

Smelt Update

Thursday – February 26, 2009

Conditions:

Fishery observations and test dipping indicate that there is an abundance of smelt in the Lexington to Castle Rock reach. Commercial fishers were successful Sunday night and last night; however, pounds landed each period is dropping. Most of their catch came from the Lexington area. The Yakama Tribe fisheries staff has made two trips to the Cowlitz this past week to collect smelt for ceremonial and subsistence (food distribution) purposes. On both occasions, they were able to find an abundance of fish in the Camelot area. Sport fishers appeared to do OK last weekend, especially in the area of Castle Rock. Birds and seals are in the lower part of the Cowlitz up to Rocky Point, but no concentrations have been noted in the mainstem Columbia. WDFW staff observed sea lions feasting on smelt above Lexington yesterday.

The Cowlitz River discharge increased slightly in the past three days, reaching 8,210 cfs (still less than the median daily discharge of 10,400 cfs for this date). Turbidity likewise increased, but then dropped again today to 47 fnu. Water temperatures increased, reaching 43°F (6.1°C) in the Cowlitz River and 41.7°F (5.3°C) in the Columbia River.

WDFW test dipped early Wednesday, February 25th around Lexington. Catches averaged a half-pound per dip. The fish were large males, half fresh and half spent. This is consistent with what commercial fishers reported, except they had noted some smaller fish in their catch further down river.

The sport fishing prospect for this coming Saturday is fair to good.

Many sport fishers have been calling and asking about fishing for smelt with hook and line. The gear-type for this fishery was restricted to dipnets in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 220-56-27000C, consistent with the Washington and Oregon Eulachon Management Plan. Washington Sport Fishing Regulations for eulachon are separate from rules on other species of smelt.

Catches:

Columbia River:

Sport: There were some reports of smelt being dipped by sport fishers near Cathlamet.

Commercial: 161-lbs landed Thursday, February 26th. Reporting is incomplete for this week. Season total increased slightly to 5,276-lbs.

Cowlitz River:

Sport: Some people able to get 10-lbs limit on Saturday, February 21st.

Commercial: 1,440-lbs landed Sunday, February 22nd, and 539-lbs landed Wednesday, February 25th. Cumulative catch since January 3rd is 12,079-lbs.

Treaty Tribe: 1,500-lbs landed Wednesday, February 18th and 2,000-lbs landed Tuesday, February 24th. Cumulative Ceremonial and Subsistence take is 3,500-lbs.

Sport Seasons/Regulations:

Tributaries - Sport dipping is only allowed on the Cowlitz River, from 6 AM to 10 PM Saturdays through March 31st. The daily limit is 10 lbs per person per day. This is equivalent to ¼ of a 5-gallon bucket.

Mainstem Columbia River daily limit is 25 lbs per person per day and the fishery is open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Commercial Seasons:

Columbia River: 7-hour fishing periods on Mondays and Thursdays.

Cowlitz River: 6-hour fishing periods on Sunday and Wednesday nights.

Fishing Rule updates are also available by calling (360) 696-6211, then press *1010

Here are some web sites that provide daily river data:

Cowlitz River water flow and levels: USGS Web site:

http://waterdata.usgs.gov/wa/nwis/uv/?site_no=14243000&PARAMeter_cd=00060.00065

Columbia River estuary water temperature: CORIE Web site:

<http://www.ccalmr.ogi.edu/CORIE/network/woody/>