

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

PROPOSED POLICY DECISION

POLICY TITLE: Non-native game fish and fisheries

POLICY NUMBER: C-

Cancels or
Supersedes: NA – requested policy is new

Effective Date: TBD

Termination Date (if applicable):

See Also: C-3010, POL 5004, POL 5408
State Wildlife Action Plan,
Priority Habitat Species

Approved _____ [date]

By: _____
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to ensure the management of non-native game fish is aligned with the agency’s mandate under RCW 77.04.012. RCW 77.04.012 requires WDFW to “preserve, protect, perpetuate and manage food fish, game fish, and shellfish in state waters...” and “maintain the economic well-being and stability of the fishing industry in the state.” This policy provides guidance on where, when and how to manage non-native game fish in a manner that protects and conserves native species, maximizes recreational opportunities on native and non-native food fish and game fish, and supports the fishing industry and the local and state economy.

In 1996 the Washington State Legislature took action through RCW 77.44.010, directing the WDFW to create a warm water gamefish enhancement program “designed to increase the opportunities to fish for and catch warm water game fish including: Largemouth black bass, smallmouth black bass, channel catfish, black crappie, white crappie, walleye, and tiger musky.” The goals of this program as outlined in RCW 77.44.040 state that the “Improvement of warm water fishing shall be coordinated with the protection and conservation of cold water fish populations. This shall be accomplished by carefully designing the warm water projects to have minimal adverse effects upon the cold water fish populations.” With the creation of this enhancement program, the Legislature and the Fish & Wildlife Commission acknowledged that non-native game fish provide popular recreational fisheries (both native and non-native game-fish species are identified in Appendix A). To support the management of these fisheries, WDFW annually conducts a survey to determine the allocation of dedicated funds. From 2009 – 2021, this survey has shown that an average of 37% of anglers have fished for one of eight non-native game fish species. This percentage has been increasing from 35% in 2009 to 46% in 2021.

During the 2019 legislative session, the Washington State Legislature passed House Bill 1579 which directed the Fish and Wildlife Commission to implement Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force recommendations and reduce predation by non-native game fish on salmonids. To implement this law the Commission undertook rule-making actions to eliminate daily bag limits for certain non-native game fish species. What follows is the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission's guidance to WDFW to address these mandates.

Intent

The intent of this policy is to provide clear and concise context and guidance as to where, when, and how WDFW may manage non-native game fish to provide recreational opportunity. This policy also recognizes that non-native game fish species play an important role in Washington's diverse recreational fishing landscape, generating hundreds of thousands of angler trips annually, and contributing millions to local and state economies. This policy does not preclude the use of non-native game fish to establish, maintain, or enhance recreational fishing. In establishing this policy for statewide application, the Fish and Wildlife Commission provides guidance to address the interests of recreational anglers to fish for non-native game fish species while meeting conservation and recovery of native species as also mandated by the Washington State legislature.

Policy Guidelines

Some non-native game fish species may pose a threat to populations of native species by depredating, competing, altering habitats, and introducing diseases. In some locations, non-native fish species can enhance native ecosystems, provide more balance to the food web, and help rebuild fisheries. In recent years, non-native game fish and their potential threats to native species have been managed through harvest rules in a majority of anadromous waters. This approach has created concerns among anglers about impacts to the quality and quantity of recreational fisheries targeting non-native game fish. Conservation and recovery of native species is WDFW's highest priority; consistent with this priority the following guidelines will be used to manage fisheries for non-native game fish that help meet the needs and interests of non-native game fish anglers where appropriate.

This policy will:

- support conservation and recovery of native species;
- utilize best available science related to non-native game fish species impacts on native species of concern – particularly vulnerable salmonids - to systematically craft fisheries to meet the interests of non-native game fish anglers where appropriate;
- be consistent with state laws, rules, commission policies, and native species conservation plans;
- use precautionary approaches to manage non-native game fish fisheries within the WDFW's available budget.

Definitions

As applied in the context of this policy:

- **Actively manage:** Direct action by WDFW on a specific water body where staff may enhance, control, or suppress fish species.
- **Anadromous:** The life history strategy of certain fish (e.g., salmon) where rearing occurs in saltwater and spawning occurs in freshwater.
- **Anadromous Waters:** For rivers and streams, where anadromous fish can access at any life stage. For lakes, ponds, and reservoirs, where anadromous fish are documented to be present.
- **Control:** To physically remove, limit movement, and/or use biological mechanisms on a targeted fish species via mechanical and/or chemical methods, habitat modification, or fishing regulations.
- **Illegal Introduction:** An aquatic species that has been moved from one water body to another water of the state without the express consent of the WDFW.
- **Limited Connectivity:** Non-direct and convoluted downstream connection with anadromous waters. Upstream migration by native anadromous fish and/or native species of concern is either non-existent or significantly restricted by physical and/or biological characteristics.
- **Native Species of Concern:** Fish and wildlife species endemic to Washington state that are listed in the [State Wildlife Action Plan](#), the [Priority Habitats and Species](#) list, and those listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act.
- **Native game fish:** Fish species endemic to Washington state and defined in [RCW 77.08.020](#) and [WAC 220-300-380](#). See Appendix A .
- **Non-native game fish:** Fish species not endemic to Washington state and defined in [RCW 77.08.020](#) and [WAC 220-300-380](#). See Appendix A.
- **Protect:** Actions that protect, preserve, or conserve native anadromous fish species and/or native species of concern. Actions may include targeting non-native game fish.
- **Significant:** For the purposes of this policy, significant is not a specific and permanent number, rate, and/or range, but something sufficiently great or important to be worthy of attention. However, significance must be measured via direct assessment, peer reviewed, and published.
- **Passively manage:** Indirect intervention by WDFW on a specific water body where staff manipulate fish species primarily through fishing regulations.

Population Management

Rivers, Streams, and Beaver Ponds

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW will prioritize management of native anadromous fish, and may secondarily manage (actively or passively) for non-native game fish species when their impacts to anadromous fish are directly assessed with best available science, are not significant, and are consistent with anadromous fish management and recovery.
Option B:	WDFW will only engage in management of native anadromous fish.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW will prioritize management of native species of concern, and may secondarily manage (actively or passively) for non-native game fish species when their impacts to native species of concern are directly assessed with best available science, are not significant, and are consistent with native fish management and recovery.
Option B:	WDFW will only engage in management of native fish species of concern.

Without Native Anadromous Fish or Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may prioritize management of non-native game fish species.
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Lakes, Ponds, and Reservoirs

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW will prioritize management of native anadromous fish and may actively manage for non-native game fish species.
Option B:	WDFW will prioritize management of native anadromous fish, and may secondarily manage (actively or passively) for non-native game fish species when their impacts to anadromous fish are directly assessed with best available science and are not significant, and are consistent with anadromous fish management and recovery.
Option C:	WDFW will only engage in management of anadromous fish.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW will prioritize management of native species of concern and may secondarily manage (actively or passively) for non-native game fish species.
Option B:	WDFW will prioritize management of native species of concern and may secondarily manage (actively or passively) for non-native game fish species when their impacts to native species of concern are directly assessed with best available science, are not significant, and are consistent with native fish management and recovery.
Option C:	WDFW will only engage in management of native species of concern.

With Limited or no Connectivity to anadromous waters, or waters with no anadromy

Option A:	WDFW may prioritize management for non-native and/or native game fish species.
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Fishing Regulations

Rivers, Streams, and Beaver Ponds

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW may promulgate rules for non-native game fish that reduce
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	impacts to native anadromous fish. This may include changes to daily bag limits, size restrictions and/or seasons. Utilizing best available science, develop rules based on empirical estimates of the effects of proposed rules on native anadromous fish and non-native game fish.
Option B:	WDFW will promulgate rules for non-native game fish that reduce impacts to native anadromous fish. This may include changes to daily bag limits, size restrictions and/or seasons. Utilizing best available science, develop rules based on empirical estimates of the effects of proposed rules on native anadromous fish and non-native game fish.
Option C:	WDFW will promulgate rules for non-native game fish that protect native anadromous fish. The intent of these rules is suppression of targeted non-native game fish populations.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may promulgate rules for non-native game fish that reduce impacts to native species of concern fish. This may include changes to daily bag limits, size restrictions and/or seasons. Utilizing best available science, develop rules based on empirical estimates of the effects of proposed rules on native species of concern and non-native game fish.
Option B:	WDFW will promulgate rules for non-native game fish that reduce impacts to native species of concern. This may include changes to daily bag limits, size restrictions and/or seasons. Utilizing best available science, develop rules based on empirical estimates of the effects of proposed rules on native species of concern and non-native game fish.
Option C:	WDFW will promulgate rules for non-native game fish that protect native species of concern. The intent of these rules is suppression of targeted non-native game fish populations.

Without Native Anadromous Fish or Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may promulgate rules for non-native game fish that protect native and/or non-native game fish. Develop rules designed to provide quality fishing for native and/or non-native game fish.
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Lakes, Ponds, and Reservoirs

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW may promulgate rules for non-native game fish that reduce impacts to native anadromous fish. This may include changes to daily bag limits, size restrictions and/or seasons. Utilizing best available science, develop rules based on empirical estimates of the effects of proposed rules on native anadromous fish and non-native game fish.
Option B:	WDFW will promulgate rules for non-native game fish that reduce impacts to native anadromous fish. This may include changes to daily bag limits, size restrictions and/or seasons. Utilizing best available

	science, develop rules based on empirical estimates of the effects of proposed regulations on native anadromous fish and non-native game fish.
Option C:	WDFW will promulgate rules for non-native game fish that protect native anadromous fish. The intent of these rules is suppression of the target non-native game fish populations.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may promulgate rules for non-native game fish that reduce impacts to native species of concern. This may include changes to daily bag limits, size restrictions and/or seasons. Utilizing best available science, develop rules based on empirical estimates of the effects of proposed regulations on native species of concern and non-native game fish.
Option B:	WDFW will promulgate rules for non-native game fish that reduce impacts to native species of concern. This may include changes to daily bag limits, size restrictions and/or seasons. Utilizing best available science, develop rules based on empirical estimates of the effects of proposed regulations on native species of concern and non-native game fish.
Option C:	WDFW will promulgate rules for non-native game fish that protect native species of concern. Intent of these rules is suppression of target non-native game fish populations.

With Limited or no Connectivity to anadromous waters, or waters with no anadromy

Option A:	WDFW may promulgate rules for non-native game fish that protect native and/or non-native game fish. Develop rules designed to provide quality fishing for native and/or non-native game fish.
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Introduction/Supplementation/Translocation

Rivers, Streams, and Beaver Ponds

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW may introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native game fish to create, improve or maintain recreational fishing opportunity, if actions are approved following environmental review (e.g., SEPA, NEPA).
Option B:	WDFW will not introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native game fish.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native game fish to create, improve or maintain recreational fishing opportunity, if
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	approved following environmental review (e.g., SEPA, NEPA).
Option B:	WDFW will not introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native game fish .

Without Native Anadromous Fish or Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native game fish to create, improve or maintain recreational fishing opportunity, if approved following environmental review (e.g., SEPA, NEPA).
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Lakes, Ponds, and Reservoirs

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW may introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native to create, improve or maintain recreational fishing opportunity, game fish if approved following environmental review (e.g., SEPA, NEPA). This would include use of non-native trout species in high lakes, or Tiger Muskie in reservoirs.
Option B:	WDFW will not introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native game fish.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native game fish to create, improve or maintain recreational fishing opportunity, if approved following environmental review process (e.g., SEPA, NEPA). This would include use of non-native trout species in high lakes, or Tiger Muskie in reservoirs).
Option B:	WDFW will not introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native game fish.

With Limited or no Connectivity to anadromous waters, or waters with no anadromy

Option A:	WDFW may introduce, translocate, or supplement non-native game fish to create, improve or maintain recreational fishing opportunity, if approved following environmental review process (e.g., SEPA, NEPA). This would include use of non-native trout species in high lakes, or Tiger Muskie in reservoirs.
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Habitat

Rivers, Streams, and Beaver Ponds

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW will provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects that benefit native anadromous fish and/or non-native game fish. For example, projects like fish passage, or large woody debris placement can increase habitat availability and benefit
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	both native and non-native fish.
Option B:	WDFW will provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects that benefit native anadromous fish and/or non-native game fish, where impact of the project to anadromous fish is not significant. For example, projects like fish passage, or large woody debris placement can increase habitat availability and benefit both native and non-native fish.
Option C:	WDFW will provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects that only benefit native game fish, native anadromous fish, or species of concern. For example, projects like fish passage, or large woody debris placement can increase habitat availability and benefit both native and non-native fish.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects to benefit native species of concern and/or non-native game fish. For example, projects like fish passage, or large woody debris placement can increase habitat availability and benefit both native and non-native fish.
Option B:	WDFW may provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects to benefit native species of concern and/or non-native game fish, where impact of the project to native species of concern is not significant. For example, projects like fish passage, or large woody debris placement can increase habitat availability and benefit both native and non-native fish.
Option C:	WDFW will provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects that only benefit native game fish, native anadromous fish, or species of concern. For example, projects like fish passage, or large woody debris placement can increase habitat availability and benefit both native and non-native fish.

Without Native Anadromous Fish or Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects to benefit game fish. For example, projects like fish passage, or large woody debris placement can increase habitat availability and benefit both native and non-native fish.
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Lakes, Ponds, and Reservoirs

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW will provide technical assistance for-habitat enhancement or restoration projects that benefit native anadromous fish and/or non-native game fish. For example, projects like shoreline bulkhead removal and native vegetation planting can provide habitat benefits for both native and non-native fish.
Option B:	WDFW will provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or

	restoration projects that benefit native anadromous fish and/or non-native game fish, where impact of the project to anadromous fish is not significant. For example, projects like shoreline bulkhead removal and native vegetation planting can provide habitat benefits for both native and non-native fish.
Option C:	WDFW will provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects that only benefit native game fish, native anadromous fish, or species of concern. For example, projects like shoreline bulkhead removal and native vegetation planting can provide habitat benefits for both native and non-native fish.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects to benefit native species of concern and/or non-native game fish. For example, projects like shoreline bulkhead removal and native vegetation planting can provide habitat benefits for both native and non-native fish.
Option B:	WDFW may provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects to benefit native species of concern and/or non-native game fish, where impact of the project to native species of concern is not significant. For example, projects like shoreline bulkhead removal and native vegetation planting can provide habitat benefits for both native and non-native fish.
Option C:	WDFW will provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects that only benefit native game fish, native anadromous fish or species of concern. For example, projects like shoreline bulkhead removal and native vegetation planting can provide habitat benefits for both native and non-native fish.

With Limited or no Connectivity to anadromous waters, or waters with no anadromy

Option A:	WDFW may provide technical assistance for habitat enhancement or restoration projects to benefit non-native game fish where appropriate. For example, projects like shoreline bulkhead removal and native vegetation planting can provide habitat benefits for both native and non-native fish.
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Illegal Introduction

Rivers, Streams, and Beaver Ponds

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW may utilize passive management techniques to control the illegal introduction of non-native game fish populations. This may include actions like, but not limited to, season or harvest regulations, habitat/flow modifications, etc.
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Option B:	WDFW may actively or passively manage illegally introduced non-native game fish to remove them or control their expansion. This may include actions like, but not limited to, netting, electrofishing, chemical, or other active removal techniques.
Option C:	WDFW will actively or passively manage to control the establishment or expansion of non-native game fish.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may utilize passive management techniques to control the illegal introduction of non-native game fish populations. This may include actions like, but not limited to, season or harvest regulations, habitat/flow modifications, etc.
Option B:	WDFW may actively or passively manage illegally introduced non-native game fish to remove them or control their expansion. This may include actions like, but not limited to, netting, electrofishing, chemical, or other active removal techniques.
Option C:	WDFW will actively or passively manage to control the establishment or expansion of non-native game fish.

Without Native Anadromous Fish or Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may utilize passive management techniques to control the illegal introduction of non-native game fish populations. This may include actions like, but not limited to, season or harvest regulations, habitat/flow modifications, etc.
Option B:	WDFW may actively or passively manage illegally introduced non-native game fish to remove them or control their expansion. This may include actions like, but not limited to, netting, electrofishing, chemical, or other active removal techniques.

Lakes, Ponds, and Reservoirs

With Native Anadromous Fish

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Option C:	WDFW will actively or passively control the establishment or expansion of non-native game fish.

With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may utilize passive management techniques to control the
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Targeted Control

Rivers, Streams, and Beaver Ponds

With Native Anadromous Fish

Option A:	WDFW may perform localized control of non-native game fish where appropriate to meet conservation and/or fish management objectives. This may include actions like, but not limited to, netting, electrofishing, chemical, incentivized fisheries, or other active removal techniques.
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With Native Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may perform localized control of non-native game fish where appropriate to meet conservation and/or fish management objectives. This may include actions like, but not limited to, netting, electrofishing, chemical, incentivized fisheries, or other active removal techniques.
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Without Native Anadromous Fish or Species of Concern

Option A:	WDFW may perform localized control of non-native game fish where appropriate to meet conservation and/or fish management objectives. This may include actions like, but not limited to, netting, electrofishing, chemical, incentivized fisheries, or other active removal techniques.
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Lakes, Ponds, and Reservoirs

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Appendix A. List of both native and non-native game fish species found in Washington, as recorded in [RCW 77.08.020](#) or [WAC 220-300-380](#). Note that this table contains species listed as game fish as of the writing of this policy, for a more up to date list consult the aforementioned RCW and WAC.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Native
<i>Ambloplites rupestris</i>	Rock Bass	No
<i>Ameiurus melas</i>	Black Bullhead	No
<i>Ameiurus natalis</i>	Yellow Bullhead	No
<i>Ameiurus nebulosus</i>	Brown Bullhead	No
<i>Coregonus clupeaformis</i>	Lake Whitefish	No
<i>Ctenopharyngodon idella</i>	Grass Carp	No
<i>Esox masquinongy x E. lucius</i>	Tiger Muskellunge	No
<i>Ictalurus furcatus</i>	Blue Catfish	No
<i>Ictalurus punctatus</i>	Channel Catfish	No
<i>Lepomis cyanellus</i>	Green Sunfish	No
<i>Lepomis gibbosus</i>	Pumpkinseed	No
<i>Lepomis gulosus</i>	Warmouth	No
<i>Lepomis macrochirus</i>	Bluegill	No
<i>Micropterus dolomieu</i>	Smallmouth Bass	No
<i>Micropterus salmoides</i>	Largemouth Bass	No
<i>Oncorhynchus aquabonita</i>	Golden Trout	No
<i>Perca flavescens</i>	Yellow Perch	No
<i>Pomoxis annularis</i>	White Crappie	No
<i>Pomoxis nigromaculatus</i>	Black Crappie	No
<i>Pylodictus olivaris</i>	Flathead Catfish	No
<i>Salmo salar</i>	Atlantic salmon (landlocked)	No
<i>Salmo trutta</i>	Brown Trout	No
<i>Salmo trutta x Salvelinus fontinalis</i>	Tiger Trout	No
<i>Salvelinus fontinalis</i>	Eastern Brook Trout	No
<i>Salvelinus namaycush</i>	Lake Trout	No
<i>Sander vitreus</i>	Walleye	No
<i>Thymallus articus</i>	Arctic Grayling	No
<i>Catostomus catostomus</i>	Longnose Sucker	Yes
<i>Catostomus columbianus</i>	Bridgelip Sucker	Yes
<i>Catostomus macrocheilus</i>	Largescale Sucker	Yes
<i>Catostomus platyrhynchus</i>	Mountain Sucker	Yes

<i>Lota lota</i>	Burbot	Yes
<i>Mylocheilus caurinus</i>	Peamouth Chub	Yes
<i>Oncorhynchus clarkii</i>	Cutthroat Trout	Yes
<i>Oncorhynchus kisutch</i>	Coho Salmon (landlocked)	Yes
<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>	Rainbow or steelhead Trout	Yes
<i>Oncorhynchus nerka</i>	kokanee (landlocked)	Yes
<i>Oncorhynchus tshawytscha</i>	Chinook Salmon (landlocked)	Yes
<i>Prosopium williamsoni</i>	Mountain Whitefish	Yes
<i>Ptychocheilus oregonensis</i>	Northern Pikeminnow	Yes
<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>	Bull Trout	Yes
<i>Salvelinus malma</i>	Dolly Varden	Yes

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