

Meeting Date: May 14, 2020

Agenda Item No. 5D.

Agenda Item: Spring Chinook Salmon Season Update and Modification

Bureau Chief Approval: JF

Prepared by: Lance Hebdon, Anadromous Fish Manager

Background:

This agenda item concerns the modification of Chinook salmon fishing seasons targeting adult anadromous Chinook salmon in the Snake River, Lower Salmon River, Little Salmon River, Mainstem Clearwater River, North Fork Clearwater River, Middle Fork Clearwater River, and South Fork Clearwater River. Though the pre-season forecast was for a low to average return, the expectation was to have sufficient harvest share to provide fishing opportunity in each of these fisheries. Currently, the run is coming in well below forecast. Staff is actively monitoring the strength of the returns as Chinook Salmon migrate up the Columbia and Snake Rivers and are assessing whether returns are sufficient to provide harvest opportunity after brood stock targets are considered. In addition to monitoring the run and assessing harvest share projections, staff is considering whether adjustments to fishing areas may be warranted to minimize any Covid-19 related public health risks associated with the fishery.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues:

Idaho Statute 36-104(b)2 gives the Commission the authority to make a rule or proclamation establishing seasons and methods for the taking of fish. Fishing Rules are provided in IDAPA 13.01.11

Public Involvement Process:

Public meetings to seek input on 2020 spring season Chinook salmon fisheries were held during February in Nampa, Cascade, Riggins, Lewiston, Orofino, and Coeur d'Alene. Idaho Department of Fish and Game Regional staffs hosted each of the meetings to provide information on 2020 projected salmon returns and to allow for public comment on potential 2020 seasons. The Department has also been communicating with community leaders to hear concerns related to Chinook Salmon fisheries in rural areas.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff will make a recommendation for season structure and/or modifications that reflect the current run strength while taking into consideration the health risks associated with Covid-19 at the time of the Commission meeting.

Justification:

Salmon and steelhead mitigation hatcheries were built to mitigate or compensate for fishing opportunity lost as a result of hydropower development. The proposed seasons would provide anglers the opportunity to fish for returning adult hatchery Chinook salmon produced at Idaho mitigation hatcheries.