

Concise Explanatory Statement Lake Roosevelt Sturgeon Rules

Rules amended as part of this rulemaking:

WAC 220-316-010

Sturgeon-Areas, seasons, limits, and unlawful acts

1. **Background/Summary of Project:**

Weak year-classes of wild-caught-larval (WCL) white sturgeon produced between 2011-2016 (year-classes of concern), which were reared and released as part of the conservation aquaculture program in Lake Roosevelt, will begin entering harvestable sizes in 2023. This group of sturgeon is present in low abundance but has high conservation value. Concurrently, there is a need to maintain a harvest sturgeon fishery in Lake Roosevelt in order to remove over-represented year-classes of hatchery sturgeon produced from 2001-2010. The Lake Roosevelt sturgeon fishery will require multiple rule changes over the next decade in order to maintain harvest of target year-classes of sturgeon while managing the fishery to minimize harvest impacts to WCL year-classes of concern.

2. **Reasons for adopting the rule:**

The purpose of the proposal is to change the permanent rules for the Lake Roosevelt white sturgeon fishery. The anticipated effect of this change is enhanced conservation of the white sturgeon population in Lake Roosevelt; specifically, protection for certain year-classes of high conservation value while allowing for harvest of over-represented year-classes of hatchery-origin sturgeon. The Lake Roosevelt sturgeon fishery is currently closed to fishing by permanent rule. Changes would include a fishing season of September 16-November 30 and a harvest slot limit of 53-63 inches Fork Length. In addition, anglers would be required to cease fishing for the day after obtaining a daily limit and for the season after the annual limit has been taken. Other statewide rules would apply.

Sturgeon creel data (collected annually) and stock assessment data (collected biennially) indicate certain weak year-classes of sturgeon in Lake Roosevelt produced between 2011-2016. These weak year-classes cannot withstand harvest. Data support the need for continued removal (harvest) of over-represented year-classes of hatchery sturgeon produced between 2001-2010. In addition, the wild adult population is declining more rapidly in the US than in Canada, and non-harvest-related fishing impacts (e.g., hooking mortality) could be contributing. Moving to a fall fishery would take advantage of cooler water temperatures, resulting in less stress to non-harvested sturgeon. Changes to permanent rules governing the sturgeon fishery will also allow for incremental changes to regulations over the next decade to ensure protection for weak year-classes while maintaining a recreational fishery.

3. **Differences between the text of the proposed rule and the rule as adopted:**

None.

4. **Public comments, response to comments, and consideration of comments**

WDFW received eleven comments on rule-making for the Lake Roosevelt sturgeon fishery. Generally, all comments were supportive of the proposed season and rule changes, but four suggestions for modifications to the proposed rules were included:

(1) Open Labor Day weekend through November 30. Response: The intent of moving to a fall season is to take advantage of cooler water temperatures, reducing stress on non-harvested sturgeon, including wild adults. Water temperatures remain above 60°F until mid-September. Opening the fishery in mid-September and fishing throughout the fall represents less risk to the population.

(2) Open September 1 through November 30. Response: Essentially the same request as #1 above and same reasoning for opening the fishery in mid-September.

(3) Annual limit of 1 fish. Response: Currently, there are still over-represented Direct Gamete Take-origin sturgeon in the population which are close to sexual maturity. A two-fish annual limit is prudent to allow for harvest of over-represented fish.

(4) Open to catch and release after annual limit has been taken. Response: Tribal partners (Colville and Spokane tribes) have requested that no sturgeon fishing be allowed after the annual limit has been taken in order to reduce potential non-harvest fishery impacts to wild adults. The proposed rules strike a balance between maintaining sturgeon fishing opportunity and responsiveness to concerns from tribal partners.