

**OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEPARTMENTS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**  
**JOINT STAFF REPORT - WINTER FACT SHEET NO. 3b**  
**Columbia River Compact/Joint State Hearing**  
**January 16, 2025**

***Fisheries under consideration:*** Non-treaty mainstem commercial smelt

*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 2025 Sturgeon/Smelt Report (January 7, 2025) 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 Jan 15, the five-day average outflow at Bonneville Dam is 135 kcfs compared to the five-year average of 160 kcfs. The current five-day average water temperature at Bonneville Dam is 43°F compared to the five-year average of 40°F. The recent five-day average visibility at Bonneville Dam is 3.6 feet compared to the five-year average of 5.9 feet.

### **STOCK STATUS**

#### ***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 then, Eulachon abundance has ranged from the low observed in 2018 to a high of 18.3 million pounds in 2022. Eulachon abundance in 2024 was 10.4 million pounds, greater than the 10-year average of 8.6 million pounds.

### **MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES**

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

- In September 2023 the states finalized the [2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Washington Oregon Eulachon Management Plan](#) (WOEMP) which utilizes three pre-season abundance indicators to inform target harvest rates for commercial and recreational fisheries. The plan also includes in-season triggers that allow managers to alter harvest rates up or down depending on the apparent strength of that year's run.
- The process from the framework of the WOEMP results in a target harvest rate of 2% for 2025 (Table 1).

- P1: The P1 pre-season abundance indicator estimates the mean run-size over the previous three years. This year P1 averages the 2022–2024 run size estimates of 18.3 million, 17.0 million, and 10.4 million pounds respectively. This gives a P1 value of 15.2 million pounds for 2025, which is within the 6.0–20.5 million pound range.
- P2: The P2 pre-season abundance indicator assesses the trend in run sizes over the previous two years and, this year calculates the difference of the 2023 and 2024 run sizes of 17.0 million and 10.4 million pounds, respectively. The resulting value of -6.6 million indicates a decreasing (or negative) trend in run sizes between the previous two years.
- P3: The P3 pre-season abundance indicator is the trend in forecasted abundance for the upcoming season. The 2025 run is expected to be less than the 2024 return and similar to or less than the 10-year average of 8.6 million pounds. Given the expectation of an average to below average return, the states take a precautionary approach and assume a negative forecast for the P3 indicator.

Table 1. Summary of harvest phases. Evaluation of the P1, P2, and P3 pre-season abundance indicators inform the selection of the harvest phase and target harvest rate.

Harvest Phase	Harvest Rate	P1 (in millions)		P2	P3
		min	max		
1	1%	-	1.5	--	--
		1.5	5.9	negative	negative
2	2%	1.5	5.9	positive	negative
		1.5	5.9	negative	positive
		6.0	20.5	negative	negative
3	5%	1.5	5.9	positive	positive
		6.0	20.5	positive	negative
		6.0	20.5	negative	positive
4	10%	6.0	20.5	positive	positive
		20.5	+	--	--

- In-season management triggers based on CPUE data collected in the proposed mainstem commercial fishery may result in an upgrade or downgrade to the Harvest Phase.

A limited Eulachon test fishery directed by WDFW staff in the mainstem Columbia River is planned for 2025. Weekly test fishing will occur using gillnets from February through April, up to 14 days depending on the timing of the run. This test fishery will collect biological data to allow staff to further evaluate the Eulachon run.

## 2025 NON-TREATY FISHERIES

### *Columbia River Commercial Smelt Fisheries*

- Mainstem Columbia River commercial landings of Eulachon averaged approximately 12,400 pounds (range 1,726–27,398 pounds) annually between 2020–2024 with an average estimated annual exploitation rate of 0.10% (range 0.01–0.15%).
- Abundance indicators for the 2025 smelt return suggest a moderate to strong return of the older age classes (age-4 and age-5), but a weaker return of younger age classes (age-2 and age-3).
- Landings data from the commercial fishery provide an in-season monitoring tool to help 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 are recommending a commercial fishery in 2025 using a similar approach to the 2023 and 2024 fisheries.

<b><i>Recommendation: 2025 Mainstem Commercial Smelt Fishery</i></b>	
<b>Season:</b>	Open 5 AM to 5 PM on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from January 20 through March 13 (24 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 allow for continued maintenance of the historic index of run strength (pounds/landing) and provide an indication of freshwater abundance to inform tributary recreational fishery management decisions, while providing for commercial harvest opportunity.
- The proposed season structure, being restricted to three commercial fishing zones and 24 periods, is similar to the conservative season structures used in 2023 and 2024 and allows for in-season run monitoring.
- The proposed hours match the longer duration periods requested by industry and implemented in 2020 to increase the likelihood that a suitable tide will occur within the fishing period.

### ***Tributary Recreational Smelt Fisheries***

- During 2020–2024, limited recreational fisheries occurred in the Cowlitz or Sandy rivers. The fisheries were restricted to 1–2 days annually (5–7 hours per day). Annual recreational harvest averaged 81,000 pounds (range 35,000–169,500) with an average exploitation rate of 0.70% (range 0.33–1.01%). The vast majority of the recreational harvest was taken in the Cowlitz River fishery. There was no recreational smelt fishing opportunity in 2018 or 2019.
- On June 6, 2024, a new law went into effect requiring a fishing license when fishing for freshwater smelt in Washington. Current fishing licenses, including temporary licenses, will be valid. Children 14 years and under do not need a fishing license. Permanent rules in Oregon require a fishing license to fish for smelt in Oregon waters when open for harvest.
- For the 2025 season, WDFW is announcing a new tentative-schedule approach for the Cowlitz River recreational smelt fishery. Under this strategy, tentative recreational smelt dipping opportunities will be considered for Wednesdays and Saturdays from February 5 through March 22. Final approval of dates and hours of harvest will be announced by WDFW by 3:00 PM on the Friday preceding each week’s tentative dates.
  - Feb. 5 and Feb. 8 (approval notice Jan. 31)
  - Feb. 12 and Feb. 15 (approval notice Feb. 7)
  - Feb. 19 and Feb. 22 (approval notice Feb. 14)
  - Feb. 26 and Mar. 1 (approval notice Feb. 21)
  - Mar. 5 and Mar. 8 (approval notice Feb. 28)
  - Mar. 12 and Mar. 15 (approval notice Mar. 7)
  - Mar. 19 and Mar. 22 (approval notice Mar. 14)
- Each week, WDFW will assess landings data from the mainstem Columbia River commercial smelt fishery to determine whether the smelt run size is sufficient to support recreational harvest. While in Harvest Phase 2, a minimum average of 200 pounds per delivery during at least one period is recommended before considering recreational fisheries.
- In the absence of adequate commercial landings data WDFW may use professional judgement to set recreational fisheries.
- It is unlikely the fishery will be open for all tentative dates, but WDFW expects some days to be approved based on the current run size expectation.
- With respect to recreational fisheries in the Sandy River, ODFW will make the determination if a fishery is to occur based on in-season information.

### **FUTURE MEETINGS**

- A Compact/Joint State hearing is scheduled for 11 AM February 10, 2025 via teleconference to consider Select Area commercial salmon (winter, spring, and summer season) and Zone 6 recreational white sturgeon fisheries.
- A hybrid-style Joint State hearing is scheduled for 10 AM February 19, 2025 to consider Columbia River recreational spring Chinook fisheries. The hearing will be held at the ODFW Clackamas office (17330 SE Evelyn Street, Clackamas, OR 97015) and a teleconference call-in option will be available.