

WDFW Commission Adopts New Sport Fishing Rules

Local News

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Posted on : February 6, 2012 at 10:24 am

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a variety of new sportfishing rules and increased the number of multiple-season hunting permits for deer and elk issued each year during a public meeting here Feb. 3-4. The commission, a nine-member citizen panel appointed by the governor to set policy for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), adopted new fishing rules for the 2012-13 season that will: Close fishing early for steelhead and other game fish in several river systems in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures, ranging from mid-January to mid-February of 2013, apply to the Nooksack, Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Green and Puyallup river systems, along with several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The proposal also includes closing the upper section of the Samish River on Dec. 1 and the lower section Jan. 1 to fishing for all species. Declassify northern pike as a gamefish and allow anglers to fish with two poles on the Pend Oreille River, where the non-native fish have been spreading. Anglers who purchase the required endorsement will also be allowed to use two fishing poles on the lower Spokane River. Close fisheries on a number of small coastal streams that drain into Washington's ocean waters to protect juvenile anadromous fish. Change the opening day of the lowland lake fishing season from the last Saturday in April to the fourth Saturday in April. Limit sturgeon retention in Puget Sound, as well as its tributaries, to June 1-June 30 and Sept. 1-Oct. 15. The new rule is designed to minimize impacts to Columbia River sturgeon that venture into Puget Sound to feed. Under the proposal, catch-and-release fishing will still be allowed year-round.

Summaries of those and other rule changes, as adopted, will be available on the department's website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/rule_proposals/ by mid-February. Public comments on the proposed changes were taken by the commission during meetings in December and January. In other action, the commission increased the number of multiple-season deer and elk permits issued each year to hunters. Those permits, awarded through annual drawings, allow permit-holders to participate in all general hunting seasons for deer and elk. Without the special permit, hunters must choose among archery, muzzleloader or modern firearm seasons. The commission approved WDFW's proposal to increase the number of deer permits from 4,000 currently to 8,500, and the number of elk permits from 850 to 1,250. State wildlife managers have assured the commission that increasing permit levels will expand hunting opportunities without posing a risk to deer and elk populations. In other business, the commission deferred action on a proposal by WDFW to acquire 165 acres for fish and wildlife habitat in Okanogan County. The commission re-scheduled consideration of the purchase for a conference call Feb. 17 to allow time for further review.