



State of Washington

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017

The Honorable Kevin Van De Wege  
Washington State Senator  
212 John A. Cherberg Building  
Post Office Box 40424  
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Brian Blake  
Washington State Representative  
314 John L. O'Brien Building  
Post Office Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Senator Van De Wege and Representative Blake:

In 2017, the Washington State Legislature directed the Department of Fish & Wildlife to gather feedback from both fishing guides and recreational anglers on the quality of the fishing experience in Washington State and the potential for adopting an alternative structure for fishing guide licensing with the objectives of:

- “(a) Improving the fishing experience and ensuring equitable opportunity for both guided and non-guided river anglers,*
- (b) managing fishing pressure to protect wild steelhead and other species; and*
- (c) ensuring that recreational fish guiding remains a sustainable economic contributor to rural economies.”*

During the fall of 2017, the department conducted seven public meetings and several smaller workshops to gather feedback from guided and non-guided anglers throughout the state and conducted a survey to gather feedback from those who couldn't attend the meetings in person. Please find (attached) a report which includes a high level summary of the feedback we received, meeting summaries and materials from the public meetings and a detailed summary of the survey results.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Raquel Crosier, Legislative Liaison at (360) 902-2226.

Sincerely,

James Unsworth, Ph.D.  
Director  
Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife



# Guiding in Washington Waters

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

December 15, 2017



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**

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# Acknowledgements

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife would like to acknowledge and thank the over 300 guides and recreational anglers who took the time to attend the public meetings scheduled across the state to obtain the information required for this report.

Additionally, the department would like to recognize and thank the 1,145 licensed guides and recreational anglers who participated in the surveys associated with this report. As with the public meeting participants, their generous donation of time and opinions provided crucial content for this effort.

## Background

During the 2017 Legislative session, state lawmakers introduced a bill that would have limited the number of fishing guides and their activities on Olympic Peninsula rivers and the Klickitat River in southwest Washington. The legislation – originally proposed by the Olympic Peninsula Guides Association and Trout Unlimited – was intended to address concerns voiced by some fishing guides and anglers that fisheries are becoming too concentrated in portions of the state, threatening the viability of healthy salmon and steelhead stocks. In addition, they expressed concerns that an increase in the number of fishing guides, especially out-of-state guides, is putting even more additional pressure on those remaining healthy populations.

However, the proposed legislation (SB 5302), which would have drastically changed how game fish and food fish guides are regulated, was met with significant resistance from the guide community. In response, the bill sponsors ultimately pulled back the proposal, and instead directed WDFW to provide the legislature with feedback from both the fishing guides and recreational anglers. This direction was in the form of a budget proviso that states:

- (11) Within the appropriations of this section, the department shall initiate outreach with recreational fishing stakeholders so that recreational fishing guide and non-guided angler data can be collected and analyzed to evaluate changes in the structure of guide licensing, with the objectives of:
  - (a) Improving the fishing experience and ensuring equitable opportunity for both guided and non-guided river anglers,
  - (b) managing fishing pressure to protect wild steelhead and other species; and
  - (c) ensuring that recreational fish guiding remains a sustainable economic contributor to rural economies. The department shall convene public meetings in the North Olympic Peninsula and Klickitat River areas, and may include other areas of the state, and shall provide the appropriate standing committees of the legislature a summary of its findings, by December 31, 2017.

In response to the budget proviso directive, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) conducted public hearings and workshops across the state; completed a survey of all licensed game fish and food fish guides; and completed a random/stratified survey of salmon and steelhead anglers licensed in Washington.

## Summary of Findings

This effort has helped the department better understand the broad range of perspectives associated with fishing guide services in Washington. Fishery managers heard various ideas on how to improve the fishing experience, species conservation, and reduce crowding. Ideas ranged from extending fishing seasons and increasing angler opportunities to limiting retention of fish and reducing the number of licensed guides. The predominant viewpoints were for more fishing opportunities, more fish available to harvest and improved angler etiquette.

Guides and recreational anglers also expressed concerns that the department didn't have the enforcement officers necessary to ensure rules are followed and higher standards of fishing etiquette are demonstrated by both guides and recreational anglers.

In addition, there was an acknowledgement that WDFW lacks adequate data to quantify fishing-guide effort by location – information that is key to determining if regulation changes should be considered. One consideration that was discussed was requiring fishing guides to keep a logbook to collect fishing trip information, helping fishery managers evaluate effort at different times of year in specific river systems throughout the state.

WDFW is committed to data-driven fisheries management and will continue to work with the guide industry to further explore ideas and concerns around a logbook program that meets the department's needs while minimizing impact on the industry.

# Proviso Implementation Plan

## Public meetings

The proviso required the department to conduct public meetings in the Olympic Peninsula and Klickitat areas, however, fishery managers held additional meetings in other areas of the state to help ensure there were opportunities to hear from anglers and the the 557 game fish and food fish guides licensed in the state of Washington (503 resident guides and 54 non-resident guides). Those meetings include:

- **Forks:** Oct. 25
- **Lyle:** Nov. 8
- **Ridgefield:** Nov. 9
- **Mill Creek:** Nov. 13
- **East Wenatchee:** Nov. 20
- **Clarkston:** Nov. 21
- **Selah:** Dec. 7

In addition to the public meetings, WDFW conducted two work sessions at the request of guides who were unable to attend the public meetings. The work sessions included:

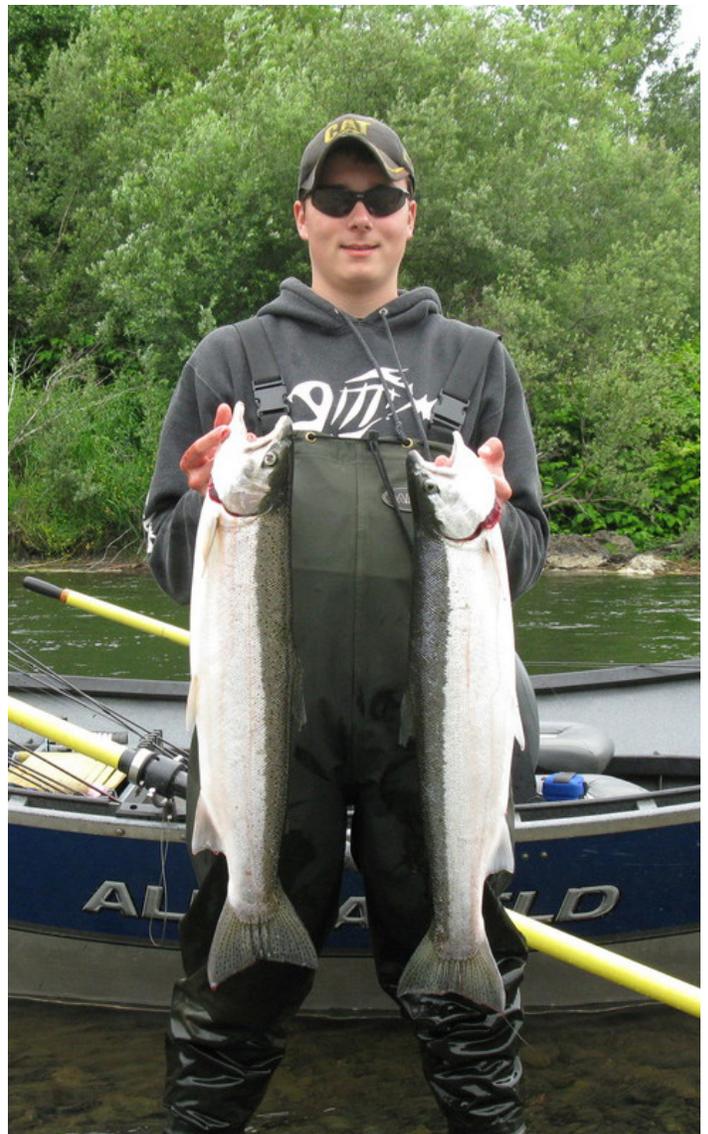
- **Montesano:** Nov. 6
- **Olympia:** Dec 6

More than 300 guides and recreational anglers attended the public meetings. The largest meeting attracted just over 90 people (Forks) while the smallest had just under 20 (Clarkston). Summaries of meetings and work sessions are attached as Appendix A.

During the meetings, people could provide input at breakout sessions, where staff posed a series of questions regarding quality of fisheries, potentially capping the number of guides in Washington, and the possibility of requiring guides to keep logbooks. A presentation and the questions asked in the breakout sessions are attached as Appendix B.

## Surveys

WDFW also contracted with an outside vendor to conduct two surveys. The contractor, Responsive Management, has over 20 years of experience conducting natural resource-related public surveys for government agencies both nationally and internationally. The purpose of the surveys was to capture both guide and recreational angler sentiments associated with the data collection requirements of the proviso. The guide survey included contact with every game fish and food fish guide licensed in Washington. The recreational angler survey utilized a random/stratified design due to the large number of licensed salmon and steelhead fishers. The methods and results of the surveys are attached as Appendix C.



# Themes Associated with the Public Meetings/Workshops

The four main themes discussed at each meeting included:

- The quality of fishing in Washington.
- Capping the number of guides in the state.
- Creating a limited entry system for guides in Washington.
- Requiring guides to maintain a logbook.

**Quality of fishing** – Although there was recognition that the quality of fishing in Washington has improved in some areas, the general consensus was that there is an overall decline in both opportunity and numbers of available fish. Quality was discussed in terms of numbers of fish available, fishery closures, and the amount of fishing pressure in certain areas. The public urged the department to increase production of hatchery fish where appropriate. Some suggested the department prioritize hatchery production over wild fish recovery on some river systems – a difficult task considering the requirements of the federal Endangered Species Act. There was unanimous support statewide for increased enforcement to address unlicensed guiding and general fishing regulations.

**Capping** – For the purpose of this report, “capping” means the maximum number of guides licensed by the department each year. New participants would be able to enter the fishery under the capping through attrition. Guides leaving the fishery would free-up licenses that would become available for purchase from the state. Under capping, licenses would have no monetary value to the license holder.

Currently, there is no limit to the number of game fish and food fish guides in Washington. Generally, the public felt that there were too many guides. However, many guides did not want to limit a person’s ability to get into guiding in the future. There was resistance to the idea of a statewide cap on the number of guide licenses, and even more resistance to the idea of a geographically specific cap on the number of guide licenses issued. While there was more support for a geographic cap in the Olympic Peninsula and Klickitat areas, the response to this concept was still mixed.

**Limited entry** – For the purposes of this report, “limited entry” means establishing a finite number of licenses available for purchase from the state. Under this model, guides would own the license, which would then have a monetary value. Any new guides would be required to purchase the license from a guide who was willing to sell.

Many members of the guide community supported the idea of a limited entry system, similar to how recreational charters operate. Some recreational anglers opposed this and did not feel it appropriate for guides to profit from the sale of a business based on the utilization of a public resource.

**Logbooks** – The concept of requiring fishing guides to maintain logbooks was discussed at length during these meetings. The department is considering requiring a logbook to collect fishing trip information, such as when, where and what fish were caught each day. This information would help fishery managers evaluate effort at different times of year in specific river systems throughout the state. That information is important in determining whether or not regulation changes for guides are needed and, if so, what changes should be considered.

Generally, the guide community was split on the idea of requiring a mandatory guide logbook. Those who were opposed expressed concern about how the information would be utilized by the department. Some were less concerned and requested additional information while others were supportive. Recreational anglers, in general, were supportive of requiring guides to provide this information to the department.



## Themes Associated with the Guide and Angler Survey

The department contracted with Responsive Management to conduct two surveys – one aimed at licensed guides and one of recreational anglers in Washington state – in order to gather opinions regarding crowding, fisheries management, regulations, and the steelhead and salmon fishing experience. All guides licensed in Washington in 2017 (554 guides) were contacted to participate in the survey. A total of 298 (53.8%) guides completed the survey and a total of 847 completed recreational angler interviews were obtained from a population size of 471,029 anglers. (Findings of the recreational angler survey was reported at a 95% confidence interval with a sampling error of plus or minus 3.36%.)

Survey questions were designed to gather feedback on how anglers use steelhead and salmon fisheries statewide, perceptions around the trends in the quality of fisheries, and how geographic areas may differ (i.e., Olympic Peninsula rivers and the Klickitat River). The survey explored themes around fishing characteristics, the importance and opportunity for steelhead fishing, perceptions on the health of steelhead populations, opinions on crowding, perceived

effects of guides on the fishery, opinions on guiding regulations, and quality of the fishing experience.

The methods and results of the surveys are attached as Appendix C. A summary of survey feedback is organized by theme below.

### Fishing characteristics: Years fishing, days fishing, counties and waterbodies

The survey found that the majority of guides surveyed (44%) had been guiding for 5 years or less with the average number of years guiding in Washington being 9.45 years. The survey found there were two predominate age groups for recreational anglers, “Old Timers” that have been fishing in Washington for more than 25 years (37% of respondents) and “Newcomers” that have been fishing in Washington for 5 years or less (27% of respondents). The survey also asked guides and recreational anglers which counties and waterbodies they primarily used and how many days they used them last year. See tables below:

Guide Use by County	
County	% Guided on It
Cowlitz County	24.6
Grays Harbor County	21.0
Clallam County	18.8
Klickitat County	18.8
Lewis County	15.1
Jefferson County	13.2
Kittitas County	12.9
Snohomish County	11.8
Clark County	10.7
Grant County	10.7
King County	10.3

Guide Use by Water Body	
Water Body	% Guided on
Columbia River	38.3
Cowlitz River	24.2
Hoh River	20.0
Bogachiel River	17.5
Humptulips River	16.7
Sol Duc River	15.8
Wynoochee River	15.8
Klickitat River	14.6
Satsop River	13.8
Yakima River	12.5
Chehalis River	12.1
Calawah River	8.8
Skykomish River	8.3
Clearwater River (Queets River tributary)	7.9
Kalama River	7.5
Lewis River	7.1
Quillayute River	6.3
Snohomish River	6.3
Nisqually River	5.4
Franklin D. Roosevelt Lake	5.0

## **Steelhead fishing: overall rate, importance and angler satisfaction**

When asked about the importance of the Olympic Peninsula and Klickitat fisheries to their steelhead fishing experience, guides rated it as very important to their businesses at a 9.15 out of 10 and recreational anglers rated it as 8.02 out of 10. When asked whether they were satisfied with the steelhead fishing experience in Washington, only 41% of guides said they were satisfied and only 49% of recreational anglers were satisfied.

## **Steelhead: Perceptions of the steelhead populations**

When asked about their perceptions of the steelhead populations and whether they had increased, decreased or remained the same in abundance, the majority of guides and recreational anglers said that for the Olympic Peninsula rivers and Klickitat River the overall abundance of steelhead has gone down over the last 5 years.

## **Steelhead fishing: Perceptions of quality of steelhead and opinions on harvest**

When asked whether the quality of steelhead on the Olympic Peninsula rivers and the Klickitat River has gone down, stayed the same or increased, both guides and recreational anglers said that the quality of steelhead fishing has gone down in those areas. Both user groups felt that large steelhead were highly valuable and felt that sustainable harvest was very important.

## **Opinions on fishery crowding**

When asked about fishery crowding, Guides were split on whether they felt Washington's fisheries were crowded, with 45% saying that fisheries were crowded and 30% stating that statewide fisheries are not crowded. Recreational anglers were also split, with 37% stating that fisheries on a typical day were crowded, but 41% saying they are not crowded.

Guides and recreational anglers were also split on whether guides affected the crowding of fisheries. Fifty percent of guides surveyed believed that guides contributed a great deal to crowding issues while 48% surveyed believed that guides contributed little to not at all to fishery crowding. Similarly, 39% of recreational anglers believed guides contributed to crowding while 47% believed that guides contributed little to not at all to fishery crowding.

When asked about the Olympic Peninsula rivers and the Klickitat River specifically, 72% of guides and 46% of recreational anglers felt there was a crowding issue on the Olympic Peninsula rivers while 51% of guides and 66% of recreational anglers felt there was a crowding issue on the Klickitat River.

## **Perceived effects of guides on fishing**

When recreational anglers were asked if they agree or disagree that the guiding industry negatively affects their recreational fishing experience, 59% disagreed that guides affected their personal recreational fishing experience and 26% agreed that guides have an impact on their recreational fishing experience.

## **Opinions on guiding regulations**

When guides were asked whether they would be willing to report trip and harvest information, 36% of guides said they would be willing to report harvest and trip information, while 46 % were opposed. The surveyed guides willingness to support reporting trip and harvest information increased to approximately 50% support to 50% opposed if the information collected would be used to manage, maintain and improve fishing opportunities.

## **Fishery experience and quality on Klickitat and Olympic Peninsula rivers**

### *Olympic Peninsula rivers*

When Olympic peninsula guides were asked about their level of satisfaction with the fishery 47% responded that they are satisfied while 40% responded that they are unsatisfied. Among guides surveyed that fish the Olympic Peninsula rivers, the most commonly fished species was steelhead (91%) followed by salmon (58%). The most commonly fished species by recreational anglers on the Olympic Peninsula was salmon (60%) followed by steelhead (31%). Olympic Peninsula guides typically spent 30 days guiding anglers on the Olympic Peninsula. Recreational anglers surveyed spent an average of 7 days fishing specifically on the Olympic Peninsula. The majority of guiding activity on the Olympic Peninsula occurs January through March with a secondary peak of activity in October. The busiest angling months for recreational anglers on the Olympic Peninsula were June to October.

### *Klickitat River*

When Klickitat River guides were asked about their level of satisfaction with the fishery, 50% responded that they are satisfied while 50% responded that they are unsatisfied. The most commonly fished species by recreational anglers on the Klickitat River was salmon (69%) followed by steelhead (61%). Klickitat River guides spend an average of 15 days (median value) per year guiding on the river. The majority of Recreation anglers surveyed (70%) spend no more than 9 days fishing the Klickitat River. The active months for guiding on the Klickitat River are September through November. The busiest months for recreational angling on the Klickitat River are August to October, with the peak in September.

**For more information, see:**

- Appendix A – Meetings and work sessions
- Appendix B – WDFW presentation and questions asked in the breakout sessions
- Appendix C – Methods and results of the surveys



*Steelhead caught in Schneider Creek*