

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

As part of a rule package associated with Columbia River Fisheries Harvest Reform, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a rule requiring use of barbless hooks only for all salmon, steelhead, and trout angling in the mainstem Columbia River, the lower Willamette River, and in certain other tributary areas of the lower Columbia River. This rule became effective January 1, 2013.

The intent of the barbless hook rule was to reduce mortality of Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed salmon and steelhead caught and released by anglers in these areas, primarily due to easier removal of barbless hooks and the corresponding improvement in the ability to release fish quickly.

Fisheries in the mainstem Columbia River are highly constrained by mortality to ESA-listed stocks. In the case of spring Chinook fisheries, non-tribal fisheries are typically constrained to an average 2% overall impact to listed upriver spring Chinook stocks. Allowable impacts for other stocks vary, but all are similarly constrained.

In the fall Chinook season in the lower river, mortality of released fish is calculated using rates assigned to the Buoy 10 fishery and nearby ocean fisheries by the Pacific Fishery Management Council. These rates were derived from field studies on post-release mortality rates for Chinook and coho, and include a small differential in mortality for fish caught in fisheries that are allowed to use barbed hooks compared to those where barbless hooks are required. Therefore, in the case of the fall lower Columbia River fishery, staffs from the Oregon and Washington departments have an empirical basis to apply modified post-release mortality rates under barbless hook requirements.

In the mark-selective Willamette River spring Chinook fishery, post-release mortality rates are derived from a field study conducted in the fishery prior to implementation of a full mark-selective fishery. This study examined the effects of gear type (bait versus lure) and physical hooking location on post-release mortality. All testing was done with barbed hooks. In this fishery, ODFW does not have an empirical basis to apply modified post-release mortality rates under barbless hook requirements.

In the remainder of the times and areas where barbless hooks are currently required, the agencies do not have empirical information to allow modification of post-release mortality rates under barbless hook requirements.

ESA limitations for spring Chinook salmon in the lower Willamette are less constraining than those in the mainstem Columbia River. Compared to the average allowable mortality of 2% on Columbia River upriver spring Chinook (of 14% total), allowable impact on Willamette spring Chinook is 15%, which has rarely been reached in implementation. Some of this impact occurs in the mainstem Columbia downstream of the Willamette, but the majority occurs in the lower Willamette River. Recreational catches of salmon in the Youngs Bay Select Area and lower Gnat Creek (Select Area recreational fisheries within the Northwest Zone) are low and hatchery fish predominate, and thus encounters of listed stocks and impacts to ESA-listed species are also very low.

In the lower Willamette River, the growing incidence of pinnipeds intercepting spring salmon that are encountered by anglers is contributing to increasing angler dissatisfaction in the fishery. This situation has been aggravated by the effects, whether authentic or perceived, of barbless hooks on angler's ability to successfully

bring hooked hatchery Chinook to the boat for harvest.

Allowance for barbed hooks in these areas will allow easier angler harvest of hatchery-produced fish, providing a more positive angling experience and promoting important reductions in the impact of hatchery-produced fish on natural spawners. Given the potential positive benefits to the fishery of allowing barbed hooks and the likely limited survival benefit to continued requirements for barbless hooks, staff does not believe there is a significant need to maintain barbless hook requirements in these areas. Because requirement of barbless hooks in the mainstem Columbia River was adopted concurrently by both commission's and because of the more limited ESA-impacts usually available in mainstem fisheries, Staff is not proposing any change to hook requirements for mainstem fisheries. Select Area recreational fisheries occur in both the Northwest (NW) and Columbia zones. At this time, Staff is only proposing the barbless hook requirement be lifted for those portions of Select Area fisheries within the NW Zone. Barbless hook regulations would remain in effect for those portions of Select Area recreational fisheries within the Columbia River Zone (Blind Slough/Knappa Slough areas) to maintain consistency with the mainstem Columbia barbless hook regulation.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Staff has periodically discussed barbless hook requirements with members of the public since implementation in 2013. However, no specific meetings were held to solicit additional input on this proposal.

OPTIONS

1. (Staff recommendation)
Adopt rules allowing use of barbed hooks in Oregon Select Areas and the lower Willamette River per draft OARs shown in Attachment 3.
2. Maintain requirement for barbless hooks in these areas.

DRAFT MOTION	I move to adopt the modifications to recreational fisheries in the Select Areas in the Northwest Zone and in the Lower Willamette River in the Willamette Zone as proposed by staff in Attachment 3.
EFFECTIVE DATE	January 10, 2015.