

Agenda Item No. 5D (Attachment A)

Attachment A: Public Outreach Summary for 2025 – 2027 Fishing Seasons and Limits Proposals

Public Outreach and Scoping Summary

IDFG provided a 22-day comment period allowing anglers to provide input on the proposed fishing seasons and limits changes for 2025-2027. Outreach efforts to encourage comment on proposals included:

- News releases and social media campaign announcing public comment periods
- General email announcements to “fishing topics” subscribers announcing comment opportunities
- Additional randomized email surveys to the last five years of fishing-license holders for selected proposals, stratified statewide and by Region
- Press releases announcing public comment periods and how to participate
- Social media posts on multiple platforms encouraging comment on proposals

Results

Our comprehensive outreach efforts utilized social media and other forms of engagement to collect a robust number of comments regarding proposed fishing seasons and limits changes. Our outreach efforts and comment totals included:

- 3 different email announcements inviting anglers to provide comment with instruction to navigate to the website. Emails were sent to:
 - All fishing/hunt topic subscriptions; 65,067 emails (5/21/24)
 - Southwest Region newsletter topic subscribers; 16,554 emails (6/04/24)
 - Fishing and Salmon/Steelhead topic subscribers; 27,146 emails (6/06/24)
- Collaborated with U of I survey expert to conduct randomized email surveys specifically for proposals on: Priest and Upper Priest lakes, CJ Strike Reservoir, Selway River, and statewide Mountain Whitefish proposals.
 - 84,145 recipients statewide, stratified and weighted by Regions
 - Reminder email to 83,658 non-respondents
 - 3,200 completed surveys
- 2 press releases announcing public comment is open with instructions to participate
- 19 social media posts summary (Instagram, Facebook, etc.), reaching 47,291 people
- 3 Facebook "reels" videos encouraging participation, reaching 5,257 people
- 5 radio show interviews promoting participation in R4 (2 ea. BUCK FM; 2 ea. KLIX; 1 ea. KBAR)
- 1 statewide video announcement, with 24 additional videos (one per proposal)
- 1,886 comments provided by anglers through the website

Agenda Item No. 5D (Attachment B)
Attachment B: 2025 – 2027 Fishing Seasons and Limits Proposals, comment summaries, and staff recommendations

Administrative Actions

1. Free Fishing Day (*Seasons/rules pages 23*)

Proposal: Establish June 14, 2025; June 13, 2026; and June 12, 2027 as Free Fishing Days. These dates are the Saturdays after the first full week in June and correspond with national events.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed.

2. Salmon/Steelhead River section code adjustments (*Seasons/rules page 50*)

Proposal: Change some river location codes and boundaries to align with management units for salmon and steelhead fisheries.

Rationale: The current river location codes used for salmon and steelhead fisheries management do not align with the geographic boundaries of our river management units in some locations. The proposed changes would bring the river location codes and management units into alignment and allow for better harvest estimation using electronic tagging (e-tagging).

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed.

3. Sockeye Salmon definition clarification (*Seasons/rules pages 19, 25, 47, 50*)

Proposal: Add clarity to definitions of Sockeye Salmon in the Clearwater, Southwest, and Salmon regions' general seasons and limits pages by defining a Sockeye Salmon to be any *Oncorhynchus nerka* longer than 14" in waters accessible to anadromous fish.

Rationale: Sockeye Salmon and kokanee entrained from lakes or reservoirs may co-occur in waters accessible to anadromous fish such as portions of the Clearwater, Salmon and Snake river drainages downstream of impassable dams. Sockeye Salmon are ESA-listed as endangered, and incidental take allowances are extremely low. Fortunately, there is no size overlap for these life histories in Idaho's anadromous waters. This additional size definition eliminates the possibility that an angler could accidentally harvest a Sockeye Salmon thinking it to be a kokanee.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed.

2025 – 2027 Fishing Seasons and Bag Limit Proposed Changes

Panhandle Region Proposals

4. Coeur d'Alene Lake – Chinook Salmon minimum length limit (*Seasons/rules pages 15*)

Proposal: Chinook Salmon limit is 2, none under 24 inches

Rationale: Despite decades of effort to increase numbers and catch rates of Chinook Salmon through hatchery supplementation, the population is almost entirely composed of naturally produced individuals at relatively low numbers. Avid Chinook anglers on Coeur d'Alene Lake have consistently asked for more restrictive harvest regulations to increase the number of trophy-sized fish in the lake. Previous work has shown that more restrictive regulations could have some impact on the population but would likely be unrecognizable to anglers. Although largely social in nature, the proposed regulation aligns with our current fisheries management plan of maintaining restrictive regulations to provide trophy angling opportunity.

Total web survey responses: 157

Option A: Increase minimum length limit to 24 inches: 125 (79%)

Option B: Keep the existing minimum length limit of 20 inches: 24 (15%)

Neither: 8 (5%)

Of the respondents that did not support either the proposed or existing regulation comments suggested respondents wanted more liberal harvest opportunities (e.g., three fish per day) or felt both options allowed too much harvest.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

5. Priest Lake – Cutthroat Trout harvest and bag limits - (*Seasons/rules pages 17*)

Proposal: Trout limit is 6, only two may be Cutthroat Trout, no Cutthroat Trout under 16 inches, no harvest of Cutthroat Trout in tributaries

Rationale: Harvest opportunity for Westslope Cutthroat Trout was removed on Priest Lake and other regional waters due to concern that populations were depressed, and harvest was not sustainable. However, limited information on the status of Priest Lake Westslope Cutthroat Trout was available at that time. Monitoring of the Westslope Cutthroat Trout population in Priest Lake since 2014 and monitoring of fish abundance in spawning and rearing tributaries to Priest Lake indicates Westslope Cutthroat Trout are abundant and the population is stable. Currently, angler effort on Priest Lake is low (i.e., approximately 50,000 hours) and the proportion of effort targeting Westslope Cutthroat Trout is small (i.e., < 10%). Modeled population response of Westslope Cutthroat Trout to harvest under a quality-trout framework indicated limited harvest is sustainable.

Total web survey responses: 75

Option A: Allow harvest of two cutthroat trout, none under 16 inches: 50 (67%)

Option B: Keep the existing no harvest regulation: 21 (28%)

Neither: 4 (5%)

Of the respondents that did not support either option one suggested the addition of limited allowable harvest of cutthroat in tributaries was desired. The remaining respondents in this group provided general comment suggesting they did not agree with the status of cutthroat in the lake and thought more broad efforts to improve the fishery should be sought. For example, one respondent suggested that harvest limits for Lake Trout should be increased.

Randomized Email Survey Summary:

Option A: Allow harvest of two cutthroat trout, none under 16 inches: 865 (74%)

Option B: Keep the existing no harvest regulation: 242 (21%)

Neither: 61 (5%)

A majority of respondents indicated they did not fish Priest in the last five years (60%). Only six percent of respondents indicated they fished Priest Lake annually over the last five years. Lake Trout were the most common targeted fish on Priest Lake for respondents (48%). Nine percent of anglers responding indicated Westslope Cutthroat Trout were their primary target when fishing Upper Priest Lake. Respondents that did not support either the proposed or existing regulation suggested either a more liberal (more harvest opportunity) or more conservative (some harvest opportunity, but less than proposed) was desired. Comments from a few respondents suggested not enough information was provided to make an informed decision or that the information provided was inaccurate.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

6. Upper Priest Lake – Cutthroat Trout harvest and bag limits (*Seasons/rules pages 17*)

Proposal: Trout limit is 6, only two may be Cutthroat Trout, no Cutthroat Trout under 16 inches, no harvest of Cutthroat Trout in tributaries

Rationale: Harvest opportunity for Westslope Cutthroat Trout was removed on Upper Priest Lake and other regional waters due to concern that populations were depressed, and harvest was not sustainable. However, limited information on the status of Upper Priest Lake Westslope Cutthroat Trout was available at that time. Monitoring of the Westslope Cutthroat Trout population in Upper Priest Lake since 2014 and monitoring of fish abundance in spawning and rearing tributaries to Upper Priest Lake indicates Westslope Cutthroat Trout are abundant and the population is stable. General observation suggests angler effort on Upper Priest Lake is low. Modeled population response of

Westslope Cutthroat Trout to harvest under a quality-trout framework indicated harvest from Upper Priest Lake is sustainable.

Total web survey responses: 49

Option A: Allow harvest of two cutthroat trout, none under 16 inches: 32 (64%)

Option B: Keep the existing no harvest regulation: 15 (30%)

Neither: 2 (4%)

Of the respondents that did not support either the proposed or existing regulation one suggested a more restrictive regulation for Lake Trout be included with the proposed harvest of cutthroat trout and one suggested the addition of limited allowable harvest of cutthroat in tributaries.

Randomized Email Survey Summary: 824

Option A: Allow harvest of two cutthroat trout, none under 16 inches: 611 (74%)

Option B: Keep the existing no harvest regulation: 169(21%)

Neither: 44 (5%)

A majority of respondents indicated they did not fish Upper Priest in the last five years (65%). Only four percent of respondents indicated they fished Upper Priest Lake annually over the last five years. Lake Trout were the most common targeted fish on Upper Priest Lake for respondents (43%). Nineteen percent of anglers responding indicated Westslope Cutthroat Trout were their primary target when fishing Upper Priest Lake.

Respondents that did not support either the proposed or existing regulation suggested either a more liberal (more harvest opportunity) or more conservative (some harvest opportunity, but less than proposed) was desired. Comments from a few respondents suggested not enough information was provided to make an informed decision or that the information provided was inaccurate.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

7. Robinson Lake Largemouth Bass – General limits (*Seasons/rules pages 17*)

Proposal: Regional bag limit: Bass limit is 6, both species combined

Rationale: Recent populations surveys indicate that Largemouth Bass in Robinson Lake grow very slowly. Most individuals do not achieve lengths greater than 12 inches. As such, the existing bag limit is ineffective at meeting the expected outcome of a quality bass rule including an increase in the proportion of large bass in the population. The proposed bag limit provides additional harvest opportunity on a small mixed species fishery. Generally, exploitation of Largemouth Bass in other area lakes with similar fish communities is low. No change to the existing size structure of the population would be expected under the proposed regulation. No significant change in abundance of Largemouth Bass is expected under the proposed regulation. The proposed regulation would simplify regulations by removing one special regulation in the seasons and rules booklet.

Total web survey responses: 43

Option A: Allow harvest of Largemouth Bass under the general regional limit: 35 (81%)

Option B: Keep the existing quality bass regulation: 8 (19%)

Neither: 0 (0%)

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

Clearwater Region Proposals

8. Deer Creek Reservoir – Trophy tiger trout length limit (*Seasons/rules pages 21*)

Proposal: Increase the minimum harvest length for tiger trout from 14” to 20” in Deer Creek Reservoir.

Rationale: Clearwater fisheries staff received multiple requests from anglers to increase the abundance of larger sized tiger trout in Deer Creek Reservoir (DCR). Recent surveys indicate angler harvest is preventing DCR from providing a quality tiger trout fishery as directed in the Fisheries Management Plan. Modeling suggests that reducing harvest of larger sized tiger trout could increase the abundance of tiger trout > 14 inches by 78%.

Total web survey responses: 44, Yes: 31 (71%), No: 9 (20%) Neither: 4 (9%)
Of the respondents that did not like either regulation option, two supported increasing the length minimum but to 16 or 18 inches rather than 20 inches.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed.

9. Elk Creek and Tributaries, and Elk Creek Reservoir – Brook Trout bag limit (*Seasons/rules pages 21*)

Proposal: Increase the Brook Trout limit in Elk Creek, Elk Creek Reservoir, and Elk Creek Tributaries from 6 to 25.

Rationale: Restrictive Brook Trout limits in Elk Creek Reservoir and tributaries within the basin were created in the 1990s with the intention to preserve larger sized fish. These limits represent two of three exceptions in the entire state that do not follow the statewide regulations for Brook Trout. Recent surveys indicated that Brook Trout harvest was so low that the current limits have no influence on the abundance or size structure of Brook Trout in Elk Creek Reservoir or surrounding streams. Here is an example where removing the restrictive Brook Trout regulations would simplify regulations without influencing the fishery.

Total web survey responses: 49, Yes: 34 (70%), No: 7 (14%), Neither: 8 (16%)
Of the respondents that did not support the proposal 3 supported increasing the limit, but to 10/day. And two suggested reducing the daily bag for Brook Trout.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

10. Moose Creek Reservoir – Electric motors only (*Seasons/rules pages 22*)

Proposal: Remove electric motors-only restrictions and replace with no wake, no personal watercraft restrictions.

Rationale: Some anglers contend that ‘Electric Motors Only’ restrictions limit angling opportunity at fisheries intended to provide a diversity of opportunity. They point out that multiple examples occur in the Clearwater Region where IDFG allows gas motors but maintain peace by posting enforceable “No wake, No Personal Watercraft” signs. Idaho Department of Fish and Game owns or manages seven lowland lakes in the Clearwater Region and uses two strategies to restrict boating activity. Four of the lakes are managed as “no wake, no motorized personal watercraft” reservoirs but do not restrict what type of motors a boat can use. Three of the lakes have “electric motor only” restrictions, including Moose Creek Reservoir (MCR). Angler satisfaction at the four lakes managed with “no wake, no motorized personal watercraft” restrictions have remained high as they are able to provide more fishing opportunity while maintaining a peaceful and safe fishing experience. It should be noted that MCR is a smaller lake (27 acres) which really prevents fast boat traffic from being an issue. Other small lakes such as Campbell’s Pond have no motor or wake restrictions at all even though it has a boat ramp. Satisfaction at this lake/pond has remained high. Removing the “Electric Motors Only” restriction from MCR would also eliminate it from being a “Special Rule Water” and help to shorten and simplify the regulations which is desired by many anglers.

Total web survey responses: 43, Yes: 9 (21%), No: 34 (79%)

Staff recommendation: Do not adopt. This proposal was met with significant public opposition.

11. Salmon River – Expanding fall Chinook Salmon fishery boundary
(*Seasons/rules pages 54*)

Proposal: Expand Fall Chinook Boundary 25 miles from Little Salmon River to Upper Vinegar Creek Boat Launch

Rationale: Fish and Game received angler comments asking to extend the upstream boundary of the Salmon River fall Chinook Salmon fishery. Anglers report that fall Chinook Salmon occur in fishable numbers in the Salmon River upstream to Vinegar Creek which are consistent with creel data and redd count surveys. The current boundary prevents anglers from targeting and harvesting fall Chinook Salmon upstream of the Little Salmon River where anglers regularly fish for steelhead. Moving the boundary upstream to Vinegar Creek opens approximately 25 miles of additional river where anglers can target, and harvest fall Chinook Salmon. This boundary change has already been approved as a part of NOAA’s Biological Opinion on IDFG’s FMEP for Fall Chinook Salmon. Additionally, fall Chinook Salmon smolt releases in the Salmon River are expected to increase in the near future which will increase fall Chinook abundance in this area. Estimating harvest and impacts on wild fish in this river reach will become relatively easy as e-tagging is incorporated into our creel program.

Total web survey responses: 67, Yes: 54 (81%), No: 11 (16%), Neither: 2 (3%)

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

12. Selway River – Cutthroat Trout harvest and bag limits (*Seasons/rules pages 22*)

Proposal: Replace catch and release only, barbless hooks required, and no bait allowed, with a two fish limit and no other restrictions.

Rationale: Fish and Game has received angler comments asking for additional trout harvest opportunities in the Selway River upstream of Selway Falls, which only provides catch-and-release fishing opportunities. This fishery can be accessed by rafts, trails, or backcountry airstrips, greatly limiting fishing effort. Recent surveys indicated that anglers annually catch around 3% of the Cutthroat Trout in the Selway River, which means that providing limited harvest opportunity is unlikely to influence the abundance or size structure of this trout population. Additionally, few trout in the Selway River live past age-5, when they are 13-16 inches in length. This suggests that by the time these fish reached desirable harvest sizes, they would likely not survive an additional year, further reducing the overall impact of allowing limited harvest. This proposed regulation change would also match what occurs in the tributaries (general regulations) which would reduce confusion and result in regulation simplification.

Total web survey responses: 80, Yes: 33 (41%), No: 29 (36%), Neither: 18 (23%)

Of the respondents that did not like either proposal option, 11 supported a two fish limit but did not support the use of bait or barbed hooks, 4 supported more restrictive cutthroat regulations in the Selway River, and one supported catch and release no bait with barbed hooks allowed.

Randomized Email Survey Summary: 1,067 people responded

Option A: Trout limit is 2/day, all species combined, bait and barbed hooks allowed.

Option B: Trout Limit is 0, catch and Release, no bait or barbless hooks allowed.

Option C: I don't like either alternative.

Option A: 690 (65%), Option B: 258 (24%), Option C: 119 (11%)

- Statewide, 46% of respondents had fished the Upper Selway River at least once in the past 10 years.
- Of the respondents who have fished the Upper Selway River, 59% supported the proposed regulation change, and 27% supported keeping the current regulations.
- 11% of anglers did not support either option. Of those anglers, the vast majority still supported a two fish limit (117 comments) but preferred to maintain barbless hook (112 comments) and/or no-bait restrictions (104 comments).
- 22% of respondents stated they definitely will not harvest cutthroat trout in the upper Selway River if allowed, while another 20% said they probably won't. 16% of respondents stated they would definitely harvest cutthroat trout in the Upper Selway River if allowed, while 33% said they might.
- The most common mode of access was hiking (44%). Airplane (3%) and horseback (3%) were the least common modes of access to the upper Selway River. The

uppermost and lowermost Selway wilderness trailheads allow vehicle access (30%) to the fishery.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

Southwest Region Proposals

13. Hells Canyon Reservoir bass minimum length limit (*Seasons/rules pages 27*)

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 surveys indicate that growth rates of bass 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. Reduced density may improve growth rates of remaining smallmouth bass and increase the average size slightly.

Total web survey responses: Total web comments: 106, Yes: 83 (78%); No: 18 (17%); Neither (4%)

Of the anglers that indicated they didn't support either option, some felt there should be a slot limit, a 16-inch minimum, while others felt regulations should mirror Oxbow Reservoir, or no bag or size limits at all should be in place.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

14. Caldwell Gravel Ponds – Trophy bass limits (*Seasons/rules pages 29*)

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:

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.

We collected public comments on two options for this fishery, including:

Option A: Bass limit is 2, none under 16 inches.

Option B: Bass limit is 2, none under 20 inches.

Staff recommendation: Adopt option B

Total web survey responses: Total number web comments. 66

Option A (16 in): 27 (41%)

Option B (20 in): 30 (45%)

Neither: 9 (14%)

Of the anglers that did not support either alternative, six of the comments suggested catch-and-release only until the fishery matures for fear that harvest in such ponds heavily influences catch. Three additional comments suggested slot limits, or different combinations of length limit with the theme of protecting large bass.

15. CJ Strike Reservoir – Bass length limit (*Seasons/rules pages 29*)

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 the 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. The 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.

We collected public comments on two options for this fishery, including:

Option A: Bass limit is 6, only 1 over 16 inches

Option B: Keep current regulation: Bass limit is 6, none under 12 inches

Option C: I don't like either alternative.

Total web survey responses: 163, Option A: 122 (75%), Option B: 29 (18%), Option C: 12 (7%)

We received comments from 12 anglers that did not support either option. Of those, three said they preferred some kind of slot limit, two preferred higher bag limits with only 1 over 16", two anglers wanted lower overall bag limits on bass, and the remaining three comments suggested other various length/bag combinations. Other comments suggested limits for crappie or restricting the number of bass tournaments.

Randomized Email Survey Summary: 1,236 people responded to this statewide randomized email survey, with 555 responses from Southwest Region anglers, and 681 responses from anglers across the rest of Idaho.

Option A: 68%, Option B: 23%, Option C: 9%

- Responses from anglers only within the Southwest Region indicated even higher support, with 71% preferring Option A (16" min), and only 20% preferring Option B (maintain current 12").
- 70% of the respondents from the Southwest Region indicated they had fished CJ Strike Reservoir at least one out of the last five years, compared to 43% of anglers outside the Region.
- Bass were the primary species targeted by anglers (34% of anglers), with 26% saying they harvested bass either occasionally or often.

With the randomized email survey, 16 of anglers did not support either option. Five anglers wanted a limit of 6 fish without any size restrictions, and five others provided varying alternatives to the proposals such as slot limits or different minimum and maximum lengths.

Staff recommendation: Adopt Option A, Bass limit is 6, only 1 over 16 inches

16. Deadwood Reservoir, and Deadwood Reservoir Tributaries – Kokanee bag limit *(Seasons/rules pages 29)*

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.

Total web survey responses: 121; Yes: 114 (95%), No: 3 (2%), Neither: 4 (3%)
Of those anglers that didn't support either option, three comments suggested the limit should be 10, while one additional comment suggested the limit be reduced to zero until the population rebounds.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

Magic Valley Region Proposals

17. Hagerman WMA Ponds and Riley Creek – Season opening dates *(Seasons/rules pages 34)*

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

section of Riley Creek (including Anderson Ponds, Bass Pond, West Highway Pond, Oster Lakes, Riley Pond, and Settling Pond). Currently, these waters are managed under three different sections with different opening or closing dates. This proposal would adopt the same opening and closing dates for all the ponds and the Riley Creek section on the WMA. This would simplify the regulations and increase fishing opportunities, while maintaining adequate protections for waterfowl.

Total web survey responses: 45, Yes: 42 (94%), No: 2 (4%), Neither: 1 (2%)
The one individual that didn't like either alternative would prefer to have additional restrictive rules in place to protect spawning warmwater fish.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

18. Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir – Walleye length limit (*Seasons/rules pages 34*)

Proposal: Remove the length limit of 1 walleye over 20 inches for Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir, while retaining the regional general bag limit of 6 walleye per day.

Rationale: This 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 per day with no length restrictions.

Total web survey responses: 85, Yes: 63 (74%), No: 20 (24%), Neither: 2 (2%)
The common theme for those who did not support the change felt that larger fish needed additional protection to allow for increased spawning potential, that a minimum size should be considered, and that additional forage would help to improve growth rates. The common theme for those in support felt that most people release larger fish already, which is supported by staff data.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

19. Silver Creek (and tributaries) – Trout seasons and bag limits (*Seasons/rules pages 34, 35*)

Proposal: Remove or combine river sections to simplify restrictions on Silver Creek and its tributaries. Adopt year-round fishing below HW20 bridge.

Rationale: Angling restrictions on Silver Creek and its tributaries are among the most complicated in the state. Fish population monitoring information suggests 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 voluntary catch-and-release fishing, proposed changes in angling restrictions are not expected to affect trout populations. This proposal would reduce the number of sections of different regulations within the mainstem from 4 to 2, while still allowing harvest opportunity downstream of Highway 20 and retaining the “fly-fishing only” rules upstream of the HW20 Bridge west of Picabo near mile marker 187.2. In addition, Silver Creek’s tributary sections and exceptions would be reduced from 3 to 1 using the trophy-trout rules.

We collected public input on these proposed changes:

- From HW20 bridge (west of Picabo) downstream to the mouth, open year-round, trout limit 2, none between 12 and 16 inches
- From HW20 upstream to Grove/Stalker creeks (except Kilpatrick Pond), adopt the current seasons/limits from the Nature Conservancy Preserve to the whole section (Saturday of Memorial Day – Nov 30)
- Kilpatrick Pond remains unchanged with current seasons
- Combine tributaries on the Hayspur Fish Hatchery property and those outside the Nature Conservancy Preserve under the same trophy-trout rules

Total web survey responses: 84. Option A (simplify rules): 66 (79%), Option B (keep it as is): 11 (13%), Neither: 7 (8%)

Comment summary: The common themes for those who chose option B (keep as is) or didn’t like either option was to “rest the fishery” by closing from April 1st through Memorial weekend and to restrict harvest completely or reduce it further. Others also mentioned closing Kilpatrick Pond at the same time the fishery upstream of Highway 20 occurs on November 30th. A similar number of comments were received that supported keeping the winter “pond” fishery open.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed, Option A (simplify rules)

20. Big Wood River & Magic Reservoir– Smallmouth bass bag limits *(Seasons/rules pages 33)*

Proposal: Remove length 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, including the Richfield Canal and all tributaries. Additional harvest of smallmouth bass may slow expansion of this nonnative predator and limit negative effects to preferred sportfishes and native species throughout the watershed.

Total web survey responses: 66. Yes: 55 (83%), No: 10 (15%), Don’t like either alternative: 1 (2%)

One person commented asking for restrictive rules, specifically a slot limit between 12 and 15” but to allow unlimited harvest under 12” and only one over 15”. Other comments received were centered around support for the proposal. Specific comments such as “I like slowing the expansion of bass in the Big Wood system” and “Get them out of Magic Reservoir.”

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

Southeast Region Proposals

21. Blackfoot River and tributaries – Cutthroat Trout seasons and bag limits

(Seasons/rules pages 38)

Proposal: 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 the trout regulation throughout the drainage by implementing a basin-wide daily bag limit of 6 trout, no harvest of cutthroat trout. This proposal would also increase angler opportunity in the upper river by expanding the fishing season by 5 months by moving the closure date from December 1 to May 1. This proposal would implement strategies identified in the current Fish Management Plan and Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Management plans to reduce harvest below Blackfoot Reservoir and improve the population in that reach. This proposal would also increase angler opportunity in the upper river by expanding the fishing season by 5 months by moving the closure date from December 1 to May 1. The proposed season change still protects cutthroat trout 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.

Option A: Simplify and increase opportunity.

Section: From the mouth to Blackfoot Reservoir including tributaries: trout limit 6, no harvest of Cutthroat Trout

Section: Upstream of Blackfoot Reservoir (including tributaries):

- May 1 through June 30 – closed to fishing
- No bait allowed

Option B: Keep existing (allow harvest of cutthroat below Blackfoot Reservoir, shorter seasons and barbless hooks above)

Section: From the mouth to Blackfoot Reservoir: trout limit 6

Section: Upstream of Blackfoot Reservoir (including tributaries):

- December 1 through June 30 – closed to fishing
- No bait allowed, barbless hooks required

Total web survey responses: 78; Option A: 49 (76%), Option B: 14 (18%), Neither: 5 (6%)

Of the anglers that didn't support either option, several indicated they would prefer the same rules above and below the reservoir, one preferred to retain barbless hooks, and one suggested a 2-fish limit (for trout and bass) on the reservoir.

Staff recommendation: Adopt Option A

Upper Snake Region Proposals

22. Henrys Fork Snake River – Trout bag limits (*Seasons/rules pages 43*)

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, but maintain the same seasons and overall daily bag limit of 6.

Rationale: The 16-inch minimum length and bag limit (only 2 cutthroat trout per day) restrictions were adopted to protect juvenile cutthroat trout. However, this section of the Henrys Fork Snake River is managed as a general fishery that includes 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 indicated that cutthroat trout in this reach mostly exceed 16 inches; therefore, the current regulation does not align with the management direction for this river reach. Removal of these restrictions would make fishing regulations easier to understand by reducing exceptions.

Option A: Simplify the existing regulations:

- December 1 through Friday before Memorial Day weekend – trout limit is 0, catch-and-release
- Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through November 30 – trout limit is 6

Option B: Keep the existing regulation in place:

- December 1 through Friday before Memorial Day weekend – trout limit is 0, catch-and-release
 - Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through November 30 – trout limit is 6, only 2 may be Cutthroat Trout, no Cutthroat Trout under 16 inches
- Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

Total web survey responses: 75, Yes: 40 (53%), No: 28 (37%), Neither: 7 (9%)

Of the anglers that did not support changing this bag limit, we received 12 written comments. The majority of those comments (8) preferred that cutthroat trout remained catch-and-release, despite their low densities in this reach. Other comments preferred

cutthroat be a 2-fish limit, while others recommended more study on why cutthroat trout are not found in higher numbers in this reach.

Staff recommendation: Adopt Option A, simplify the existing regulations as proposed

23. Upper Snake Region – General bass bag limit (*Seasons/rules pages 41*)

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 or minimum length limit for bass, which is consistent with fisheries management objectives.

Total web survey responses: 59, Yes: 35 (59%), No: 18 (31%), Neither: 6 (10%)
Of those anglers that did not prefer either option, two anglers indicated they would prefer some kind of slot-limit, two recommended protecting Mud Lake, while two suggested higher minimum sizes to protect large fish and spawning adults.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

24. Mud Lake – Bass bag limit (*Seasons/rules pages 44*)

Proposal: Maintain a 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, an exception may need to be developed for Mud Lake. This proposed exception would set the daily bag limit as 6 bass. As the only water-supporting a quality bass fishery in this area, this exception would maintain quality bass fishing opportunity while still allowing some harvest.

Total web survey responses: 46 Yes: 36 (78%), No: 1 (2%), Neither: 9 (20%)

Of the anglers that did not support either proposal, there were 9 comments submitted. Four of the comments suggested the 6-fish limit was too high and should be reduced further to protect this quality bass fishery. Three comments suggested catch-and-release should be applied, while one preferred a slot limit. One angler expressed that we should not liberalize harvest on quality bass fisheries just to simplify regulations. However, the proposal does not change the bag limit from the previous proclamation pamphlet.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

25. Sand Creek WMA ponds – Season opening dates clarification (*Seasons/rules pages 44*)

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. Currently, an exception for these waters requires calling the Upper Snake Regional office to determine whether emergency short-term closures are in place, which confuses users. Additionally, IDFG human entry closure are in place to protect nesting waterfowl with closure dates that do not align with the existing fishing season. We propose that five ponds be managed within two sections, each with fixed opening and closing dates, offering better clarity for users and matching human entry restrictions with fishing seasons to ensure that a diversity of IDFG wildlife and fisheries management objectives are met. This would make it clear which ponds are open and when. This proposal would establish the following seasons on the Sand Creek Wildlife Management Area:

Sand Creek Wildlife Management Area

- Motorized watercraft prohibited

Blue Creek Reservoir, Sand Creek Pond #1, and Sand Creek Pond #2

- December 1 through Friday before Memorial Day weekend – closed to fishing
- Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through July 15 – no boats, rafts or float tubes
- Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through November 30: trout limit is 6; no boats, rafts, or float tubes allowed before July 16

Sand Creek Pond #3 and Sand Creek Pond #4

- December 16 through June 30 – closed to fishing
- July 1 through December 15, trout limit is 6, no boats, rafts, or float tubes allowed before July 16

Total web survey responses: 28, Yes: 25 (89%), No: 2 (7%), Neither 1 (4%)

This proposal received broad support; however, we received three comments where anglers still felt the regulations were too complex and the July 16 opening for watercraft was confusing.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

26. Henrys Lake – Clarify Brook Trout ice fishing bag limit (*Seasons/rules pages 43*)

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 14. This offers some harvest protection for brook trout, which are managed for larger sizes here. 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 a 25 fish/day bag limit during the catch and release season. This proposal will include brook trout in the catch-and-release trout limit during February 15-Memorial Day Weekend catch and release fishery.

Total web survey responses: 95, Yes: 77 (81%), No: 5 (5%), Neither: 13 (14%)
We received 13 comments from anglers that did not support either proposal. Of those anglers, most comments were not related to this brook trout clarification. Most of the comments focused on asking to close the ice-fishery (9 comments), including five anglers indicated they would like to see the January – May season closed, and two suggested closing fishing after February 15th. Other comments asked that no-bait and barbless hooks be required during the catch/release spring season.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

Salmon Region Proposals

27. Pettit Lake – Kokanee season and bag limits (*Seasons/rules pages 48*)

Proposal: Close kokanee harvest from August 8 through December 31 in Pettit Lake to reduce incidental take of ESA-listed Sockeye Salmon and align with a similar closure in nearby and similarly managed Redfish Lake.

Rationale: Pettit Lake is an important water for recovering ESA-listed Sockeye Salmon. Trap-and-haul efforts or release of captively reared adult Sockeye Salmon are and will continue to be emphasized to restore this population, similar to nearby Redfish Lake. This lake also possesses a small population of kokanee with small-sized adults. Anglers that target kokanee in this small lake would have a high likelihood of incidentally catching Sockeye Salmon after anadromous adults return to the Sawtooth Valley in early August. Due to the endangered status of Sockeye Salmon, incidental take limits are very low. Closing fishing for kokanee would not substantially reduce fishing opportunity as this fishery has very low participation; and on the positive side, would ensure that incidental take limits aren't exceeded. Furthermore, this proposed change would better align with regulations implemented at nearby Redfish Lake, that is managed similarly.

Total web survey responses: 0

This topic was not identified during initial scoping and instead was brought forward by staff from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe's Fisheries and Wildlife Program during the

comment period for other proposals. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe is an important contributor to Pettit Lake fisheries management and operates the weir near the lake's outlet. Despite the lack of an opportunity for the public to comment, this regulation should be adopted due to the high possibility of incidental take of ESA-listed species and low amounts of kokanee fishing effort at this water, and its importance to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe.

Staff recommendation: Adopt as proposed

28. Statewide - Mountain Whitefish bag limits

Proposal: 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.

Total web survey responses: 157, Yes: 115 (72%), No: 26 (16%), Neither: 18 (11%)

Of the respondents that did not like either proposal option, 6 preferred more precise application of regulations only where needed, 4 preferred reducing bag limits even further, and the remaining comments were mixed.

Randomized Email Survey Summary: 2,893 people responded, 1,405 provided input on whitefish.

Option A: Whitefish is 10.

Option B: Whitefish Limit is 25.

Option C: I don't like either alternative.

Option A: 842 (60%), Option B: 454 (33%), Option C: 99 (7%)

- Statewide, 66% of respondents had not fished for whitefish during 2023, 22% had fished 1-4 days, 6% had fished 5-9 days, and 6% had fished 10 or more days.
- Of the 1,405 respondents, 70% indicated harvesting between 1-10 whitefish for zero days in 2023, 24% harvested between 1-10 whitefish for 1-4 days, 4% harvested 1-10 whitefish for 5-9 days, and 2% harvested 1-10 whitefish for 10 or more days.
- Of the 1,405 respondents, 87% indicated harvesting between 11-25 whitefish for zero days in 2023, 12% indicated harvesting between 11-25 whitefish for 1-4 days, 1% indicated harvesting between 11-25 whitefish for 5-9 days, and 1% indicated harvesting between 11-25 whitefish for 10 or more days.

- Regional differences in participation in whitefish fishing were slight. However, Only 22% of anglers from the Southeast Region fished for whitefish at some point during 2023, while 48% of anglers from the Salmon Region did so (48%). Participation in other regions was near the mean of 34%.
- There was little difference in harvest tendency amongst regional anglers with only a small percentage (5-8%) of anglers harvesting 1-10 whitefish for more than 4 days during 2023.
- Similarly, there was little difference in harvest tendency exceeding the proposed bag limit of 10 amongst regional anglers with only a small percentage (2-4%) of anglers harvesting 11-25 whitefish for more than 4 days during 2023.
- Anglers from the Upper Snake and Magic Valley were least supportive of reducing bag limits (53% and 56%, respectively) though still a majority, whereas anglers from the Salmon Region were most supportive (83%). All other region's anglers were 60-67% supportive of reducing bag limits.

Staff recommendation: Do not adopt.

Suggested Motion: I move the Commission adopt staff recommendations for 2025-2027 Fishing Seasons and Rules.