

**OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**  
**JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 3a**  
**Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing**  
**January 24, 2023**

<b><i>Fisheries under consideration:</i></b> Zone 6 recreational white sturgeon Non-treaty mainstem research-level commercial smelt
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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 on-line. The most recent report is the 2023 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 13, 2023) 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 January 23, Columbia River current water temperature at Bonneville Dam (38°F) is similar to the five-year average for this time in January (40°F). The outflow is about 126.7 kcfs (including 0.7 kcfs spill), which is lower than the recent 5-year average of 174.6 kcfs. Visibility is 7 feet which is similar to the five-year average of 6.6 feet.

### **STOCK STATUS**

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

- White sturgeon stock status for populations upstream of Bonneville Dam was presented in Winter Fact Sheet #1, dated November 9, 2022.

#### ***Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)***

- Columbia River smelt (Eulachon) return annually to the Columbia River to spawn in the mainstem and several of its tributaries downstream of Bonneville Dam. The fish typically begin to enter the Columbia River in December and peak tributary abundance is usually in February or March. Columbia River smelt are listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- Eulachon abundance increased steadily from 2011 to 2014, reaching a peak abundance of 16.6 million pounds in 2014, followed by a decline to 370,000 pounds in 2018. Since 2018, Eulachon abundance has again increased steadily to the recent peak of 18.3 million pounds in 2022, which is the highest return recorded since 2011 when the states began producing more reliable estimates.

### **MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES**

#### ***White Sturgeon – Columbia River Zone 6***

- Management guidelines for sturgeon fisheries upstream of Bonneville Dam were presented in Winter Fact Sheet #1.

- The Sturgeon Management Task Force, a joint state/tribal body, met on January 19, 2023 and recommended maintaining the same harvest guidelines for 2023–2025 in John Day Pool (315 fish total guideline: 210 for treaty commercial and 105 for non-treaty recreational). The states and tribes have adopted these guidelines:

Table 1. 2023 sturgeon harvest guidelines in Zone 6 reservoirs.

Pool	Recreational Guideline	Treaty Guideline	Total Guideline
Bonneville	675	675	1,350
The Dalles	190	560	750
John Day	105	210	315

### ***Columbia River Smelt (Eulachon)***

- Beginning in 2001, the Washington and Oregon Eulachon Management Plan (WOEMP) provided guidance in structuring smelt fisheries. The plan identified three levels of fisheries based on expected adult run size, juvenile production, and ocean productivity. Level 1 fisheries are the most conservative and Level 3 are the most liberal.
- In response to the ESA listing in 2010, the states discontinued commercial and recreational smelt fisheries during 2011–2013. Since 2014, the states have worked closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to conduct research-level smelt fisheries that provide biological data and pounds per landing (CPUE) data so that smelt status and run strength can be better assessed.

## **2023 NON-TREATY FISHERIES**

### ***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. Upon opening for retention, all three Zone 6 reservoirs are managed to the pool-specific guidelines.
- At the Joint State Hearing on November 9, 2022 the states modified the Bonneville and The Dalles pools’ fisheries by adopting a limited days-per-week retention fishery. The season set in Bonneville Pool allowed retention on Sunday January 1, and Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays from January 2 through March 22. Similarly, the season set in The Dalles Pool includes retention on Sunday January 1, and Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays from January 2 through March 4. John Day pool retention fisheries opened under permanent rules on January 1, 2023.
- At the Joint State Hearing on January 10, 2023, the states closed Bonneville Pool to sturgeon retention effective 11:59 pm on Wednesday, January 11, 2023. High angler effort and catch rates meant this fishery would have exceeded the harvest guideline if the fishery was allowed to proceed as scheduled.
- Current recreational sturgeon guidelines and harvest estimates for 2023 Zone 6 recreational fisheries are summarized below:

Table 2. Current sturgeon harvest estimates in Zone 6 reservoirs through Monday, January 23, 2023.

Pool	Angler Trips	Harvest	Recreational Guideline	Percent of Guideline
Bonneville	2,183	600	675	89%
The Dalles	1,211	171	190	90%
John Day	2,191	80	105	76%

- All three Zone 6 pools have experienced higher than average effort and catch rates, and projections indicate that the guidelines in The Dalles and John Day pools will be reached soon. Staff recommend the following closures to stay within the harvest guidelines.

***Recommendation - 2023 The Dalles Pool Recreational White Sturgeon Fishery***

Effective 11:59 PM Wednesday, January 25 the retention of sturgeon is prohibited in the mainstem Columbia River from The Dalles Dam upstream to John Day Dam (The Dalles Pool), and all adjacent tributaries.

- The projected kept catch in The Dalles Pool through January 25 is 184 fish (97% of the guideline).

***Recommendation - 2023 John Day Pool Recreational White Sturgeon Fishery***

Effective 11:59 PM Sunday, January 29 the retention of sturgeon is prohibited in the mainstem Columbia River from John Day Dam upstream to McNary Dam (John Day Pool), and all adjacent tributaries.

- The projected kept catch in the John Day Pool through January 29 is 101 fish (96% of the guideline).
- Although there is a balance of 75 fish on the Bonneville Pool harvest guideline, staff are not comfortable recommending an additional day of retention fishing. Average weekday harvest in-season was 40 fish per day and weekend catches averaged 175 fish per day. Given enough advanced notice, staff feel that angler effort on an additional weekday fishing period would likely resemble a weekend day and therefore put the likelihood of exceeding the guideline at an unacceptable level of risk.
- 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.

***Columbia River Research-Level Commercial Smelt Fisheries***

- During 2014–2018 and 2020–2022, limited commercial research fisheries occurred primarily in February each year to help evaluate run strength and provide biological data. Fishing was limited to two days per week for 4–7 weeks, annually.
- Due to declining participation in the commercial fishery, fishing hours were expanded from seven to 12 hours per day in 2020 to allow fishers access to at least one fishable tide daily. Fishing was also expanded to three days per week for eight weeks in 2022, to improve in-season monitoring and provide additional flexibility for fishers.

- Mainstem Columbia River commercial landings averaged approximately 11,700 pounds (range 110–27,398 pounds) annually during 2014–2018 and 2020–2022 and averaged an estimated annual exploitation rate of 0.15% (range 0.03–0.31%).
- Abundance indicators for the 2023 smelt return suggest a moderate to strong return of the predominant age classes (age-3, age-4, and age-5). The 2023 run is expected to be similar to or slightly lower in magnitude than the 2022 return of 18.3 million pounds.
- After discussion with NMFS, and considering the mutual desire to continue a conservative management approach to smelt fisheries, staff are recommending a research-level commercial fishery for 2023.
- The biological data collected during the commercial fishery allow staff to investigate attributes of the annual Eulachon run into the Columbia River. Landings data from the commercial fishery also help to provide an in-season monitoring tool to inform whether the run can support recreational harvest opportunity. Therefore, due to a history of low exploitation rates and the valuable information collected by this fishery, staff designed the 2023 recommendation using a similar approach to the 2022 commercial fishery.
- Staff reviewed the recommendations with the Columbia River Commercial Advisory Group and heard that Friday fishing periods pose a challenge for processors’ ability to bring fish to market. Therefore, staff recommend the 2023 schedule include fishing periods on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

<i>Recommendation: 2023 Mainstem Commercial Smelt Fishery</i>	
<b>Season:</b>	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays (5 AM to 5 PM) January 25 through March 16. 23 periods
<b>Area:</b>	Zones 1-3
<b>Gear:</b>	Gillnet only. Mesh size may not exceed two inches stretch measure. Nets may not exceed 1,500 feet in length along the cork line.
<b>Allowable Sales:</b>	Smelt
<b>Misc. Regulations:</b>	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 season structure, being restricted to three zones and 23 periods, is similar to the

conservative season structure used in 2022 and allows for better in-season run monitoring.

- The proposed hours match the longer duration periods requested by industry in 2020 to increase the likelihood that a suitable tide will occur within the fishing period.
- Landings will be sampled to collect biological data.

#### ***Tributary Research-Level Recreational Smelt Fisheries***

- During 2014–2017 and 2020–2022, limited recreational fisheries occurred in the Cowlitz River. The fishery was restricted to 1–5 days annually (5–6 hours per day). During this timeframe, the Sandy River was only open in 2014 and 2015 (2–4 days annually; 6 hours per day). Annual recreational harvest averaged 133,153 pounds (range 541–290,770) with an average exploitation rate of 1.35% (range 0.03–2.77%). There was no recreational smelt fishing opportunity in 2018 or 2019.
- At this time, Washington and Oregon are not recommending recreational smelt fisheries in the Cowlitz or Sandy rivers. Staff will determine if fisheries are warranted after additional freshwater abundance indicators become available.

#### **FUTURE MEETINGS**

- A Compact Hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 14, 2023 via teleconference to consider Select Area (winter-summer) and treaty commercial fisheries.
- A hybrid Joint State Hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 22, 2023 to consider mainstem Columbia River recreational spring Chinook fisheries. The meeting will be held at the WDFW Ridgefield office (5525 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Ridgefield, Washington 98642) and a teleconference call-in option will be available.