

TITLE 14. Fish and Game Commission Notice of Proposed Changes in Regulations

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Fish and Game Commission (Commission), pursuant to the authority vested by Sections 200, 202, 205, 215, 220, 240, 315 and 316.5 of the Fish and Game Code and to implement, interpret or make specific Sections 200, 202, 205, 215 and 316.5 of said Code, proposes to amend subsection 7.50(b)(91.1), Title 14, California Code of Regulations, relating to Lower Klamath River Basin sport fishing.

Informative Digest/Policy Statement Overview

The Klamath River System, which consists of the Klamath River and Trinity River basins, is managed through a cooperative system of State, federal, and tribal management agencies. Salmonid regulations are designed to meet natural and hatchery escapement needs for salmonid stocks, while providing equitable harvest opportunities for ocean sport, ocean commercial, river sport and tribal fisheries.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) is responsible for adopting recommendations for the management of sport and commercial ocean salmon fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (three to 200 miles offshore) off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. When approved by the Secretary of Commerce, these recommendations are implemented as ocean salmon fishing regulations by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) adopts regulations for the ocean salmon sport (inside three miles) and the Klamath River System sport fisheries which are consistent with federal fishery management goals.

For the purpose of PFMC mixed-stock fishery modeling and salmon stock assessment, salmon greater than 22 inches are defined as adult salmon (ages 3-5) and salmon less than or equal to 22 inches are defined as grilse salmon (age 2).

Klamath River Fall-Run Chinook

Klamath River fall-run Chinook salmon (KRFC) harvest allocations and natural spawning escapement goals are established by the PFMC. The KRFC harvest allocation between tribal and non-tribal fisheries is based on court decisions and allocation agreements between the various fishery representatives.

The 2016 KRFC in-river sport fishery allocation recommended by the PFMC is currently unknown. All proposed closures for adult KRFC are designed to ensure sufficient spawning escapement in the Klamath River Basin and equitably distribute harvest while operating within annual allocations.

Klamath River Spring-Run Chinook

The Klamath River System also supports Klamath River spring-run Chinook salmon (KRSC). Naturally produced KRSC are both temporally and spatially separated from KRFC in most cases.

Presently, KRSC stocks are not managed or allocated by the PFMC. The in-river sport fishery is managed by general basin seasons, daily bag limit, and possession limit regulations.

KRFC Allocation Management

The PFMC 2015 allocation for the Klamath River System sport harvest was 14,133 adult KRFC. Preseason stock projections of 2016 adult KRFC abundance will not be available from the PFMC until March 2016. The 2016 Klamath River Basin allocation will be recommended by the PFMC in April 2016 and presented to the Commission for adoption prior to its April 2016 meeting.

For public notice requirements, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) recommends the Commission consider an allocation range of 0 – 67,600 adult KRFC in the Klamath River Basin for the in-river sport fishery.

Current Sport Fishery Management

The KRFC in-river sport harvest allocation is divided into geographic areas and harvest is monitored under real time subquota management. KRSC in-river sport harvest is managed by general season, daily bag limit, and possession limit regulations.

The daily bag and possession limits apply to both stocks within the same sub-area and time period.

Blue Creek Area Management

On April 17, 2015, the Commission adopted regulations to close the main stem Klamath River near the mouth of Blue Creek to reduce catch and release mortality in a thermal refuge area and protect late-fall-run Chinook salmon holding prior to entering Blue Creek. The Commission's action was a precautionary conservation measure to provide maximum resource protection and ensure long-term sustainability during a critical multi-year drought.

Proposed Changes

No changes are proposed for the general (KRSC) opening and closing season dates, and bag, possession and size limits.

The following changes to current regulations are proposed:

KRFC QUOTA MANAGEMENT: Seasons, Bag and Possession Limits

For public notice requirements, a range of KRFC bag and possession limits are proposed until the 2016 Klamath River Basin quota is adopted. As in previous years, no retention of adult KRFC salmon is proposed for the following areas, once the subquota has been met.

The proposed open seasons and range of bag and possession limits for KRFC salmon stocks are as follows:

1. Klamath River - August 15 to December 31
2. Trinity River - September 1 to December 31
3. Bag Limit - [0-4] Chinook salmon of which no more than [0-4] fish over 22 inches total length may be retained until the subquota is met, then 0 fish over 22 inches total length.
4. Possession limit - [0-12] Chinook salmon of which [0-12] fish over 22 inches total length may be retained when the take of salmon over 22 inches total length is allowed.

BLUE CREEK AREA MANAGEMENT

The following option is provided for public discussion, and Commission consideration and action.

Modify Existing Blue Creek Mouth Area Closure

This option would modify the regulations for the existing fishing closure on the Klamath River during the June 15 through September 14 closure period by reducing the distance closed below the mouth of Blue Creek from ½ mile to 500 feet. The distance of the closure above the mouth of Blue Creek would remain at 500 feet. The regulations for the September 15 through December 31 fishing closure on the main stem Klamath River would not change. Local angling constituents and many fishing guides support this option with a closure distance of 500 feet.

Other changes are proposed for clarity and consistency.

Benefits of the Proposed Regulations

The benefits of the proposed regulations are in conformance with federal law, sustainable management of Klamath River Basin salmonid resources, and promotion of businesses that rely on sport fishing in the Klamath River Basin.

The proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing State regulations. The Legislature has delegated authority to the Commission to promulgate sport fishing regulations (Sections 200, 202, 205, 315, and 316.5, Fish and Game Code). Commission staff has searched the California Code of Regulations and has found no other State regulations related to the sport fishing in the Lower Klamath River Basin.

NOTICE IS ALSO GIVEN that any person interested may present statements, orally or in writing, relevant to this action at a teleconference originating in the Fish and Game Commission conference room, 1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1320, Sacramento, California, on Monday, April 18, 2016, at 8:30 a.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard. Interested persons may also participate at the following locations: Department of Fish and Wildlife, Conference Room, 50 Ericson Court, Arcata, California; Department of Fish and Wildlife, Conference Room, 4665 Lampson Avenue, Los Alamitos, California; and Department of Fish and Wildlife Conference Room, 7329 Silverado Trail, Napa, California. It is requested, but not required, that written comments be submitted by 12:00 noon on April 13, 2016 at the address given below, or by email to FGC@fgc.ca.gov. All comments must be received no later than April 18, 2016, at one of the teleconference hearing locations listed above. If you would like copies of any modifications to this proposal, please include your name and mailing address.

The regulations as proposed in strikeout-underline format, as well as an initial statement of reasons, including environmental considerations and all information upon which the proposal is based (rulemaking file), are on file and available for public review from the agency representative, Michael Yaun, Acting Executive Director, Fish and Game Commission, 1416 Ninth Street, Box 944209, Sacramento, California 94244-2090, phone (916) 653-4899. Please direct requests for the above mentioned documents and inquiries concerning the regulatory process to Michael Yaun or Sherrie Fonbuena at the preceding address or phone number. **Wade Sinnen, Senior Environmental Scientist, Department of Fish and Wildlife, [(707) 822-5119 or Wade.Sinnen@wildlife.ca.gov], has been designated to respond to questions on the substance of the proposed regulations.** Copies of the Initial Statement of Reasons, including the regulatory language, may be obtained from the address above. Notice of

the proposed action shall be posted on the Fish and Game Commission website at <http://www.fgc.ca.gov>.

Availability of Modified Text

If the regulations adopted by the Commission differ from but are sufficiently related to the action proposed, they will be available to the public for at least 15 days prior to the date of adoption. Circumstances beyond the control of the Commission (e.g., timing of Federal regulation adoption, timing of resource data collection, timelines do not allow, etc.) or changes made to be responsive to public recommendation and comments during the regulatory process may preclude full compliance with the 15-day comment period, and the Commission will exercise its powers under Section 202 of the Fish and Game Code. Regulations adopted pursuant to this section are not subject to the time periods for adoption, amendment or repeal of regulations prescribed in Sections 11343.4, 11346.4 and 11346.8 of the Government Code. Any person interested may obtain a copy of said regulations prior to the date of adoption by contacting the agency representative named herein.

If the regulatory proposal is adopted, the final statement of reasons may be obtained from the address above when it has been received from the agency program staff.

Impact of Regulatory Action/Results of the Economic Impact Analysis

The potential for significant statewide adverse economic impacts that might result from the proposed regulatory action has been assessed, and the following initial determinations relative to the required statutory categories have been made:

- (a) Significant Statewide Adverse Economic Impact Directly Affecting Business, Including the Ability of California Businesses to Compete with Businesses in Other States:

The proposed action will not have a significant statewide adverse economic impact directly affecting business, including the ability of California businesses to compete with businesses in other states. The proposed regulations are projected to have minor impact on the net revenues to local businesses servicing sport fishermen. If the 2016 KRFC quota is reduced, visitor spending may correspondingly be reduced and in the absence of the emergence of alternative visitor activities, the drop in spending could induce business contraction. However, this will not likely affect the ability of California businesses to compete with businesses in other states. The preservation of Klamath River salmon stocks is necessary for the success of lower and upper Klamath River Basin businesses which provide goods and services related to fishing. The proposed changes are necessary for the continued preservation of the resource and therefore the prevention of adverse economic impacts.

- (b) Impact on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State, the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses, or the Expansion of Businesses in California; Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents, Worker Safety, and the State's Environment:

The proposed regulations range from no fishing of KRFC adult salmon to a normal Klamath River Basin salmon season. The Commission anticipates some impact on the creation or elimination of jobs in California. The potential employment impacts range

from 0 to 45 jobs which are not expected to create, eliminate or expand businesses in California. The Commission anticipates impacts on the creation, elimination or expansion of businesses in California ranging from no impact to reduced revenues to approximately 30 businesses that serve sport fishing activities. However, the possibility of growth of businesses to serve substitute activities exists. Adverse impacts to jobs and/or businesses would be less if fishing of steelhead and grilse KRFC salmon is permitted than under a complete closure to all fishing. The impacted businesses are generally small businesses employing few individuals and, like all small businesses, are subject to failure for a variety of causes. Additionally, the long-term intent of the proposed action is to increase sustainability in fishable salmon stocks and, consequently promoting the long-term viability of these same small businesses.

The Commission anticipates benefits to the health and welfare of California residents. Providing opportunities for a salmon sport fishery encourages a healthy outdoor activity and the consumption of a nutritious food.

The Commission anticipates benefits to the environment by the sustainable management of California's salmonid resources.

The Commission does not anticipate any benefits to worker safety because the proposed action does not affect working conditions.

(c) Cost Impacts on a Representative Private Person or Business:

The Commission is not aware of any cost impacts that a representative private person or business would necessarily incur in reasonable compliance with the proposed action.

(d) Costs or Savings to State Agencies or Costs/Savings in Federal Funding to the State: None.

(e) Nondiscretionary Costs/Savings to Local Agencies: None.

(f) Programs Mandated on Local Agencies or School Districts: None.

(g) Costs Imposed on any Local Agency or School District that is Required to be Reimbursed Under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4, Government Code: None.

(h) Effect on Housing Costs: None.

Effect on Small Business

It has been determined that the adoption of these regulations may affect small business. The Commission has drafted the regulations in Plain English pursuant to Government Code Sections 11342.580 and 11346.2(a)(1).

Consideration of Alternatives

The Commission must determine that no reasonable alternative considered by the Commission, or that has otherwise been identified and brought to the attention of the Commission, would be more effective in carrying out the purpose for which the action is proposed, would be as effective and less burdensome to affected private persons than the proposed action, or would be more cost effective to affected private persons and equally effective in implementing the statutory policy or other provision of law.

FISH AND GAME COMMISSION

Dated: February 23, 2016

Michael Yaun
Acting Executive Director