

EDFE Adopts New Sportfishing Rules, Approves Pacific County Land Purchase

Local News

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Moses Lake, WA - The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted numerous changes to sportfishing rules and approved three land transactions during a public meeting March 1 in Moses Lake. Nearly 70 sportfishing rules were adopted by the commission, a nine-member citizen panel appointed by the governor to set policy for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Rules approved by the commission include: Increasing the daily catch limit for walleye from eight to 16 fish in Lake Roosevelt and a portion of the Spokane River - waters where there is an overabundance of walleye. The rule is designed to bring the walleye population back into balance with other fish populations, improving the quality of the fisheries. The rule also opens that portion of the Spokane River to the harvest of walleye year round. Limiting anglers to one white sturgeon per year in Washington's waters beginning May 1. Starting Jan. 1, 2014, the new rule will also require anglers to release all white sturgeon in the lower Columbia River below Bonneville Dam, the Washington coast, Puget Sound and their tributaries. However, catch-and-release fishing for the species will be allowed in those areas. The rule is designed to address ongoing concerns about declines in the lower Columbia River white sturgeon population. Removing the daily catch limit for channel catfish and the daily catch and size limits for bass and walleye in portions of the Columbia and Snake rivers and their tributaries to assist recovery efforts for salmon and steelhead. The changes are designed to increase the harvest of abundant bass, walleye and channel catfish, which prey on juvenile salmon and steelhead that are listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. Reducing the daily catch limit of cabezon to one fish in marine areas 4-11 and 13 and prohibiting the retention of cabezon measuring less than 18 inches in length. The rule, designed to provide additional protection for the species, also reduces the fishing season for cabezon in those areas to May 1 through June 15. Most new rules take effect May 1. Summaries of the rule changes, as adopted, will be available on WDFW's website in the next two weeks.

In other action, the commission approved three land transactions, including the purchase of 1,614 acres in Asotin County. The acquisition is phase two of a multi-year project to secure a total of nearly 12,000 acres of riparian habitat for steelhead and bull trout and terrestrial habitat for deer, bighorn sheep and elk. The commission also approved the purchase of 195 acres of lowlands in the Chinook River Estuary in Pacific County to increase salmon habitat, and an easement across four properties along Issaquah Creek in King County for the construction of a replacement intake system upstream from the WDFW Issaquah Fish Hatchery. In other business, the commission held a public hearing on proposed changes to hunting rules. The 17 adjustments proposed by WDFW include allowing the use of illuminated arrow nocks for archery equipment and restoring antlerless elk opportunities for archery hunters in Yakima County, specifically in Game Management Units 352 (Nile) and 356 (Bumping). The proposed adjustments are available on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/regulations/development.html#12-19-007>. The commission will consider final adoption of the proposed changes to hunting rules at its April 12-13 meeting in Olympia.