

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Fish Program  
**Columbia River Commercial Advisory Group**  
September 5, 2018  
WDFW Ridgefield Office- 5525 S 11<sup>th</sup> St, Ridgefield WA 98642

**Attendance:**

CRCAG Members: Ken Wirkkala, Les Clark, Jim Coleman, Robert Sudar

WDFW Staff: Cindy LeFleur, Ryan Lothrop, Myrtice Dobler, Kessina Lee (for first portion of meeting) Captain Jeff Wickersham (stopped by for introduction and to provide contact information)

Public: None

**Meeting Agenda:**

Time	Topic
10:00 – 10:15	Introductions / Agenda / Review update and timeline
10:15 – 11:45	Policy summary review
11:45 – 12:00	Wrap-up / What's next

**Meeting Notes:**

**Intro**

Advisors asked who was in charge of enforcement in the region. Captain Wickersham came in to introduce himself and explain the area that his team covers- most of the river counties except Pacific.

Our new Regional Director, Kessina Lee, introduced herself. The advisory group did a quick round of introductions

**Observer issues**

Staff asked advisors about what they have heard on observers- whether we would be able to get enough volunteers to make the program worthwhile. Because it's voluntary it can't be randomized, we would still get good information, but our cooperation rates are low.

Several of the concerns expressed were from the small sample- makes group highly vulnerable to one bad set. The program seems to be checking a box because we have to instead of objective driven. It also seems punitive.

Discussion of liability- the issue hasn't changed. This would need to be changed by the law

There's lots of bad blood

- Commercial fishermen were penalized before- now if they don't have to take observers they don't want to

- Recs think that commercial fishermen are refusing
- Perhaps if you did something meaningful in observing the recreational fisheries it would feel more equitable

Those who do take observers aren't seeing anything change. Data hasn't changed. There was a discussion on what had changed- Observer data from 2017 provided information that led to lowering the steelhead mortality rates based (2009, 2012, 2017 data). The challenge is what we tried to do this fall was not statistically defensible.

Ultimately it's recognized that there are a lot of assumptions on what is happening in some of the fisheries- having observers could help shed some light on what is really going on in those fisheries

### **Policy Summary**

What we did for today was pull the section summaries, our consultant is still writing the overall summary. They have some room to do their own analysis- but the information they are working off of are the questions that we answered. They are focusing on "did we implement the policy and what occurred as a result?".

The Advisory Group expressed they would like to have even split- no sport or commercial priorities. And would like to do the best we can for the resource. It should start fair and even. Won't keep commercial interest if they can't make a livelihood, won't keep the recreational folks if we don't raise fish for them to catch.

The Advisory group expressed concerns that the Commission will not look at the details in the document and will look at the summary.

In the presentation to the Commission the Advisory Group would like a conclusion slide stating that the policy did not work- we have the documentation that shows it hasn't met its objectives they don't want people to miss that.

### **Management**

- One of the claims on this policy was that it was going to be a conservation policy- would like the summary to state that this policy did not have a conservation benefit.
  - Some commissioners thought this was a conservation policy- but staff have made it clear that this is not.
- Issues with the fall chinook- lower Columbia sport mark selective fishery should not be considered a 'conservation' fishery- mark rate is low, mortality rate is high
- In concurrency section (3<sup>rd</sup> section of 2019 Fall Chinook) WA buyers cannot bring in fish. All fish sales would have to be in OR- (Staff will check to make sure this is correct)
  - All the buyers this fall were WA buyers- when catches are low OR buyers don't send boats, most recently OR has not been buying from WA.
- How do Sport fisheries use avoidance as selectivity?

- Time and place restrictions (ex. Area differences- Tongue Point to Lewis, bag limit difference)
  - Opportunity is there but the bulk of the fishery dries up
  - While management objective is met- ex. Reduction of impact on steelhead
- Avoidance doesn't look the same between recreational and commercial

### Recreational

- If there are fish going unharvested in their allocation, then they are not using the allocation that they took from the commercial fishery
  - Recs are using about 75% of allocation
  - Commercial can reach 100% of their allocation
- Thinks that Spring Chinook would be a better example of when they used their allocation
- Recreational objective wasn't harvest- it was opportunity which they hoped would turn into angler trips

### Commercial

- We know that commercial is not the only user of Select Area fish, but wish that the Deep River plan had been brought before the Advisory Group – the change to late coho
  - That was more of an immediate decision
  - Staff hope to have more discussions and perhaps look at some of the other areas
- Discussion of the coho program and potential loss of funding from BPA
- With switch to late Coho, we don't know how that fishery will act
  - It's a big question and a lot of risk to assume that the stock will do the same as the early stock.
- License buy back is left in the air on why it didn't succeed/happen/ or on hold
  - Would like to have a why- ex. Lack of funding, lack of interest, etc.
- Saying Chinook catch was less than modeled- seems to say that the steelhead data is off.
  - Wants to make sure that people know we handled less steelhead than expected
  - Regardless of how many chinook caught the mortality rate was less than expected
  - Would like a sentence explaining the immediate mortality rate was less than expected

### Tribal

- Used to put 50 summer Chinook for Wanapum- now they're using 200+ fish, why the increase?
  - Their actual catch averages 200 summer Chinook per year
  - But for Spring Chinook they didn't fish this year.

### Allocation

- Once run is past peak sport fishery declines- this can be due to water quality, and ability to catch fish
  - The Advisory Group asked staff to make sure the why is clear.
- There's a disconnect in the whole policy- work group expectation was that sport would not be able to use full allocation of URBs, the unused URBs were expected to be used by commercial fishery- this is what drove the financial numbers
  - This works as long as there are enough URBs
  - If the run doesn't materialize than there will be economic harm
- This is why the 80:20 split will kill commercial fisheries
- This is why there hasn't been a benefit to the recreational fishery, we were already trying to make the fisheries as good as they could be using the matrices- the policy made it harder to manage the fisheries.
- Discussion on Table 30C- catch balance shares
  - Question on accuracy of average % used
  - The difference in the 2017 fishery- was after policy where they could only fish in SAFE
  - Make foot note saying 2017 on the commercial side- fisheries only occurred in Select Areas (no mainstem fisheries)
- 36C- Commercial impacts are primarily utilized above the Lewis River, the commercial fishery is not able to harvest tules destined for lower river hatcheries.
  - Concerned that the table makes it look like we are getting quite a few fish
    - Doesn't describe what was available, and sometimes the increase is on purpose
    - Over the last 5 years the development of alternative gears did not make up for the overall decline. We tried to correct for run size, but we don't have the time to tell the story for each fishery each year.

#### Alternative Gear

- Commercial lost some selective fisheries the policy doesn't allow anymore
  - large mesh fishery in March
  - Spring Chinook tangle net
  - Fall coho
- Same argument as made with sport fishery- mark rate and mortality rate in the fall

#### Economics

- Discussion on Table 2I
  - The \$0 on tables means there wasn't a loss
  - For example, 2016 was constrained by something else- so even if you had more allocation you wouldn't have been able to use it.
- Worried that the summary says that there were increases in the rec fishing but doesn't note the predicted gains of 15-20% were not achieved.

#### **Goals of Policy**

There was a discussion of goals, Advisory members don't think the shift in allocation was one of the goals in the Policy but that was one of the few mandates in the Policy. The goals were the things that were supposed to happen as a result of that mandate. The allocation shifts were spelled out, and for the most part they were met, at least in the pre-season planning. Those mandates were similar to the specification of removing gillnets from the mainstem by 2016, and maybe even increasing Select Area releases, though those required funding which was not provided for in the Policy and couldn't just be a decision by staff.

The following are some of the actual goals:

- Create a sport priority.
  - This did happen, but in reality there already was a sport priority in all seasons.
- Require barbless hooks.
  - This was accomplished, at least so far, but the benefits have not been quantified.
- Improved conservation.
  - The conservation was already in the US v. Oregon treaty and the ESA limitations. As staff pointed out in this review, there is no new conservation benefit via this Policy.
- Increased angler trips - an expectation of 15% in the short term and 22% in the long term.
  - It didn't happen in any year, even with the big returns from 2014-2016.
- Increased angler license sales.
  - Didn't happen, even as the populations in Washington and Oregon grew.
- Increased Select Area production.
  - There were some improvements, all in Oregon. Some goals were met, or nearly met, but not for all stocks. There were also significant declines, we all know Washington's results.
- Improved economics for the commercial fishery.
  - Didn't happen. The gains in the Select Areas didn't replace the losses in the mainstem.
- Develop new Select Area sites.
  - One site in each state was identified as a possibility but there were problems with both, no funding was provided to expand and there was no certainty that viable smolts would be available.
- Development of alternative selective commercial gears.
  - Also hasn't happened as planned, plus we lost some selective fisheries
- Elimination of non-selective gillnets in the mainstem.
  - The plan did remove gillnets from most fisheries, but the evidence that they are non-selective as we use them - with time, area and mesh variations - was never proven. In fact, the on-board monitoring showed we were actually more selective for steelhead than previously measured.
- MSC certification.
  - This did not happen, but we also told them in 2012 that it would be a waste of time and money.

- Sport guide logbooks.
  - Didn't happen.

### **Wrap-up**

The consultant's summary should come out Friday, as soon as we can we will send it out to the Advisory Group and Commission to review.

Would like to have this included: The policy achieved shifting allocation, but the benefits were not obvious or measurable.

Path forward: Is there a definitive discussion on what will happen?

- WDFW staff is not in the loop- advisory group members may want to reach out to commission members

### **Action Items:**

WDFW staff:

- Update Policy Review documents with input from CRCAG for final document due October 15

CRCAG:

- Review meeting notes for finalization

### **Next Meeting/ Important Dates:**

Thursday, September 13 @ 4pm- Fish Committee Meeting in Olympia WA

Saturday, September 15 @ 8 am- Presentation to the Commission, Olympia WA