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## **NEWS RELEASE**

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

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### **Commission approves modifications to its Columbia River salmon fishery policy**

SPOKANE – The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission has agreed to allow the use of gillnets during the fall salmon fishery on the lower Columbia River while state fishery managers work with their Oregon counterparts to develop a joint long-term policy for shared waters.

The commission, a citizen panel appointed by the governor to set policy for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), took that action and received public comments on proposed hunting seasons for 2019-21 during a public meeting March 1-2 in Spokane.

The commission's action to extend the use of gillnets was one of a number of recommendations for Columbia River fisheries developed by a joint committee with members of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. Oregon's full commission will also consider the recommendations when it meets later this month.

Commissioners from both states are working on an overhaul of their respective Columbia River salmon management policies, which are designed to achieve conservation goals for salmon and steelhead, promote orderly fisheries in concurrent waters, and maintain and enhance economic stability in sport and commercial fisheries.

The change in policy affects allowable commercial fishing gear and the allocation of catch between sport and commercial fisheries, among other adjustments. Conservation measures remain unchanged, and no additional fishing pressure was approved beyond the annual amount allowed in full compliance with all salmon and steelhead Endangered Species Act requirements and sustainable fishery management practices.

The Washington policy, approved in 2013, intended for the commercial fishery to have completed a transition from gillnets to alternative gear this year and be relocated away from mainstem Columbia River areas. However, the use of alternative gear has not yet been refined and the off-channel areas have been determined to be unsuitable.

The commission modified that policy in response to a comprehensive performance review conducted over the past year. Without that action, fishing rules for Washington and Oregon would have been incompatible, because Oregon plans to allow the use of gillnets during the upcoming fall season.

The recommendation approved by the commission at the meeting in Spokane will allow commercial fisheries to proceed similar to 2018. A maximum of 70 percent of the fall chinook catch will be allocated to the recreational fishery, the same amount allocated under Oregon's policy.

Washington commissioners also agreed to retain the recreational fishery's share of 80 percent during the spring chinook fishery. The allocation for the commercial fishery was set at 20 percent with no commercial fishing in the mainstem Columbia River unless the in-season run-size update for upper river spring chinook is more than 129 percent of the pre-season forecast of 99,300 fish.

Additionally, the commission made the use of barbless hooks voluntary in Columbia River fisheries as soon as possible, but no later than June 1, 2019.

Five Washington commissioners voted to approve the recommendation: commissioners Kim Thorburn, Barbara Baker, Robert Kehoe, Donald McIsaac and Jay Holzmillier. Commissioner David Graybill voted "no," and commissioners Bradley Smith and Larry Carpenter abstained.

Details of the motion that passed and more information on the Columbia River Policy Review can be found at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/commission/>.

Prior to that decision, the commission was briefed by WDFW wildlife managers and accepted public comments on proposed hunting rules for deer, elk, waterfowl, and other game species. The commission is scheduled to take final action on those proposal at a public meeting April 5-6 in Olympia.

For more information on the season-setting process see <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/seasonsetting/>

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