

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 6
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
March 1, 2022

<i>Fisheries under consideration:</i>	Non-treaty mainstem research level commercial smelt 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 these fisheries is the 2022 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 14, 2022) available at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/management/columbia-river/reports> and <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM/jsmreports.asp>

RIVER CONDITIONS

- As of February 28, the current Columbia River water temperature at Bonneville Dam (38°F) is the same as the five-year average for this time of year. The five-day average outflow is 176.5 kcfs (including 0.6 kcfs spill), which is less than the recent 5-year average of 187.8 kcfs. Visibility is five feet, slightly less than the five-year average of 4.5 feet.
- The river stage at Vancouver is about 6.2 feet as of the afternoon of Monday February 28 and is forecasted to increase to 11.0 feet by this coming weekend (Action Stage is 15.0 feet and Flood Stage is 16.0 feet).

STOCK STATUS

Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)

- Columbia River smelt (Eulachon) stock status was presented in Winter Fact Sheet #2a.

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

- Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day pools white sturgeon stock status were presented in Winter Fact Sheets #1 and #2a.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)

- Eulachon management guidelines were presented in Winter Fact Sheet #2a.

White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6

- White sturgeon management guidelines for Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day pools were presented in Winter Fact Sheets #1 and #2a.

2022 NON-TREATY FISHERIES

Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)

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

- Pre-season abundance indicators for the 2022 smelt run suggested a strong return of the predominant age classes (age-3, age-4, and age-5). The 2022 run is expected to be larger in magnitude than the estimated returns of 9 million pounds in 2021. Thus far in-season monitoring data supports pre-season expectations.
- During the Compact Hearing on January 25, 2022, the states set 15 commercial smelt fishing periods, running three days per week (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays) starting Wednesday, January 26 and ending Monday, February 28.
- Smelt were detected in the Columbia River in early January. Upon opening the commercial fishery, smelt presence appeared to decline and no fish were harvested during the first three weeks of the commercial fishery.
- Observations of smelt activity picked up over the past week (February 18–25) and commercial landings indicated a steady mainstem presence. For 2022, a summary of commercial landings to date is reported in the table below:

Date	Pounds Landed	Average Pounds Per Delivery	Deliveries Reported
Jan 26-Feb 16 (10 periods)	0	n/a	0
Feb 18	1,062	354	3
Feb 21	3,416	683	5
Feb 23	6,637	1,659	4
Feb 25	2,166	1,083	2
Total Landings	13,281	948.6	14

- Due to the delayed onset of the smelt run, the apparent recent increase in abundance, and the need for continued run monitoring data, staff is recommending an extension to the research-level commercial fishery. The extension would maintain the conservative approach used in the 2022 smelt fishery and would continue to provide biological and run-strength data as well as some fishing opportunity.

Recommendation: 2022 Mainstem Commercial Smelt Fishery

Season:	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (5 AM to 5 PM) from March 2 through March 18 (8 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 extend the current 2022 season structure and would end one week later than the 2021 season.
- Landings will be sampled to collect biological data.

2022 Tributary Research-Level Recreational Smelt Fisheries

- Although commercial fisheries have achieved catch rates high enough to trigger a Cowlitz River recreational fishery, as of Monday, February 28, 2022, the smelt are not yet abundant in the Cowlitz or Sandy rivers and are therefore not accessible to recreational dippers.
- 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.

2022 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.

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.

- At the Joint State Hearing on December 15, 2021 the states modified The Dalles Pool fishery by adopting a limited days-per-week retention fishery (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays January 1–26) due to retention fisheries lasting less than a month in recent years under a seven days-per-week retention fishery schedule. Bonneville and John Day pool retention fisheries opened under permanent rules on January 1, 2022.
- At the Joint State Hearing on January 25, 2022 the states closed the Bonneville Pool fishery as of January 30 based on projections indicating that the guideline may be reached, and extended The Dalles Pool fishery on a limited days-per week (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays) through February 28 as fish remained on the guideline.
- Actual harvest in Bonneville Pool through January 29, 2022 (543 fish or 80% of the guideline) fell short of the projected catch (584 fish or 87% of the guideline).
- Current recreational sturgeon guidelines and harvest estimates for 2022 Zone 6 recreational fisheries are summarized below:

Table 1. Current sturgeon harvest estimates in Zone 6 reservoirs through February 27, 2022.

Pool	Angler Trips	Harvest	Recreational Guideline	Percent of Guideline
Bonneville	3,445	543	675	80%
The Dalles	1,983	84	190	44%
John Day	3,259	15	105	14%

- Catch rates in The Dalles Pool have slowed significantly in February and overall catch (84 or 44% of the guideline) is well below the projected catch through February 28 (188 or 99% of the guideline) presented at the January 25 hearing.
- Catch rate data from 2019-2022 indicate a fishery in Bonneville Pool is likely to retain an estimated 49 to 117 fish for single weekend day of fishing. With 132 fish remaining on the current guideline, staff believe the Bonneville Pool sport retention fishery can support at least one additional day of fishing effort.
- Therefore, staff is recommending the following for the Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool sturgeon retention seasons. Staff intend for these fisheries to be closed to retention after the recommended extension date.

Recommendations: 2022 Zone 6 Recreational White Sturgeon Fisheries

Bonneville Pool

Season:	Saturday, March 12 (1 retention day)
Area:	Mainstem Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to The Dalles Dam, and all adjacent tributaries
Allowable Catch:	Up to 675 white sturgeon Legal size: 38-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 Dalles Pool

Season:	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays March 2–30 (13 retention days)
Area:	Mainstem Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to The Dalles 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

- Assuming the highest single weekend day catch in the last four years in Bonneville Pool, the total kept catch would be 660 fish (98% of the guideline).
 - The proposed March 12, 2022 date was selected to avoid high water conditions, which are expected to occur later this week.
- The expected kept catch in The Dalles Pool through March 30, 2022 is 178 fish (94% of the guideline). The proposed fishery is based on a modeled projection applying 2022 in-season catch rates and effort. 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.
- Given the John Day Pool fishery has additional catch remaining on the guideline, and current catch rates are low, this fishery can remain open at this time. Staff will continue to monitor harvest closely and will recommend management action when needed.

- 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

- A Joint State Hearing is requested for 2 PM March 30, 2022 to consider the Estuary recreational white sturgeon fishery.
- The Joint Staff will monitor fisheries and recommend additional hearings as needed.