



# TRI-STATE STEELHEADERS

SALMON ENHANCEMENT GROUP

November 27, 2012

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission  
600 Capitol Way N.  
Olympia, WA 98501-1091

Dear Commissioners:

This letter is in follow-up to previous correspondence dated August 7, 2012 sent to Commissioners Douvia, Schmitt, Perry and Kehne pertaining to the manner in which the *U.S. v. Oregon* Management Agreement and Commission Policy C-3617 have been implemented for upriver spring Chinook fisheries on the mainstem Columbia River and lower Snake River.

The purpose of my earlier letter was twofold. The first was to express serious concerns regarding the extent to which the policy's 75/25 allocation of ESA impacts between lower and upriver fisheries has consistently fallen short of the intended distribution of 25% of the sport fishery impacts and harvest for Zone 6 and the Snake River, especially for the Snake River spring fishery. The second was to request a greater role for upriver sport fishing interests in future policy development processes involving Columbia River Compact fishery management. To that end, I would like to thank Director Anderson and the Commission for affording me the privilege of serving as a sport fishing advisor to the current Columbia River Fishery Management Work Group (CRFMW) for Washington.

The intent of this letter is to request the Commission's attention and assistance in addressing the following concerns and recommendations relative to how Policy C-3617 has been applied in the past and should be rewritten to more effectively direct future management. These concerns and recommendations were not voiced during of the CRFMW process as they were clearly not consistent with the stated intent of Gov Kitzhaber's initiative regarding lower-river commercial gillnetting. That in no way means they are not relative to current and future management of Columbia River spring Chinook fisheries. The current management allocation structure for Columbia River spring Chinook fisheries does not meet the interests and needs of upriver anglers, businesses and communities and the continuation of business as usual is simply unacceptable.

**CONCERN:** Current Columbia River spring Chinook fishery management practices have consistently resulted in an inability for upriver sport fisheries, especially in the lower Snake River, to achieve ESA impact and harvest allocation targets established in Policy C-3617. The extent to which this is true is clearly evidenced in the attached table developed using harvest data provided by WDFW.

Additionally, the current 75/25 distribution of impacts between lower and upper river sport fisheries is not an accurate or fair representation of the level of angler interest and participation based on geographic distribution.

**RECOMMENDATION:** 1) Direct the agency (WDFW) to work with NOAA Fisheries to develop and implement a distinct sport fishing ESA-Impact allocation for spring Chinook in the Washington portion of the lower Snake River, separate from the existing sport impacts granted to the Columbia River and Idaho. We believe this is the only realistic alternative to the zero-sum management flaw inherent in current policy and practice.

2) Amend Policy C-3617 (aka the "75/25" agreement) to more accurately and equitably reflect angler distribution based on the sale of Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement licenses.

**RATIONALE:** Without a separate and distinct allocation, the lower Snake River spring Chinook fishery will continue to be subject to the fundamental flaws and biases that have become evident through past and present fishery management practices. Until and unless this solution is implemented anglers and communities along the lower Snake River will continue to come out on the losing end of a zero-sum game where the odds and fishery benefits consistently favor lower-river interests.

Harvest data provided by WDFW shows that since Policy C-3617 was adopted in 2009, the Snake River has never been allowed to achieve its allotment of spring Chinook, even though in every year but one there have been unused impacts left on the table and used for catch balancing (*See attached table*). Not surprisingly, this recurring outcome has led many anglers and communities along the Snake River to believe the *U.S. v. Oregon* harvest is being balanced on their backs and at their expense.

WDFW license data for 2010, the first year the Columbia River Salmon & Steelhead Endorsement was required, reveals that 37% of the Endorsements are purchased by anglers in communities located in eastern Washington, while only 12% of the harvest for spring Chinook has been allowed to occur above Bonneville Dam. Although this may not serve as a concrete indicator of the exact number of upriver anglers who fish for spring Chinook, it is most certainly a reasonable and realistic indicator of the level of interest that exists in upriver communities that would benefit greatly from better opportunities to pursue and harvest these fish.

**CONCERN:** Lower river spring Chinook seasons and allocations are structured and managed in a way that continually results in 80-100% of the harvest below Bonneville impacting the first 10-40% of the upriver run. The current management policy of assuring a mainstem sport season of 40+ consecutive days below Bonneville prior to the run update poses a serious conservation threat to early returning upriver stocks. This approach focuses a high level of harvest and mortality on the earliest returning stocks year after year and is strongly believed to be a major contributing factor to upriver runs that are returning later and later. There is strong concern that some upriver stocks may already have suffered serious damage. Attempts to address this concern have repeatedly been rebuffed or ignored by lower-river managers.

In years with robust run projections and optimistic lower river harvest allocations, current management practices are prone to over-harvest when run predictions fail to materialize, with the result that mid-Columbia and Snake River fisheries are either forced to close early or are drastically curtailed. While harvest buffers have helped, they have not resulted in improved opportunities or enhanced upriver sport harvest, especially in regards to the Snake River fishery.

**RECOMMENDATION:** 1) Direct agency fish managers (WDFW) to work with ODFW, and lower- and upper-river sport fishing stakeholders to develop and implement a season structure for lower-river spring Chinook that constrains harvest prior to the mid-season run update in order to ensure passage of a biologically-significant number (i.e. 10% of pre-season forecast??) of early returning fish above Bonneville Dam annually.

2) Seasons below Bonneville should be limited (2 or 3 days per week/1fish limit) or delayed until the passage target has been achieved.

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Determination of an appropriate “biologically-significant” number of early returning stocks should be done in consultation with Region 1’s Fish Program managers for southeast Washington as well as Idaho Fish & Game and other Snake Basin co-managers (Nez Perce Tribe, ODFW, etc.).

**RATIONALE:** There is a strong and growing concern among upriver fish managers and anglers that consistently allowing sport and commercial fisheries to harvest a significant portion of the earliest returning upriver spring Chinook stocks is a major factor contributing to continually late returns and is impacting both the viability and availability of fish destined for the Snake River and its tributaries.

Passage data at Bonneville, compiled and analyzed by IDFG, indicates stocks such as Rapid River are consistently being hit hard year after year. As a result, fewer and fewer of the earliest returning and genetically strongest upriver stocks are being allowed to enter the Snake River system prior to the run update. This is resulting in detrimental impacts to these stocks and sets the stage for later and shorter season opportunities for upriver communities from year to year.

**CONCERN:** Upriver anglers, guides and businesses are frustrated because they are unable to count on a fishery continuing to a set date that enables them to plan for trips and purchases. When upriver seasons are curtailed due to downgraded run projections but high harvest has already occurred below Bonneville, the economic impact to smaller upriver communities is greatly magnified, especially in comparison to larger metropolitan areas like Portland and Vancouver where economies are much more resilient.

**RECOMMENDATION:** 1) Adjust the distribution of ESA-impacts and allocations to ensure that a set number of consecutive days of sport fishing will be provided for the Snake River spring Chinook fishery as has been and is the policy for lower river sport seasons (i.e. 40+ consecutive days).

**RATIONALE:** Unlike their lower river counterparts, anglers in communities along the Snake River lack the ability to shift their fishing efforts relatively easily to main-stem tributaries like the Willamette and Cowlitz, at least not without incurring substantial extra costs. Snake River anglers, guides and businesses would like assurance they will receive at least a baseline-level fishery as occurs below Bonneville Dam.

**CONCERN:** Eastern WA anglers and communities have had little involvement or representation in the development and implementation of past Compact agreements and WDFW policies involving harvest allocations. Policy decisions regarding seasons and harvest allocations have consistently been developed with little regard concerning equitable fishing opportunities upstream of Bonneville Dam.

**RECOMMENDATION:** 1) Ensure the C-3617 Phase II long-term (2014-2018) policy revision process includes greater participation by mid-Columbia and Snake River stakeholders, with representation by sport anglers and guides, the business community and local. The number of citizen representatives from eastern Washington serving as advisors on the Columbia River Recreational Fishing Advisory Group should be commensurate with the percentage of Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement licenses sold in eastern Washington counties.

2) Direct agency fish managers from Vancouver to meet with staff and upriver stakeholders in Walla Walla for the express purpose of developing recommendations and provisions that satisfactorily address the concerns outlined in this letter to bring before the Commission for consideration and approval.

3) Schedule and conduct a Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting during 2013 in southeast Washington.

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**RATIONALE:** Landowners, anglers and communities along the Snake River feel they have made substantial sacrifices that demonstrate a long-term commitment to salmon and steelhead recovery by a) restoring critical spawning and rearing habitat on a watershed scale; b) returning water to streams for fish by improving irrigation practices through greater efficiencies, piping of ditches and water banking; and c) by being forced to accept reduced angling opportunities and new restrictions without being afforded due consideration and inclusion in harvest opportunities or in the development of policies and programs that directly impact them in significant ways.

In 2008, none of the nine CRFWG citizen advisor members involved in developing the "75/25 Agreement" resided in communities above Bonneville Dam. In addition, of the eighteen members (9 from Washington and 9 from Oregon) that comprise the Columbia River Compact Recreational Fishing Advisory Group, only two live upstream of Bonneville and only one of those individuals (myself) resides east of White Salmon.

In August, representatives from local city and county government, salmon recovery organizations and concerned anglers in southeast Washington had the pleasure of meeting with Director Anderson in Walla Walla to share and discuss these concerns. We are pleased to have received his support in addressing this particular concern by selecting me to serve as a sport fishing advisor for the Commission's Columbia River Fish Management Workgroup. Opportunities for others to participate in future processes will go a long way towards building trust and a sense of equal consideration.

In closing, it's been a privilege to represent anglers, businesses and communities in the southeast part of our state by assisting the Commission and the Department as you tackle this incredibly complex and highly important social, economic and recreational public policy issue. On behalf of my organization, our fellow stakeholders and local communities we look forward to continuing to work closely with the Commission, Director Anderson and agency staff to develop sound and successful policy solutions that serve a broader constituency.

A response outlining the Commission and Department's approach and timeline for addressing these concerns will be greatly appreciated. Please call on us for assistance and thank you for your consideration and support.

Respectfully,



Mike Bireley  
Executive Director

Attachment: Col Rvr Sprg Chinook ESA Impact Harvest Table

cc: Phil Anderson, Director (WDFW Olympia)  
Jim Scott, Assistant Director, Fish Program (WDFW Olympia)  
Steve Pozzanghera, Region 1 Director (WDFW Spokane)  
Guy Norman, Region 5 Director (WDFW Vancouver)  
Bobby Levy, Chair, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Echo)  
Pete Hassemmer, Anadromous Fish Manager, Idaho Fish & Game (Boise)  
Liz Hamilton, Executive Director, Northwest Sport Fishing Industry Association  
Jim Martin, Conservation Director, Pure Fishing

**COLUMBIA RIVER SPRING CHINOOK HARVEST AND ALLOCATION**

Allocation

Under Allocation

Over Allocation

BELOW BONNEVILLE SPORT												
Year	Upriver Run Forecast	Upriver Run Actual	Pre-season Harvest Allocation	Post-update Harvest Allocation	Harvest Actual	% Total CR Sport Harvest	ESA Impact Allocation*					
							ESA Take	Impact Allocated	Impact Actual	% Actual vs. Allocated	% Total CR ESA Allocation	% Total CR ESA Actual
2005	254,100	106,911			10,591	96.0	293	0.80%	0.87%	114%	73%	87%
2006	88,400	132,583			6,985	83.2	246	0.86%	0.45%	52%	75%	79%
2007	78,500	86,247			6,476	79.9	165	0.86%	0.57%	67%	75%	75%
2008	269,300	178,629			20,040	88.3	313	0.87%	1.25%	144%	75%	84%
2009	298,900	169,296			16,923	95.5	340	0.93%	1.05%	114%	75%	94%
2010	470,000	315,345			29,247	85.2	535	0.83%	0.84%	102%	75%	81%
2011	198,400	221,157			11,694	73.5	315	0.90%	0.54%	60%	75%	68%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,657,600</b>	<b>1,210,168</b>			<b>101,956</b>		<b>2,207</b>					
<b>AVG</b>	<b>236,800</b>	<b>172,881</b>			<b>14,565</b>	<b>86.0%</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>0.86%</b>	<b>0.79%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>81%</b>

ZONE 6 SPORT												
Year	Upriver Run Forecast	Upriver Run Actual	Pre-season Harvest Allocation	Post-update Harvest Allocation	Harvest Actual	% Total CR Sport Harvest	ESA Impact Allocation*					
							ESA Take	Impact Allocated	Impact Actual	% Actual vs. Allocated	% Total CR ESA Allocation	% Total CR ESA Actual
2005	254,100	106,911			363	3.3	25	0.10%	0.08%	81%	9%	8%
2006	88,400	132,583			1,220	14.5	68	0.10%	0.06%	61%	9%	11%
2007	78,500	86,247			1,343	16.6	56	0.09%	0.13%	143%	8%	17%
2008	269,300	178,629			2,130	9.5	66	0.10%	0.18%	185%	8%	12%
2009	298,900	169,296			284	1.6	6	0.12%	0.02%	14%	10%	2%
2010	470,000	315,345			3,431	10.0	81	0.11%	0.13%	122%	10%	13%
2011	198,400	221,157			2,308	14.5	71	0.12%	0.14%	114%	10%	17%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,657,600</b>	<b>1,210,168</b>			<b>11,079</b>		<b>373</b>					
<b>AVG</b>	<b>236,800</b>	<b>172,881</b>			<b>1,583</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0.10%</b>	<b>0.10%</b>	<b>102%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>11%</b>

SNAKE RIVER SPORT												
Year	Upriver Run Forecast	Upriver Run Actual	Pre-season Harvest Allocation	Post-update Harvest Allocation	Harvest Actual	% Total CR Sport Harvest	ESA Impact Allocation*					
							ESA Take	Impact Allocated	Impact Actual	% Actual vs. Allocated	% Total CR ESA Allocation	% Total CR ESA Actual
2005	254,100	106,911			76	0.7	8	0.20%	0.05%	27%	18%	5%
2006	88,400	132,583			190	2.3	10	0.19%	0.06%	31%	17%	10%
2007	78,500	86,247			287	3.5	7	0.19%	0.06%	33%	17%	8%
2008	269,300	178,629			511	2.2	13	0.19%	0.05%	27%	17%	4%
2009	298,900	169,296			508	2.9	10	0.19%	0.05%	26%	15%	4%
2010	470,000	315,345			1,663	4.8	20	0.17%	0.06%	35%	15%	6%
2011	198,400	221,157			1,913	12.0	36	0.18%	0.11%	63%	15%	14%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,657,600</b>	<b>1,210,168</b>			<b>5,148</b>		<b>104</b>					
<b>AVG</b>	<b>236,800</b>	<b>172,881</b>			<b>735</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0.18%</b>	<b>0.06%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>7%</b>

Columbia River Spring Chinook Sport ESA Impact Based on Run Forecast				
	Forecast	Actual	Impact Used	Unused Impact
2005	2.0%	2.0%	1.42%	0.58%
2006	2.0%	2.0%	1.94%	0.60%
2007	1.5%	2.0%	1.31%	0.69%
2008	2.0%	1.9%	2.21%	-0.31%
2009	2.2%	1.9%	1.83%	0.07%
2010	2.6%	2.2%	2.01%	0.19%
2011	1.9%	2.0%	1.45%	0.55%

Data source: C. LeFleur (WDFW) 7/17/12 Email  
 2012 Joint Staff Report: Stock Status by Joint Columbia River Management Staff

\*Allocations are based on **post-season** run size