

The March 4, 2014 letter (Guidance Letter) from Mr. Will Stelle, West Coast Regional Administrator, to Ms. Dorothy Lowman, Chair, Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC) outlines NMFS guidance related to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for 2014 fisheries. For Chinook salmon populations in Puget Sound, the letter includes a table (Table 1) containing management objectives or fishing regimes for the numerous populations. For Green River Chinook, Table 1 indicates the fishing regime for “normal abundance years” as the “minimum fishing regime.” It has long been NMFS’ understanding that the “minimum fishing regime” for Green River Chinook applies when escapement is expected below the “minimum abundance threshold” of 1,800 fish as reflected in the 2010 Puget Sound Chinook Management Plan (2010 Plan). The escapement expectation for 2014 of 2,700 fish exceeds the minimum abundance threshold and therefore would not trigger the “minimum fishing regime” as reflected in the 2010 Plan.

NMFS has discussed this characterization with co-managers, and continued the discussion to include the fishing regime proposed for Green River Chinook in 2014. This regime resembles that implemented in 2013 and is described with minor changes in the 2010 Plan. NMFS believes that objectives achieved by this fishing regime, if implemented in 2014, are consistent with consultations standards reflected in the “Guidance Letter,” but should not be characterized as the “minimum fishing regime.”