

OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 1
Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing
October 31, 2023

<i>Fisheries under consideration:</i> 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 online. The most recent report relevant to these fisheries 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>*

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 annually during the past ten years, except in 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. Since 2013, measurable recruitment has been detected in seven out of 10 years; however, recruitment has been lower in recent years. The results for the 2023 stock assessment in The Dalles Pool will be available in January 2024.
 - John Day Pool—The 2022 survey indicated a 12% decrease in the abundance of legal-sized sturgeon (43–54 inch fork length) and an 11% decrease in the overall 38–65 inch fork length population. Since 2013, measurable recruitment has only been detected once, during 2019. The spatial coverage of the spawning sanctuary was extended in 2020 to further protect reproductive adults and improve future recruitment.

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, 2023 and recommended maintaining the harvest guidelines for 2023–2025 in John Day Pool (315 fish total guideline: 210 for treaty commercial fisheries and 105 for recreational fisheries). The states and tribes adopted these guidelines (see Table 1). The Task Force will meet in January 2024 to review the results of the stock assessment done in The Dalles Pool and will consider updating those harvest guidelines at that time.

Table 1. Current white sturgeon harvest guidelines in Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day reservoirs.

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

- 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, total harvest guidelines have increased in Bonneville and The Dalles pools but have remained constant in John Day Pool.
- Bonneville Pool—Season length has averaged 36 days during the previous 5-year period but has been highly variable with a low of 6 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
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
2023	1/1 & 1/2-1/11*	6	675	600	89%	100

**Three-days-per-week retention schedule (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays).*

- The Dalles Pool—Season length has averaged 21 days during the previous 5-year period and has also been quite inconsistent with a low of four days and a high of 48 days (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
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
2023	1/1 & 1/2-1/25*	12	190	188	99%	16

*Three-days-per-week retention schedule (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays).

- John Day Pool—Season length has averaged 67 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
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
2023	1/1-1/29, 2/11, 2/15, 2/18	32	105	95	90%	3.3

- Catch rates and season length have been highly variable in Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool due to several factors, including variable water temperatures, weather, and on-the-water conditions. In order to moderate this variability in retention seasons, the states have recently adopted a days-per-week approach in Bonneville Pool (2023) and The Dalles Pool (2022 and 2023).
- 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 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

- Given the limited harvest guidelines and successful management of these fisheries in 2023, staff recommend modifying the permanent seven-day-per-week retention fishery structure in Bonneville and The Dalles pools again for 2024.
- Due to the lower risk of exceeding the guideline in John Day Pool within a short timeframe, staff are not recommending any changes to permanent regulations at this time. This fishery is scheduled to begin January 1 and remain open to retention seven days per week. Staff will monitor harvest closely and will recommend management action when needed.
- Modeling assumptions for the 2024 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.
 - 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 recent-year retention fisheries provides informative data for designing the 2024 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 2024.

<i>Recommendation - 2024 Bonneville Pool Recreational Sturgeon Fishery</i>	
Season:	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays January 1–February 7 17 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 (applicable to any/all retention fisheries): Two fish

<i>Recommendation - 2024 The Dalles Pool Recreational Sturgeon Fishery</i>	
Season:	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays January 1–29 13 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 (applicable to any/all retention fisheries): Two fish

- The expected kept catch for the Bonneville Pool 17-day retention season is 670 fish (99% of the guideline) and the expected kept catch for The Dalles Pool 13-day retention season is 188 fish (99% of the guideline).
- The 2024 harvest projections incorporate the recent 3-year average catch rate. Because these estimates were partially drawn from seasons when retention was open seven days per week, staff acknowledge that a days-per-week approach may increase the daily angler effort and catch rates.
- Angler effort has generally increased over the last three years in these fisheries. The duration of the retention fisheries will be adjusted if catch rates and/or 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 within the designated sanctuary areas downstream of the dam tailraces May 1 through August 31. 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.