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The Columbia River Fish Management Plan

COLUMBIA RIVER SERIES

Randall S. Anderson

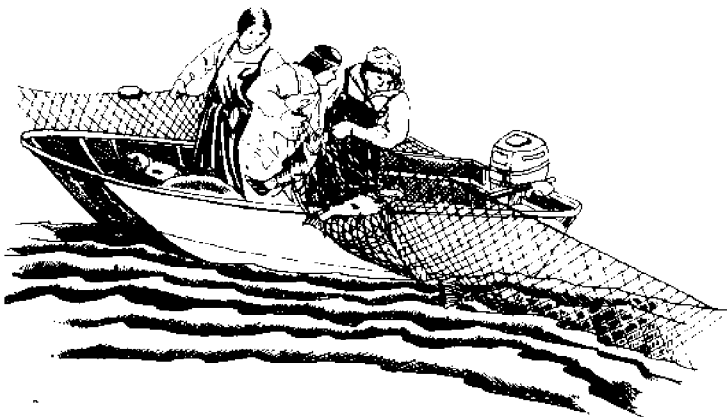
A Summary of the U.S. v. Oregon Agreement

After 20 years of legal challenges and nearly 5 years of negotiation, the states of Oregon and Washington, the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Yakima tribes, and the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Interior have reached an agreement on Columbia River fisheries management. This newly adopted *Columbia River Fish Management Plan* represents a historic agreement outlining how salmon and steelhead runs will be rebuilt and shared among Indians and non-Indians.

Impetus for this agreement began in 1968 when the federal government and the tribes filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court (*U.S. v. Oregon*) challenging state management of Columbia River salmon and steelhead. The initial ruling on this case by Judge Robert Belloni noted that state management practices failed to meet the tribal fishery rights guaranteed in the treaties signed by the federal government and Northwest Indian tribes in 1855. Belloni ruled that the tribes were entitled to "a fair and equitable share" of the fish harvest. He also ruled that the state can regulate the Indian fishery only for the purposes of conservation, and that those regulations cannot "discriminate against the Indians."

In 1974, after more litigation, Judge Belloni defined "a fair and equitable share" as an even split of the harvestable Columbia River fish between treaty and non-treaty fisheries. This followed on the heels of the landmark decision of Judge George Boldt allocating 50 percent of the fish in Puget Sound and off the coast of Washington to treaty Indians.

Work on this new plan has been underway since 1983 when Judge Belloni ordered development of a joint management agreement. At the core of this new agreement is the goal "to rebuild weak runs to full productivity and fairly share the harvest of upper river runs." Major points of the plan include:



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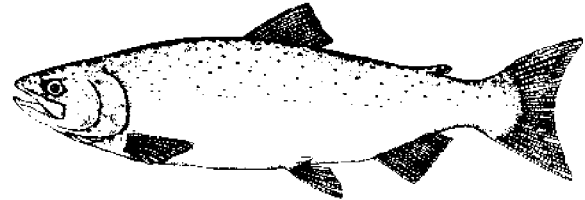


- Rebuilding the upriver spring and summer Chinook runs to levels that would restore fisheries within 15 years. The plan contains a number of proposals that will increase the natural and hatchery production of salmon and steelhead. Changes will be made to some of the current hatchery programs, and the long-term plans include new hatcheries on the Yakima and other major tributaries.
- Fair sharing of Chinook and coho harvests between Indian and non-Indian fisheries as well as between ocean and inland fisheries.
- Management of inriver harvests to promote the rebuilding of wild salmon and steelhead runs.
- Creation of a Production Advisory Committee (PAC) to coordinate the development of sub-basic plans that will address habitat protection, fish propagation and harvest.
- Procedures for resolving technical and policy disputes among the parties without going to court.
- Establishment of review dates for all species to allow modification of the plan if necessary.

This new agreement represents a blueprint that will shape the region's fisheries for years to come. Since it is designed to build upon the existing U.S./Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty and the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program, it provides the critical link needed in developing a coordinated, regional effort to restore Columbia River salmon and steelhead runs.

There are, however, some remaining issues. For example, there are concerns regarding the success of the hatchery supplementations outlined in the agreement and possible impacts on wild fish populations. In addition, the state of Idaho has been unwilling to sign the agreement because of concerns over Idaho's wild steelhead runs. It is likely that some of these concerns will be discussed in federal court.

Following is a summary of some of the main points within the plan.



Spring Chinook

BACKGROUND - The lower river spring Chinook run is comprised primarily of Willamette and Cowlitz river stocks with lesser, but increasing, stocks from the Kalama, Lewis and Sandy rivers. Lower river fish enter the Columbia from February through early May, with peak abundance in late March and early May.

The upriver spring Chinook run is comprised of races destined for the upper Columbia system above McNary Dam, the Snake River system, and middle Columbia tributaries between Bonneville and McNary dams. Upriver fish enter the Columbia in March and reach peak abundance in April and early May.

MANAGEMENT—Rebuilding the upriver spring Chinook runs is a priority. The interim management goal is 115,000 adult fish at Bonneville Dam and 35,000 at Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River.

PRODUCTION - Some of the plans outlined in the agreement include:

- Rearing 500,000 spring Chinook at the Herman Creek Ponds (near Cascade Locks, OR) for release in Bonneville Pool tributaries.
- Constructing a 3-4 million smolt hatchery for NE Oregon tributary supplementation.
- Expanding Carson National Fish Hatchery on the upper Wind River from 2.4 million spring Chinook a year to 4.2 million.
- Constructing the Yakima hatchery
- Expanding smolt production at Little White Salmon National Fish Hatchery from 500,000 to 1,000,000.



HARVEST - Treaty Indians will have a minimum mainstem entitlement of 10,000 spring and summer Chinook for ceremonial and subsistence purposes. It is anticipated that most of these fish will be taken from the spring Chinook run.

When runs are fewer than 128,800 at Bonneville Dam or 39,200 at Lower Granite, non-Indian fisheries downstream of Bonneville Dam will target on Willamette, Cowlitz, and other lower river Chinook stocks. The non-Indian commercial and recreational catch will be restricted to less than 5 percent of the upriver run.

Lower Columbia gillnet seasons must end before March 10, unless an extension is agreed to by the states and the tribes. Sport fishing downstream from the Interstate 5 Bridge must terminate prior to May 1. The lower river recreational fishery may be extended beyond March 31 only if the sport/commercial harvest does not exceed 5 percent of the upriver spring Chinook run.

When runs exceed 128,800 at Bonneville Dam, the harvestable surplus will be shared equally between the Indians and non-Indians. However, the non-Indian share of the surplus between 128,800 and 143,750 at Bonneville Dam can be taken only above the confluence of the Columbia and Snake rivers. Harvestable surpluses above the 143,750 level may be taken in expanded mainstem fisheries (commercial, recreational, ceremonial and subsistence) or passed on to tributary fisheries.

Summer Chinook

BACKGROUND - Summer Chinook enter the Columbia in June and July and are almost entirely of upriver origin. The run is comprised of an earlier migrating race destined primarily for the Salmon River in Idaho and a later migrating race destined for the upper Columbia and its tributaries above Priest Rapids Dam. Because summer Chinook production has been so small, there have been no targeted fisheries since 1964.

MANAGEMENT - The management goal will be developed by TAC based on the sub-basin plans.

PRODUCTION - The plan outlines a new mid-Columbia summer Chinook program. Space at the Bonneville hatchery used in rearing 200,000 fall Chinook will be switched to summer Chinook production. New summer Chinook hatcheries are also planned for the Wenatchee and Yakima basins.

HARVEST - Until run sizes reach management goals, the non-Indian harvest will be limited to incidental catches during fisheries for other species. The non-Indian commercial sockeye and shad fisheries will use a net mesh size of less than 4 1/2 inches to minimize summer Chinook impact. That impact shall be less than 5 percent of the run. There shall be no target sport fishery.

Indian ceremonial, subsistence, and commercial sockeye fishery impacts will also be limited to 5 percent of the run. The majority of tribal ceremonial and subsistence summertime needs will be met by spring Chinook and sockeye catches.

Fall Chinook

BACKGROUND - There are two main runs of fall Chinook that return to the Columbia each year. The *lower river run* consists of a hatchery stock and a wild stock destined for production areas downstream of Bonneville Dam. Lower river fall Chinook enter the Columbia from early August through fall.

The *upriver run* of fall Chinook are those fish destined for production areas upstream of Bonneville Dam. The run consists of two main stocks. "Upriver brights" are destined primarily for the Hanford Reach, the last free-flowing stretch of the upper Columbia, where they spawn naturally. "Tules" are a darker fall Chinook that return to the hatcheries of the Bonneville Pool. Both stocks migrate over Bonneville Dam in peak numbers in early September.

Upriver brights are not readily caught in the ocean or the Columbia River sport fisheries. They are, however, important in the lower river gillnet fishery and the tribal fishery. Conversely, tules are important for sport and troll fishing off



the Washington coast. However, they are worth less in the Columbia than upriver brights because their flesh deteriorates as they near spawning time.

MANAGEMENT - The interim spawning escapement goal is 40,000 naturally spawning upriver brights above McNary Dam.

PRODUCTION - Upriver bright production will be increased at Little White Salmon, Lyon's Ferry, and the new Yakima hatchery to be built. Production at the Spring Creek National Fish Hatchery will be switched entirely to tule production.

HARVEST - Upriver stocks available for harvest in the Pacific Ocean and mainstem Columbia will be shared equally between the treaty Indian and non-Indian fisheries. Basically, treaty fishermen will target on upriver brights in the area between Bonneville and McNary Dams, and non-Indians on tules in the lower river below Bonneville.



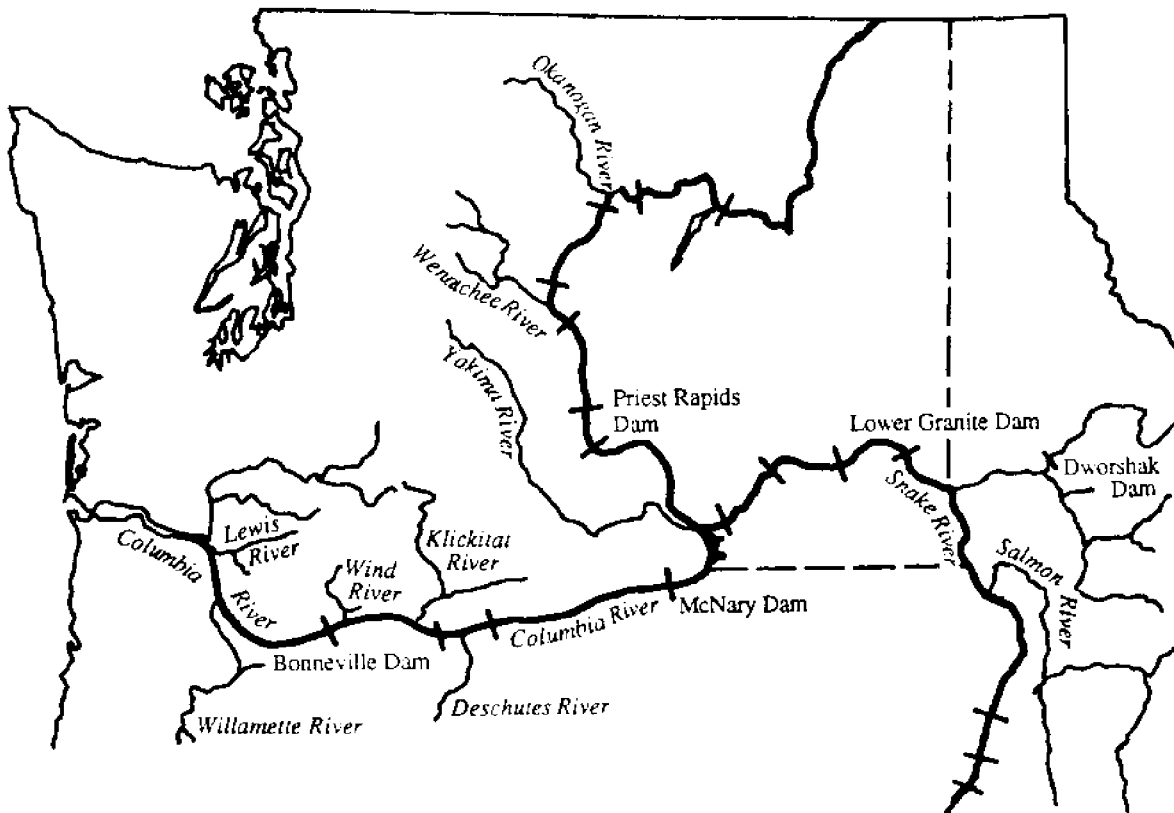
Sockeye

BACKGROUND - Sockeye salmon enter the Columbia in June and July. They are bound for natural production areas above Priest Rapids Dam in the Wenatchee and Okanogan rivers.

MANAGEMENT - The sockeye management goal is 65,000 as measured at Priest Rapids Dam. Under average conditions, this requires a 75,000 run over Bonneville Dam.

PRODUCTION - There are no hatcheries; all production is natural.

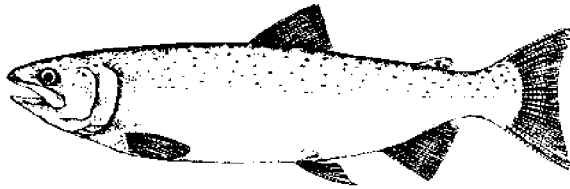
HARVEST - On runs under 75,000, there will not be a non-Indian commercial fishery. Indian ceremonial and subsistence fishing will be limited





to 7 percent or less of the run, depending on run size. Sport fishing will remain open.

On runs of 75,000 to 100,000, Indian fishermen will be allocated 75 percent of the harvestable surplus and non-Indians 25 percent. On runs over 100,000, the harvestable portion of the run will be split 50/50 between the Indian and non-Indian fisheries.



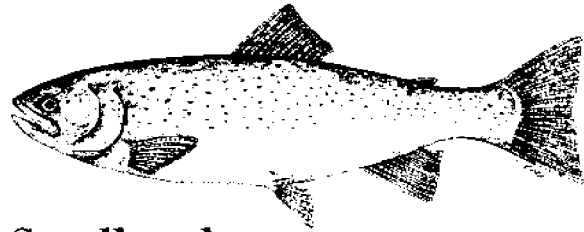
Coho

BACKGROUND - Coho enter the Columbia primarily from August through November. The coho run contains two segments: an early migration in early September and a late segment that peaks in the lower river in mid-October. Early run coho originate primarily from Oregon hatcheries. Late coho are produced at several Washington facilities, primarily the Lewis River and Cowlitz hatcheries. Although wild coho used to be found in the upper Columbia, the dams and other habitat degradation have substantially reduced these runs.

MANAGEMENT - The management goal is to provide more harvest opportunities for treaty fishermen.

PRODUCTION - To increase the harvest opportunities, 2.5 million late coho smolts from the Washougal hatchery will be released in the Klickitat River. The plan also calls for 700,000 early coho to be released in the Yakima River, and 1 million early coho will be released into the Umatilla River system. These smolts will come from Cascade hatchery near Bonneville Dam, or from other appropriate hatcheries.

HARVEST - The plan will have no allocation constraints on non-Indian ocean and lower river harvest of coho. Mainstem Indian coho fisheries will be constrained only by allowable impacts on other salmon and steelhead stocks.



Steelhead

BACKGROUND - Steelhead can generally be found in the Columbia year-round. Winter steelhead enter the Columbia from November through April and are destined primarily for tributaries below Bonneville Dam. Summer steelhead enter the Columbia from April through October. Summer steelhead entering the Columbia in June - early August (*Group A*) are destined for tributaries throughout the Columbia. Those entering in late August - October (*Group B*) are generally larger fish destined primarily for tributaries of the Snake River.

MANAGEMENT - The interim management goal is 62,000 wild Group A steelhead and 13,300 wild Group B steelhead above Bonneville Dam. Steelhead management will be reviewed in 1989, two years earlier than the first major review for the other species.

PRODUCTION - The John Day, Wenaha, Middle Fork Salmon, and Selway rivers will continue to be managed for wild steelhead, without hatchery supplementation. In other tributaries, hatchery fish can be used to supplement and accelerate rebuilding or they can be used for local fisheries. Sub-basin plans will describe outplant programs for wild/natural rebuilding and tribal/non-tribal fisheries.

HARVEST - When runs are less than the management goal, treaty fisherman will be limited to catching 15 percent of the Group A wild steelhead and 32 percent of the Group B wild steelhead. Non-Indian gillnet fisheries will be structured to minimize steelhead handling during salmon seasons, and mainstem sport fisheries will concentrate on hatchery fish. Indian and non-Indian combined catches will not exceed 50 percent of the total harvestable steelhead (hatchery plus wild/natural).

If the tribes must forgo their opportunity to catch their full share of fall Chinook in order to



protect steelhead, Indian fishermen may be allowed to take additional fall Chinook above McNary Dam or below Bonneville Dam. Additional harvest opportunities for other stocks, such as coho or sockeye, are another possibility.



White Sturgeon

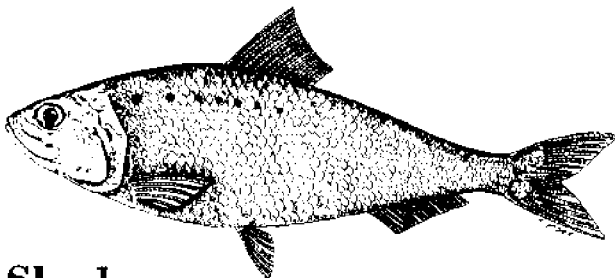
BACKGROUND - White sturgeon are found throughout most of the mainstem Columbia and portions of its lower tributaries. White sturgeon populations above Bonneville Dam appear to be landlocked. Those populations in the lower Columbia move freely to and from the ocean.

Sturgeon are a large, slow-growing fish and thus are easily susceptible to overharvest. Sturgeon catches have increased so dramatically in recent years that there are now concerns regarding the health of the sturgeon populations.

MANAGEMENT - Determining the current status of the sturgeon populations is the high priority. Additional information will be collected on population sizes, life history characteristics, recruitment, and appropriate sturgeon sanctuaries. A program will also be implemented to estimate the recreational sturgeon catch in the Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day pools.

PRODUCTION - There are currently no public sturgeon hatcheries, only several private hatcheries in Oregon.

HARVEST - The Indian setline sturgeon fishery will remain open year-round. Sturgeon of legal size caught during the treaty salmon and steelhead seasons may also be sold.



Shad

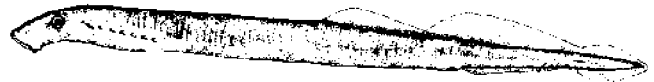
BACKGROUND - Although not native to this area, shad have become well established in the

Columbia River and have expanded their range into the upper Columbia and Snake rivers. Shad enter the Columbia from May through July. In recent years, shad runs have been very large, exceeding one million fish at Bonneville Dam.

MANAGEMENT - Although shad runs have become large enough to expand the harvest, markets are limited. The large shad run also coincides with the depressed runs of spring and summer Chinook.

PRODUCTION - Shad spawn naturally throughout the Columbia and its lower river tributaries.

HARVEST - Limited shad fishing will continue by both Indians and non-Indians. Efforts will be made to develop ways to harvest shad while avoiding other species.

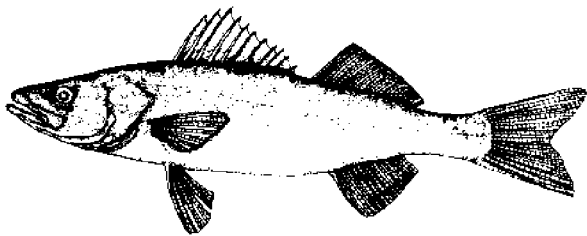


Lamprey

BACKGROUND - Lamprey are another anadromous species native to the Columbia River. Lamprey spend much of their adult life as a parasite attached to fish in the ocean. After several years of this parasitic lifestyle, they return to fresh water to spawn. Lamprey have some value as a gourmet food and are useful for biological studies.

PRODUCTION - Lamprey spawn naturally in the Columbia and its tributaries.

HARVEST - There will be no commercial harvest by Indians in the mainstem Columbia or its tributaries. This does not prevent trade or barter among Indian tribes, or harvest for personal use by non-Indians. Efforts will be made to cooperate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in developing a method for harvesting lamprey from dam fishways. The resulting harvest will be given to the Indian tribes for their ceremonial or subsistence use.



Walleye

BACKGROUND - Walleye, a member of the perch family, were introduced into the upper Columbia decades ago. Walleye have become a popular sport fish as they have extended their downstream range to the middle Columbia reservoirs and to a lesser extent into the lower Columbia River. Beginning in 1980, walleye caught by Indians may be retained for subsistence purposes but may not be sold.

PRODUCTION - Walleye spawn naturally in the Columbia.

HARVEST - To minimize the take of walleye, there will be no treaty fishery targeting on walleye. However, walleye caught incidentally during other Indian fisheries may be sold or utilized. The non-Indian ban on commercial harvest and sale will continue.

Acknowledgements

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The Columbia River Office is a unique educational project, focusing on regional Columbia River public policy issues. Funded through the Washington Sea Grant Program, this three-state effort (Washington, Oregon, and Idaho) maintains an office in Vancouver, Washington, and provides regional expertise through a university consortium consisting of the University of Washington, Washington State University, Oregon State University, and the University of Idaho.

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