

Quantity and Quality: CCA Advocates for Wider Ranging Fishing on the Columbia this Spring

Thanks to passionate CCA members and others who testified at Compact hearings and participated in the fisheries management process, you will have a lot more freedom to fish the Columbia this Spring. In a landmark change from last year, boat anglers will enjoy fishing the Columbia all the way to Rooster Rock and bank anglers will fish all the way to Bonneville. We faced a “combat” fishing atmosphere in 2010 involving dangerous overcrowding and jammed boat ramps so the goal was to develop options to allow recreational access to a broader area of the river and more large boat ramps. This year, CCA advocates worked proactively together with staff to improve the options to be presented at the start of the advisory group process. Staff responded positively and presented 13 options to the initial gathering of the Columbia River Recreational Advisory Group (“CRRAG”). One of these, Option #12, struck members of CRRAG as head and shoulders above the rest. The option would allow fishing seven days a week and address the boat crowding problem by opening the Columbia above I-5 all the way to Rooster Rock. Popular and accessible bank angling could also be enjoyed all the way to Bonneville under this Option. With the support of strong CCA testimony and a huge CCA turnout at the key Compact meeting, the CRRAG decided by rare unanimous vote to adopt Option #12, leading to its ultimate approval.

Option #12 provided the same number of days of fishing as the option to limit the season to below I-5. Since both fisheries would close the same day (April 6th), there would be nothing gained by bottling up the sport boats below I-5. Still some anglers wanted to know why the boat fishery could not be open all the way to Bonneville. The answer, unfortunately, is that the fishing is too productive just below the dam. Allowing that access would have slashed the season to only 3 days a week and cut the total days of fishing in half.

Setting the Columbia River spring Chinook season is no easy task. CCA has been fully engaged over the last three years opposing commercial gillnetting at night and advocating for a 30% conservation buffer to prevent overfishing and increase the odds of a full season for mid and upper Columbia sport anglers.

Unfortunately, forty percent of wild fish impacts still go to the gillnet fleet despite the fact that they are catching more fish now in the SAFE areas than in the main stem. This favoritism is no accident. Since the ODFW Commission has directed a greater share of our hatchery production to the SAFE areas, there is a de facto shift in allocation of our public resource to the tiny gillnet fleet. How this effects the sport angler is easy to see; pressure to shorten our seasons and restrict public fishing areas will continue until gillnetting can be put to an end. But at least for this year we see improvement in the size and quality of our spring sportfishing season on the Columbia even in the face of a smaller predicted run size. In other words, CCA and YOU are actively bringing about positive change by participating

in the process!