



Comprehensive Evaluation of the Columbia River Basin Salmon Management Policy C-3620, 2013-2017

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Executive Summary

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted the Columbia River Basin Salmon Management Policy (C-3620) in January 2013 and included direction for a comprehensive five-year review by the end of 2018. The comprehensive review began in January 2018, with written questions from the Fish and Wildlife Commission focused on whether the provisions of the Policy were implemented or not and whether the stated purposes and goals of the Policy were successfully achieved. During the course of the review (January to September 2018), Department staff met frequently with commissioners, and as a result, additional questions and information requests were incorporated into the review.

The intent of this review was to assist the Commission in their evaluation of a) whether the Policy was successful in achieving the stated objectives, principles, and provisions; b) areas where the Policy failed or has not been working well, and c) to provide information that might help explain reasons why these potential outcomes may have occurred. The intent can be abbreviated as follows: Has the policy been implemented as written, and what has occurred as a result of policy changes?

The analytical approach was to provide information and analysis for each of the written questions, and then to organize the analysis into seven overarching theme categories. Detailed responses to those questions, as well as public comments on each question, are located in the following seven themed sections of this report: General Fishery Management, Recreational Fisheries, Commercial Fisheries, Tribal Fisheries, Allocation, and Economics.

General Fishery Management

This theme encompassed questions about conservation, fishery management, predation and concurrency.

There were few aspects of the Policy that focused on conservation; however, the Policy operated within the conservation guidelines already in place through *U.S. v Oregon*. Meeting *U.S. v Oregon* requirements was an overarching principle, and all fisheries were conducted consistent with the *U.S. v Oregon* court order. The Policy intent was to enhance the conservation benefits for tule fall Chinook and coho, by implementing additional mark-selective fisheries, primarily with the transition to alternative gear commercial fisheries. Very few additional mark-selective fisheries were implemented during the Policy.

During the Policy implementation period, the proportion of hatchery fish on spawning grounds (pHOS) decreased compared to the pre-policy average in five primary Lower Columbia River fall Chinook populations, however; the bulk of this reduction was attributed to the use of weirs, as there were only limited mark-selective mainstem recreational and commercial fisheries that occurred.



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Concurrent regulations and/or policies between Oregon and Washington are critical to effectively manage fisheries in the Columbia River. There are several instances where achieving concurrency is difficult due to substantive differences between the current Washington Policy and Oregon rule/policies. These instances can result in unharvested fish or not meeting the objectives of both states. Non-concurrent rules can be very challenging for fishery managers and enforcement officers. These challenges are described in a synopsis at the end the General Fishery Management section.

Though not a direct result of the Policy, predator reduction programs and improvements in management tools are occurring consistent with C-3620's Guiding Principles.

Recreational Fisheries

This theme encompassed questions about the goals to prioritize recreational fishing in the mainstem of the Columbia River, implementation of barbless hooks in mainstem and tributary salmon fisheries, and the charge to evaluate the use of logbooks.

Recreational fisheries have been prioritized in the mainstem as a result of changes to allocations that result in a high proportion of their allocation being utilized. A barbless hook requirement was implemented in the mainstem Columbia River and tributary recreational fisheries with some exceptions where ESA-impacts are negligible. Staff is not aware of any information presented during the consideration of the Policy, on the scientific basis of a difference in mortality due to the use of barbed versus barbless hooks. Legislation has occurred to allow Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to require logbook use for the guide industry but has not been implemented.

Commercial Fisheries

This theme encompassed questions about the goals to explore new Select Areas, monitor the fishery, seek certification as a sustainably managed fishery, and pursue commercial license buy-backs.

Exploration of new Select Areas occurred by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and one potential new site for Washington was identified in their analysis. At this time, no additional work has been done to consider this site. A new Select Area site in Washington was attempted in Cathlamet Channel but was not successful due to poor smolt survival and resulted in no new fishery.

The commercial fishery was monitored in 2017, and results were similar to expectations. A certification for a sustainably managed fishery was not attempted during the Policy. A commercial license buy-back program was initiated, but the effort was abandoned and a new approach has begun.



Tribal Fisheries

The objectives of the Policy included meeting the subsistence and ceremonial needs of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Wanapum Band (RCW 77.12.453). The Colville Tribes and Wanapum Band were allocated sufficient catch to meet their annual needs.

Allocation

This theme primarily encompassed questions about allocation between sport and commercial fisheries and allocation within the sport fishery, including area-specific allocations.

Recreational and commercial fisheries have been prioritized in the mainstem and off-channel areas, respectively, through ESA-impact allocations. All of the fisheries were planned pre-season using the Policy allocations. As fisheries occurred, changes to run sizes and actual harvests resulted in alterations to the pre-season plan. Comparing ESA impact sharing may not be the most appropriate way to view how the Policy performed. For most sport and commercial fisheries and within geographic areas, a high percentage of their catch allocation was used, with the exception of the upriver/lower river sharing for spring Chinook.

Alternative Gear

This theme primarily encompassed questions about development and implementation of alternative gears while phasing out gillnets in the mainstem Columbia.

Implementation of alternative gear was a key component to the success of the Policy, but did not materialized. There have been substantial resources invested to develop and test alternative fishing methods for Lower Columbia River commercial fisheries. Catch rates, bycatch, post-capture fish condition and survival, and gear investment costs have been evaluated for purse seines and beach seines for summer and fall fisheries. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, no alternative gear types have been fully adopted, though coho and spring Chinook tangle net and fall seine net (beach and purse) fisheries have been operated under the Washington Administrative Code and RCW 77.70.180, respectively. There are a number of issues associated with successful implementation of alternative gears, including high handle of non-target species (specifically steelhead,) high release mortality rates, ESA impact limitations, and high cost to operate the gear. Some commercial licensees have made notable investments to use alternate gears; to date, there has been no return from those investments.

Economics

The Policy endeavored to *“enhance the overall economic well-being and stability of Columbia River fisheries”* by prioritizing use of alternate commercial gear types in the Columbia River mainstem, increasing commercial harvest in off-channel fishing areas, and boosting recreational angling opportunity. This theme primarily encompassed questions about whether the expected economic benefits have accrued as a result of Policy implementation and whether adaptive adjustments to the Policy have occurred if the expected benefits were not realized, as prescribed in the Policy.



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Estimating economic impacts for this assessment is challenging for a number of reasons. The Columbia River Fishery Management Workgroup process included a multitude of assumptions during the development of their report intended for the Commission, and many of those assumptions were included in this Policy. The expectations from the Workgroup were meant to provide a trend or change over time of fishery angler trips and ex-vessel values. The Policy was expected to increase recreational angler trips by reallocating more impacts or fish to the recreational fisheries, and increase ex-vessel value to the commercial fishery through increased production in Select Areas and implementation of alternative gears.

It is important to note that the analysis of economic benefit that has accrued as a direct result of the Policy is complicated by factors affecting the economic value of both recreational and commercial fisheries that are not under control of the Policy, such as unexpected changes in the abundance of fish returning to the Columbia Basin, changes in the price of commercially caught salmon, and other factors. Nevertheless, when analytical corrections and normalizations regarding such factors are attempted, it remains apparent that the goal of enhancing the overall economic well-being and stability of Columbia River fisheries was not achieved as expected.

After standardizing the data for total salmon returns to the Columbia Basin (angler trips/fish returns), the annual number of angler trips to mainstem fisheries downstream of Bonneville Dam decreased overall during the post policy period despite a slight increase in total fishing days.

Lower than expected commercial landings for spring and summer Chinook were offset by a relatively high price per pound. A small proportion of landings were made via experimental seine and tangle net fisheries. The majority of gillnet ex-vessel value was derived from mainstem fisheries (which Policy C-3620 terminates after 2018), and increased slightly relative to the economic contribution of mainstem fisheries during the pre-policy period. Ex-vessel value derived from off-channel fisheries did not increase as expected during the policy implementation period and primarily benefited Oregon fishers. Overall, the commercial fishery saw a decrease in ex-vessel value after standardizing for run size.

Conclusions

The large economic benefits for both commercial and recreational fisheries expected from the Policy were not observed during the implementation period. Commercial Select Area enhancements and alternative gear development have not replaced mainstem fisheries. Recreational fisheries have only seen marginal benefits to changes in allocations. The expectations in the development of the Policy were not met.



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List of Ideas for Columbia River Policy

Received from the Public and Washington Commission

October 26, 2018

General Ideas

1. Ability for constituents to participate in next steps
2. Status quo – more time is needed for review of the Policy
3. Adjustments to the Policy need to be made – the plan has failed on all levels
4. Drastic course correction is needed
5. Need to develop an different strategy – need fish on the market
6. Need to make sure we continue to produce sufficient hatchery fish for all fisheries
7. Both states (WA and OR) should lobby NW Power and Conservation Council for continued funding through BPA for SAFE areas
8. WA commission should coordinate with NOAA on any hatchery production changes to continue to comply with all ESA requirements
9. Include hatchery production goals in the Policy to raise more fish
10. Hatchery surplus needs to be considered or risk reduced hatchery production
11. Need the Policy to be better interfaced with the Lower Columbia Recovery Plan and the Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries Plan
 - a. The Policy needs to include acknowledgment of an all H approach
 - b. Include provisions and goals for all H's
 - c. Improve communication with all H's especially recovery boards

General Management

12. Work with Oregon commission to improve all sectors
13. Negotiate for concurrent regulations with Oregon
14. Leave non-concurrency issues alone for 2019
15. Fish to preseason schedule before extending fisheries until there is a run update (primarily spring Chinook)
16. Increase monitoring and observation of fisheries
17. Resolve the liability issue with the commercial industry for the observer program
18. Mandate more fishery monitors/observers in sport and commercial fisheries
19. Conservation has to be over-riding principle
20. Manage escapement for the natural production needs
21. Enhance commercial fishing – stop trying to remove the gillnets– legislative mandate
22. Mandate more selective fisheries
23. Consider the role the sport fishery can have as a mop-up fishery on tule Chinook
24. Education for the public to identify tule Chinook to assist with release
25. Live release fishing methods only
26. Focus attention on improving run forecasts

Recreational Fisheries



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27. Consider logbooks for all sport anglers
 - a. Continue to work on implementing log books for sport sector
 - b. Require logbooks for sport fishery guides/guide boats
28. Change barbless hook requirement to voluntary
29. Alter or eliminate the Youngs Bay sport fishery closure

Commercial Fisheries

30. Prioritize a commercial license buyback program, including funding
 - c. Buyback – start planning and budgeting
31. Provide an amount of fish/opportunity to allow for a profit to commercial fishers based on the social contract between WDFW and the commercial license holder; a contract that commercial license holders believe is renewed annually
32. Need to develop a gear for summer Chinook
33. Provide for a gillnet fishery in the summer with appropriate time and area restrictions

Allocation

34. Change current sport/commercial allocations
35. 50/50 sport/commercial allocation
36. Consider the matrix concept that was used in the past for spring Chinook and coho
37. Use an abundance-based matrix for spring Chinook allocation
38. Provide separate allocation of limiting impacts for annual tangle net coho fisheries
39. Redistribute the catch to more tributary-based fisheries

Allocation – Upriver/lower river

40. Change allocation of sport fishery between upriver and lower river
41. Use harvest as the metric for upriver/downriver allocation for spring Chinook
42. Use the Columbia River endorsement sales as the allocation sharing for upriver/downriver allocation for spring Chinook
43. Consider value-added to the angler trips in the smaller communities (Brewster) versus the greater Portland area and their impact on the economy
44. Spring Chinook allocation – if lower river (below Bonneville) exceeds allocation in one year, the second year should be “payback”
 - a. Payback for overages by the below Bonneville fisheries to above Bonneville fisheries the following year if the lower river fisheries fish into the upriver share
45. Upriver/downriver sharing based on origin of stock – primarily spring Chinook
46. Increase the above Bonneville allocation to a level that allows for equitable recreational fishing opportunities for spring Chinook in the areas above Bonneville Dam, and in the Snake River
47. Apply the spring Chinook management buffer only to fisheries below Bonneville Dam
48. Establish a defined season length objective for fisheries above Bonneville
49. Remove the catch balancing requirements from the above Bonneville recreational fisheries



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50. Implement days per week recreational fisheries below Bonneville when upriver stocks are first present in the run
51. Implement measurement of economic value based upon fishing opportunity rather than harvest
52. Strictly fish to the preseason plan with no below Bonneville fishery extensions until the run update occurs
53. Suggest using real-time dam passage to allocate spring Chinook between upriver and lower river fisheries
54. Consider a bi-state group to discuss upriver/downriver spring Chinook allocation
55. Allocation should consider salmon recovery efforts by upriver entities.

Alternative Gear

56. Alternative gear – hire a conservation expert to assist WDFW in designing a program.
 - b. Regroup and convene discussions with commercial fishers
 - c. Need to make progress on alternative gear and buyback
57. Provide real incentives and planning for alternative gear
 - a. Hire an alternative gear expert
 - b. Return the commercial fishery flexibility to pre-Policy until alternative gear is successful for implementation
58. Consider alternative gear locations in tributary mouths
59. Commission should complete an effective program, including funding for alternative gear (seines)
60. Allow use of spring Chinook tangle net gear
61. Allow tangle net commercial fisheries in the spring or throughout the year as dictated by run size and other species of concern
62. End the gillnet ban for mainstem fisheries
63. Keep the gillnet ban for mainstem fisheries

Economics

64. Consider the values from commercial fishing to the smaller communities and their impact on the economy
65. Engage the commercial fishing industry on further SAFE development
66. Better SAFE areas in Washington