

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

POLICY DECISION

POLICY TITLE: Lower Columbia
Sturgeon Management

POLICY NUMBER: C-3001

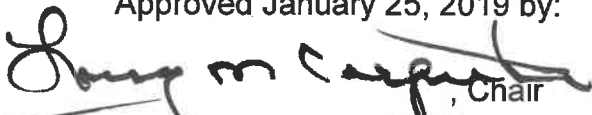
Supersedes: 2014-2018 Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management C-3001

Effective Date: January 25, 2019

Termination Date:

See Also: Policy C-3608

Approved January 25, 2019 by:


Chair
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for management of the Lower Columbia River White Sturgeon population and fisheries.

Definition and Intent

The Lower Columbia River White Sturgeon population inhabits the waters of the Columbia River and tributaries downstream of Bonneville Dam and migrates into ocean and coastal estuaries. The intent of the policy is to provide consistent management guidelines that promote a healthy population and provide sustainable fisheries.

General Policy Statement

Manage the Lower Columbia River White Sturgeon population with conservation and fishery management objectives that are consistent with a healthy population.

Policy Guidelines

Conservation Objectives:

- Provide regulatory protection to increase the abundance of the spawning population.
- Manage with a precautionary approach due to uncertainties in population parameters.
- Manage for an annual combined sport and commercial harvest of White Sturgeon to provide measurable population growth to achieve the goals of: (1) fully seeded habitats and (2) full representation of each size class within the population.
- Population Monitoring (within available resources):
 - Index young-of-the-year (YOY) to track spawning and recruitment success.
 - Estimate population abundance of all size classes.

- Evaluate methods to improve accuracy of abundance estimates.
- Monitor sea lion predation for incorporation into stock status evaluations.
- Advocate for Columbia River flow regimes that promote successful spawning, incubation, and early rearing.

Fishery Management Objectives:

- Provide sufficient sturgeon spawning sanctuaries or other protective measures where and when appropriate.
- Quantify impacts of commercial and recreational fisheries on sublegal, legal, and over-size (including spawning adult) abundances.

When Retention Fisheries are Allowed:

- Manage Lower Columbia River sturgeon fisheries through an agreement with Oregon.
- Maintain concurrent Washington and Oregon regulations in the Columbia River.
- Manage fisheries in a manner that considers projected recruitment, with the objectives of increasing abundance of the legal size segment and increasing escapement into the spawning segment of the population. Management should consider all mortality sources, including both recreational and commercial fisheries and pinniped predation.
- Manage fisheries using an 80/20 sport/commercial harvest allocation.
- Strive for viable and diverse recreational and commercial fishing opportunities.
- Develop sport fishery regulations consistent with the following objectives:
 - Stay within approved harvest guidelines.
 - Balance catch between estuary and non-estuary fisheries.
 - Maintain fishery monitoring and management capabilities.
- Develop commercial fishery regulations consistent with the following objectives:
 - Optimize economic value (adjust to market needs).
 - Spread harvest opportunity throughout the year.
- Consideration of fisheries outside the Lower Columbia River must take into account the ability to monitor and manage those fisheries and be consistent with Lower Columbia River sturgeon conservation objectives.
- Maintain prohibition of Green Sturgeon retention until delisting occurs and retention can be re-evaluated.

Annual Review

Given the degree of uncertainty about various population parameters (e.g., recruitment success, pinniped predation, and size-class structure) of the Columbia River White Sturgeon, the Commission is adopting a precautionary approach to management. The Director will provide an annual review of the population status and fisheries for the Commission, as an essential component of this precautionary approach, to include updated information on:

- stock status;
- available information on pinniped predation;

- review of in-season management actions;
- summary of catch data, including handling of sturgeon in non-target fisheries, when available;
- recommended management changes; and
- other pertinent information.

This policy may be updated as part of any Lower Columbia sturgeon stock status review. The Director will provide the Commission a review of this Policy at least every five years.

Delegation of Authority

The Commission delegates the authority to the Director to develop and negotiate Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management Accords with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife that are consistent with these policies and objectives. The Director will consult with appropriate recreational and commercial advisory bodies during this process. Additionally, the Commission delegates the authority to the Director, through the Columbia River Compact, to set seasons for recreational and commercial fisheries in the Columbia River, and to adopt permanent and emergency regulations to implement these fisheries. The Director shall work with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to achieve implementation of this Commission action in a manner that results in concurrent regulations between the two states. The Director shall consult with the Commission Chair if it becomes necessary to deviate from the Commission's policy to achieve concurrent regulations with Oregon.