

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 1
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
November 9, 2022

Fisheries under consideration: Zone 6 recreational white sturgeon

Detailed information on stock status and management guidelines for Columbia River fisheries are presented in Joint Staff Reports, which are produced annually and available on-line. 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> or
<https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM/jsmreports.asp>*

RIVER CONDITIONS

- As of November 3, the five-day average outflow at Bonneville Dam is 108.1 kcfs compared to a five-year average of 104.7 kcfs. The five-day average water temperature at Bonneville Dam is 59°F compared to a five-year average of 55°F.
- According to NOAA's climate prediction, the winter weather conditions in the Pacific Northwest are expected to be cooler than average with higher-than-normal precipitation.

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 among the Zone 6 reservoirs on a three-year annual basis. Young-of-year surveys are completed annually in all three reservoirs.
- The most recent stock assessment information available for each pool is summarized below:
 - Bonneville Pool—The 2021 survey indicated a 22% increase in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (38–54 inch fork length) and an 18% increase in the overall 38–65 inch fork length population. Young-of-year surveys indicate measurable recruitment on an annual basis over the past ten years, except 2015.
 - The Dalles Pool—The 2020 survey indicated a 54% increase in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (43–54 inch fork length), but a 21% decline in the overall 38–65 inch fork length population. Young-of-year surveys during the past 5-year period indicate generally low recruitment. Since 2012, measurable recruitment has been detected in seven out of 10 years.
 - John Day Pool—The 2019 survey indicated a 24% increase in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (43–54 inch fork length) and a 20% increase in the overall 38–65 inch fork length population. Since 2012, measurable recruitment has only been detected in two years (2012 and 2019). The spatial coverage of the spawning sanctuary was extended in 2020 to further protect reproductive adults and improve future recruitment.

The results for the 2022 stock assessment in John Day Pool will be available in January 2023.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

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

- The *U.S. v. OR Sturgeon Management Task Force*, a joint state/tribal body, met on January 19, 2022 and recommended new harvest guidelines for 2022–2024 in Bonneville Pool (1,350 fish total guideline: 675 for treaty commercial fisheries and 675 for recreational fisheries) based on the improved legal-size population estimate. The states and tribes have adopted these guidelines (see Table 1).

Table 1. —Current white sturgeon harvest guidelines in Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day reservoirs. Updated guidelines for John Day Pool will be considered in January 2023.

Pool	Recreational Guideline	Treaty Guideline	Total Guideline
Bonneville	675	675	1,350
The Dalles	190	560	750
John Day	105	175	280

- Since 2012, total harvest guidelines have generally decreased in all three reservoirs based on the abundance of legal-size fish available for harvest. 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.

PAST RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

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

- Over the past 5-year period (2018–2022), total harvest guidelines have increased in Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool, but have remained constant in John Day Pool.
- Bonneville Pool—Season length has averaged 42 days during the previous 5-year period but has been highly variable with a low of 7 days and a high of 102 days (Table 2).

Table 2. —A summary of recreational sturgeon retention periods and harvest in Bonneville Pool.

Year	Retention Period(s)	Total Retention Days	Total Guideline	Recreational Harvest	Proportion of Guideline Harvested	Average Fish Kept Per Day
2018	1/1–2/3 & 6/15	35	325	452	139%	13
2019	1/1–4/12	102	500	448	90%	4
2020	1/1–2/13	44	500	431	86%	10
2021	1/1–1/7	7	500	655	131%	94
2022	1/1–1/19 & 3/9	20	675	622	92%	31

- The Dalles Pool—Season length has averaged 35 days during the previous 5-year period but has been the least consistent of the three pools (Table 3).

Table 3. —A summary of recreational sturgeon retention periods and harvest in The Dalles Pool.

Year	Retention Period(s)	Total Retention Days	Total Guideline	Recreational Harvest	Proportion of Guideline Harvested	Average Fish Kept Per Day
2018	1/1–3/24 & 6/15	84	135	180	133%	2
2019	1/1–1/6	6	135	79	59%	13
2020	1/1–2/17	48	135	205	152%	4
2021	1/1–1/4	4	190	235	124%	59
2022	1/1–3/21	35	190	204	107%	6

(M/W/Sa Only)

- John Day Pool—Season length has averaged 70 days over the past 5-year period and has been both longer and more consistent relative to season lengths in Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool (Table 4).

Table 4. —A summary of recreational sturgeon retention periods and harvest in John Day Pool.

Year	Retention Period(s)	Total Retention Days	Total Guideline	Recreational Harvest	Proportion of Guideline Harvested	Average Fish Kept Per Day
2018	1/1–2/11	42	105	81	77%	1.9
2019	1/1–4/2	92	105	129	123%	1.4
2020	1/1–3/9	69	105	102	97%	1.5
2021	1/1–3/18	77	105	98	93%	1.3
2022	1/1–3/9	68	105	94	90%	1.4

- Catch rates and season length have been highly variable in Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool due to a culmination of several factors, including variable water temperatures, weather, and on the water conditions. In contrast, catches in the John Day Pool tend to accrue more slowly, resulting in relatively consistent season lengths.
- 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.

2023 NON-TREATY FISHERIES

Recreational White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6

- In 2022, the recreational sturgeon retention seasons in Bonneville and John Day pools opened on January 1 per permanent rule. In The Dalles Pool, the states adopted a days per week season structure which extended fishing through mid-March for the first time in four years. Angler feedback was generally positive, although anglers requested additional lead time in future years for pre-season changes to the permanent season structure.

- Due to the lower risk for exceeding the guideline in John Day Pool within a short timeframe, staff are not recommending any changes at this time. This fishery is scheduled to begin January 1 and remain open to retention seven days per week per permanent regulations. Staff will monitor harvest closely and will recommend management action when needed.
- 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 Bonneville and The Dalles pools for 2023.
- Modeling assumptions for the 2023 white sturgeon recreational fisheries included:
 - An early January start when catch rates are generally lower to provide for a longer retention season and for consistency with past years. January 1 is included because it is New Year’s Day and the traditional start date for this fishery.
 - Use of the days-per-week approach to aide in increasing the duration of the season and provide staff the opportunity to review fishery performance on a weekly or daily basis.
 - Daily effort is expected to be higher on holidays and weekends than weekdays.
 - Daily effort is expected to increase slightly in Bonneville Pool after the closure of The Dalles Pool.
- Results of the 2019–2022 retention fisheries provided informative data for designing the 2023 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 proposals represent a reasonable approach for 2023.

<i>Recommendation - 2023 Bonneville Pool Recreational Sturgeon Fishery</i>		
Season:	Sunday, January 1 and Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays January 2–March 22	36 days
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 expected kept catch for this 36-day retention season in Bonneville Pool is 635 fish (94% of the guideline).

<i>Recommendation - 2023 The Dalles Pool Recreational Sturgeon Fishery</i>		
Season:	Sunday, January 1 and Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays January 2–March 4	28 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 28-day retention season in The Dalles Pool is 186 fish (98% of the guideline).
- The 2023 harvest projections incorporate the recent 3-year average catch rate. These estimates were drawn primarily from seasons when 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 seasons will be adjusted if catch rates and effort are much different than projected, based on pool-specific catch guidelines. 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 future hearings.
- 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. Daily and annual sturgeon bag limits apply to all fisheries statewide.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- No additional Compact or Joint State hearings are scheduled at this time.