

Forage Fish and Commercial Smelt Fishery Update – (Briefing)

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Summary

Meeting dates: December 9-10, 2016

Agenda item: Forage Fish and Commercial Smelt Fishery Update - (Briefing)

Presenter(s): Dr. Dayv Lowry, Senior Marine Fish Research Scientist, Fish Program

Background summary:

Since 1998 the department has formally recognized the need to manage forage fish species both as independent populations and as critical food web components upon which other species rely (C3012). While some species (e.g., herring, surf smelt) have been well researched, data gaps exist for many species that require managers to fall back on the precautionary principle in lieu of employing more sophisticated management strategies. For the majority of species, we lack such fundamental information as the geographic extent of their distribution and their abundance. In the past three years significant efforts have been made to close these knowledge gaps by obtaining new funding, staff, and support for directed research projects.

This briefing will provide a summary of existing management and policy guidelines for forage fish species, a “state of the knowledge” summary for each species or species group, as well as highlights of several research and management efforts focused on each species.

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

N/A

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

N/A

Action requested:

N/A

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A.

Communications Plan:

Several reports and peer-reviewed publications will be written over the next several years that detail the findings of recent abundance and distribution surveys, survey method comparisons, and novel analyses of historic data. The results of these studies will be shared with federal and multi-entity working groups focused on forage fish research, governmental co-managers, and the public (e.g., scuba diving clubs, recreational angler associations, and the general public via the Department’s webpage).

Form revised 12/5/12

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

POLICY DECISION

**POLICY TITLE: Forage Fish Management
Policy, Goals and Plan**

POLICY NUMBER: POL-C3012

Cancels: N/A

Effective Date: January 24, 1998

Termination Date: <

See Also: N/A

Approved by: 

Fish and Wildlife Commission Chair

Policy

It shall be the policy of the department to maintain healthy populations of forage fish species and individual stocks of forage fish while assuring the integrity of the ecosystem and habitat upon which marine resources depend. If insufficient information exists or the condition of the resource is poor, a conservative approach to fisheries will be taken. Fishery management plans will consider the role of forage fish in the marine ecosystem and the need to supply sufficient quantities of forage fish for ecosystem needs. A precautionary approach to resource management shall be utilized. The department shall consider the best scientific information available.

Goals

Consistent with the general goals established by the Commission for the Department, the following specific goals will guide the management of the forage fish resources of Washington.

- Maintain healthy populations of forage fish in Washington.
- Fisheries shall be permitted, as appropriate, for sustainable resources.
- Washington based fishing industries (fishing, processing and marketing) shall receive consideration of an opportunity to utilize harvestable forage fish resources within state waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone.
- Management plans shall consider by-catch and wastage and provide for estimation of the magnitude of each and recommendations made for their reduction.
- Increase public confidence in forage fish management.
- All significant fisheries will have sufficient monitoring to estimate catch and evaluate resource condition and population trends.
- Stock status summary of principle species of forage fish shall be produced every two years.
- Document and protect spawning habitat of forage fish species.
- Implement the Wild Salmonid Policy as it relates to forage fish and their habitats.

Plan

Following the direction given in the forage fish policy and goals, the following plan of action will be implemented by the Department.

Habitat Surveys and Protection

Forage fish spawning habitat surveys are a high priority for forage fish management. Activities related to spawning ground documentation will include:

- conducting spawning habitat documentation surveys in areas likely to face human caused alterations,
- providing expert testimony in court cases or other legal activities, maintaining and updating databases, depending on funding,
- providing limited surveys in case of urgent need, upon request,
- completing a formal report which summarizes existing information and making it available to the public and interested officials.

Fishery Management

- Management of forage fish shall include provisions for rapid change in abundance.
- Forage fish shall be managed to avoid periods of low abundance.
- The achievement of maximum yield shall not be a goal of forage fish management.
- Consideration will be given to both recreational and commercial fishing interests when stock conditions permit fishing.
- The Department shall conduct a review and report on potential forage fish by-catch in each significant commercial fishery.

Stock Assessment

- Stock assessments shall be based on direct measurement of fish populations whenever possible.

The following plan of action shall be implemented for individual forage fish species:

Sardine

- The Department will participate in interstate planning and research efforts for coordinated management of the west coast sardine resource.
- The Department will investigate and, if feasible, allow a new commercial experimental fishery for sardine. This fishery would require coordinated management and include special monitoring/review for bycatch concerns. Any fishery is dependent on action by the Pacific Fishery Management Council.
- Annually review stock status, fishery results and fishery regulations.

Surf Smelt

- The Department will seek to increase its monitoring of fisheries and resources to:
 - a. establish a biological database
 - b. estimate growth and mortality rates.
- In the absence of better information, manage each individual spawning ground as a unique stock.

- Spawning habitat surveys shall emphasize potential surf smelt spawning grounds.
- The Department will seek to increase the mapping of surf smelt spawning habitat.
- Annually review stock status, fishery results and fishery regulations.

Anchovies

- The Department will participate in interstate planning and research efforts for coordinated management of the anchovy resource.
- Annually review stock status, fishery results and fishery regulations.
- No other agency action is planned for anchovies during the length of this plan.

Eulachon

- The Department will work with appropriate government agencies and the public, develop a harvest management plan for Columbia River smelt.
- The Department will pursue reduced harvest levels of Columbia River smelt until information is available for scientific management of the resource.
- The Department will seek to document eulachon spawning grounds.
- Annually review stock status, fishery results and fishery regulations.

Sand Lance

- The Department will end commercial fishing for sand lance in all state waters.
- Spawning habitat surveys shall emphasize potential sand lance spawning grounds.
- The Department will seek to increase the mapping of sand lance spawning habitat.
- Annually review stock status.

Herring

- Conduct surveys of known spawning grounds annually.
- Continue to gather biological data from selected spawning stocks.
- Annually review stock status, fishery results and fishery regulations.
- Institute no new commercial fisheries of herring in state waters. Continue the moratorium on commercial fisheries for herring in coastal waters.
- In the absence of information, treat each spawning ground as an individual stock
- Investigate, and report on sources of increased herring mortality.
- Participate in information exchange with herring researchers and managers from British Columbia and other areas.
- Institute a system of marine protected areas which include herring spawning grounds.
- Continue coordinated management with appropriate tribal governments.