

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 1
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
December 15, 2021

<i>Fisheries under consideration:</i>	Zone 6 recreational white sturgeon
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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 report relevant to the fisheries under consideration 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>*

RIVER CONDITIONS

- As of December 13, the five-day average outflow at The Dalles Dam is 163.5 kcfs compared to a five-year average of 133.7 kcfs. The five-day average water temperature at The Dalles Dam (tailrace) is 48.4°F compared to a five-year average of 45.6°F.

STOCK STATUS

White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6 (Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam)

- The states and tribes work cooperatively to complete white sturgeon stock assessments, which are rotated between the three Zone 6 reservoirs on an annual basis. The 2020 survey was conducted in The Dalles Pool and indicated a 54% increase in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (43–54 inch fork length), but a 21% decline in the overall 33–65 inch fork length population. Results from the 2021 survey in Bonneville Pool will be available in late January 2022.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

White Sturgeon – Lower Columbia River

- Staff intend to receive further public feedback and commission guidance during each respective states' Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings in February 2022, where population status updates for this portion of the population will be presented.

White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6

- The Sturgeon Management Task Force, a joint state/tribal body, met on January 20, 2021 and recommended new harvest guidelines for 2021–2023 in The Dalles Pool (750 fish total guideline, 560 for treaty commercial and 190 for recreational retention) based on the improved legal-size population estimate. The states and tribes have adopted these guidelines (see Table 1).
- Over the past 10-year period (2012–2021), total harvest guidelines have generally decreased in all three reservoirs. There is no harvest guideline for the treaty subsistence catch of sturgeon, but these catches are accounted for and used in population assessments. Subsistence harvest typically occurs in association with fisheries targeting other species and is generally low.

Table 1. Current sturgeon harvest guidelines in Zone 6 reservoirs.

Pool	Recreational Guideline	Treaty Guideline	Total Guideline
Bonneville	500	500	1,000
The Dalles	190	560	750
John Day	105	175	280

2022 NON-TREATY FISHERIES

Recreational White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6

- In 2021, the recreational sturgeon retention seasons in the three Zone 6 reservoirs opened on January 1 per permanent rule. Catches in Bonneville and The Dalles pools were higher than usual due to a culmination of several factors, including ideal water temperatures, generally good weather which led to higher-than-average participation and catch rates, and the fishery opening on a three-day holiday weekend. The states acted to close retention fisheries in these pools shortly after the start of the new year; however, the harvest guideline in both pools was exceeded (see Table 2).
- In contrast, catches in the John Day pool accumulated more slowly, resulting in a 2021 season length similar to the 5-year average (78 days). Catch in the John Day Pool remained within the harvest guideline.

Table 2. 2021 Zone 6 recreational sturgeon seasons and harvest estimates.

Pool	Dates Open	Recreational Harvest	Recreational Guideline	Proportion of Guideline Harvested
Bonneville	Jan 1–7 (7 days)	655	500	131%
The Dalles	Jan 1–4 (4 days)	235	190	124%
John Day	Jan 1–Mar 18 (76 days)	98	105	93%

- In all pools, catch rates are often low at the start of the year and then can rapidly increase within a very short window, such as a day or weekend. The states’ catch monitoring program provides catch estimates in a timely manner. However, some lead time is necessary to take appropriate management action and provide notice to the public.
- Due to this volatility, season length can vary greatly from year to year and be challenging to predict.
 - The 2021 Bonneville Pool retention season was the shortest on record; however, this was the first time that the retention fishery lasted less than one month.
 - In January, the highest-risk fishery tends to be in The Dalles Pool where retention seasons in two of the past five years lasted less than one week and in three of the past five years have been less than one month.

- John Day Pool is also vulnerable to rapid changes in catch rates; however, this area hasn't reached the guideline in the month of January within the past ten years and typically closes later in the spring when catches increase.
- Due to the lower risk for exceeding the guideline in Bonneville and John Day pools within a short timeframe, staff are not recommending any changes at this time. These fisheries are scheduled to begin January 1 and be open to retention seven days per week per permanent regulations. Staff will monitor harvest closely and will recommend management action when needed. The public should be aware that modifications to the permanent season structure in these pools may be necessary in future years.
- Given the limited harvest guideline and a track record of short retention seasons and harvest in excess of the guideline, staff recommend modifying the seven-day-per-week fishery structure in The Dalles Pool for 2022. Modeling assumptions for the 2022 white sturgeon recreational fishery in The Dalles Pool included:
 - An early January start when catch rates are generally lower to provide for a longer retention season and for consistency with past years.
 - Use of the days-per-week approach to aide in increasing the length of the season and provide staff the opportunity to review fishery performance on a weekly basis.
 - Daily effort is expected to be higher on holidays and weekends than weekdays.
- Results of the 2019–2021 retention fisheries provided informative data for designing the 2022 fishery but modeling this fishery is challenging due to the variability in environmental conditions during the winter months and uncertainty in predicting fishing effort. However, staff believes the following fishery proposal represents a reasonable approach for 2022.

<i>Recommendation - 2022 Sturgeon Recreational Fishery in The Dalles Pool</i>		
Season:	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays January 1–26	12 days
Area:	Mainstem Columbia River from The Dalles Dam to John Day Dam, and all adjacent tributaries	
Allowable Catch:	Up to 190 white sturgeon	
	Legal size: 43-inch minimum and 54-inch maximum fork length (Fork length is measured in a straight line from the tip of the nose to the fork in the caudal fin (tail) with the fish laying on its side on a flat surface, with the tape measure/ruler positioned flat <u>under</u> the fish)	
	Daily bag limit: One fish	
	Annual bag limit: Two fish	

- The expected kept catch for this 12-day season in The Dalles Pool is 186 fish (98% of the guideline).

- The proposed fishery is based on a mean modeled projection incorporating mean catch rates over the last three seasons. These estimates were drawn from seasons where retention was open seven days per week, therefore, staff caution that a days-per-week approach may increase the daily angler effort and catch rates.
- The duration of the retention season will be adjusted if catch rates and effort are much different than projected. The recommended days-per-week approach will allow staff sufficient time to produce and monitor daily harvest estimates and recommend action necessary to stay within the harvest guidelines. If harvest is lower than projected, additional retention days may be considered during a future hearing.
- Permanent regulations allow for catch-and-release sturgeon angling all year, except angling for sturgeon is prohibited May 1 through August 31 within the sanctuary areas designated below each of the dam tailraces.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- The Joint Staff recommends a Compact hearing for 10 AM January 25, 2022 to consider non-treaty Eulachon commercial fisheries and treaty Zone 6 commercial fisheries.