

Meeting Date: May 16, 2024

Agenda Item No. 10

Agenda Item: Proposed changes to 2025-2027 Fishing Seasons and Limits for Public Review

Bureau Chief Approval: LH

Prepared by: Joe Kozfkay, State Fisheries Manager

Background:

By statute, fishing seasons and limits are set by actions of the IFG Commission on a regular basis. Since 2013 fishing seasons and limits have been set on three-year interval. Seasons and limits for Idaho fisheries were last set by the Commission in November 2021 and implemented in January 2022 and expire December 31, 2024.

To start the fishing seasons and limits revision process for 2025 through 2027, the Department completed internal and public scoping in February and March soliciting input for potential changes. Staff will review the draft proposals developed from the scoping comments for changes to 2025-2027 fishing seasons and rules and will seek Commission concurrence to release the draft changes for public comment.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues:

Idaho Code Sections 36-104(b) and 36-901. IDAPA 13.01.11.000

Public Involvement Process:

Staff gathered input for developing draft proposals for new fishing regulations for 2025-2027 using multiple methods. Staff developed a series of presentations pertaining to important fisheries or common themes voiced by anglers and hosted in-person open houses at which presentations were given followed by back-and-forth discussions with attendees. In addition, staff presentations were made available on the department's website for later viewing. News releases, email blasts, and social media campaigns were utilized to inform the public of meetings and opportunities for providing comments. Online comment forms were posted on the Department's Website from February 14 through March 10, 2024. In addition, input was gathered by conventional means such as in-person or by phone.

Justification:

This action allows IDFG to update fishing seasons and limits in response to new opportunities, new biological information, or changes in public preferences.

Staff Recommendation:

The Department seeks Commission concurrence to release the draft changes to the 2025-2028 Fishing seasons and limits to the public for their input.

Agenda Item No. 10A – Draft Proposals

Attachment A: Recommended 2025 – 2027 Fishing Seasons and Limits Proposals for Public Review

The Fisheries Bureau has evaluated internal and public input (also see Attachment B) and recommends the following fishing seasons and limits proposals be presented for additional public review and comment. After analyzing public comment, staff will draft final recommendations and present them to the Commission for consideration at the July 24 meeting.

Panhandle Region

- 1. Proposal: Increase the minimum length limit for Chinook Salmon in Coeur d’Alene Lake from 20 to 24 inches while maintaining the current daily bag limit of 2.**

Rationale: Despite decades of effort to increase numbers and catch rates of Chinook Salmon through stocking, the population is almost entirely naturally produced, remains at relatively low abundance, and provides trophy opportunity. Avid anglers have consistently asked for more restrictive harvest regulations to increase the number of trophy-sized fish. Previous work has indicated that more restrictive regulations would have limited effect on the trophy component of the population. However, the proposed regulation aligns with the current fisheries management objective for this water and species (i.e. provide trophy angling opportunity).

- 2. Proposal: Allow for limited harvest of Cutthroat Trout in Priest Lake by increasing the bag limit from 0 to 2, none under 16 inches, while continuing to prohibit harvest in tributaries.**

Rationale: Harvest opportunity for Cutthroat Trout was eliminated in Priest Lake during 1988 due to suspected population decreases, although little information was available at the time. Recent monitoring, within the last decade, has indicated that this Cutthroat Trout population is abundant and stable. Currently, angler effort on Priest Lake is low (approximately 50,000 hours) and less than 10% of effort targets Cutthroat Trout. Modeled population response under the proposed regulation indicated that limited harvest opportunity would be sustainable.

- 3. Proposal: Allow for limited harvest of Cutthroat Trout in Upper Priest Lake by increasing the bag limit from 0 to 2, none under 16 inches, while continuing to prohibit harvest in tributaries.**

Rationale: Like Priest Lake, harvest opportunity for Cutthroat Trout was eliminated from Upper Priest Lake during the 1988. Recent monitoring, within the last decade, has indicated that this Cutthroat Trout population is abundant and stable. General observations suggest angler effort is low. Modeled population response under the proposed regulation indicated that limited harvest opportunity would be sustainable.

- 4. Proposal: Remove the length limit for bass in Robinson Lake, while maintaining the current daily bag limit of 2.**

Rationale: Recent populations surveys and age data indicate that Largemouth Bass in Robinson Lake grow very slowly and rarely grow larger than 12 inches. As such, the existing length limit does not substantially increase the number or proportion of large bass in the population. The proposed bag limit provides additional harvest opportunity on a small mixed species fishery. Generally, harvest of

Largemouth Bass in other area lakes with similar fish communities is low. No change to the abundance or existing size structure of the population would be expected under the proposed rule and the proposed rule would simplify regulations by removing one exception.

Clearwater Region

- 1. Proposal: Increase the minimum length limit for Tiger Trout in Deer Creek Reservoir from 14 to 20 inches, while maintaining the bag limit of 2.**

Rationale: Tiger Trout are a sterile hybrid trout that are stocked in Deer Creek Reservoir to provide species diversity, quality or trophy fish potential, and to take advantage of abundant Golden Shiner. Anglers have commonly expressed interest in increasing the abundance of larger sized Tiger Trout, while maintaining higher harvest rates for stocked Rainbow Trout. Growth and survival of Tiger Trout appear adequate for increasing size structure if harvest were reduced. Modeled population responses indicate that reducing harvest through higher minimum length limit could increase abundance of larger Tiger Trout by 93% relative to those provided by current regulations.

- 2. Proposal: Increase the daily bag limit for Brook Trout at Elk Creek, Elk Creek Reservoir, and their tributaries from 6 to 25.**

Rationale: Restrictive bag limits for Brook Trout in the Elk Creek drainage were implemented in the 1990s to increase average Brook Trout size. The reduced bag limits represent two of only three exceptions for Brook Trout in the state which are usually managed with a daily bag limit of 25. Recent surveys indicated that Brook Trout harvest was low and harvest had little effect on abundance or size of Brook Trout in Elk Creek, Elk Creek Reservoir, and tributaries. Removal of restrictive Brook Trout bag limits would simplify regulations without influencing the fishery. Initial input suggest that many anglers support this potential change.

- 3. Proposal: Remove the electric-motors-only restriction at Moose Creek Reservoir.**

Rationale: Removing the electric motors only restriction from Moose Creek Reservoir will increase opportunity for those anglers possessing other motor types. The use of other motor types is thought to be compatible with the character of this fishery. Conflicts between anglers using different types of motors are not expected due to the relatively small boat ramp and lake size as well as the presence of seasonally dense beds of aquatic macrophytes. In addition, "No wake, No Personal Watercraft" rules would be posted and enforced to maintain a peaceful experience if the electric-motors-only restriction were removed.

- 4. Proposal: Extend the upstream boundary for the fall Chinook Salmon fishery on the Salmon River an additional 25 miles upstream.**

Rationale: Increased abundance of fall Chinook Salmon in the Salmon River upstream of Riggins has led to increased incidental catches by anglers targeting steelhead. Anglers have expressed a desire to harvest these Fall Chinook Salmon which would be best accomplished by moving the upstream

boundary for the fall Chinook fishery an additional 25 miles upstream to the Vinegar Creek boat ramp. While additional effort for fall Chinook is not expected to be substantial, this allows the additional harvest opportunity requested by anglers and is not expected to increase incidental take of ESA listed fishes.

5. Proposal: Increase the trout daily bag limit for the Selway River upstream of Selway Falls from 0 to 2 and remove bait and barbless restrictions.

Rationale: The Selway River upstream of Selway Falls supports abundant trout populations and has relatively low angler use due to its remote ness of being largely within the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness area. Recent data from tagged Cutthroat indicated that anglers catch about 3% of the Westslope Cutthroat Trout in this reach annually. The proposed change is not expected to cause population declines due to high voluntary catch-and-release rates among avid trout anglers, and examples from other regional waters with similar regulations.

Southwest Region – McCall

1. Proposal: Remove the 12 inch minimum length limit for bass in Hells Canyon Reservoir, while maintaining the daily bag limit of 6.

Rationale: Sampling data and angler reports indicate that Hells Canyon Reservoir has a highly abundant population of Smallmouth Bass. Currently, the fishery is managed with a bag limit of 6 bass and a minimum length limit of 12 inches, which under normal circumstances would slightly reduce harvest and lead to higher average size. Recent data indicates that growth rates of bas in Hells Canyon Reservoir are very slow compared to national averages. Removing the length limit will allow for additional harvest opportunity and may slightly decrease bass density which may marginally improve growth rates of remaining Smallmouth Bass.

Southwest Region – Nampa

1. Proposal: Reduce the bag limit and increase the length limit for bass at the newly renovated Caldwell Gravel Ponds. Staff would like to consider two potential options:

- a. Bass limit is 2, none under 16 inches.**
- b. Bass limit is 2, none under 20 inches.**

Rationale: Caldwell Gravel Pond(s) was recently deepened and reshaped by an excavation company, during which the ponds were mostly dewatered causing loss of fish populations. As the project nears completion, the department will re-establish Largemouth Bass and Bluegill populations. Based on angler’s desires for more quality or trophy bass opportunity combined with relatively high bass harvest in nearby small waters, restricting bass harvest and length limits are expected to diversify and improve fishing opportunity.

2. Proposal: Modify length restrictions for bass at CJ Strike Reservoir to improve size structure.

Rationale: CJ Strike Reservoir supports a high-density bass population that garners high effort and angling interest from a diversity of angler types. During scoping, organized and general anglers indicated a desire to improve size structure of bass at CJ Strike by altering regulations to increase harvest of small fish (to increase growth of remaining bass) while decreasing harvest of larger bass. The department has data from population, fish tagging, and creel surveys at CJ Strike Reservoir. Harvest of Smallmouth Bass over 12 inches is higher than most other waters and is affecting size structure. The proposal would alter the current regulation of 6 bass per day, none under 12 inches to 6 bass per day, only one over 16 inches.

3. Proposal: Reduce the daily bag limit for kokanee at Deadwood Reservoir from 15 to 6.

Rationale: The kokanee population in Deadwood Reservoir has traditionally functioned as a harvest fishery, prey source for trophy size Rainbow Trout and other salmonids. Deadwood Reservoir has also been the department's primary egg source for early spawning kokanee which are stocked throughout the state. The kokanee population collapsed around 2021-2022 and the department is taking steps to re-build this population; harvest should be limited until the population rebuilds.

Magic Valley Region

1. Proposal: Align season opening and closing dates for ponds on the Hagerman Wildlife Management Area to March 1 and October 31st, respectively.

Rationale: The Hagerman Wildlife Management Area is primary managed for waterfowl, but also provides popular fishing opportunity on a series of 10 ponds and a creek. The waters are managed under three sections with different opening or closing dates. This proposal seeks to combine 3 sections into 1 and standardize opening and closing dates to reduce complexity and increase opportunity, while maintaining adequate protections for waterfowl.

2. Proposal: Remove the 1 Walleye over 20 inches restriction for Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir, while retaining the regional general bag limit of 6.

Rationale: The proposal will simplify regulations by removing a restriction with little to no biological benefit. Originally, the one-over 20 inches regulation was intended to increase Walleye size; however, repeated surveys and Walleye tagging studies have indicated this population is relatively stable and is not substantially affected by harvest. Additionally, the reservoir lacks sufficient prey to allow for fast growth, thereby making potential benefits from the current restriction unlikely. If adopted, Walleye in Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir would be managed with the general regional bag limit of 6 with no length restrictions.

3. Proposal: Remove or combine sections to simplify restrictions on Silver Creek and its tributaries.

Rationale: Angling restrictions on Silver Creek and its tributaries are among the most complicated in the state. Monitoring information suggest that the trout community here is relatively stable with many anglers preferring catch and release fishing opportunities. Because of the productivity, high natural mortality rates, and high adoption of voluntary catch-and-release fishing, proposed changes in angling restrictions are not expected to affect populations. This proposal would reduce the number of sections and exceptions within the mainstem from 4 to 2, while still allowing harvest opportunity downstream of Highway 20 and retaining the fly-fishing only rules upstream. In addition, Silver Creek's tributary sections and exceptions would be reduced from 3 to 2.

4. Proposal: Remove size and bag limit restrictions for bass throughout the Big Wood River including Magic Reservoir.

Rationale: Smallmouth Bass were illegally introduced and are incompatible with fisheries management objectives for the Big Wood River and Magic Reservoir. Additional harvest of Smallmouth Bass may slow population growth of this nonnative predator and limit negative effects to preferred sportfishes and native species.

Southeast Region

1. Alter and simplify restrictions for Cutthroat Trout in the Blackfoot River drainage.

Rationale: The proposal seeks to reduce Cutthroat Trout Harvest in the lower Blackfoot River and simplify trout regulation throughout the drainage by implementing a basin-wide daily bag limit of 6 trout, no harvest of Cutthroat Trout. The proposal would also increase angler opportunity in the upper river by expanding the fishing season by 5 months. The expansion still protects cutthroat during the spawning season, which is the intent of the seasonal closure. The proposal would also better align gear restrictions with other regional waters. Therefore, barbless hook restrictions would be removed throughout the drainage. Extensive research and case studies from other Idaho waters indicate that barbless hook restrictions are unnecessary.

Upper Snake Region

1. Proposal: Alter and simplify the daily bag and minimum length limits for trout in the Henrys Fork from McCrea Bridge upstream to the Henrys Lake Outlet by removing the “only 2 may be Cutthroat Trout, none under 16 inches restriction, while maintaining the daily bag limit of 6.

Rationale: The 16-inch minimum length and only 2 bag limit restriction on Cutthroat Trout was adopted to protect juvenile Cutthroat Trout. This section of the Henrys Fork Snake River is managed as a general fishery with a put-and-take Rainbow Trout stocking program, has very few Cutthroat Trout and provides little benefit to statewide Cutthroat Trout conservation. Recent surveys have shown Cutthroat Trout in this reach mostly exceed 16 inches, suggesting that the removal of these restrictions would have little noticeable effect, but would offer further simplification of regulations by reducing exceptions.

2. Proposal: Increase bass harvest opportunity throughout the Upper Snake Region by removing the regional bag limit.

Rationale: Bass are only found in three public waters within the Upper Snake Region. For two of these waters, Gem Lake and Ririe Reservoir, bass populations are managed for high harvest rates due to very slow growth or incompatibility with existing or nearby fisheries. Removing bag limits for

bass in the Upper Snake Region would result in Gem Lake and Ririe Reservoirs having no bag limit for bass which is consistent with fisheries management objectives.

3. Proposal: Maintain 6 bass bag limit in Mud Lake to protect quality Largemouth Bass fishery.

Rationale: Mud Lake is the third public water supporting bass in the Upper Snake Region. If the proposal to remove the regional bag limit for bass is approved, this proposal would maintain a daily bag limit of 6 bass on Mud Lake. As the only water supporting quality bass fishery in this area with adequate growth rates, bass longevity, and low harvest allow this rule would maintain quality bass production and fishing opportunity.

4. Proposal: Add clarity and set firm open and closing dates for Sand Creek Wildlife Management Area ponds.

Rationale: The Sand Creek Wildlife Management Area is primarily managed to provide wintering habitat for a variety of big game species, but also provides waterfowl nesting, hunting, and fishing opportunities, including ice fishing. Currently, an exception for these waters requires calling the regional office to determine whether emergency short-term closures have been enacted, which causes confusion for users and inefficiency for staff. Staff are proposing that five ponds be managed within two sections, each with fixed opening and closing dates, offering better clarity for users while ensuring that a diversity of management objectives are met.

5. Proposal: Add clarity for bag limits and seasonal closure for brook trout at Henrys Lake.

Rationale: Henrys Lake is managed with a daily bag limit of two trout including Brook Trout from Memorial Day Weekend through February 14th. This offers some harvest protection for Brook Trout, which are managed for larger sizes in this water. During the last regulation cycle, a catch-and-release season was established at Henrys Lake from February 15 through the Friday before Memorial Day weekend during which the trout limit is zero. Due to staff oversight Brook Trout were not specifically included in the catch and release season. Without including Brook Trout in the trout limit is zero regulation, Brook trout would default to the regional general bag limits and 25 fish/day bag limit during the catch and release season. The proposal seeks to include brook trout in the catch-and-release trout limit during February 15-Memorial Day Weekend catch and release fishery.

Salmon Region

There are no draft proposals for the Salmon Region.

Statewide

1. Proposal: Reduce all general regional daily bag limits for whitefish from 25 to 10.

Rationale: The current daily bag limit of 25 whitefish was adopted in 1950. While whitefish populations remain robust in certain waters, there is also information indicating that whitefish in some waters are experiencing declines in population abundance, recruitment, and occupancy. Causes of declines are unclear and current information does not suggest harvest is driving the declines. The proposal is a conservative approach to whitefish management while additional research is conducted to better identify population status and the causes for whitefish population declines while still allowing for harvest opportunity.

Agenda Item No. 10B – Scoping Comments

Attachment B: Summary of Initial Public Scoping for 2025-2027 Fishing Seasons and Limits Changes

Fisheries and Communications staffs began soliciting potential changes to fishing seasons and limits in preparation for updating the current fishing regulation booklet for the next triennial cycle, 2025-2027. Outreach included in-person open houses, video recordings of staff presentations (hosted on the department's YouTube site), and on-line comment forms. Input opportunities were communicated to the public via press releases, email, and social media. These outreach efforts included:

Public scoping period duration:	Open Date	Close Date
• Fishing Seasons/bag limits input period:	February 9	March 10

2 Press releases – announced scoping period for seasons and limits and how to participate

- January 26: Announce upcoming public comment opportunity for Chinook seasons, 2025-27 statewide fishing seasons, and fish management plan
- February 9: Anglers can now provide comments on IDFG's fishing seasons and fish management plan and attend public meetings to get more information

7 Email invitations were sent to anglers

Statewide:

- February 8: 25,627 recipients; 49% open rate; 71 clicks
- February 15: 25,707 recipients; 47% open rate; 610 clicks
- February 2: 25,858 recipients; 47% open rate; 68 clicks

Upper Snake Region anglers

- February 8: 14,490 recipients; 47% open rate; 139 clicks

Additional emails were sent directly to constituent lists provided by the McCall (2 email) and Clearwater (1 email) Fisheries Managers.

59 Social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) promoting scoping process, how to participate, schedule of events, and reminders on event starting times. In combination, 120,666 people viewed these posts at least once.

14 In-person open house events to solicit input and answer live questions. A total of 257 anglers attended these events.

14 Videos explaining the statewide scoping process and information on regional topics, which were posted prior to the virtual open houses to encourage participation, and were available online until scoping closed. There were over 2,200 views of scoping-related videos.

15 Online comment forms were developed and hosted on the department's website. These included comment forms for fishing regulations changes for each Region, as well as salmon season input for 3 regions, and additional input on Clearwater Anadromous fisheries. A total of 685 comments were submitted through the online comment forms.

2,059 Users visited the department's website and viewed the rules scoping materials

Ideas, generated by the public or staff, that were expected to produce biological, social, or economic outcomes and were consistent with the 2019-2024 Statewide Fisheries Management Plan were forwarded as draft proposals (Attachment A). Below, we list common input received by each region that was **not** developed into a draft proposal and the associated rationale for not advancing to the draft proposal stage.

Statewide Comments

We received 23 online comments focusing on general fishery management changes statewide. Comments varied widely with few consistent themes. A summary of statewide comments is below:

Several comments on licensing included 2 comments requesting licenses be valid for 365 days from purchase and 1 comment asking for a 3-year, 2-pole permit to match a 3-year fishing license. Some anglers requested that the 2-pole restriction should be lifted, and others felt disabled veterans should not be charged.

Two comments requested a modification of the “head-and-tail rule” to allow fish to be processed in a boat while in the field.

Three comments focused on wild trout management, encouraging more catch/release regulations, focusing stocking on lakes, and “hoot owl” restrictions during warm water temperatures.

Two comments regarded salmon management to increase the hook gap restriction and breach the lower Snake River dams.

Two comments pertained to sturgeon fishing, including a request for a lottery harvest tag, and another to reinstate the sturgeon permit previously required.

A variety of comments included requests to simplify fishing regulations, establish protocols to work with water managers to lift access closures from invasive species detections, more active salvage orders on canals, statewide bag limits on panfish, and increased Department oversight of bass tournaments.

Panhandle Region

The Panhandle Region received 199 comments. Common themes included:

1. Coeur d’Alene and St. Joe rivers. Eight comments were related to regional trout fisheries in the Coeur d’Alene and St. Joe rivers. Three comments requested more restrictive regulations. However, the current catch-and-release regulations are providing adequate harvest protection for these fisheries. In contrast, five comments requested less restrictive regulations (i.e., allowing harvest). These fisheries are not very productive; and historical observations indicate that allowing harvest on these waters reduces average size. Based on the relatively few and divided comments, staff did not develop a draft proposal for either of these fisheries.
2. Electric Motors. Twenty-three comments related to a scoping survey inquiring about preferences for regional waters with “electric motor only” restrictions where county ordinances also preclude the use of internal combustion engines. Sixty-five percent of respondents preferred the existing IDFG regulation be retained, providing regulatory duplication. Due to support for existing regulatory structure, staff did not develop a draft proposal.
3. Clark Fork River. Eight comments related to the catch-and-release season for Rainbow Trout on the Clark Fork River (regarding spawning trout from Lake Pend Oreille). Seven of these comments requested restricting this fishery, and one requested additional harvest opportunity.

The current catch-and-release regulations provide adequate protection for Rainbow Trout, so there is not a biological justification for implementing a closure or more restrictive regulations. The current regulation is supported by many anglers and provides additional angling opportunity by allowing fishing for Rainbow Trout during their seasonal migration into the Clark Fork River. Staff did not develop a draft proposal based on these few and divided comments.

4. Hayden and Robinson lakes. Thirty-nine comments related to a scoping survey regarding angler preferences for special harvest regulations of Largemouth Bass at Hayden and Robinson lakes. Fifty-two percent of comments supported limits on harvest opportunity for Largemouth Bass at Hayden Lake despite their ineffectiveness at creating more large bass. In contrast, 61% of Robinson Lake comments supported more harvest opportunity on this slow growing population. Based on these comments, staff developed a draft proposal to increase harvest opportunity for Largemouth Bass at Robinson Lake. Staff did not draft a proposal Hayden Lake due to more support for conservative harvest of Largemouth Bass.
5. Priest Lake. Twenty comments were related to the Priest Lake fishery. Nine comments related to reducing Lake Trout abundance by liberalizing harvest. Three comments requested more restrictive harvest regulations for Lake Trout or an emphasis on improving Lake Trout fishing. Three additional comments requested allowances for more harvest of Smallmouth Bass. Five comments requested additional language be added to highlight existing regulations limiting harvest of native fishes and or generally increasing restrictions on fishing gear (no bait, artificial flies only). Staff did not develop a proposal for Priest Lake because comments represented diverse and opposing opinions, were inconsistent with the established fisheries management plan, and represented concepts which would increase regulation complexity without biological significance. Current fisheries management plan direction identifies a yield fishery for Lake Trout as the primary objective. This management plan was established in 2019 following considerable public input. While public sentiment guiding Priest Lake fishery management may have changed, a thorough review of angler preferences is needed prior to considering whether alternative management direction is needed or preferred.
6. Spearfishing. Ten comments were related to spearfishing for gamefish, including Walleye and Northern Pike. Idaho Administrative Code identifies Walleye and Northern Pike as gamefish and limits the use of spears and other non-traditional fishing gear to only non-game fishes. Staff did not develop a proposal to permit spearfishing of Walleye and or Northern Pike because changes to Idaho Administrative Code are outside of the scope of this regulation renewal process. However, we took note of the public input received and will discuss whether to recommend future action within the negotiated rule making process associated with Idaho Administrative Code.

Clearwater Region

The Clearwater Region held 4 open house events with 93 attendees and received 254 online comments. Comments were diverse, and three common themes included:

1. Electric Motor Restrictions. Sixty-six comments related to a scoping survey inquiring about boat motor restrictions at lowland lakes across the region. The survey asked anglers their preference for current electric motor only restrictions or alternative restriction such as no wake. In total, 59% of anglers preferred no wake over electric motor only restrictions. Currently the Clearwater Region has 4 lakes managed as “electric motors only” including Spring Valley, Moose Creek,

Winchester, and Mann Creek reservoirs. Four comments supported “no wake” restrictions everywhere except Spring Valley Reservoir. However, at Winchester Lake, Idaho State Parks is a management partner and prefers the “electric motors only” restrictions. Also, Mann Lake is located on tribal property; and although we received the most comments from anglers asking to allow gas motors there, this decision is out up to IDFG to change this regulation. Because of all these factors, we are only proposing changes to Moose Creek Reservoir from “electric motors only” detailed in the proclamation to “No Wake, No personal watercraft” restrictions posted at the waterbody instead of within the proclamation.

2. Dworshak Reservoir. Six comments related to Dworshak Reservoir. Half of these comments related to kokanee size being too small, with the other half requesting more protective regulations for Smallmouth Bass. IDFG administers a nutrient enrichment program that increases kokanee growth, and current bag limits allow for 25 kokanee per day. Surveys indicate that Kokanee populations are cyclical, influenced by environmental factors and reservoir management, and size increases during times of low abundance. Fishing effort for kokanee is relatively low here suggesting bag limits adjustments are unlikely to affect this population. Smallmouth Bass growth is influenced by kokanee abundances. High abundance of small kokanee lead to fast bass growth. Lastly, angler harvest of Dworshak bass is low, and restrictive regulations for bass are not biologically justified at this time. Because of these factors, staff did not develop a draft proposal for Dworshak Reservoir.
3. Reduce steelhead Fishing opportunities for Non-Resident Anglers. Six comments requested reduced angling opportunities for non-resident steelhead anglers. Of the comments, half requested IDFG work towards reducing the number of guide permits, guided clients, and guided trips per week in all steelhead waters. However, IDFG does not have the statutory authority to regulate outfitters and guides. The other half of comments requested an increase price for non-resident steelhead permits and limits to the number of days non-resident anglers may target steelhead. Staff recently updated steelhead regulations using an angler working group, which led to more balanced steelhead angling opportunities across time and space. Although staff recognize that non-resident and guide crowding may affect Idaho steelhead fisheries, we are not proposing any regulation changes as the public requested and IFG Commission directed staff to provide adequate time for the newly adopted regulations to be properly evaluated.

Southwest Region – McCall

The Southwest Region - McCall hosted 2 in-person open house meetings (Cascade, Riggins) that included 29 attendees. Thirty-eight online and 15 in-person comments were provided. A common theme included:

1. Cascade Reservoir. Two comments requested changes to Yellow Perch limits on Lake Cascade. Both comments suggested setting daily bag limits for perch. During the previous regulation scoping period (for 2022 – 2024 regulations), 9 comments requested similar changes. Staff have conducted extensive monitoring of angler effort, catch, and harvest for perch on Lake Cascade, as well as extensive surveys related to perch population dynamics. All studies have indicated that perch limits are not warranted, as angler harvest is low and not driving perch abundance, size, or recruitment. As a result, staff did not develop a proposal for any changes to perch fishing regulations for Cascade Reservoir at this time.

Southwest Region – Nampa

The Southwest Region - Nampa held 2 in-person open house meetings with 41 people attending (Boise and Nampa). During the open house meetings and open house walk-in periods, the Southwest Region – Nampa received 7 comments, with an additional 43 received online. Common themes included:

1. Lower Boise River. Twenty-three comments requested more restrictive trout regulations in the lower Boise River. All in-person commenters were members of Boise Valley Fly Fishers and comments focused on reducing bag limits and implementing seasonal closures for the reach between Lucky Peak and Barber dams. Staff currently have little survey data describing the trout population or angler harvest in this reach. However, farther downstream reaches have been extensively studied, and all evaluations have indicated that wild trout harvest is very low. Also, angler reports suggest that the wild trout population between Lucky Peak and Barber dams is already providing an excellent fishery under the current general seasons and limits. The 2019-2025 Fisheries Management Plan designates this section to be managed for a “general” trout fishing experience. Due to the combination of these factors, staff did not develop a draft proposal at this time. Instead, staff are committed increasing understanding of this section of and its fishery to determine whether changes to management direction or seasons and limits are needed in the future.

Magic Valley Region

The Magic Valley Region hosted 2 in-person open house meetings (Jerome and Hailey) that included 25 attendees. Thirty-four online and 3 in-person comments were provided. Common themes included:

1. Billingsley Creek. Two comments requested reduced bag limits for Billingsley Creek, and one comment requested a no bait and barbless restriction on Upper Rock Creek. Tagging data in these systems indicate that harvest is low and therefore more restrictive regulations are not needed. Staff continue to periodically monitor angler use and exploitation in these fisheries. No draft proposals were developed at this time.
2. Big Wood River – Sun Valley section. Four comments requested changes for the Big Wood River. One comment request prohibition of trout harvest over 14” in length throughout the system. Tag returns and exploitation data suggest harvest (or fishing in general) are not limiting size structure within the trout population. An additional comment requested year-round fishing opportunity. Staff are initiating an extensive study of the Big Wood River to determine status, assess management direction and regulations, as well as engage anglers and determine their preferences. For these reasons, no draft proposals were developed at this time.
3. Big Wood River – Below Magic Dam. Two comment requested winter catch and release (zero harvest) restrictions for below Magic Dam. Tagging studies indicate that harvest is very low in this reach and that restrictions are not needed. Staff are initiating an extensive study of the Big Wood River to determine status, assess management direction and regulations, as well as engage anglers and determine their preferences. For these reasons, no draft proposals were developed at this time.

Southeast Region

The Southeast Region hosted 1 in-person open house with 16 attendees. Seventy-six comments were received (50 submitted online). Two common themes included:

1. Blackfoot Reservoir. Ten comments requested increased harvest restriction for Smallmouth Bass. Smallmouth Bass were illegally introduced into Blackfoot Reservoir and pose a threat to this important native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout population; and therefore, are incompatible with this priority management direction. Currently, bass harvest is unregulated at this reservoir. Furthermore, creel surveys in 2023 estimated only 10% of bass caught by anglers were harvested. Therefore, staff did not develop a draft proposal to reduce bass harvest.
2. Snake River below American Falls. Fourteen comments requested reinstatement of season and rule restrictions in the Snake River below American Falls Dam due to recent declines in fishery quality. Angler opinion indicated that regulation changes negatively affected this fishery. However, available information indicates that this fishery has declined due to environmental conditions. Entrainment from American Falls Reservoir contributes substantially to this fishery, and drought conditions from 2020 to 2022 caused the reservoir to be drafted to as low as 10%, causing inhospitable conditions for trout survival. Furthermore, anglers continue to request bait restrictions, but creel surveys have indicated that less than 4% of anglers utilize bait, making this an unlikely contributor to recent population declines. Water carryover and reservoir levels were higher during 2023 and early 2024 creating better conditions for trout. Should these conditions continue, trout populations and catch rates are expected to rebound quickly. Therefore, staff did not develop a draft proposal at this time but will continue to monitor this important fishery.

Upper Snake Region

The Upper Snake Region held 1 open house with 25 attendees. Ninety-five comments were received (with 74 submitted online). Comments were widespread and diverse, but bulk of the comments were focused on Henrys Lake.

1. Henrys Lake. Thirty-seven comments requested shorter seasons and additional gear restrictions for Henrys Lake, especially a reduction in ice fishing opportunities. Angler opinions indicated that recent regulation changes negatively affected this fishery. However, survey data indicates that fishing related mortality is low and not the cause of the recent decline. Rather, recent environmental conditions have caused lower trout survival rates and resulted in lower overall trout numbers. During 2024, and following years, IDFG will continue to monitor trout survival and obtain current estimates of angler catch and harvest to quantify fishing-related mortality. Since recent reductions in trout abundance and catch rates were environmentally caused and not related to fishing-related mortality, staff did not develop a draft proposal at this time but remains committed to rebuilding this important fishery.

Salmon Region

The Salmon Region hosted 1 open house event with 10 attendees. Twenty comments were received (14 submitted online). Comments varied widely, and we will not be proposing any new changes this year.

1. Upper Salmon River. Three comments related to resident and anadromous fisheries in the upper Salmon River were provided and requested less hatchery rainbow trout stocking and prohibitions on night fishing for steelhead and use of combustion motors upstream of North Fork. Due to the diversity of opinion and conflicting nature of requests, staff did not develop a draft proposal for the upper Salmon River.