



Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

Meeting date:

4/7/2023

Agenda item:

Petition to amend fishing rules on North Skookum Lake in Pend Oreille County

Presenter(s):

Chris Donley, Region 1 fish program manager

Background summary:

North Skookum Lake is in Pend Oreille County in northeast Washington (Figure 1). North Skookum has been managed as an Opening Day fishery since 1961, it is 42 surface acres and lies at an elevation of 3581 feet. The lake is populated with wild eastern brook trout and is stocked each spring with 8,000 triploid rainbow trout fingerlings. The lake is relatively high in elevation and provides consistent trout fishing from late spring through the summer months. North Skookum has an angler following that enjoys a serene setting with plentiful pan sized trout along with clean, clear, and cold water.

Mr. Daniel Camara Jr. has petitioned the Fish and Wildlife Commission to consider changing the open dates for fishing on North Skookum Lake. He requests that the lake be opened for the months of January and February for ice fishing and may only be accessed by over-snow vehicles. Mr. Camara states in his petition, "It's not really about the fish; rather it's about the adventure and experience. This lake by far represents the best candidate in Northeast Washington for this purpose."

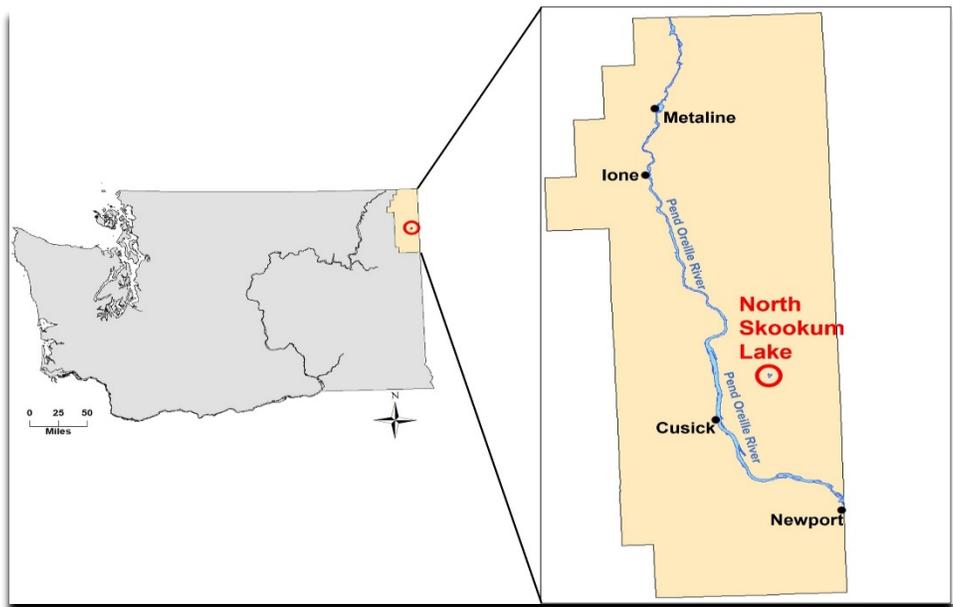


Figure 1. A map of Washington State depicting the location of North Skookum Lake

North Skookum is located adjacent to the Kings Lake Sno-Park groomed trail system (Figure 3). The trail system is operated for over-snow machine touring of the Kings Lake area. Over-snow machine users could be allowed to access the lake and ice fish. Mr. Camara believes this location would allow snow machine enthusiasts a unique fishing opportunity to pursue along with their general enjoyment of snow related sporting activities.

The land surrounding the lake is wholly owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). While the property is entirely public, access to the lake is limited due to dense forestation and minimal road development. Most anglers access the lake through a campground that is operated by a DNR lessee. The lessee and his family have operated this facility for an extended period and the campground has a reputation as a great camping, fishing, and family destination.

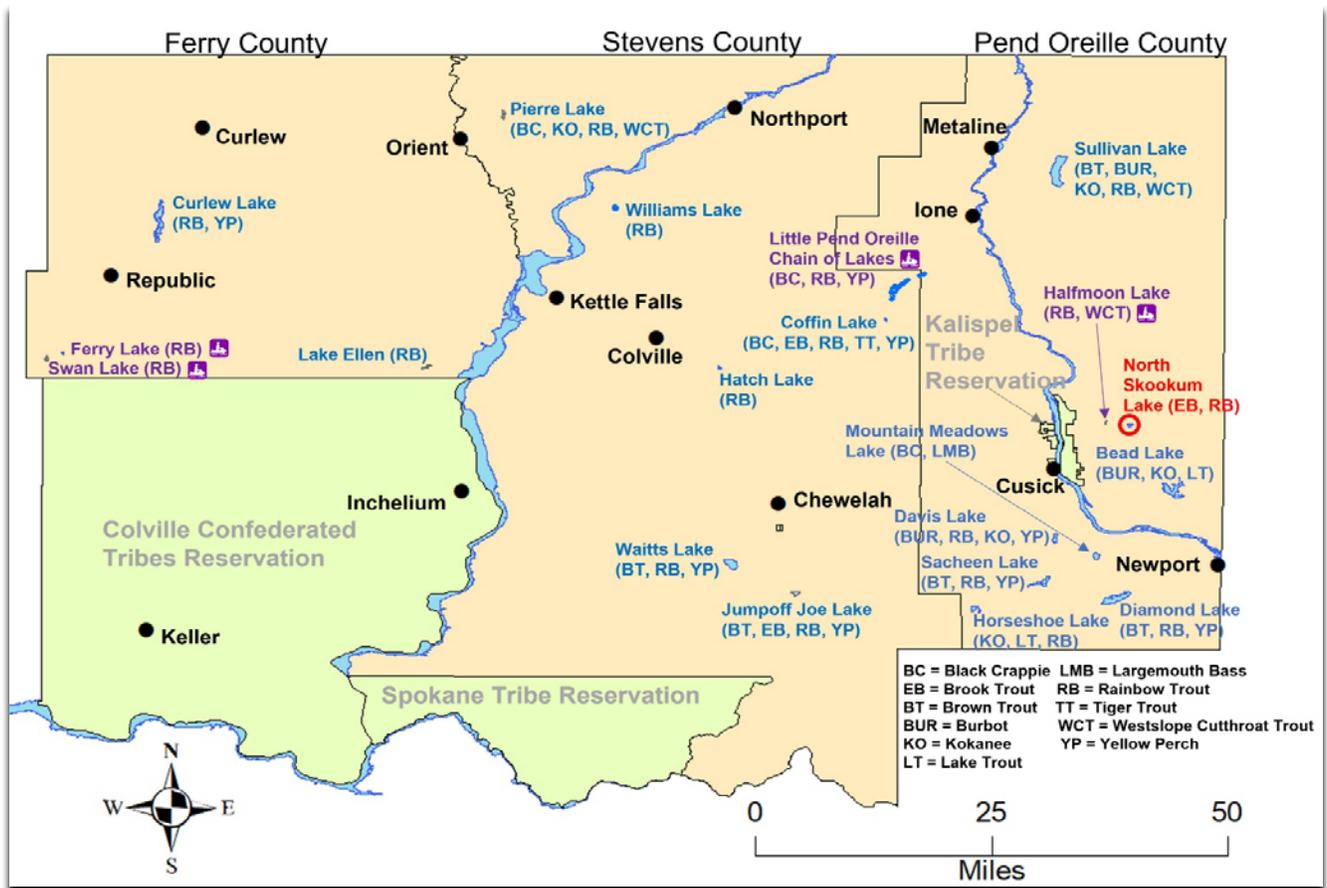


Figure 2. A map depicting lakes and fishing opportunities in the Tri-County area of northeast Washington.

There are multiple winter fishing opportunities within driving distance of North Skookum Lake (Figure 2). In the Tri-county area (Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties) there are 16 lakes (blue text) open to year round fishing that offer ice fishing opportunities. In addition, there are three large rivers and their associated reservoirs (Columbia, Spokane, Pend Oreille) that afford winter fishing opportunities. Lakes depicted with purple text (Figure 2) are year round fisheries offering ice fishing opportunity that are also adjacent to over-snow machine trail systems. There are at least five lakes accessible by over-snow machine in the Tri-county area. Of the five lakes, three are accessible only by over-snow machines.

Staff recommendation:

Deny the petition to amend sportfishing rules on North Skookum Lake.

In 2018 the Department completed a yearlong public process to simplify sport fishing rules for game fish, including reducing the number of different seasons on lowland lakes. During the rule simplification process there were no requests by the public or staff to modify existing rules on North Skookum. The rules for the lake have functioned well for the past 60 years and there is no biological or social reason to adjust them.

There are already multiple options available for snow machine accessed fisheries within the Tri-County area (Figure 2, purple text). Specifically, adjacent to North Skookum Lake is Halfmoon Lake. Halfmoon Lake is adjacent to the Kings Lake Sno-Park groomed trail system (Figure 3). Essentially offering the same opportunity that Mr. Camara has petitioned to create.

Like North Skookum, the land surrounding Halfmoon Lake is publicly owned, and anglers can access the lake with over-snow machines. There is minimal use of the halfmoon fishery during the winter months. The dearth of angler participation indicates that the already existing opportunity isn't being overused by anglers. Thus, modifying rules on North Skookum Lake isn't warranted based on angler demand.

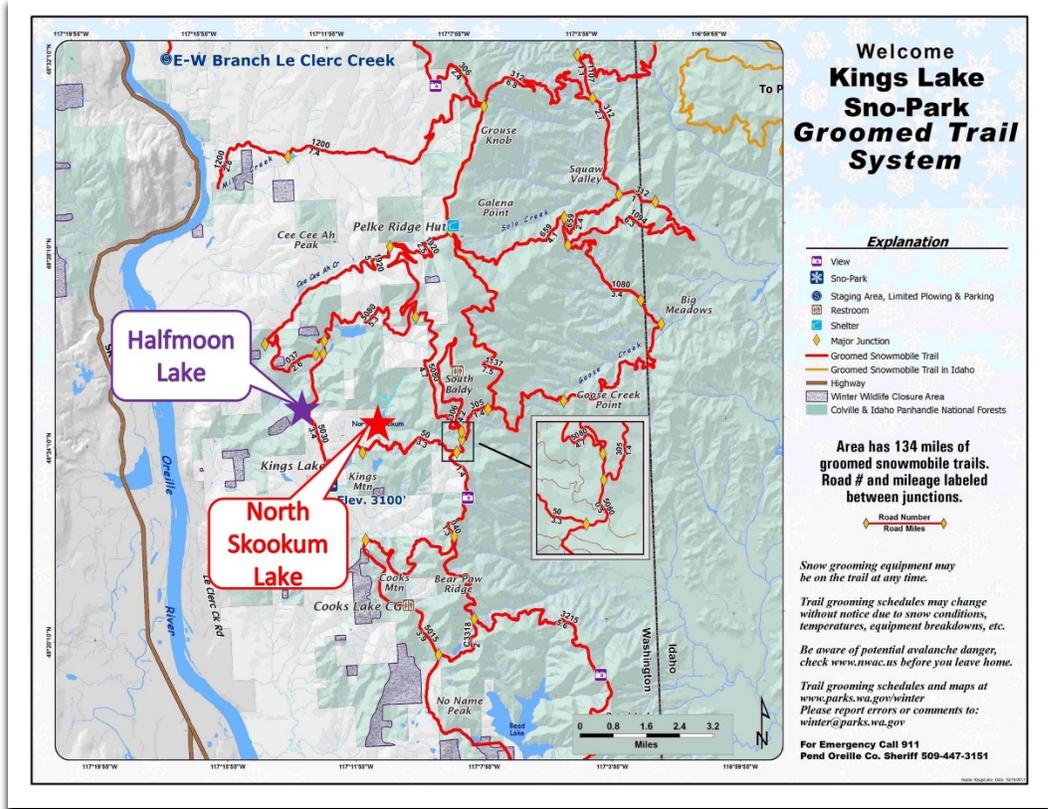


Figure 3. Map depicting location of North Skookum and Halfmoon Lakes as they relate to the Kings Lake Sno-Park trail system.

DNR and their Lessee of the campground facility on North Skookum do not support winter access to the lake. DNR staff have concerns about how winter access may impact the existing uses of the campground and could increase vandalism and theft of the lessee's campground infrastructure. DNR staff are also concerned with the lack of publicly accessible restroom facilities available to potential ice anglers using the lake. Separately, the Lessee of the campground is opposed to winter access because of potential vandalism. In addition, it would be difficult for law enforcement to routinely visit this site and ensure theft or vandalism are not occurring.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

Pursuant to RCW 34.05.330

Option A) Deny the petition in writing, stating the reasons for denial, specifically addressing the concerns raised by the petitions; or

Option B) Initiate the rule making for the proposal to change the sport fishing season on North Skookum Lake from the 4th Saturday in April to October 31 to allow fishing the 4th Saturday in April to October 31st and January 1- February 28, restricted to over snow machine access only January 1- February 28 or year-round, restricted to over snow machine access only January 1-February 28.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

None

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

WDFW staff contacted DNR staff, DNR campground lessee and USFS staff to confer over possible issues with allowing winter access to North Skookum and adjacent waters. DNR and Lessee were not supportive of expanding the season on North Skookum. USFS staff confirmed that there is over-snow machine access to Swan, Ferry, Little Pend Oreille Chain and Halfmoon Lakes.

If the petition is accepted there will be a public process during rule making to review the proposed rule change.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

Department staff recommend the Commission deny this petition to change the sportfishing rules on North Skookum Lake.

Draft motion language:

Option A (preferred) Motion: I move to deny the petition to change the sportfishing rules on North Skookum Lake (Pend Oreille Co.).

Is there a “second”?

If so, then motion maker states the basis for the motion; other Commissioners discuss views on motion; amendments, if any, proposed and addressed.

Option B Motion: I move to accept the petition and direct the Department to initiate rule-making.

Is there a “second”?

If so, then motion maker states the basis for the motion; other Commissioners discuss views on motion; amendments, if any, proposed and addressed.

Post decision communications plan:

Commission staff will provide a letter to the petitioners with the outcome of the Commission decision regarding the petition.
