

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

POLICY DECISION

**POLICY TITLE: Lower Columbia
Sturgeon Management**

POLICY NUMBER: C-3001

Supercedes: 2011-2013 Lower Columbia
Sturgeon Management C-3001

Effective Date: March 1, 2014
Termination Date: December 31, 2018

See Also: Policy C-3608

Approved February 7, 2014 by:

 , Chair

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for management of the Lower Columbia River white sturgeon population and fisheries.

Definition and Intent

The Lower Columbia River white sturgeon population inhabits the waters of the Columbia River and tributaries downstream of Bonneville Dam and migrates into ocean and coastal estuaries. The intent of **the policy is to provide consistent management guidelines that promote a healthy population.**

General Policy Statement

Manage the Lower Columbia River white sturgeon population with conservation and fishery management objectives that are consistent with a healthy population.

Policy Guidelines

Lower Columbia Sturgeon Conservation Objectives:

- Provide recruitment and regulatory protection to increase the abundance of the spawning population.
- Manage with a precautionary approach due to uncertainties in population parameters.
- Manage for an annual combined sport and commercial harvest of white sturgeon to provide measurable population growth to achieve the goals of: (1) fully seeded habitats and (2) full representation of each age class within the population.
- Population Monitoring (within available resources):
 - Continue young-of-the-year (YOY) sampling to track spawning success.
 - Evaluate legal-size abundance methodology to improve accuracy of estimates.
 - Continue to monitor sea lion predation for incorporation into stock status

evaluations.

Fishery Management Objectives:

- Provide sufficient sturgeon spawning sanctuaries or other protection measures where and when appropriate.
- Conduct research, within available resources, to assess spawner and sublegal abundance and to quantify impacts of commercial and recreational fisheries on these abundances.
- Provide appropriate added protective measures to prevent further decline of green sturgeon.
- Limit incidental impacts on other species.

When Retention Fisheries are Allowed:

- Manage Lower Columbia River sturgeon fisheries through an agreement with Oregon.
- Maintain concurrent Washington and Oregon regulations in the Columbia River.
- Manage fisheries in a manner that takes into consideration projected recruitment, with the objective of increasing abundance of the legal size segment, and increasing escapement into the spawning segment of the population. Management should be based on consideration of all mortality factors, including sea lion predation and both recreational and commercial fishery related mortalities.
- Maintain the 80/20 sport/commercial harvest allocation.
- Maintain viable and diverse recreational and commercial fishing opportunities.
- Develop sport fishery regulations consistent with the following objectives:
 - Minimize emergency in-season action.
 - Balance catch between estuary and non-estuary fisheries and maintain a diverse array of sturgeon fishing opportunity.
 - Maintain fishery monitoring and management capabilities.
- Develop commercial fishery regulations consistent with the following objectives:
 - Optimize economic value (adjust to market needs).
 - Spread harvest opportunity throughout the year.
 - Minimize impacts to green sturgeon listed under the Endangered Species Act.
- Manage sturgeon harvests outside the mainstem lower Columbia River consistent with Lower Columbia River sturgeon conservation and management needs.

Annual Review

Given the degree of uncertainty about the current state of the Columbia River white sturgeon, including the impact of population stress factors such as increased predation and decreased food base, the Commission is adopting a precautionary approach to management. The Director will provide an annual review for the Commission, as an essential component of this precautionary approach, to include updated information on:

- stock status;
- predation rates;

- review of in-season management actions;
- accounting of fish left unharvested;
- review of sturgeon harvest in areas outside the mainstem lower Columbia River;
- by-catch in all fisheries;
- recommended management changes; and
- other pertinent information.

Delegation of Authority

The Commission delegates the authority to the Director to develop and negotiate Lower Columbia Sturgeon Management Accords with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife that are consistent with these policies and objectives. Additionally, the Commission delegates the authority to the Director, through the Columbia River Compact, to set seasons for recreational and commercial fisheries in the Columbia River, and to adopt permanent and emergency regulations to implement these fisheries. The Director shall work with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to achieve implementation of this Commission action in a manner that results in concurrent regulations between the two states. The Director shall consult with the Commission Chair if it becomes necessary to deviate from the Commission's policy to achieve concurrent regulations with Oregon.