WDFW Commission Will Vote on New Columbia River Fishery Policy That Phases Out Gillnetting

Local News

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OLYMPIA - The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission heard public testimony on a set of recommendations to restructure salmon and sturgeon fisheries on the lower Columbia River during its meeting Dec. 14-15 in Tumwater.The commission, a nine-member citizen panel appointed by the governor to set policy for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), will consider revisions to current policies that reflect the recommendations at its Jan. 11-12 meeting in Olympia. The public can comment through Jan. 4 on the new draft policy, available for review on the commission’s website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/commission/ . Comments can be submitted to commission@dfw.wa.gov . The public also will have an opportunity to provide comments on the draft policy at the Jan. 11-12 commission meeting. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission approved a new management framework for Columbia River fisheries on Friday (Dec. 7).

A work group made up of representatives from Washington and Oregon developed the set of recommendations to restructure salmon and sturgeon fisheries in the lower Columbia River. The work group - assembled at the request of Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber - included members from each state’s fish and wildlife commissions.Key provisions of the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission’s new draft policy, "Columbia River Basin Salmon Management," include:- Promoting conservation and recovery of wild salmon and steelhead, maintaining orderly fisheries and increasingly focusing harvest on abundant hatchery fish.
- Seeking to enhance the overall economic well-being and stability of Columbia River fisheries in a manner that is consistent with conservation and does not impair the resource.
- Prioritizing recreational fisheries for salmon and steelhead in the mainstem lower Columbia River and commercial fisheries in off-channel areas.
- Phasing out the use of gillnets by non-tribal fishers in the mainstem by 2017, while maintaining the economic viability of the commercial fishery during and after the transition.
- Developing and implementing selective-fishing gear and techniques for commercial fisheries in the mainstem, and providing incentives to commercial fishers to develop and implement these alternative gears and techniques.
- Requiring sport anglers fishing for salmon and steelhead in the mainstem Columbia River and its tributaries to use barbless hooks beginning 2013.
- Tracking implementation and results of the fishery management actions and hatchery programs in the lower Columbia River during the transition period, with an initial review at the end of 2014 and a comprehensive review at the end of the transition period.The commission, citing the continuing decline of legal-size white sturgeon in the Columbia River, also charged WDFW Director Phil Anderson with negotiating an agreement with his counterpart in Oregon regarding sturgeon management in 2013.On a separate issue, the commission approved a new Puget Sound shrimp policy and management strategy that expand recreational shrimp fishing opportunities in 2013 within established conservation guidelines. The new policy allocates 70 percent of the shrimp catch in Puget Sound to the recreational fishery.Under that policy, the San Juan Islands could be open for 26 additional days of recreational shrimp fishing next year, while the Strait of Juan de Fuca could be

open for 31 additional days. Other areas of Puget Sound could open for one or two additional days. The commission also approved several changes proposed in state rules for compensating commercial livestock owners who lose livestock to large carnivores.In other action, the commission approved three land transactions, including the purchase of nearly 162 acres in Pacific County, nearly 80 acres in Okanogan County and six acres along Icicle Creek in Chelan County to protect fish and wildlife habitat and ensure public access for outdoor recreation.