



## AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

### ISSUE 1

2026-27 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations and Adoption of an Ocean Endorsement

### BACKGROUND

The purpose of Issue 1 is to adopt the biennial sport fishing regulations for 2026-2027.

The sportfishing regulations establish seasons, bag limits, and allowable methods for harvest of gamefish in Oregon. Because the abundance of salmon and many marine species fluctuates annually, regulations for many of those fisheries are established through separate Commission processes. The ODFW Commission considers changes to Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations on a biennial basis as part of an ongoing process of simplifying angling regulations, responding to changing environmental conditions, and improving the efficiency of Departmental processes.

ODFW staff developed the proposed 2026-2027 regulations based on input from ODFW staff, the Oregon Department of Justice (DOJ), Oregon State Police (OSP), Oregon Tribes, and the public. Most of the proposed regulation changes are categorized as housekeeping corrections, changes to simplify regulations, changes to serve a conservation need, or providing new angling opportunities.

### PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public is invited to contribute input on Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations to the Department throughout the year. This feedback occurs both on an ad-hoc basis and is received in various stakeholder forums. Input is catalogued and considered during development of the final proposed rule changes.

In anticipation of the Commission consideration of the proposed rules, the Department published the Notice of the Proposed Rulemaking (Attachment 2a), created a website with the proposed regulations, and issued a press release on July 29 notifying the public of an opportunity to comment on the final proposed changes (posted at <https://myodfw.com/articles/2026-2027-draft-sportfishing-regulation-proposals>).

Additionally, the public has an opportunity to provide comments prior to (in writing) or during (orally) the hearing that occurs at the September Commission meeting.

## ANALYSIS

Currently, the Department presents proposed fishing regulations to the Commission every two years unless changes are necessary to align with the State's wildlife policy. The proposal typically readopts the previous regulations by reference and incorporates any additional changes that may be needed. This year, staff are presenting proposals for 2026 and 2027.

In 2015, staff engaged in a substantial fishing regulation simplification process that included feedback from the public, stakeholders, and tribes. The result of this process has led to a significant reduction in the number of fishing regulation changes that occur each year. Because of this, starting in 2024 the Department moved to a two-year process to provide more consistency and help reduce public confusion with fishing regulations. The regulation book continues to be printed annually to allow for incorporation of new legislation, changes that the Commission may have authorized through separate rulemaking, and to correct any typographical errors.

The draft rules proposed by the Department are provided in Attachment 3a; these reference and incorporate the Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations book. The proposed changes for the Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations book are shown in Attachment 4. That attachment includes the unique proposal number assigned to each proposed change, a description of the current regulation and proposed regulation modification, the page number where the current regulation can be located, the type of regulation to be modified, the purpose of the change, and the justification for the change.

There are seventy-five proposed regulation changes. The proposed changes are categorized as follows: simplifications (twenty-seven), housekeeping (twenty), new angling opportunities (eleven), conservation need (ten), corrections to inadvertent restrictions (six), and consideration of climate change impact (one). These proposals were developed after extensive discussion and coordination with ODFW District staff, OSP, Oregon tribes, and the public. Additionally, related to the passage of HB 2342 in 2025, an ocean endorsement will be required to fish for any species (except shellfish, salmon and steelhead trout) in ocean waters. The ocean endorsement is in addition to, and not in lieu of, other angling licenses and tags required under the wildlife laws.

The proposed fishing regulation changes are summarized below.

### **Statewide**

There are five proposed changes statewide. There are two new angling opportunities. One allows spearfishing in rivers and streams for bass and walleye and the other allows the use of spring (basket/cage) type feeders when angling for Carp. There is a simplification proposal that helps define the Kokanee bag limits in each applicable Zone, and a proposed conservation need that prohibits the use of aquaria species as bait due to pathogen risk. There is one proposal to fix an inadvertent restriction on the crayfish open season in lakes.

### **Northwest Zone**

There are two proposed changes in the Northwest Zone, both for conservation need. The proposed regulations will close angling for sturgeon all year instead of allowing catch-and-release in Tillamook Bay and the tidewater reach of the Tillamook River. Sturgeon often concentrate in these areas and OSP has identified an increasing concern over poaching.

### **Southwest Zone**

There are five proposed changes in the Southwest Zone. In the South Fork Coquille River, there is a proposed regulation to remove the closure to all fishing from the USFS boundary near Powers to Coquille River Falls, including tributaries, and align with the zone regulations. This will provide consistency and provide additional angling opportunities.

There are four housekeeping corrections that are collectively needed to change the description of the location of an angling deadline due to the removal of Pomeroy Dam in 2024. This edit is needed to redefine the location of the deadline to a new landmark (the confluence of the East Fork and West Fork Illinois River).

### **Willamette Zone**

There are eight proposed changes in the Willamette Zone. Seven of the eight proposed changes are to allow Coho retention in areas of the McKenzie, South Fork Santiam, and Willamette (mainstem, Coast Fork, and Middle Fork) rivers. Increased Coho populations are allowing for increased angling opportunities. This has been implemented as a temporary rule in recent years. The October 1 through December 31 season will help with conservation and protection of spring Chinook and winter Steelhead in these areas. The eighth proposal in the Willamette Zone is to simplify the location description for the closed area near Cazadero Dam to help alleviate confusion, and a new map will be included to provide additional clarification.

### **Central Zone**

There are fifteen proposed changes in the Central Zone. There are eight proposals related to the kokanee bag limit. There was repeated confusion about the “bonus bag” language. The proposal will follow the zone regulations of 10 kokanee per day (or 25 kokanee per day where described in the exceptions). There are four housekeeping corrections that clarify location descriptions and correct an inadvertent error in Fifteen Mile Creek that will align the season with the zone regulations and provide consistency with neighboring watersheds. Three proposed changes are for conservation need; two are for catch-and-release of tiger trout and one will prohibit the targeting of bull trout in Odell Creek.

### **Northeast Zone**

There are four proposed changes in the Northeast Zone. Two housekeeping changes are proposed to clarify location descriptions. One conservation need proposal will allow Lake Trout to be harvested with no limit on size or number to possibly help with Bull Trout recovery. There is one proposal in consideration of climate change impacts that will close salmon and steelhead angling in the John Day River from the Mainline Railroad Bridge to the ODFW marker below Tumwater Falls. This is needed to address the protection of fish in this area as they are holding and

recovering from water temperatures that are often near critical thermal thresholds. This has been implemented by temporary rule the past couple of years.

### **Southeast Zone**

There are thirteen proposed changes in the Southeast Zone. Four are inadvertent restrictions including the use of bait in Crystal Creek below the confluence with Recreation Creek. This is a perch fishing area that was inadvertently affected by the regulation for artificial flies and lures only. Redband trout stage and spawn upstream from this location so there is no conservation concern to allow the use of bait to provide opportunity and restore a popular perch fishery.

There are three proposals related to conservation needs. Hatchery rainbow trout are no longer being released into Burnt River and Eagle Creek, so reverting the trout bag limit to the zone regulations will provide conservation protections for the wild trout populations. The proposal to shorten the season in Spencer Creek from October 31 to September 30 will protect the Chinook salmon that are entering the creek earlier in the fall.

Three housekeeping correction proposals include a location clarification in the Klamath River (to help specify the location of the closed area upstream of the Hwy 66 bridge), a location clarification above Hells Canyon Reservoir, and the addition of a new section in the Burnt River from the BLM property line to Unity Dam.

Two new angling opportunities and one simplification are proposed. There is a simplification proposed to remove the limit on brown trout in the North Fork Sprague River and Tributaries. This proposal provides consistency with zone regulations and the removal of brown trout in this area may provide a benefit to native fish. The proposed regulations for 2 trout over 20 inches per day in Thief Valley Reservoir and open all year for trout regulation in the Kirk Rd Bridge to headwaters section of the Williamson River will provide additional angling opportunities.

### **Snake River Zone**

There is one proposed change in the Snake River Zone in Hells Canyon Reservoir to remove the length limit on bass. Few bass exceed 12-inches in this area, and this change will provide consistency with Idaho.

### **Columbia River Zone**

There are twenty-two proposed changes in the Columbia Zone. Fifteen proposals are simplifications, most of which are to remove location-specific salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon regulations and instead direct anglers to look at [www.myodfw.com](http://www.myodfw.com) for the current regulations. The current regulations are modified by temporary rules each year creating much confusion and inconsistencies. These proposals will eliminate some conflicting information between the Sport Fishing Regulations book and the temporary rules and provide a consistent approach to communicating these dynamic fisheries.

Seven of the proposals are housekeeping changes to better describe the appropriate salmon and steelhead regulations in tributaries of the Columbia River. The current regulation describes a large reach of the Columbia River between Bonneville Dam and the OR/WA border. There are often different regulations in effect within that geographic scope. The proposed change would

align the regulations in the tributaries with the area in the Columbia River that is adjacent to the mouth of the tributary.

### **Ocean Endorsement**

With the passage of HB 2342 in 2025, the Oregon State Legislature granted the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission the authority to establish annual and daily ocean endorsements, determine where and when an ocean endorsement is required, and also set a fee schedule, which are being proposed (see Attachment 3a). An Ocean Endorsement is required to fish for any species (except shellfish, salmon, and steelhead trout) in ocean waters, and is in addition to, and not in lieu of, angling licenses and tags required under the wildlife laws. An Ocean Endorsement is included for free with resident Pioneer, resident Disabled Veteran, and Youth licenses, and will not be required on Free Fishing Weekends for all anglers.

### **Other Updates**

As staff continue to optimize the Sport Fishing Regulations book layout with the publisher, staff may need to make minor editorial changes to address clarity and consistency. Staff propose that the Commission authorize staff to make such formatting changes, to correct spelling or grammar errors, and to address inadvertent inconsistencies to improve overall readability.

## **OPTIONS**

Option 1. Accept the proposed rules and regulation changes as recommended by staff in Attachment 3a and Attachment 4, respectively, with an effective date of January 1, 2026.

Option 2. Modify the proposed rules and regulation changes, with an effective date of January 1, 2026.

Option 3. Reject the proposed rule and regulation changes.

## **ISSUE 2**

Adopt administrative rules to set a season for hatchery fall Chinook salmon in the Coquille River.

## **BACKGROUND**

The purpose of Issue 2 is to consider a limited season for hatchery fall chinook in the Coquille basin.

There are two hatchery fall Chinook programs in the Coquille basin, the Harvest Augmentation Program and the Conservation Hatchery Program. The latter was initiated in 2022 following approval by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. This program is intended to supplement production of wild fall chinook that have collapsed in the Coquille Basin, primarily due to smallmouth bass predation. Fish from this program are released in the upper basin and are not fin-clipped. This program will be reviewed by the ODFW Commission in 2026-2027. The

proposed fishery will not allow for retention of fish from the conservation hatchery program (i.e., these fish do not have their adipose fin clipped off, which is what anglers look for to determine whether a fish is a hatchery fish in a fishery).

The harvest augmentation program has been in place since 1983. The goal of the harvest program is to provide angler opportunity and historically the program has contributed hundreds of adults to the creel. Coincident with the decline in wild fish after 2017, the hatchery program also experienced significantly reduced returns as a result of several factors (infrastructure, release site changes, poor ocean conditions) that led to difficulties obtaining sufficient broodstock to meet the production targets. As a result of low returns, harvest of hatchery Chinook salmon was closed in 2021. Since the closure, efforts have been underway to improve the hatchery program, understand fishery effects, and reestablish a harvest opportunity. As a result of these efforts, returns of adults to the lower basin and hatchery have improved in recent history and are expected to be sufficient this year to allow a limited harvest opportunity with minimal impact on wild fall Chinook.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

In anticipation of the Commission consideration of the proposed rules, the Department published the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Attachment 2b). Extensive coordination has occurred with the Coquille Indian Tribe. There has also been outreach with the public, including media events and news releases. Additionally, the public has an opportunity to provide comments prior to (in writing) or (orally) during the hearing that occurs at the September Commission meeting.

## **ANALYSIS**

This proposal (Attachment 3b) is only related to the Harvest Augmentation hatchery program and all references to hatchery fish in this section are for this program; fish from the Conservation Hatchery program do not present as hatchery fish in the fishery given they do not have an adipose fin clip. The proposal allows hatchery fall Chinook salmon retention in the Coquille River during the wild coho salmon season (September 13 to October 15) from the Hwy 101 Bridge upstream to the Hwy 42S Bridge at Sturdivant Park. The daily salmon bag limit would be two adult salmon per day, of which both could be hatchery salmon or could include one wild coho salmon (until the wild coho seasonal retention limit of 3 is met). No wild Chinook salmon may be retained. This fishery is expected to take advantage of a larger number of returning hatchery fall Chinook this year, while having a limited impact on wild fall Chinook.

The 2022 brood year marked the first significant release of Coquille hatchery Chinook salmon smolts upstream of the Hwy 101 Bridge since 2018 (Table 1). These fish are anticipated to result in an increased return of 3-year-old adults this fall, especially above the Hwy 101 Bridge. This is expected to provide a limited hatchery Chinook salmon harvest opportunity in the Coquille River. Broodstock goals are expected to be met from the hatchery fall Chinook salmon returning to the acclimation site at Ferry Creek (2 miles downstream of the Hwy 101 Bridge). Also, currently there are no trapping facilities and no feasible option for collecting the returning

hatchery adults above Hwy 101 Bridge, so allowing for harvest of the hatchery Chinook salmon is the most practical and beneficial use of these fish.

**Table 1. Total pre-smolt/smolt hatchery Chinook salmon released in the Coquille Basin, brood years 2018-2023.**

Brood year	Total fish released	Percent fish released above Hwy 101
2018	65,952	0
2019	66,116	0
2020	9,371	0
2021	78,808	2.6
2022	224,435	55.6
2023	161,985	54.1

In 2023 and 2024, ODFW and Coquille Indian Tribe staff conducted an e-creel during the wild coho seasons on the Coquille River. Anglers were interviewed and asked if they caught and released any hatchery or wild Chinook salmon during the coho fishery. Table 2 shows that hatchery fish represented most Chinook salmon caught and released for these two seasons.

**Table 2. Number of Chinook salmon caught and released in the Coquille River during the coho fishery, as estimated from the wild coho salmon e-creel.**

Year	Hatchery Chinook salmon	Wild Chinook salmon
2023	39	26
2024	54	24

The 2025 pre-season forecast for wild fall Chinook salmon (574) is estimated to be similar to the 2023 and 2024 spawner abundance estimates (633 and 341, respectively). Due to this, it is anticipated that the number of wild fall Chinook salmon encountered and released in 2025 during the coho and proposed hatchery fall Chinook fisheries will be similar to those observed the last two years. So, there are expected to be limited encounters and impacts of the fisheries on wild fall Chinook (i.e., estimated to be 4 or fewer incidental catch-and-release mortalities). However, due to the increased release in hatchery smolts since 2022, the number of returning adult hatchery Chinook salmon available for harvest is expected to be higher than in previous years.

## OPTIONS

Option 1. Accept the proposed rule change as recommended by staff in Attachment 3b, with an effective date of September 13, 2025 (upon filing).

Option 2. Modify the proposed rule change, with an effective date of September 13, 2025 (upon filing).

Option 3. Reject the proposed rule change.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION: ISSUE 1**

Option 1. Accept the proposed rule and regulation changes as recommended by staff in Attachment 3a and Attachment 4, respectively, with an effective date of January 1, 2026.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION: ISSUE 2**

Option 1. Accept the proposed rule change as recommended by staff in Attachment 3b, with an effective date of September 13, 2025 (upon filing).

### **DRAFT MOTION:**

Issue 1: I move to amend OAR Chapter 635 Divisions 011, 013, 014, 016, 017, 018, 019, 021, 023, 024, and 039 as proposed by staff in Attachment 3a, and I move to adopt modifications to regulations proposed by staff as described in Attachment 4. I also authorize staff to update the necessary calendar dates and make formatting changes, to correct spelling or grammar errors, and to address inadvertent inconsistencies to improve readability.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** January 1, 2026

Issue 2: I move to adopt the staff recommendations to allow for harvest opportunity for hatchery Chinook salmon in the Coquille River as proposed by staff in Attachment 3b.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** Upon filing (September 13, 2025)