

**From:** [Heath Heikkila](#)  
**To:** [ODFW Commission \\* ODFW](#); [CLEMENTS Shaun \\* ODFW](#); [COLBERT Debbie L \\* ODFW](#)  
**Cc:** [TATE Michelle L \\* ODFW](#); [Evan Burck](#)  
**Subject:** Sandy River Sanctuary Boundary  
**Date:** Wednesday, December 10, 2025 4:09:38 PM  
**Attachments:** [Sandy River Sanctuary Request Letter 9-3-25.pdf](#)  
[Additional Sandy River Images.docx](#)

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Commissioners, Director Colbert, and Deputy Director Clements–

I appreciate the opportunity to provide comment during the Friday, December 12, Public Forum time during the December Commission meeting. I wanted to resend the September 3, 2025 letter sent by CCA Oregon on the matter, as well as additional images that support the need for changing the boundary of the current commercial fishing sanctuary at the mouth of the Sandy River. This action is needed because:

- In recent decades, the flow from the eastern mouth of the Sandy River has shifted due to habitat restoration projects and natural causes.
- During low flows, which are typical during the summer and fall months when commercial gillnetting takes place in the area, the current sanctuary boundary provides little protection (in fact, it is likely on dry land – see attached image).
- The current sanctuary boundary appears to end at the westernmost channel of the eastern mouth, but it does not include outflows upriver of that area.
- During low flows, the Sandy River often flows towards the east (upriver), including behind Gary Island.
- Local residents have witnessed commercial fishing activity immediately upriver of the eastern mouth (approx. river mile 123/124), where fish returning to the Sandy River are staging.

After reviewing these images and the current boundary, we hope the Commission and ODFW will look to expand the sanctuary boundary well above the eastern mouth of the Sandy – to include some or all of Gary Island. This would be more easterly than the suggested boundary we provided in our September 3, 2025 letter. However, after reviewing the attached images, we came to the conclusion that this more easterly boundary would be prudent.

Thank you for your consideration.

Heath Heikkila  
on behalf of CCA Oregon

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September 3, 2025

Dr. Debbie Colbert, Director  
Mrs. Mary Wahl, Commission Chair  
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
4034 Fairview Industrial Drive SE  
Salem, OR 97302

Director Colbert and Chair Wahl,

RE: SANDY RIVER COMMERCIAL GILLNET SANCTUARY

We respectfully request an urgent review and modification of the current boundary of the Sandy River commercial gillnet sanctuary, which we believe is inadequate to protect salmon staging to return to the Sandy River.

As you know, gillnet sanctuaries exist to protect salmon that are staging at the mouths of tributaries. Salmon congregate at these areas for two primary reasons: waiting at the mouth of their natal stream until water conditions are conducive for them to migrate upstream or upriver bound fish that may dip into the area to find cold water refugia.

The Sandy River is somewhat unique in that it has two mouths, or areas where it flows into the Columbia River. The westerly mouth was historically the only migration corridor into the Sandy River. However, after a large salmon restoration project was completed a secondary mouth of the Sandy River was created upstream – creating a new easterly migration corridor for salmon to access the Sandy River.

Unfortunately, the current Sandy River sanctuary is insufficient to protect salmon staging at the easterly mouth of the Sandy River. During low flows, which are typical this time of year, a significant portion of the Sandy River flows into the Columbia at the easterly mouth. When flows are low, which is when gillnets are fishing this area, the easterly end of the sanctuary is dry or swampy land – it is not a salmon migration corridor. As such, the salmon migration corridor and staging areas are not protected by the current sanctuary.

The eastern end of the sanctuary should be expanded in two ways: into the mainstem Columbia River and above the easterly mouth of the Sandy River. This will help ensure that

the sanctuary includes the salmon migration corridor during low flows. Below is an image that roughly illustrates the current boundary (in yellow) and a suggested expanded boundary (in red) to provide protection for those fish staging at the easterly mouth of the Sandy River. The area highlighted in yellow is dry or swampy land that salmon do not migrate through during low flows.

Given the urgent nature of this matter, we respectfully ask that you consider an emergency rule to provide additional protection during this current fall fishing season.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Pat Hoglund

CCA Oregon Executive Director





