

Lower Columbia Oversize Sport Sturgeon Fishery

A summary of the workshop meeting concerning gear regulations and best fish handling practices for the oversize sport sturgeon fishery

A public workshop was held on December 29, 2003 at the ODFW's NW Region office in Clackamas, Oregon. The purpose of the workshop was to review the oversize sport sturgeon fishery and develop alternative gear regulations and best fishing practices that would reduce injury and mortality to oversize white sturgeon handled in this fishery. A total of 11 members of the public attended the meeting, of which nine were professional guides that participate in the current fishery and three represented sport fishing industry organizations (i.e. NSIA and Pure Fishing). Technical and policy staff from the ODFW and the WDFW were also present.

Discussion at the workshop focused primarily on the status of the broodstock populations, fishery impacts, appropriate gear for use in the oversize sport sturgeon fishery, best fishing practices, and angler education. Fishery recommendations developed by the group were divided into two general categories: 1) gear regulations and 2) angler education. Results of the discussion are summarized below.

Gear Regulations:

The group discussed gear that is currently used by professional guides participating in the oversize sport sturgeon fishery. In general there was consensus among the public participants that the following gear regulations would be appropriate for use in an oversize sport sturgeon fishery. The group felt that these regulations should apply to all sturgeon anglers in the area above Skamania Island during the timeframe that the oversize sturgeon boat fishery sanctuary is in effect. Additionally, the group expressed concern over the handle of oversize sturgeon in the bank fishery that occurs when and where the oversize sturgeon boat fishery sanctuary is in effect.

- Line Type: No monofilament line allowed
Mainline size \geq 80 pound test
Leader size \geq 95 pound test
- Hooks: Restrict to one hook only
Restrict to bronze hooks only
Based on the assumption that ingested bronze hooks will dissolve more quickly than plated or stainless steel hooks
Hook size \geq 9/0
Based on the assumption that larger hooks were less likely to be deeply ingested
- Rod: Rating \geq 40 pound

Other gear topics were also discussed but were not part of the groups recommended regulation package. The group did not support the use of circle hooks or the elimination of whole shad as bait in this fishery. Guides who experimented with circle hooks report poor hooking rates in comparison to the "J" style hooks currently used in the fishery.

Leader length was also discussed but the group could not come to consensus on what the appropriate leader length should be.

Education:

The group discussed methods of educating the general public on best fishing practices for sturgeon fisheries in the lower Columbia River, especially the oversize fishery. Many of the participants at this workshop put on seminars concerning the oversize sport sturgeon fishery and felt that these seminars should focus on protection of oversize sturgeon through best fishing practices. In general the participants in this workshop agreed that the topics listed below should be included in an education program for the general public. Additionally, it was proposed that the Oregon and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife should work with fishing industry organizations, such as NSIA, to develop brochures that describe best fishing practices for sturgeon sport fisheries, especially the oversize fishery. Education efforts should focus primarily on the area where the oversize fishery occurs. Educational information should also be included in ODFW and WDFW regulation pamphlets and other types of media (i.e. radio and television) when feasible.

- Encourage proper fish handling techniques to maximize survival of released fish. Information should focus on oversize fish but should also include legals and sublegals handled to promote maximum survival of all fish handled in sport sturgeon fisheries.
- Proper boat handling procedures to reduce stress on fish by landing fish quicker. Use of propeller guards should be emphasized to avoid striking a fish with an operating boat motor.
- Proper techniques for reviving stressed fish prior to release after a strenuous fight. Fish should be strong enough to swim away vigorously.
- Promote removal of all hooks possible. Proper hook removal techniques should be identified and emphasized.
- Anglers participating in the oversize sport sturgeon fishery should be encouraged to end their fishing trip when each person has had a chance to participate in landing one oversize white sturgeon. Landing of several oversize sturgeon per passenger should be discouraged.

The ODFW and the WDFW joint staff will take these recommendations under advisement and will present fishery recommendations at future Commission and Joint State regulation hearings.

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