

Summary Sheet

Meeting dates:	March 12, 2021
Agenda item:	Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy (C-3622) Review -- Decision
Presenter(s):	Ron Warren, Director of Fish Policy

Background summary:

In the fall of 2014, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC), supported by Department staff, initiated a process to develop a salmon management policy for Willapa Bay. The intent of the policy is to provide Department staff with general guidance and management objectives for salmon management in Willapa Bay.

To inform the development of this policy, a Willapa Bay Advisory Group was formed. The group consisted of stakeholders representing recreational and commercial fishers. Public engagement in the development of Policy C-3622 included four meetings with the group, four public workshops, and one workshop with the Pacific County Commissioners. These meetings took place in fall 2014 through spring 2015.

In June 2015, the policy was adopted by the FWC as the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy – C-3622. The objectives of the policy “is to achieve the conservation and restoration of wild salmon in Willapa Bay and avoid ESA designation of any salmon species. Where consistent with this conservation objective, the policy also seeks to maintain or enhance the economic well-being and stability of the commercial and recreational fishing industry in the state, provide the public with outdoor recreational experiences, and an appropriate distribution of fishing opportunities throughout the Willapa Bay Basin. Enhanced transparency, information sharing, and improved technical rigor of fishery management are needed to restore and maintain public trust and support for management of Willapa Bay salmon fisheries.” The policy recognizes uncertainty in implementation, so depends on continued economic and biological analysis, and relies on an adaptive management approach.

The implementing structure of the policy consisted of two phases; phase-one covered years 1 through 4 post adoption (covering the 2015 through 2018 fisheries) and phase-two, years 5 through 21 (July 2019 through June 2035). In 2018, the FWC provided staff with additional guidance for management of salmon fisheries prosecuted in Willapa Bay applicable to the 2018 season only.

In January, staff proposed a timeline and process to be used for consideration of policy revisions. In February, staff provided a briefing to satisfy the Commission request to annually review the implementation and performance of interim and to seek policy guidance for Willapa Bay fisheries in 2020. Fishery management objectives for 2020 fisheries in Willapa Bay were based upon guidance contained in Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy (C-3622) along with interim Commission guidance specific to 2020 Willapa Bay fisheries season. Staff provided preliminary harvest estimates from the 2020 fishery season in relation to pre-season predicted estimates of harvest. At the February meeting the Commission also asked staff to provide recommendations for the 2021 fisheries season. This meeting is intended to fulfill that obligation so that the Commission may take possible action on the Willapa Bay Policy C-3622 interim policy guidance for 2021 fisheries.

Staff recommendation:

Staff recommendations for the hatchery program include the release of hatchery production at their facility of origin to preserve options for long-term policy modifications. Staff

recommendations for fisheries management include actively managing Chinook harvest to not exceed a 20% impact rate for Naselle and Willapa Rivers, suspend time and area restrictions for commercial fisheries south of Marine Area 2T, determine season length to achieve recreational priority for Chinook harvest, and continue the development and implementation of test fisheries and in-season update models.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

In recent years, the Commission has provided interim modification to the policy for staff implementation. This is their opportunity to do the same this year.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

Not applicable.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Public involvement in the 2020 fisheries planning process and Willapa Bay policy review was included throughout last year. This year there are five regional public meetings planned throughout the North of Falcon season to provide information to and receive feedback from the public.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

This is the Commission's opportunity to provide the department with interim guidance for the 2021 fisheries through the implementation of the policy and the department's planning process.

Draft motion language:

Not applicable.

Post decision communications plan:

If the Commission requests additional analysis or development of potential adaptive management steps, those requests should be communicated to stakeholders via the webpage developed for the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy Review on the Agency website as well as through a post meeting press release. Interim guidance for fisheries planning provided by the Commission will also be communicated through posting on the Willapa Bay Advisory Group Agency website.
