

2024 Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor North of Falcon (NOF) Public Meeting

Virtual via Zoom Platform

February 28, 2024, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

WDFW Staff: Leah Snyder, Mark Baltzell, Marlene Wagner, Barbara McClellan, Mike Scharpf, Kim Figlar Barnes, Erin Witkop, James Losee, Nick Vanbuskirk, and 9 staff signed in

Public: 54 individuals virtual via Zoom or phone

Leah Synder (WDFW) – Walked through meeting guidelines

Marlene Wagner (WDFW)

- Opening statements
- Presentation PowerPoint
 - Introductions
 - Meeting purpose: Introduce NOF process, provide information, answer questions about information provided, hear initial fisheries suggestions from the public
 - NOF background and schedule
 - APA process for 2024

Erin Witkop (WDFW) - Willapa Bay (WB) part of presentation

- 2024 Forecasts
 - Chinook: 3519 natural, 27327 hatchery
 - Coho Ocean age 3: 29512 natural, 91536 hatchery
 - Chum: 78648 natural, 1742 hatchery
- Species Trends graphs

Mike Scharpf (WDFW) – Grays Harbor (GH) part of the presentation

- 2024 Forecasts and Species trend graphs
 - Chehalis Spring Chinook: TBD
 - Chehalis Fall Chinook: 10601 natural, 1851 hatchery
 - Chehalis Coho Ocean age 3: 67709 natural, 52940 hatchery
 - Humptulips Fall Chinook: 3728 natural, 3462 hatchery – downward trend
 - Humptulips Coho Ocean age 3: 4068 natural (below goal), 12002 hatchery
 - Grays Harbor Chum: 67308 natural, 1967 hatchery – upward trend but a little lower than last two years
 - Quinault River Coho Ocean age 3: 25261 natural, 34745 hatchery
 - Queets River Coho Ocean age 3: 15795 natural, 18895 hatchery
- 2024 Management Objectives
 - Willapa Bay
 - Chinook 20% impact rate cap
 - Coho and chum to meet escapement goals
 - Grays Harbor
 - No Chehalis spring chinook fishery – petition to list coastal Chinook
 - Humptulips coho – 5% impact rate cap
 - All other stocks managed to meet escapement objectives goals

James Losee (WDFW) – 2024 Fishery Proposals/Ideas to-date

- Willapa Bay
 - River-specific mark selective fisheries
 - Rules to combat snagging
 - Gear restrictions (jigs, leader length etc)
 - Area restrictions
 - Retention rules (all landed fish count against limit, retained fish must be hooked in the mouth etc.)
- Grays Harbor
 - Model December closures
 - Model December open and seek agreement on steelhead impacts at NOF

Public Comment:

Public comment:

- We would have made Chinook escapement goal in GH if Chinook didn't come in early. If the fish don't return early, then there will be problems.
- December fishery – not many steelhead in the river. Not a rational approach to restrict salmon season to protect steelhead.

Public comment: Clarifying questions on forecasts in Willapa

- Do you have harvest forecasts available?
- Was the ocean age 3 forecast using 2021 brood year?

Erin Witkop (WDFW): Yes it did use 2021 brood year

James Losee (WDFW): Now that we have forecasts, next steps will be to work on harvest impacts for each fishery.

Public comment: December fishery in GH – likely little to no encounters through Dec 15.

- Model through Dec 15 because already showed that there are little impacts.
- Maybe Dec 1 switch to a 1 fish limit

Public comment:

- GH Chehalis – a long term solution on December fishery needs to come to agreement with tribe on steelhead
- Agrees with modeling through Dec 15 and 1 hatchery fish limit through Dec 16 from Porter to Borst Park in Centralia. It would be great to get that opportunity back.

Public comment:

- Model through mid-December
- Model 1 fish bag limit
- Model MS Chehalis 2 fish bag, with 1 hatchery Chinook
- Marine Area East Bay Sept 16 – Nov 30 – 2 fish limit, 1 hatchery Chinook
- Marine Area North Bay August 1 – September 15 – 1 fish limit, possible Chinook retention, 1 wild coho
- Jack fishery in Chehalis August 1 – September 16 – no limit

Public comment:

- Willapa Bay – enforce WB salmon management policy and keep commercial fishery out of the bay until Sept 16 and after Labor Day
- Still want this considered regardless of new policy

Marlene Wagner (WDFW): Fish and Wildlife Commission approved a new WB Salmon Management Policy in Sept 2023

Public comment:

- How comparable are these forecasts to 2023?
- Do we look at run timing?

James Losee (WDFW): if you want individual stock, species, or river specific information, reach out to staff

Public comment:

- Jack Chehalis fishery – don't understand why there is a limit of 6 fish
- Chehalis problem with too many people, may cause some abuse. Public needs to understand the issue.

Public comment:

- Nemah river:
 - Model 3 adults with 1 hen Chinook
 - Why hatching chum? Hatch less chum and more Chinook

Public comment:

- Humptulips River: rollover last year's fishery for Chinook and coho.

Public comment:

- Supportive with continued discussions with QIN regarding steelhead to provide opportunity that time of year

Public comment:

- Consider going to no eggs/bait at all in Chehalis. Coho can be caught without eggs.

Public comment:

- In 2021, WB released 8+ million Chinook. Only 3.3% return. Need to improve efficiencies in fall Chinook production from the hatchery for better returns.

James Losee (WDFW): Forecasts are similar to last year for coho and chum. In some cases, releasing more fish results in a lower return.

Public comment:

- Limit the gillnet net to only cover no more than 50% of the river (no set netting or blocking the entire width of the river)
- Does not support all landed fish count against the daily limit
- Could support limiting or reducing jigging to deal with snagging

Public comment:

- Carrying capacity of the bay is reduced. It's a warning signal for smolts.

Public comment:

- Use hook size restriction for WB

Public comment:

- Provide the number of coho spawners in Dec and Jan (true late coho) per month for GH

Public comment:

- Jack fishery is from South Montesano to Fuller Hill in GH
- Won't catch any Chinook while fishing for jacks with a 10-pound leader
- Protection of late coho is needed (Nov – Jan)

Public comment:

- Staff all seem to be great people and do a good job

Public comment:

- Appreciate everyone who tries to keep these fisheries going

Public comment:

- Consider when it comes to hooking mortality, if you see a fin on a fish using bait, you should not touch or net the fish. Just release the fish by cutting leader. Protect adult chinook. Mortality will go down.

Meeting ended at 1940.