



Columbia River Spring Chinook Update

THE COLUMBIA RIVER PRODUCES MORE SALMON AND STEELHEAD THAN any other river system in Washington or Oregon, supporting major recreational, commercial and tribal fisheries in both states. Since 1915, the two states have worked together to set fishing seasons under the Columbia River Compact, a cooperative agreement designed to maintain orderly fisheries on a 300-mile stretch of the river that forms their common border.

*Bi-state policy agreement
requires cooperative approach*

But today, when 13 wild salmon and steelhead stocks in the Columbia River Basin are listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), the issues shared by Pacific Northwest fishery managers extend well beyond setting annual salmon fishing seasons. Working together, the fish and wildlife commissions of Washington and Oregon are involved in ongoing efforts to protect and restore wild salmonid populations, while continuing to support sustainable fisheries throughout the watershed.

To facilitate these efforts, the two fish and wildlife commissions created the Columbia River Fish Working Group, a bi-state panel responsible for making recommendations on issues facing fishery managers on both sides of the river. Three commissioners from each state serve as voting members of the Working Group, supported by top fishery managers and citizen advisors representing sport fisheries, commercial fisheries and local communities.

The new Working Group, established in September 2008, agreed on several key objectives for bi-state cooperation:

- Meeting ESA conservation directives
- Reforming hatchery operations
- Promoting sustainable fishing methods that protect wild fish
- Providing stable sport and commercial fishing opportunities
- Addressing predation on listed salmon stocks by marine mammals and seabirds

In Phase 1 of its charge by the two state commissions, the Working Group was to develop a planning approach for allocating non-tribal spring and summer fishing opportunities in the lower Columbia River. Other issues, ranging from hatchery reform to selective fisheries, were considered for Phase 2 of the group's work.

WASHINGTON
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Spring and summer chinook salmon allocations

In December 2008, the Working Group issued recommendations for spring and summer chinook fisheries, designed to provide a foundation for concurrent management policies for Washington and Oregon. Concurrence on those policies was a key goal for those involved in the process, since the two states jointly manage those fisheries.

For the summer chinook fishery, both commissions followed the Working Group's recommendation to extend the previous policy through 2009. That policy divides harvest opportunities 50-50 between non-tribal sport and commercial fisheries below Priest Rapids Dam. The Washington commission also supported the management policy for spring chinook fisheries recommended by the Working Group, which identified key objectives for those fisheries (see inset). The Oregon commission also endorsed those objectives, but later adopted a catch-sharing policy that allocated a greater share of the catch to the commercial fishery than the full Working Group had recommended.

That action prompted a two-month stalemate between the two commissions over which policy would be used to set fishing seasons for spring chinook in the Columbia River. In early February 2009, as the first spring chinook were entering the Columbia River, the Washington commission authorized state fishery managers to work with their counterparts in Oregon to develop joint fishing seasons – but only for March and April. The May/June portion of the fishery was held in abeyance due to the two states' policy differences.

Difficult issues

The task of developing a management policy for the spring chinook fishery was widely acknowledged as a difficult assignment for the new Working Group. For years, the two state commissions had struggled to reach agreement on an allocation formula for one of the region's most popular and lucrative fisheries.

Management of the fishery is complicated by the fact that a portion of the spring chinook run includes wild salmon listed under the ESA. Federal rules strictly limit mortality rates for wild upriver fish to 0.5 percent to 2.7 percent of the run, depending on the number of fish returning in a given year. Although both states require that all wild spring chinook be released, the mortality rates allowed for sport and commercial fisheries provide an opportunity to harvest marked, hatchery fish while having a small impact on wild fish.

Under the base allocation policy recommended by the bi-state Working Group and approved by the Washington commission, the sport fishery would be allowed 65 percent of the allowable "ESA

Key Spring Chinook Management Objectives

Columbia River Fish Working Group

- A conservation "buffer" to maintain a low risk of exceeding impact limits on wild salmon listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act.
- A high probability of an uninterrupted 45-day sport-fishing season on the lower Columbia River in March and April, with additional fishing opportunities in May.
- 25 percent of the sport fishery's allowable impacts to fisheries above Bonneville Dam.
- A stable commercial fishery in off-channel "select areas" such as Deep River in Washington and Youngs Bay in Oregon.
- Commercial fishing opportunities in the mainstem Columbia River in March and April.
- Sport and commercial fishing opportunities in May if the run is large enough.

Spring Chinook Allocations Calculated Under Working Group Recommendations

	Past Years (Recast) 1999 – 2008			Actual Average 2001 – 2008 ¹	2009 Scenarios	
	Lowest	Highest	Average ²		Med-High	Very High
Upriver Return	38,700	416,500	199,600	217,000	250,000	300,000
Willamette Return ²	>50,000	>50,000	>50,000	>50,000	<50,000	<50,000
ESA Impact Allocation	70% sport 30% com	55% sport 45% com	65% sport 35% com	60% sport 40% com	70% sport 30% com	60% sport 40% com
Total Sport Catch ³	3,600 (77%)	75,200 (68%)	32,400 (70%)	18,640 (57%)	26,300 (73%)	29,700 (69%)
Total Commercial Catch ⁴	1,100 (23%)	35,800 (32%)	13,800 (30%)	14,000 (43%)	9,700 (27%)	13,100 (31%)

- 1) Current management period began in 2001 with mark-selective fisheries and mainstem targeting of upriver hatchery fish.
- 2) Willamette return is average or high abundance (>50,000) in 1999-2008 scenarios and is low abundance (<50,000) in 2009 scenarios
- 3) Mainstem Columbia and lower Snake harvest of upriver and lower river chinook.
- 4) Mainstem Columbia and SAFE area harvest of upriver and lower river chinook.

impacts” and the commercial fishery 35 percent. However, after the working group had completed its work and both full commissions had reviewed the final product, the Oregon commission adopted a base allocation of 55 percent sport and 45 percent commercial, later modifying its formula to 60 percent sport, 40 percent commercial.

The actual numbers of fish available to sport and commercial fisheries will be based on the size of the spring chinook runs in both the upper Columbia River and the Willamette River and the resulting federal ESA impacts allowed for those runs. Both states adopted the Working Group’s recommendation to base allocation rates on a sliding scale, providing relatively more harvest opportunities to commercial fisheries in years with large runs and relatively less fishing time when returns are down. As a result, the formula will likely be weighted more heavily toward the

Working Group Members

September 2008

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

- Commissioner Gary Douvia
- Commissioner Jerry Gutzwiler
- Commissioner Conrad Mahnken, Ph.D

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

- Phil Anderson, Interim Director
- Guy Norman, Southwest Region Director

Citizen Advisors

- Irene Martin, Skamokawa fishery historian
- Robert Sudar, Longview, Columbia River Commercial Advisory Group
- Ed Wickersham, Ridgefield, Coastal Conservation Association and the Clark Skamania Fly Fishers
- George Trott, Cathlamet, Wahkiakum County Commissioner
- Axel Swanson, Cowlitz County Commissioner

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission

- Commissioner Skip Klarquist
- Commissioner Jon Englund
- Commissioner Dan Edge

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

- Curt Melcher, Deputy Director
- Steve Williams, Fish Division Deputy Director

Citizen Advisors

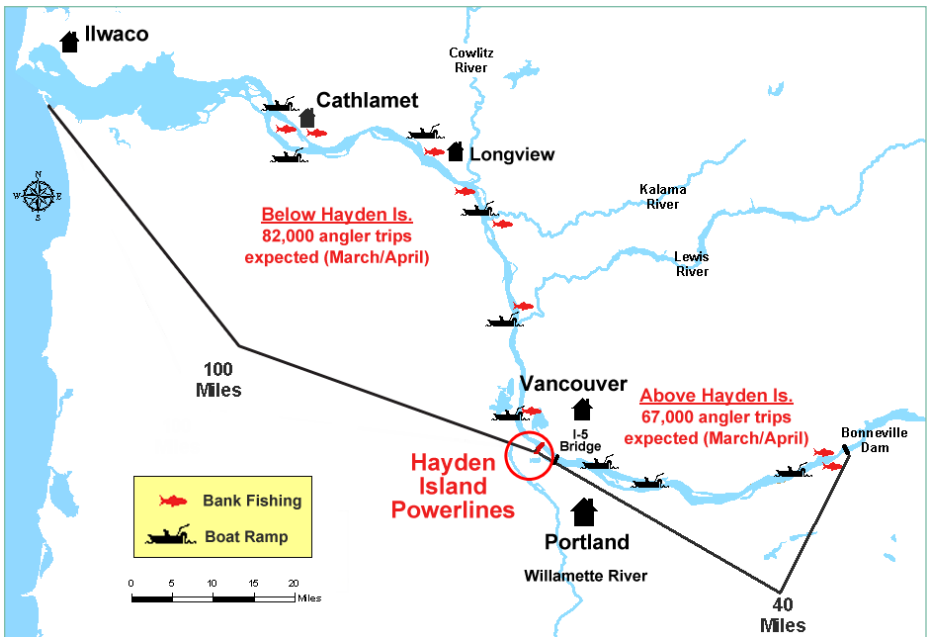
- Jack Glass, Troutdale, fishing guide and board member of the ODFW Restoration and Enhancement Program
- Dave Eng, Clackamas, recreational angler
- Bruce Buckmaster, Astoria, Salmon for All
- Brian Tarabochia, Astoria, commercial fisherman and fish buyer



commercial fishery in 2009, when a large upriver run of nearly 300,000 spring chinook is projected to enter the Columbia River.

Under this run size, the Washington commission has allocated 60 percent of the ESA impacts to the sport fishery and 40 percent to the commercial fishery, consistent with the Working

Group's recommendations. The Oregon commission has announced plans to allocate 55 percent of the catch to the sport fishery and 45 percent to the commercial fishery.



Anglers will have more time to fish for spring chinook – both above and below Hayden Island – in March and April than in 2008 under the initial seasons adopted by Washington and Oregon.

2009 Season and Beyond

Because the two state allocation policies were only 5 percent apart, fishery managers were able to develop concurrent fishing regulations for March and April without violating either commission's position. Further efforts to reach an agreement are expected before the later part of the season arrives in May.

In the 100 miles of river below Hayden Island, the initial sport season provides 30 days of spring chinook fishing in March and April, compared to just 12 days last year. During those two months, anglers also will have 39 days to catch and retain spring chinook in the 40 miles miles of river between Hayden Island and Bonneville Dam. The commercial fishery will have an opportunity to catch up to 6,000 spring chinook between Hayden Island and the dam.

The best sport fishing upstream from Bonneville Dam and in the lower Snake River is expected in May and June.

As initially conceived, the Working Group would resolve the spring and summer chinook allocation process, then move on to other key policy issues such as hatchery reform and expanding selective fisheries in Phase 2. The Washington commission still sees the bi-state Working Group as a viable forum for those efforts and will continue working with the Oregon commission to achieve the goals that the two commissions jointly laid out for Columbia River fisheries.