

An Overview of Mainstem Columbia River Fisheries
(Special Meeting)

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“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting dates: May 31, 2012, Commission Workshop

Agenda item: An Overview of Mainstem Columbia River Fisheries

Staff Contact: Cindy LeFleur, Columbia River Policy Coordinator, Region 5

Presenter(s): Cindy LeFleur, Columbia River Policy Coordinator, Region 5
Bill Tweit, Columbia River/Distant Waters Policy Lead, Director’s Office
John Whalen, Fish Program Manager, Region 1
Jeff Korth, Fish Program Manager, Region 2
John Easterbrooks, Fish Program Manager, Region 3

Background:

Salmon and steelhead once extensively utilized the Columbia River and its tributaries for spawning and freshwater rearing. Chinook salmon migrated nearly 1,200 miles up the Columbia River to Lake Windermere, Canada, and 600 miles up the Snake River to Shoshone Falls near Twin Falls, Idaho.

Access to over 500 miles of the upper Columbia River mainstem was blocked by the construction of Grand Coulee Dam in 1941. In the Snake River, Brownlee Dam blocked access to the upper mainstem in 1958. Between 1933 and 1968, four federal dams with fish passage were completed on the lower mainstem Columbia and five public utility dams were completed on the upper mainstem in eastern Washington. Four federal dams were completed on the lower mainstem Snake between 1961 and 1975.

Salmon were a fundamental part of Native American culture and subsistence in the Columbia Basin. Columbia River tribes made use of salmon for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans. Europeans began using salmon about 1830, and by 1861 commercial fishing became important. In 1866, salmon canning began and the non-tribal commercial fishery grew very rapidly. Recreational or sport fishing began in the late 19th century and occurred primarily in tributaries. The main-stem Columbia sport fishery did not become important until after World War II.

Current fishery management strategies have become very complex with the majority of the salmon and steelhead populations listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Fisheries and hatchery production plans are managed under the “2008-2017 United States v. Oregon Management Agreement” (MA); an agreement between the states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho, the four Columbia River treaty tribes, the Shoshone-Bannock tribes, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Modern day fisheries operate within very strict limits/guidelines to ensure compliance with the ESA and the MA.

The Commission members requested a briefing on Columbia River fisheries. Staff will provide information on background and historical perspective, Federal court orders, management agreements, conservation objectives, species listed under the ESA and ESA guidelines, commission policies and joint state agreements, fisheries implementation, forecasting abundances, tools for managing harvest, cost to manage fisheries, time lines for decisions, fishery modeling, current and historical fisheries in the mainstem Columbia River, Select Areas, Snake River and tributaries. Species covered will include salmon, steelhead, shad and smelt.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

None

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The staff is providing a PowerPoint presentation to the commission in a workshop open to the public.

Action requested:

None

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A

Communications Plan:

Presentation will be available to the public.

COMMISSION REQUEST TO DEPARTMENT

"Blue Sheet"

Date of Request: February 4, 2012

Title of Request: An Overview of Mainstem Columbia River Fisheries

Commissioner: Connie Mahnken

Priority Level (put one check in each row):

Importance: High Medium Low

Urgency: High Medium Low

Request Due Date: June

Knowledge or Action Being Requested (narrative). Describe what you want to know. Be specific.

A presentation on management of the major Columbia River fisheries including salmon, steelhead, sturgeon and forage fishes.

Output Requested (e.g., telephone call, memo, material from files, new report, presentation, other):

A presentation to the full Commission for the review of:

- Commission policies and the authority delegated to the Director by the Commission. Timing of annual Commission decisions and dates when individual Columbia River fisheries are due to be addressed
- State, federal and tribal legislative authorities and the role of the Columbia River Compact.
- Role of conservation in decision-making, including the modeling process used to estimate abundance trends and run-size estimates.
- Species listed under the state and federal endangered species acts that are impacted by fisheries.

- Timelines for prosecution of fisheries including areas fished and areas excluded (sanctuaries). Harvest allocation and historic harvest trends for commercial and recreational fisheries.
- Tools for fishery management (e.g. SAFE areas, mark selective fisheries, slot limits, hydroelectric dam transit, gear restrictions, recovery boxes, in-season monitoring of harvest, on-board observer data. etc.)
- Enforcement protocols.
- The role of hatcheries in providing harvest to fisheries.
- The economic value of commercial and recreational fisheries and the costs incurred by the Department for their management.

For Commission Executive Assistant Use

Date Assigned: 2/6/12 **Assigned To:** Fish
[At Debrief] [Program]

"Blue Sheet form revised October 2009 - sdy