

Puget Sound Steelhead Advisory Group (PSSAG) Meeting Notes

February 1, 2018, Noon – 7PM

Embassy Suites, Lynnwood, Washington, 98036

Drafted by Cole Caldwell and James Scott

Key Messages to Stakeholders Agreed at Meeting Conclusion

- 1) We reviewed public comments on the potential recreational catch and release fishery for steelhead in the Skagit River. When considering recreational fishery rules, we recommend that the Department emphasize providing time and area for the fishery. This is a unique opportunity and it is important that the fishery be implemented successfully - do it right.
- 2) A holistic approach to steelhead management will be essential to rebuilding steelhead runs and providing fishing opportunities. We can make a valuable contribution to conserving and rebuilding Puget Sound steelhead by identifying habitat strategies and actions.

Agenda Items discussed at the meeting:

1) Introduction

2) Potential 2018 Skagit Steelhead Fishery (Edward Eleazer)

- What public comments have been provided to the Department?
- What additional suggestions do advisors have for a rule regarding the time, area, and manner for the potential fishery?

3) Potential Skagit Hatchery Steelhead Program

- Review requests for additional information and modifications to draft preliminary analysis.

4) Summer Steelhead Hatchery Programs

- Review letter from NOAA Fisheries and response from the Department.
- Review performance of current programs and alternative options.

5) Northern Cascades MPG Steelhead

- Review iterative approach to developing a portfolio of conservation objectives, sustainable fisheries, and artificial production programs.
- What is our proposed delisting scenario?
- What are our aspirational objectives for Northern Cascades recreational fisheries?
- Would an artificial production program help achieve conservation or fishery objectives?

6) Northern Cascades MPG Steelhead (continued)

7) Looking Ahead

8) External Messages

- What are the 3-5 messages regarding this meeting that we want to provide to other interested stakeholders?

9) Public Comment

10) Thoughts on Meeting

Advisors Attending

David Yamashita

Jamie Glasgow

Derek Day

Mark Spada

Gary Butrim

Curt Wilson

Rich Simms

Nick Chambers (for Rob Masonis)

Curt Kraemer
Al Senyohl
Andy Marks
Conrad Gowell (for Jonathan Stumpf)

Public Attending

Jesse Salsberry

Staff Attending

Jim Scott (co-facilitator), Cole Caldwell (co-facilitator)
Brett Barkdull
Jennifer Whitney
Edward Eleazer

Notes from the meeting per agenda item:

Introduction

- Jim distributed the agenda and multiple handouts to the group and then discussed the meeting agenda and tasks that the PSSAG would be working on for the meeting.
- Jim discussed PSSAG obligations for reviewing provisional recommendations moving forward.
- Jim discussed the need for PSSAG to review an overlooked Central and South Puget Sound River decision (Green River, Summer Steelhead Program).

Central & South Puget Sound Provisional Portfolio

- Jim asked all PSSAG member to review the provisional decisions for the Central and South Puget Sound portfolio (provided as a handout to the group) and provide Jim with any corrections.

Potential 2018 Skagit Steelhead Fishery, Public Meetings and Comments, and PSSAG Recommendations

- A Resource Management Plan (RMP) was submitted to NOAA Fisheries in November 2016 and must be approved before a steelhead fishery can be implemented. If approved, the RMP would be the basis for identifying allowable steelhead impacts each year.
 - NOAA has collected public comments related to a Proposed Evaluation and Pending (PEPD) regarding the criteria for plan approval.
 - WDFW is expecting a decision from NOAA Fisheries in March 2018.
- Edward Eleazer provided a presentation to the PSSAG regarding two public meetings (one at Sedro Woolley, WA, and another at Mill Creek, WA) seeking public input on potential recreational fishery rules. The rules would be used to implement the RMP (if approved) in a potential 2018 Skagit River steelhead fishery.
- The public meetings were geared towards learning time, area, and gear preferences for the potential fishery, and included a specific questionnaire to gather comments.
- Results from the public meetings and questionnaire are summarized in the presentation.
- PSSAG suggestions and recommendations for rules regarding the potential Skagit River fishery:
 - The Department should emphasize providing time and area for the fishery when developing the fishery rules.
 - This is a unique opportunity and it is important that the fishery be implemented successfully - do it right.

- Fishery impact rates should be monitored during the season due to the effectiveness of current angling practices. WDFW representatives stated that the fishery could be closed within a 24 hour timespan.
- Consideration should be given to closing the recreational fishery on April 15th to limit impacts on kelts.
- PSSAG members suggested WDFW and others look at other similar river systems and how they are regulated to help guide how the Skagit River fishery is managed (look outside the box).
- PSSAG members recognized that boat restrictions will prevent some people from fishing. Special attention should be sought towards elderly and disabled anglers.
- PSSAG members recognized that the Skagit River is large and that boat fishing can help distribute people and decrease bank fishing competition.
- WDFW staff clarified that a default 10% catch and release mortality is specified within the Statewide Steelhead Management Plan. This rate will be used unless specific information is available for the Skagit River or NOAA Fisheries requires the use of a higher rate.

Potential Skagit Hatchery Steelhead Program

- PSSAG reviewed requests for additional information and modifications to the draft preliminary analysis (see handout).
- PSSAG members were provided handouts and discussed follow-up questions and analyses.
- Additional questions identified were:
 - The analysis assumed a 70% harvest rate on marked fish. Is that achievable?
 - What might the tribal fishery season look like with and without the hatchery program?
 - What is the accuracy of the preseason forecasts of abundance?
 - What is the expected run-timing of the fish? Would they be accessible to the recreational fishery?
 - Is space available at the Marblemount Hatchery to increase production above 200,000?
- PSSAG reviewed previous Skagit River broodstock program records and discussed the available data.
 - Jim analyzed and provided a summary of the information to the group. He noted that evaluations of the programs were limited or poorly documented.
 - Jim noted that the historic Skagit River broodstock program management approaches do not match what the proposed program would seek to accomplish.
 - PSSAG members suggested that Ted Muller may have included information in historical Dingell-Johnson (federal funding source) reports {follow-up note: WDFW staff looked for these reports and were unable to locate them}.
 - PSSAG members recognized that a two-year smolt program would be needed, thus an increased management effort would be needed to decrease precocious males.
 - PSSAG recognized that integrated fish program techniques have improved over time.
 - Curt K. provided PSSAG with hydrograph handouts. He suggested that these handouts may be useful when discussing the Northern Cascades Major Population Group and associated fisheries.

Summer Steelhead Hatchery Programs

- PSSAG reviewed a letter from NOAA Fisheries and response from the Department.
- PSSAG reviewed the performance of current programs and alternative options.

- The Snohomish and Stillaguamish Rivers have summer steelhead hatchery programs that use a broodstock that originated from the lower Columbia River.
- The Technical Recovery team identified four historical summer steelhead populations (Deer Creek, Canyon Creek, North Fork Skykomish, and Tolt River) in these rivers
- Impacts to natural spawning populations.
 - PEHC (i.e. estimate of how much gene flow occurs, reference definition within the PSSAG folder Glossary, if needed) is standardized and limited at 2% by WDFW for populations important to conservation and recovery.
 - High rates of gene flow have occurred from the hatchery programs to some natural populations.
 - NOAA recognized these conditions and wrote WDFW a letter expressing concern and encouraged alternative hatchery management programs.
 - Alternative WDFW hatchery options were provided to PSSAG for review (see handout).
 - District Biologist Jennifer Whitney provided PSSAG with handouts and summarized the available natural population information above Sunset Falls.
 - Sunset Falls historically blocked access of anadromous fish to the upper watershed. Genetic information indicates that steelhead that spawn above Sunset Falls are now primarily naturalized Skamania-origin summer steelhead.
 - The Evenson Estate has provided funding for a Skykomish River Summer Run Research Program, conducted in collaboration with the Steelhead Trout Club, that has provided valuable information on spawn timing and location, age, and genetic characteristics of steelhead spawning above Sunset Falls.
 - Adult fish do fall back through the falls.
 - There is a hydroelectric project being proposed for this watershed.

Northern Cascades MPG Steelhead

- PSSAG reviewed iterative approach to developing a portfolio of conservation objectives, sustainable fisheries, and artificial production programs.
- PSSAG developed preliminary proposals for delisting scenarios
 - Group 1: Rich S., Derek D., and Andy M. (Eleazer)
 - Group 2: Jamie G., Curt W., Al S. (Whitney)
 - Group 3: Curt K., Gary B., David Y. (Barkdull)
 - Group 4: Mark S., Nick C., and Conrad G. (Scott)
- Preliminary Proposals Results for Delisting Scenarios Developed by PSSAG on 2/1/218

Population	Contribution to Delisting				Comments
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	
Drayton Harbor (w)	C	S	S	C	(2S, 2C)
Nooksack (w)	P	P	P	P	(P)
S. Fk. Nooksack (s)	P	P	P	P	(P)
Samish/Bellingham (w)	P	C	P	C	(2C, 2P)
Skagit (s/w)	P	P	C	P	(1C, 3P)
Nookachamps (w)	C	C	P	P	(2C, 2P)
Baker (s/w)	S	C	S	C	(2S, 2C)
Sauk (s/w)	P	P	P	P	(P)
Stillaguamish (w)	P	C	C	C	(3C, 1P)
Deer (s)	P	P	P	P	(P)

Canyon (s)	C	P	C	P	(2C, 2P)
Snohomish/Skykomish (w)	C	P	C	P	(2C, 2P)
Pilchuck (w)	P	P	P	P	(P)
N. Fk. Skykomish (s)	S	C	S	P	(2S, 1C, 1P)
Snoqualmie (w)	C	P	P	P	(1C, 3P)
Tolt (s)	C	P	C	P	(2C, 2P)
Geometric Mean	2.25	2.47	2.30	2.71	

(w) = winter, (s) = summer, P = Primary Population, C = Contributing Population, S = Stabilizing Population

- PSSAG was not able to address the aspirational objectives for Northern Cascades recreational fisheries. This will occur at the next meeting.
- PSSAG was not able to address if an artificial production program would help achieve conservation or fishery objectives.

Looking Ahead

- PSSAG and WDFW staff will continue to answer questions about potential hatchery program on the Skagit River.
- PSSAG will continue to develop preliminary recreational fishery recommendations
- PSSAG will discuss how much effort the group wants to put into habitat strategies moving forward with the portfolio.
- PSSAG will develop a communication strategy for key stakeholder groups, WDFW Commission, and others. This might include a Power Point presentation and report.

External Messages

- We reviewed public comments on the potential recreational catch and release fishery for steelhead in the Skagit River. When considering recreational fishery rules, we recommend that the Department emphasize providing time and area for the fishery. This is a unique opportunity and it is important that the fishery be implemented successfully - do it right.
- A holistic approach to steelhead management will be essential to rebuilding steelhead runs and providing fishing opportunities. We can make a valuable contribution to conserving and rebuilding Puget Sound steelhead by identifying habitat strategies and actions.

Public Comment

- Have the public input and comment process changed for the development of Wild Stock Gene Banks?
 - Jim addressed why some processes are different and noted that the Puget Sound process was initiated with the Puget Sound Hatchery Action Advisory Group (2011-2012) and that public meetings occurred in 2015-2016.

Thoughts on Meeting

- The group is taking time to make good decisions.
- The group has a good dialogue and had good discussions about the Skagit River.
- It's good, helpful, and enjoyable to compare different perspectives.
- The group and WDFW need to be proactive and spread the word about what is taking place/being accomplished as these meetings.

- Habitat discussion will be very important moving forward (restoration processes specifically)
- The Skagit River discussion was critical and well received by members of the group.
- A Skagit River catch and release fishery needs to be thought about critically and optimistically.