosecute fisheries where there are species of concern

Ross B. – I don't see things being recovered in Puget Sound at all.

Mark B. – Guidance was to go up to 20% but that does not mean we need to go all the way there. The guidance limits us to not to exceed 20%.

Ross B. – Does this guidance negate having an upward trajectory

Mark B. – We can't look at each year individually. We must look over time.

Ross B. – We used AHA that projected a trajectory. Don't think we will make it with this approach. I do not see Models A – D having an upward trajectory to recovery. Do you plan to do an AHA model?

Mark B. – We are here to talk about this year's fisheries package but do not believe running an AHA model is pertinent to this year's fishery discussion.

Greg McMillan

- Why do none of the models run up to 20%?
- Our fishery is always the easiest to take days away. Set the fishery at 20% then take days away in-season when appropriate.

Mark Baltzell – We hit coho objective before we get to the other objectives for Chinook.

Jody Pope – We have modeled what the public has proposed to the agency. We are not altering the proposals.

Francis Estalilla

- Supports Model E – likes the idea of 3 fish bag but only 1 hen Chinook. That will help use up surplus males and help with eggtake at the hatchery
- Coho is the limiting stock in this case

Tim Hamilton

- The history shows that the coho in the bay go through a lethargic condition, we have dead fish everywhere. Selective fishing doesn't work in marine waters. You end up killing a lot of wild fish before you get to the 2-hatchery fish. That is what he remembers of why the wild coho can be retained in the marine area.
- Fairness has not been discussed.
- In-season management history – you need to have standards/triggers. Also, would you identify the criteria that you will use to have in-season management.
- Coho will be a problem. Model C pushes the chinook impacts right to the wire and natural origin coho to escapement. This will result in failure.

Lance Gray

- Grandchildren may not see fish unless we continue to raise more fish. WB is not a Chinook bay.
- Thought the impact rate was all around 11 % at the north end and 18% at the south end in the commercial proposals
- Doesn't seem that anyone is happy unless commercial fishery doesn't fish.
- No one has added zero fishing to see where it goes. Argument is always over allocation.
- Early fish in the early part of the season are for harvest. These surpluses are killing things.

Andy Mitby

- Why don't we have the zero option if we really want to save these fish to get those few additional fish?
- Are we going to use these fish to enhance fisheries where we can benefit everyone? That was the FWC guidance
- We are supposed to maximize to get viable fisheries for both sectors.
- We are supposed to harvest excess hatchery fish
- Did anyone look at a 6-hour opener compared to a 12-hour openers?

Mark B. – Staff have been discussing that internally. We haven't landed on anything specifically

James Losee – With a net fishery, the harvest rate doesn't necessarily get cut in half. We are interested in understanding what a fishery can do in concept for modeling purposes but need to move cautiously.

Andy M – We don't know but if you don't try it we won't know. 6 hours is easier to monitor and track, but the con is that sometimes we give stuff up but don't get it back. Maybe for the chinook fishery try it once or twice, maybe it's something we can work with in the future.

Cynthia Pierce

- Property owners on the Naselle River – How would people feel if people dropped trash on your front porch?
- Need to consider the people who own property along the river.
- Getting mixed messages on water line. There is a lot of false information out there.
- These are issues that the agency needs to address
- There are no signs posted stating that fishing is closed.
- There will be tons of people on the river if it opens in August. She does not support this
- Wants the water line defined properly
- Open to allowing fishing but not open to the trespassing

James Losee –you’ve identified with communication gaps with anglers or enforcement issues, we need to touch base on that.

Greg McMillan

- There is plenty of time to adjust if we are only fishing 1-3 days a week – we have a lot of active monitoring. Wish the agency would have some consideration in that.
- Agree with Cindy Pierce relative to trespassing on Naselle River. It’s bad and needs to be addressed. It should remain closed until October 16 from Hwy 4 bridge to hatchery.

Mark B. – Want to be thoughtful about the proposal and potential impacts. We want to make sure we have the right approach.

Greg M. – The modeling is with a big mesh with a full fleet. The data is not completely accurate for what it is now because using the tangle net gear has less effort. We have proposed things.

James Losee – we feel strong about the modeling work we have done in the last several years. That is the problem we are having with moving from 12 to 6-hour fisheries, we have noticed in other tribal fisheries you have an increase in total number of fish harvest due to effort increase and efficiency during those 6 hours.

Greg M. – We have adjusted data from Labor Day and after but before labor day, we just don’t have data anymore since it’s been a while since we fished that timeframe. It’s taken a long time to get the data that we currently have where it represents what we are fishing post Labor Day.

Lance Gray

- If we don’t say it out loud at these public meetings, the agency gets scrutinized that the agency is doing something behind closed doors. Until we go fishing, you just don’t know what will happen.
- We want a fishery that survives. We are trying to figure out ways to harvest fish, which is what you guys have asked us to do. If we catch a bunch of natural fish, you will take days away from our fishery. If we get close to our impacts, days get removed. It’s happened for years.
- It’s frustrating when an angler tells you they have as much right to be there as you, the landowner. It’s important to work this out now before it’s all lost. The landowners will close access. There are a lot more bad fishermen now than before.

James Losee – We want to see what the math looks like but want to see how to put it in the model

Lance G – We need to figure out these runs because we are getting a lot more fish back than we get credit for.

James Losee – Tracking mark rates between fisheries and spawner surveys. We are working on it.

Ross Barkhurst

- Regarding the comment about 11% wild chinook on Willapa River in the models, killed more fish than the Naselle River.

Tim Hamilton

- There are two zones: hatchery and gravel. Natural fish are mixed with hatchery runs.
- We are so far out of whack in the hatchery production out of Naselle hatchery. If we can’t restore some number of natural spawners, then it reduces hatchery production.
- Bring any study where it says you can bring in 5 million compared to 33% of escapement goal for natural fish. Drags down natural returners.
- With 5 million fish, now you need to catch them.

Greg McMillan

- The last two comments confuse him. Did they suggest that we are under the federal management under ESA?
- I didn't believe that Ron Warren was behind the 5 million Chinook in Naselle. Thought that came from SRKW.

Mark B. – Not aware of any ESA concerns on the federal level

Andy Mitby

- You mentioned the error earlier. How significant is the error?

Mark B - It's fairly insignificant. Small calculation error in daily limit in recreational fisheries. It means a little less catch and impacts.

Andy M – We aren't asking for the 6-hour days to exceed the 20% objective. We are trying to stay within the model and figure out a way to monitor the fishery. The previous data is nighttime fishing with big mesh but now we are proposing tangle net in the day light. This won't be as effective and effort will be lower.

Greg King

- Guidance is to provide valuable fisheries
- The policy is a disaster. These small communities depend on these fisheries both commercial and recreational.
- It went sideways with the reduction of chinook production at Forks Creek.
- This bay does not have any ESA review going on.
- No such thing as a wild fish in Willapa
- What is the agency's idea of not keeping a hen? Novice fisherman doesn't know the difference. I think it will be a problem. How do you do that?
- Things are always a fight and we need to start working together. Model things at 20% following commission guidance.
- There will be a decision on April 9 on HSRG by the commission
- Produce more fish at Forks.

Mark Baltzell –

- We will be doing some check-in daily from PFMC at 8 am. Those details will be on the website. Primarily, it's been Puget Sound oriented but if you have other questions, we could add that.
- Jody Pope said we will send out the model proposals with the error corrected.
- Next week, we will be scheduling another meeting. We will let you know when that will happen and a date set.

Francis Estalilla

- Sorting through hens is easy. If there is any enforcement issue, another way to check is to slice it open since it's already dead since it was retained. If it is a hen, then a ticket can be issued.

Tim Hamilton

- Clarification on ESA status – The purpose in the policy was to restore natural origin spawners and avoid ESA designation. Willapa Chinook are in coastal ESU and all are considered. Coho is different.
- At this point in time, NOAA is not anticipating a review for ESA status, but it's important to note that any citizen has to file a petition and document excessive hatchery strays and failure for natural origin spawning escapement goals. NOAA shall start a review.

- A working policy is the only way to convince NOAA that we are fixing the problem. How does anyone have any faith in these numbers when we keep changing how we use the policy?

Lance Gray

- Need a policy that works for everyone instead of a policy that eliminates one sector. At this point in time, that seems impossible.
- Test fishery – Does this fall into NOF or later? Don't want this to come up later.

James Losee – We are talking about an in-season update tool to update the forecast relative to Chinook. We explored ideas last year. We are good at predicting the hatchery runsize but not as much the natural runsize. We know we need a fishery that takes place in the same time in the same manner for multiple years in a row. If we can design a commercial fishery within objectives that we can depend on for multiple years, we can talk about it.

Lance G. – We do lot of test fishing in Columbia River to figure out when we had fewer natural fish present. We have done lot of things outside the policy. It would be nice to look at what we think we are going to impact. We need to look at catch rates. We can use the commercial fishery to figure out how many natural fish we have.

Mark Baltzell –

- Want to recognize Leah Snyder for the Zoom help, and Jody, Marlene, Barb, and Lyle for all their work.
- We always appreciate the comments and the respect shown tonight.
- We Invite everyone to join us as we move through PFMC.
- Staff have committed to sending out the fishery proposals with the error corrected
- We will get information out to you for a meeting next week.

Meeting ended at 8 p.m.