

Summary

Meeting dates: January 12, 2018

Agenda item: Puget Sound Chinook Harvest Management Plan

Presenter(s): Kyle Adicks, Intergovernmental Salmon Manager

Background summary:

This briefing is the result of a Commission request to the Department. The Puget Sound Chinook Harvest Management Plan defines limits to impacts of fishing activities on Puget Sound Chinook salmon listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). A federally-approved joint state-tribal resource management plan exempts tribal and state-managed salmon fisheries from take prohibitions of ESA consistent with limit six of the salmon 4(d) rule. The previous multi-year limit 6 plan expired in the spring of 2014. The state and tribes have received ESA coverage via annual Section 7 consultations through the Bureau of Indian Affairs each year since the previous plan expired.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) and the Puget Sound tribes submitted a new multi-year plan to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on December 1, 2017, with a proposed duration of 10 years, beginning in 2019. The Plan was developed through a court-mediated process under U.S. v Washington following court rules on confidentiality. NOAA has indicated that their evaluation of a new multi-year plan will take approximately 18 months. NOAA provided initial comments on the plan in late December, and have indicated that the plan needs to have additional information included before they begin their evaluation.

The goal of the Plan is to “*Ensure that fishery-related mortality will not impede rebuilding of natural Puget Sound Chinook salmon populations, consistent with the capacity of properly functioning habitat, to levels that will sustain fisheries, enable ecological functions, and are consistent with treaty-reserved fishing rights.*” To accomplish this goal, the plan establishes harvest management guidelines for the annual implementation of fisheries. Those guidelines are a combination of abundance thresholds and exploitation rate (ER) limits based on the best available information on the productivity of each population. Fisheries in the southern United States are designed annually to meet the applicable ER limits for each population. Exploitation rates and abundance thresholds in the proposed plan are listed in the table below. More detail on the management units and their objectives are available in the plan, which is posted online at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/fisheries/chinook/>.

The scope of NOAA’s evaluation of the plan will include all marine and freshwater salmon and trout fisheries that take listed Puget Sound Chinook. In addition to the evaluation of risk to Puget Sound Chinook, NOAA’s biological opinion will assess the effects of the plan on other listed species, most notable southern resident killer whales (SKRW). Because of the recent decline in abundance of SRKW, the effect of the plan on their prey abundance will be a focus of the review.

The Plan acknowledges that the status and productivity of Chinook populations is changing, and in many cases there have been declines since the previous long-term plan was completed. The management objectives proposed for Stillaguamish Chinook are more conservative than in the last plan, reflective of the decline in status for that population. The plan includes provisions for monitoring, reporting and evaluation of performance, with commitment to reassess

management objectives and harvest strategies and make adjustments in response to new data or future changes in status and productivity of Chinook populations.

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

Briefing the Commission on the status of the Puget Sound Chinook plan and ESA coverage for future fisheries.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Because the Plan was developed through a confidential court mediated process under U.S. v Washington, opportunities for public comment were limited during the Plan's development to date. Going forward, as revisions to the Plan are negotiated, WDFW plans to incorporate check-ins with the Commission in public sessions. There will also be public comment options when NOAA's NEPA and ESA processes commence.

Action requested:

N/A

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A

Communications Plan:

N/A