

DRAFT SACRAMENTO RIVER WINTER CHINOOK HARVEST POLICY REVIEW PROCESS

Background

At the September 2015 Council meeting, the Council discussed the status of Sacramento River winter Chinook (SRWC) and plans for the management of this stock beyond 2016. During that discussion, the Council decided to move forward with forming an ad hoc workgroup and developing a proposed schedule to explore an alternative SRWC harvest policy for the future. It is anticipated that appointments to an ad hoc workgroup and the approval of a final schedule will occur at the November, 2015 Council meeting.

In the past, the Council has expressed concern that the control rule, adopted under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is unnecessarily restrictive in years with low mean escapement, particularly when the 3-year mean falls below 500 fish. In August 2013, the Council asked the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to consider alternative control rules that allow for *de minimis* levels of fishing when abundance is low without significantly increasing the risk of extinction. After soliciting public comment, NMFS decided not to reconsider the harvest control rule prior to the 2015 fishing season. However, NMFS indicated intent to initiate a review under the ESA for changes in the current fishery control rule that might include juvenile salmon abundance indices and other considerations, with a tentative completion target date of 2017 or 2018. In 2015, the Council applied an additional level of precaution beyond the SRWC harvest policy, due to extended current drought and the associated concerns.

The Council and NMFS employed a collaborative process in the review and revision of harvest policies for Lower Columbia River tule fall Chinook and Lower Columbia River natural coho and is proposing to utilize a similar process to develop and analyze alternative harvest policies for SRWC within the open and transparent Council process. These processes were widely recognized as successful efforts integrating Magnuson-Stevens Act and the ESA processes. The following workgroup membership and draft schedule to address this task are modeled after the successful efforts for the previously mentioned Columbia River stocks.

Proposed Membership for and Ad Hoc SRWC Workgroup (Workgroup)

- NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center Representatives (2)
- NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center Representative (1)
- NWFS West Coast Region Representatives (2, one Technical and one Policy)
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife Representatives (2, one Technical and one Policy)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Representative (1)

Stakeholder input would be scheduled via joint sessions between the Workgroup and the Salmon Advisory Subpanel, as well as the normal open process at advisory body and Council meetings.

Proposed Schedule

September 2015 Council Meeting (Sacramento, CA)

- Council Floor Session
 - Approve Workgroup membership and proposed schedule

November 2015 Council Meeting (Garden Grove, CA)

- Council Floor Session
 - Appoint representatives to the Workgroup
 - Refine the proposed schedule

March 2016 Council Meeting (Sacramento, CA)

- Initial meeting of the Workgroup in a joint session with the SAS.
 - Review Council charge and develop a draft work plan and schedule
 - Develop preliminary range of alternatives
- Council Floor Session
 - Review of process to date
 - Discuss expectations for 2016 and refine schedule as necessary
 - Provide guidance on preliminary alternatives and subsequent analysis

May 2016 Intersessional Meeting of the Workgroup (Santa Cruz, CA)

- Review and respond to Council guidance from March
- Refine alternatives and analyses
- Prepare Report for June Council Meeting

June 2016 Council Meeting (Tacoma, WA)

- Council Floor Session
 - Review progress
 - Provide guidance on alternatives and analyses

Summer 2016 Intersessional Meeting(s) of the Workgroup (Santa Cruz, CA)

- Review and respond to Council guidance from June
- Refine alternatives and analyses
- Prepare Report for September Council Meeting

September 2016 Council Meeting (Boise, ID)

- Council Floor Session
 - Review progress and analyses of alternatives
 - Adopt preliminary preferred alternative, if possible
 - Consider further guidance on final analyses

November 2016 Council Meeting (Garden Grove, CA)

- Council Floor Session
 - Adopt final recommendations to NMFS for potential use in 2017 management
 - Consider further Council process