



Priest Rapids Fish Forum

Conference Call

Wednesday, 5 February 2025

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

FINAL MINUTES

PRFF Members

Emily Orling, USFWS
Ralph Lampman, Keely Murdoch, YN
Nathan and Clayton Buck, Wanapum
Jason McLellan, Bret Nine, CTCR
Mike Clement, Chris Mott, Grant PUD
Tracy Hillman, Chair

Patrick Verhey, Benjamin Cox, WDFW
Melissa Peterson, Chad Brown, WDOE
Aaron Jackson, Carl Merkle, CTUIR
Steve Lewis, BIA
Pete McHugh, CRITFC

Meeting Attendees

Mike Clement, Grant PUD
Steve Lewis, BIA
Patrick Verhey, WDFW
Laura Heironimus, WDFW
Melissa Peterson, WDOE
Shannon Adams, YN
Jason McLellan, CTCR
Tracy Hillman, Chair

Chad Brown, WDOE
Emily Orling, USFWS
Tygh Schuster, YN
Joseph LeMoine, Grant PUD
Nate Patterson, YN
Pete McHugh, CRITFC
Erin Harris, Grant PUD

Action Items:

- Ralph Lampman will update the Upper Columbia Juvenile Source Lamprey Datasheet and send it to Tracy Hillman for distribution to the PRFF.

Decision Items:

- None.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Tracy Hillman welcomed everyone to the meeting and identified all attendees.

II. Agenda Review

The PRFF reviewed and approved the February agenda with the addition of the Draft 2024 Aquatic Invasive Species Annual Report.

III. Approve November Meeting Notes

The PRFF reviewed and approved the 6 November 2024 meeting minutes.

IV. Review Action Items

The PRFF reviewed the following action item from the November meeting:

- Ralph Lampman will update the Upper Columbia Juvenile Source Lamprey Datasheet and send it to Tracy Hillman for distribution to the PRFF. **Ongoing.**
- Tracy Hillman will send the Passage Guidelines for Selective Native Pacific Northwest Fish report prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the PRFF committee. **Completed in November 2024.**

V. Pacific Lamprey

Draft 2024 Pacific Lamprey Annual Report – Mike Clement reported that Evelyn Zepeda at Grant PUD sent the draft Pacific Lamprey Annual report to PRFF members on 13 January 2025. Members have 30 days to review the report with comments due to Mike on 14 February 2025. Mike indicated that the report is similar to previous reports with some minor reconfigurations. The Summary Section outlines activities planned for this year, including increased adult fish tagging at Bonneville and John Day dams. Grant PUD is preparing to activate the HDX-PIT antenna in their projects to detect any HDX-PIT-tagged fish passing through their projects. The annual trap-and-transportation program will occur again this summer. As before, Grant PUD will also collect adult lamprey for the Douglas PUD program.

VI. White Sturgeon

Update on White Sturgeon Rearing – Tygh Schuster reported that fish are growing well at the hatchery. Juveniles experienced a growth spurt last month, gaining 10 grams per fish, which puts them 20 grams ahead of the previous brood years. Indeed, fish are larger at this time than in the past couple of years. He also reported that there are minimal fin deformities. Tygh said they have more than enough fish to meet stocking levels in the project area.

Mike Clement stated that marking, tagging, and spontaneous autopolyploidy testing will take place during the last week in March (24-28 March). He said that 3,250 fish will be processed that week. He added that they have developed a very efficient process, and anyone is welcome to watch the process. Please let Mike know if you want to observe the process.

Laura Heironimus asked about the size of the fish when blood draws are taken for spontaneous autopolyploidy testing. Mike responded that fish range from about 90 mm to greater than 250 mm. This year they may be larger because of the excellent growth they are experiencing.

Jason McLellan asked what cutoff values are used to distinguish an 8N fish from a 12N fish. That is, what is the nuclei volume size that is used as the cutoff value? Jason said they use 45-56 cubic microns to

identify 8N fish in their program, per Joel Van Eenennaam, but values can differ depending on the population. Nate Patterson responded that they use 86-93 cubic microns to identify 12N fish and 57-64 cubic microns to identify 8N fish. Jason asked whether the ranges were based on flow cytometry or frequency distribution. Nate indicated that he did not know but thought they were based on frequency distribution. Jason said the values they typically see in the upper Columbia population are in the 70s for 12N fish and low 50s for 8N fish. Nate indicated that any fish that have high values are considered 12N fish. Jason asked whether fish with nuclei volumes in the 57 to 60s range are retained for stocking. Nate said, yes, those fish are retained for release into the project area.

Steve Lewis asked whether the incidence of spontaneous autopolyploidy has increased, decreased, or remained about the same over time. Mike responded that he would have to go back to the annual reports to verify but believes the incidence of spontaneous autopolyploidy has generally decreased over time.

Draft 2024 White Sturgeon Annual Report – Mike Clement share that on 29 January 2025, Evelyn Zepeda sent the 2024 Annual White Sturgeon Management Plan Report to PRFF members for a 30-day review. Comments on the draft report are due to Mike by 3 March 2025. Please let Mike know if you have any questions.

Mike noted that the organization of the report is similar to previous years with the addition of the population assessment and indexing work. He said the abundances were not as high as expected, which may affect regional discussions regarding a recreational and/or commercial fishery. Final decisions on a fishery are left to the co-managers. Mike said that Paul Grutter, WSP, will give a presentation in March on monitoring and indexing work.

Statewide Sturgeon Conservation Plan – Laura Heironimus gave a presentation titled “Washington Statewide Sturgeon Conservation Plan, Briefing” (see Attachment 1). She began by introducing herself and noted that she leads the sturgeon, smelt, and lamprey program at WDFW. Given the distribution of sturgeon within the state, there is a need to develop a statewide sturgeon plan. She said the purpose of her talk is to identify the goals of a statewide sturgeon plan. This includes an overview of sturgeon in the state, development of a timeline, identify engagement opportunities, and responding to questions. She made it clear that they have not developed the plan yet.

Laura indicated that a statewide plan is necessary because there is currently no unifying sturgeon plan and WDFW believes that a plan is an important step in guiding the conservation of sturgeon in Washington. In developing the plan, WDFW intends to engage with tribes, bordering states, federal agencies, and the public on conservation concerns and management needs across the state. This coordination work will help WDFW develop consistent and transparent strategies and policies that support mitigation and recovery efforts, promote sustainable harvest opportunities, and identify research to fill critical data gaps. This work will build upon existing sturgeon plans, which include the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Plan, the Lower Columbia River and Oregon Coast White Sturgeon Conservation Plan, and the Columbia Basin White Sturgeon Planning Framework. In addition, the PUDs’ management plans will help inform the process.

Laura said a big part of developing the statewide plan will be strengthening and establishing partnerships. She said that WDFW collaborates with state and tribal partners in monitoring sturgeon populations, implementing hatchery programs, and managing sustainable harvest opportunities. WDFW plans to strengthen these partnerships and to establish and build new ones to support sturgeon conservation throughout the state.

Laura then provided a brief overview of the status of sturgeon in the state. She said there are two species of sturgeon in the state: Green Sturgeon and White Sturgeon. She indicated that there are two

distinct populations of Green Sturgeon in the state. The Southern Distinct Population Segment (DPS) is ESA listed as threatened, while the Northern DPS is a Species of Concern. Both populations mix within estuaries within Washington. WDFW leads a monitoring effort using acoustic telemetry to evaluate Green Sturgeon use of estuaries. White Sturgeon are listed under the Species At Risk Act (SARA) in Canada and the Kootenai River population is listed as threatened in the U.S. The Columbia River and Snake River populations are not listed. The San Francisco Estuary population is petitioned for listing. Laura said there are several factors that limit sturgeon in the state of Washington. Those include habitat fragmentation; loss of habitat complexity, quantity, and quality; flow and flow variation; water quality; competition and predation from changing fish communities; exploitation and illegal harvest; and climate patterns and trends. Laura pointed out that in Washington, the Fish and Wildlife Commission identified management goals for White Sturgeon, but those goals are specific to the lower Columbia River White Sturgeon population (fish downstream from Bonneville Dam). She would like to expand the goals in that plan to the entire state. This is where she would like input from the local groups such as the PRFF.

Laura then reviewed the timeline for developing the plan. She said they are in the initial outreach phase on the timeline. This is where WDFW reaches out to federal and state partners and local groups. This is why WDFW is reaching out to the PRFF and other groups and asking whether anyone is interested in participating in the process. She said later this spring they will begin developing the plan and will coordinate with plan contributors. The goal is to provide a draft report for public review by winter 2025-2026. She hopes the Director will approve the plan in summer 2026 and then they will present the plan to the Commission.

Laura indicated that the next steps are to identify plan contributors, develop strategies and policies, prioritize actions, and build a path forward. Conservation and management actions will basically follow the same four categories for salmonids. Those include habitat and population monitoring, hydropower impacts, hatchery implementation, and sustainable harvest strategies. She noted that if anyone is interested in collaborating with her on this project, they should reach out to her. She said that she will be reaching out to those on the PRFF and other forums for information and suggestions.

Steve Lewis asked whether the strategy will address passage at hydro projects. Laura responded that she is interested in dam passage and has been looking for papers and data that address sturgeon passage through dams. She added that WDFW would like to develop a strategy and goals for sturgeon passage at dams. Steve said that BIA can reach out to tribes to help with fish passage. Tygh Schuster asked whether there is any interest in examining thiamine levels in White Sturgeon. He said testing of their sturgeon eggs suggests the eggs are deficient in thiamine. Laura stated that she has been talking to Dr. Reid (ODFW veterinarian) about thiamine levels in sturgeon and the need to expand testing to lower river stocks. At this time, they do not know what level of thiamine would be considered an issue for sturgeon. Laura is hoping more research can be done on this topic.

VII. Bull Trout

Final 2024 Bull Trout Annual Report – Mike Clement noted that the 2024 Bull Trout Monitoring and Evaluation Plan Annual Report was sent to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on 23 January 2025 after receiving a letter of approval from the Washington Department of Ecology on 15 January 2025. Mike also shared that the count of Bull Trout in the project area was 5 fish last year.

VIII. Aquatic Invasive Species

Draft 2024 Aquatic Invasive Species Control and Prevention Plan Annual Report – Mike Clement reported that Evelyn Zepeda sent the 2024 Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Control and Prevention Plan Annual Report to PRFF members on 4 February 2025. A meeting will be scheduled to consult on the content of the AIS report before 1 May 2025. If you are unable to attend this meeting, your comments would be appreciated by 1 April 2025. Please send questions and comments to Nate Dietrich, Grant PUD.

IX. Administration

Chad Brown, Washington Department of Ecology, reported that Melissa Peterson will serve as Ecology's representative on the PRFF. Chad will serve as the alternate on the PRFF.

X. Adjourn

With no additional business to discuss, Tracy Hillman adjourned the meeting at 10:00 am.

XI. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the PRFF will be on 5 March 2025.

Attachment 1

Presentation by Laura Heironimus on the Washington Statewide Sturgeon Conservation Plan, Briefing

Washington Statewide Sturgeon Conservation Plan, Briefing

Laura Heironimus

Sturgeon, Smelt, and Lamprey Unit Lead

Feb. 5, 2025



Introduction

Laura Heironimus

- Laura.Heironimus@dfw.wa.gov
- Work mobile: 360-719-0677



Agenda

- Purpose and goals
- Sturgeon status overview
- Development timeline
- Engagement opportunities
- Question and answer





Purpose and goals

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Statewide Sturgeon Conservation Plan

Why?

Currently, there is no unifying statewide sturgeon plan, and we believe this is an important step in guiding the conservation of sturgeon in Washington.



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Statewide Sturgeon Conservation Plan

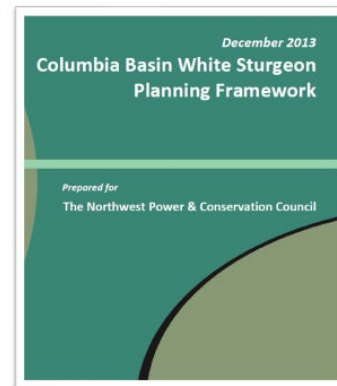
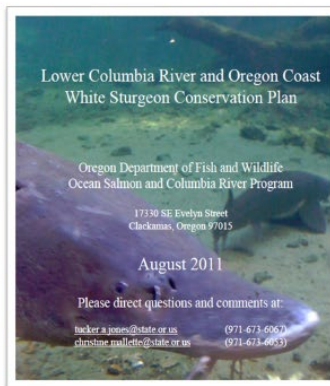
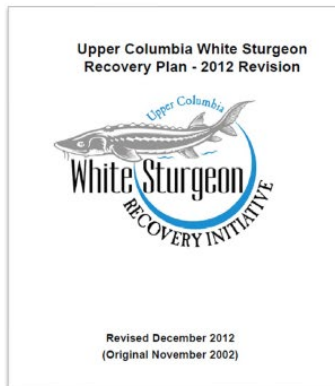
Plan goals

- To engage with tribes, bordering states, federal agencies, and the public on sturgeon conservation concerns and management needs across the state of Washington.
- To work with these entities to develop consistent and transparent strategies and policies to support:
 - Mitigation and recovery efforts.
 - Sustainable harvest opportunities.
 - Research to fill critical information gaps.



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Building on existing sturgeon plans



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Strengthening and establishing partnerships

In Washington, WDFW collaborates with state and tribal partners in monitoring wild sturgeon populations, implementing hatchery programs, and managing sustainable harvest opportunities. Throughout this process, we will strive to strengthen existing partnerships and to establish and build new partnerships to support sturgeon conservation around the state.



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Sturgeon status overview

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Green Sturgeon Status

Southern DPS: ESA listed – Threatened

- Spawn exclusively in the Sacramento River basin in California

Northern DPS: Species of Concern

- Spawn in the Eel, Klamath, and Rogue rivers

Both populations mix within Washington’s coastal estuaries. WDFW leads a monitoring effort to evaluate Green Sturgeon use of the WA’s coastal estuaries using acoustic telemetry.



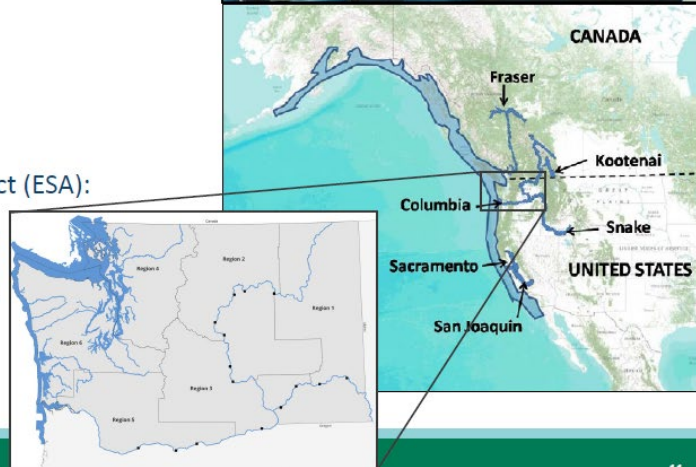
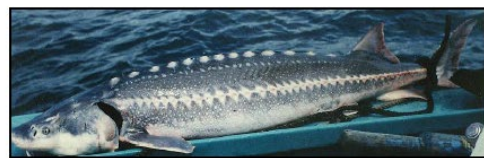
White Sturgeon Status

Canada, Species At Risk Act (SARA):

- Upper Fraser River - Endangered
- Lower Fraser River - Threatened
- Upper Columbia River - Endangered
- Upper Kootenay River - Endangered
- Nechako River - Endangered

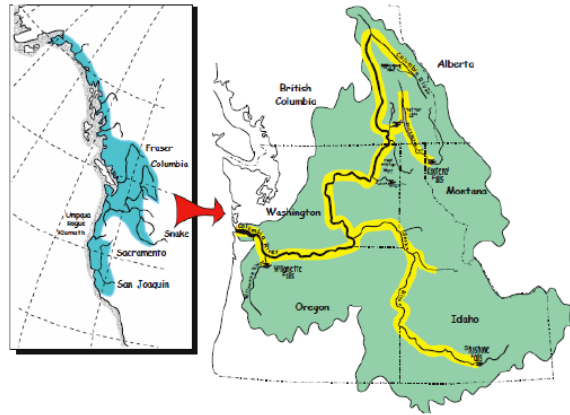
United States, Endangered Species Act (ESA):

- Kootenai River, ID – Threatened
- Columbia River, WA/OR – not listed
- Snake River, WA/OR/ID – not listed
- San Francisco Estuary, CA- Petitioned



White sturgeon limiting factors and threats

1. Habitat fragmentation
2. Habitat complexity, quantity, and quality
3. Flow and flow variation
4. Water quality
5. Competition and predation from changes in fish communities
6. Exploitation and illegal harvest
7. Climate patterns and trends



Source: Northwest Power and Conservation Council, 2013



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Lower Columbia River Sturgeon Management

WDFW Fish and Wildlife Commission Policy C-3001

Purpose:

To manage the Lower Columbia River White Sturgeon population with conservation and fishery management objectives that are consistent with a healthy population.



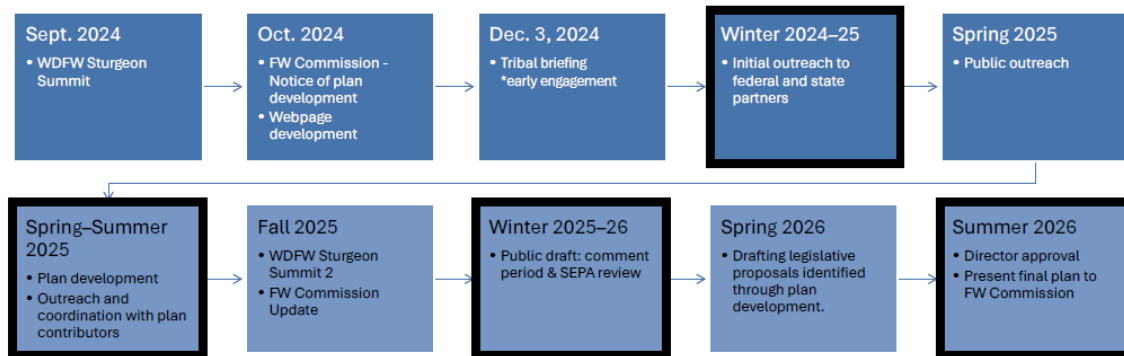
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Plan Development

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Development Timeline



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Plan Development

- Identify plan contributors.
- Develop strategies and policies around conservation and management actions related to topics such as:
 - Habitat and Population Monitoring
 - Hydropower Impacts
 - Hatchery Implementation
 - Sustainable Harvest Strategies
- Prioritize actions and build a path forward.



Engagement opportunities

Engagement Opportunities

How can you contribute?

- Connect with me! Share data and knowledge.
- Get on email list for updates about the plan and open comment periods.
 - Email: Laura.Heironimus@dfw.wa.gov



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Question and answer opportunity

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