

Resident Native Trout Management

Steve Caromile
Inland Fish Program Manager





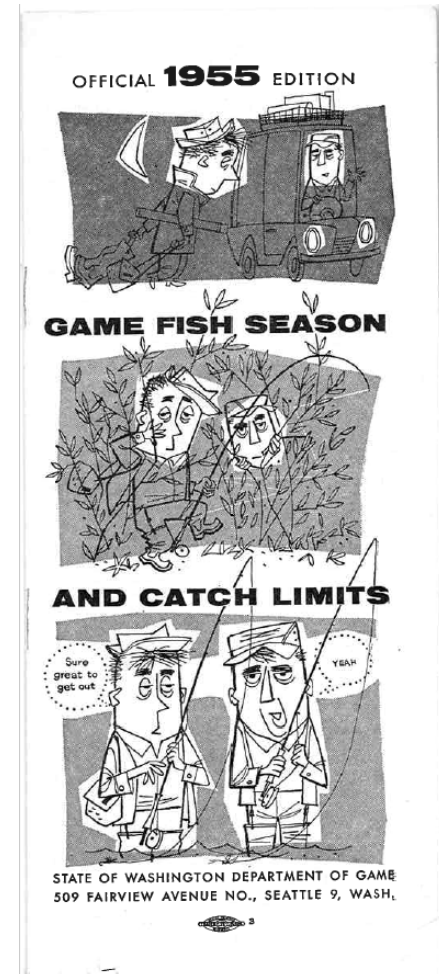
Outline of Presentation

- Review of Pre-1984 Regulatory context
- Basic Fishery Management Strategy
- Changes in angler preferences through time
- Current Management Framework
- Summary
- Questions/Discussion



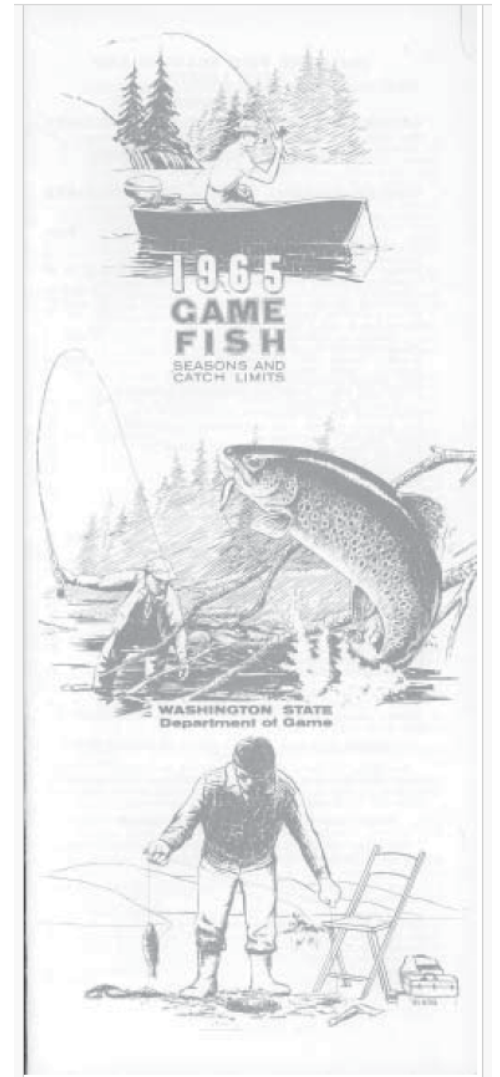
Pre-1984 Regulatory context

- Trout harvest rules had minimal exceptions;
- Resources abundant, bag limits liberal
 - Lakes and Rivers/Streams managed under the same paradigm
- 1950's represented an initial change in philosophy; daily limits reduced, begin to see exceptions to include fly fishing only waters



Regulatory Framework – 1960s & 70s

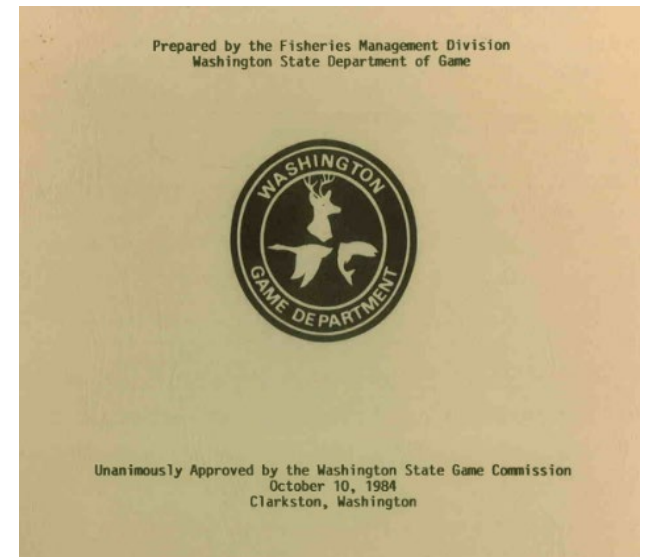
- Seasons structures emerge separating lakes and streams
- Daily limit further reduced and more commonly expressed in number of fish



Regulatory framework – 1980s

- Early 1980s – more special rules:
 - Catch–and–release of coastal cutthroat trout in marine waters of Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca
 - Stillaguamish and tributaries: 2 trout over 10"
- 1984 – Basic Fishery Management Strategy (BFMS)

Game Commission identified need to further prioritize conservation in streams. Staff reported findings and recommendation to implement more conservative rules for native trout.





1984 - BFMS

“A Basic Fishery Management Strategy For Resident and Anadromous Trout in the Stream Habitats of the State of WA.”

Objectives:

- Develop strategies “to meet the conservation objectives of resident and anadromous trout populations.”
- Emphasize management that would “prevent overfishing and be resistant to increased angler effort.”

Recommendations:

- Focus on conservation
- Rivers/Streams and Lakes should be managed separately;
- Statewide freshwater fishing rules created to cover the most common situations



Trout Minimum sizes

Streams/Rivers

- Statewide, 8" Minimum harvest sizes
 - ensure that most females spawn at least once
 - protective of tributary rearing juvenile anadromous and resident salmonids, out-migrating juvenile salmonids and spawning adult resident native trout
- Special Rule, 14" minimum length more protective of sea-run cutthroat and migratory rainbow trout.

Lakes

- Most waters statewide have no minimum length for trout harvest
- Except: Special Rules are applied for conservation reasons or diversity of opportunity;



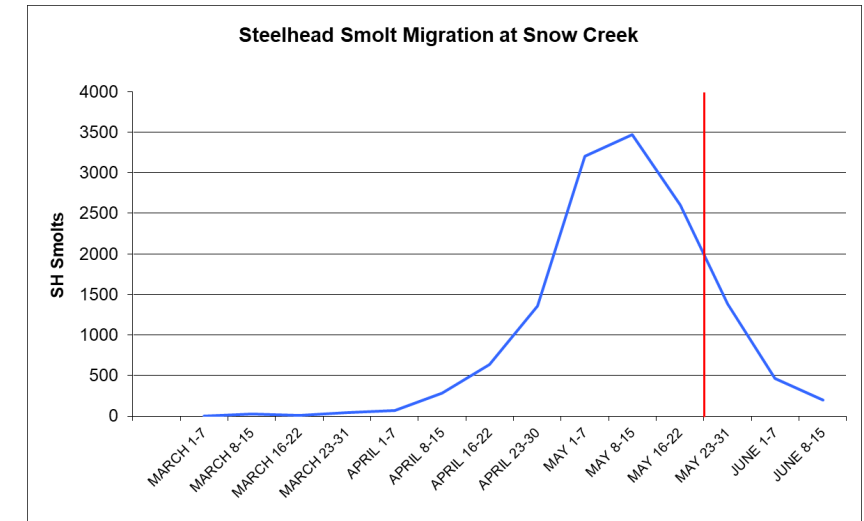
Seasons and Catch Limits – rivers/streams

Season timing

- Designed to be protective of migrating native salmonids
- Balance of conservation priorities and opportunity

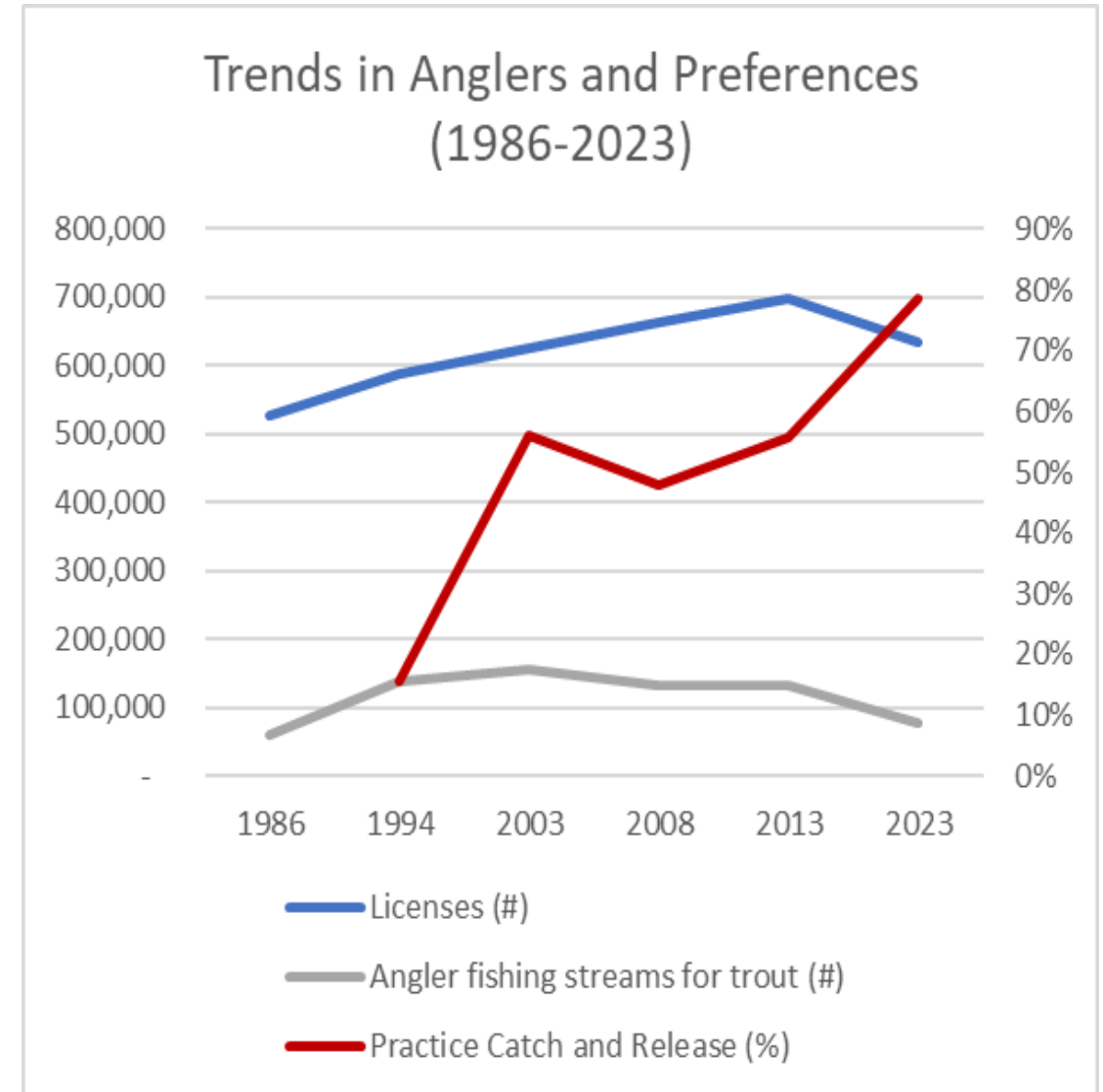
Catch limits

- Designed to spread out allowable harvest over a specified time-period while minimizing conservation risk



Angler Preference

- Number of licensed anglers from 1984 to 2023, **↑** ~20% (blue line)
- Portion of all anglers that reported fishing for trout in streams from 1986 to 2023, **↑** ~4% (gray line)
- Anglers that reported practicing catch-and-release, (red line) 1994 to 2023; 15% in 1994 79% in 2023



Current Framework – Lowland Lakes

- Lake Management Strategies:
 - Wild trout emphasis
 - Trout emphasis
 - Multi-species waters
 - Warmwater lakes



Current Framework – High Lakes

- Science-based management plan –
 - addresses conservation needs of native aquatic communities
 - limited, periodic stocking of native trout at low densities
- Access is limited, ~1,600 in Western WA and ~950 in Eastern WA
- Majority are fishless (62%), some have self-sustaining trout populations (21%), a small portion have introduced fish



Contemporary management; 1986 to Current

Implemented in 1986, effectiveness reviewed in 1995.

- Three (3) river/streams were evaluated (one each in the upper Columbia Basin, lower Columbia, and Puget Sound).
 - New rules were accomplishing the intended objectives
 - Assessments noted increasing numbers of small trout and increasing densities of larger trout



Contemporary management; 1986 to Current (cont)

- Based on BFMS, with exceptions for rules implemented post-1986
- 1995/96, merged rules for the two departments (Game and Fisheries)
- 2007-2010 updates addressed evolving conservation needs and provided new opportunity
- 2015-2018 Statewide Standards and exceptions updated;
 - Further address conservation needs throughout the state (e.g. required the release of cutthroat and wild rainbow in a significant number of major river systems and tributaries)
 - Changes provided greater consistency in rules and some increased opportunity for anglers

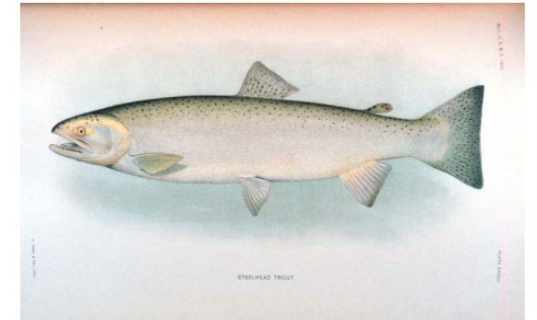


Contemporary management; 1986 to Current (cont.)

Additional guidance found in:

- Ongoing research and scientific findings
- Federal ESA listings –
 - Resource management plans and permit requirements
- Co-management and international treaty requirements (e.g. North of Falcon Policy, Pacific Salmon Treaty, etc.)
- Statewide Steelhead Management Plan

The Pacific Salmon Treaty



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Statewide Steelhead Management Plan:

Statewide Policies, Strategies, and Actions



Current Framework – Streams/Rivers

Statewide rules

- Open Saturday before Memorial Day – October 31
- 8” min, 2 fish limit
- Dolly Varden and Bull Trout: Closed
- Eastern Brook Trout: No daily limit, no minimum size.

Special Rules

- Length limits
- Alternative seasons
- Gear restriction (selective gear, fly fishing)
- Closed areas
- Release wild or all trout



Summary

- Rule structure meets statewide needs and site-specific conservation needs.
- Changes in angler preference are now more aligned with our conservation efforts than they have been in the past
- Management is science-based with needs of broader ecosystem considered
- Consistent with Agency Mission – protect, preserve, and perpetuate, while providing fishing opportunity (RCW 77.04.012)



Questions and Discussion

