

Summary

Meeting dates:	January 9, 2015
Agenda item:	Lower Columbia River Sturgeon (Briefing and Public Hearing)
Presenter(s):	Cindy Le Fleur, Region 5 Fish Program Manager (Fish Program) Brad James, Region 5 Sturgeon Manager (Fish Program)

Background summary:

Information regarding Lower Columbia River (LCR) white sturgeon population status was presented to the Commission on December 13, 2014. Population status indicators are mixed. A significant positive indicator is a doubling of legal-size abundance over the past 4 years. Areas of concern are depressed spawner-size abundance and a lack of improvement in juvenile production.

Currently, retention of white sturgeon is prohibited in recreational and non-Indian commercial fisheries in the lower Columbia River downstream of Bonneville Dam, the Oregon and Washington coasts, Puget Sound, and their tributaries. With retention prohibited in 2014, angler participation in the Columbia River estuary sport sturgeon fishery declined by 90% from 2013 levels and by 82% elsewhere in the LCR. There has been some interest from the public to see conservative retention fisheries reinstated in 2015.

With the doubling of legal-size abundance, staff from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) are exploring whether or not reinstating conservative retention fisheries are warranted for 2015. ODFW staff will be briefing the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission on LCR white sturgeon population status at their January 9 meeting. The ODFW briefing does not include a staff recommendation.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Staff is requesting time to meet with the Commission at the February 6-7, 2015 meeting to update members on results of discussions with ODFW and the public on options for 2015 LCR white sturgeon fishery management, in particular regarding options for retention in 2015.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Staff met with members of both the Columbia River Recreational and Commercial Advisory groups on December 4, 2014. Staff received a mix of responses from Recreational advisors that included both support and opposition to retention fisheries in 2015, with others reserving their opinion for what staff ends up recommending.

The Coastal Conservation Association submitted a letter to both the Washington and Oregon Fish and Wildlife commissions identifying the areas where they have concerns about current population status. The letter did not specify whether they supported or opposed reinstating retention fisheries, but did encourage continuation of using a precautionary approach to managing fisheries.

The Ilwaco Charter Boat Association has consistently expressed that maintaining a conservative level of retention of white sturgeon is necessary to generate angler interest and support the economy of the lower Columbia coastal communities in the summer prior to the beginning of coastal salmon fisheries.

Action requested:

Briefing only.

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A

Communications plan:

N/A