December 12, 2025

Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission

Good morning, Chair Wahl, Commissioners and Director Colbert,

For the record my name is Dave Schamp. I live in Lebanon, Oregon and am here representing the Oregon Chapter of the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA).

We are encouraged that the Commission is showing an interest in reviewing the barbless hook requirement on the Columbia River. The barbless hook rule implemented as part of the Columbia River Reforms continues to be a major concern and basis of complaint by our members.

Science suggests that there are no appreciable conservation benefits gained by using barbless hooks in freshwater salmon fisheries. ODFW has shown their concurrence by removing such restrictions largely throughout the state where they once existed, except on the Columbia. While we recognize the situation on the Columbia is unique and presents added regulatory challenges, it's time to seriously consider change.

CCA strongly supports eliminating the barbless hook requirement for winter, spring and summer salmon and steelhead fisheries in the Columbia. This should also apply to fall fisheries where the retention of wild fish is allowed (Zones 4 - 5 is an example) and these changes should be implemented as soon as possible.

Because lower river fall fisheries could be subject to adjustments in the post-release mortality rate possibly resulting in less days on the water in lower river fisheries, CCA feels it's important to better understand possible implications. To provide decision makers, and users, a clearer picture, ODFW should conduct modeling to determine what impact a return to the higher release mortality rate would have on conservation and harvest opportunities before the Commission acts on the fall fisheries in the lower river zones.

Longer term, we urge ODFW to review the current hook-and-release mortality rate applied to fall fisheries, evaluate recent scientific studies, and consider initiating a new study specific to the Columbia River. CCA supported continuation of the Columbia River Endorsement which could be a source of funds to cover the cost of the study.

I have attached a one-page summary of CCA's perspective on this important issue along with a copy of very recent scientific analysis of C&R impacts on salmon and steelhead.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter. We encourage you to move forward as quickly as possible and offer our help and support.

Respectfully,

Dave Schamp, Chair Oregon CCA

attachments

Fish and Wildlife Commission to Review Columbia River Barbless Hook Requirement

CCA Oregon to comment at December 12 meeting in support of revising barbless hook rule

Key Points

- **The 2012 requirement was largely punitive in nature as studies show no conservation benefit associated with barbless hooks in freshwater salmon fisheries.**
- **Oregon and Washington already removed the barbless hook requirement in many tributaries, including the Willamette River.**
- **In 2019, the Washington Commission voted to make barbless hooks optional, but WDFW staff have chosen to maintain concurrence with Oregon's rule.**
- **There is little-to-no impact from removing the requirement in the winter, spring, and summer, while staff should be asked to model potential impacts to fall fisheries.**

Background

The barbless hook requirement was adopted over a decade ago by Oregon and Washington as part of the bi-state fishery reforms – despite numerous scientific studies showing that barbless hooks don't provide a conservation benefit in freshwater recreational fisheries for salmon and steelhead. In fact, these studies show that hooking location, as opposed to barbed or barbless, is the primary driver of mortality.

For most Columbia River fisheries, the Departments' own fishery models support the same conclusion. In fact, only one fishery – the lower Columbia river fall Chinook and Coho fishery – has been given a release mortality rate reduction associated with the use of barbless hooks (from 21% to 19%). This is likely due to the similarity of some of these fisheries, including the Buoy 10 fishery, to saltwater recreational fisheries where there is science to support reduced mortalities with barbless hooks.

Next Steps?

CCA Oregon supports ending the requirement for winter, spring, and summer fisheries since it will have little-to-no impact on conservation or fishing opportunity. For fall fisheries, ODFW should conduct modeling to determine what impact returning to the higher release mortality rate would have on conservation and fishing opportunities (i.e., less days on the water in lower river fisheries).

Depending on the result, the Commission could remove or revise the requirement in the fall, taking a tailored approach reflecting the differences between fall fisheries while maintaining fishing opportunity. Generally, barbless hooks should not be required in the fall when wild Chinook can be retained (Zones 4-5). In the longer term, ODFW should review the current hook-and-release rate applied to fall fisheries, evaluate recent studies, and consider a new study specific to the Columbia River. In 2022, a hooking release mortality study was finalized on the Cowlitz River funded by WDFW primarily with Columbia River Endorsement funds.

Recommendations:

- Remove the barbless hook requirement during winter, spring, and summer fisheries.
- Review and revise the requirement in the fall, taking a tailored approach reflecting the differences between fall fisheries while maintaining fishing opportunities.
- Review the current hook-and-release mortality rate applied to fall fisheries, recent science, and the need for additional scientific studies specific to these fisheries.

META-ANALYSIS OF STEELHEAD AND SALMON CATCH-AND-RELEASE SURVIVAL

IAN COURTER[1], MARK ROES[1], TARA BLACKMAN[1], KATIE KENNEDY[1], BEN BRISCOE[1], TIMOTHY COPELAND[2], THOMAS BUEHRENS[3], ANTHONY FRITTS[4], AND STEPHEN PHILLIPS[5]

[1]Mount Hood Environmental, 39085 Pioneer Blvd, suite 100 Sandy, OR 97055
[2]Idaho Department of Fish and Game, 1414 E Locust Ln, Nampa, ID 83686
[3]Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2108 Grand Boulevard, Vancouver, WA 98661
[4]Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 201 N. Pearl St., Ellensburg, WA 98926
[5]Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, 205 SE Spokane Street Suite 100, Portland, OR 97202

Abstract

Efforts to recover depressed stocks of steelhead and salmon in North America include implementation of mark-selective recreational fisheries, whereby anglers are allowed to harvest hatchery-origin fish but must release natural-origin fish. Catch-and-release (C&R) is generally thought to be an effective tool for conservation due to high survival of released adult salmon and steelhead in freshwater. However, estimates of C&R survival are necessary to approximate the number fish that perish after being released.

Studies designed to estimate C&R mortality have produced highly variable results among species and fish size classes, gear types, and environmental conditions. Additionally, beliefs about C&R best practices have been promoted by recreational angling enthusiasts, though many of these techniques have little or no direct empirical support. Taken together, disparate studies with complex, nuanced findings and advocacy for principled restrictions on angling practices has led to diverse regulations, some of which do not provide a clear conservation benefit.

Mount Hood Environmental has collaborated with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to develop a metadatabase[1] representing data collected in rivers throughout Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. This database is a near-comprehensive collection of currently available data for salmon and steelhead C&R in freshwater made public through a user-friendly web application. The metadatabase was analyzed to estimate effects of C&R and use of different terminal tackle types on survival for steelhead trout, Chinook Salmon, and Coho Salmon within 48-hours of C&R.

We found that survival of angled steelhead and Coho was very similar to survival of control fish, indicating no detectable effect of angling (Figure 1). However, survival of angled Chinook Salmon was approximately 9.4% lower than non-angled Chinook. Terminal tackle type, including barbed hooks, did not influence survival, but hooking location did (Figures 2 and 3).

[1] https://mounthoodenvironmental.shinyapps.io/CatchReleaseDatabase

These findings are useful for assessing trade-offs between conservation measures and harvest opportunity when defining fishing regulations in mark-selective salmon and steelhead fisheries. Specifically for steelhead, our finding that angled fish survived at very similar rates to control fish suggests that impacts of recreational angling in freshwater are negligible. The difference between C&R survival of Chinook Salmon and the other two species warrants further investigation but may be attributed to greater effects of hooking location on Chinook survival.

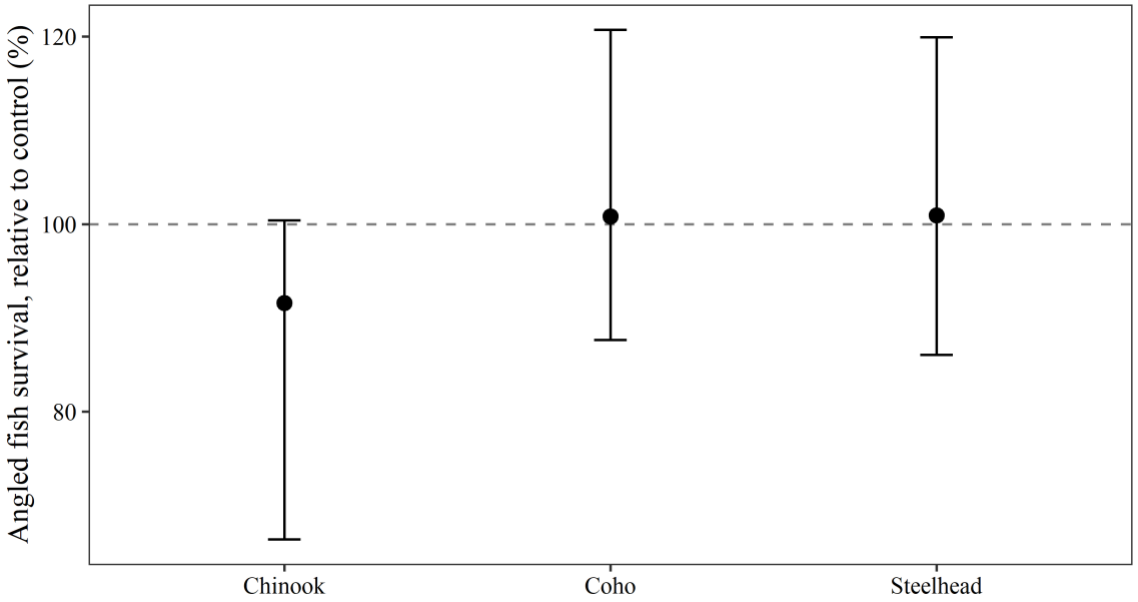

Figure 1. Predicted survival of catch-and-release angled fish from the base model, relative to control fish. Points are estimates, and error bars denote 95% credible intervals.

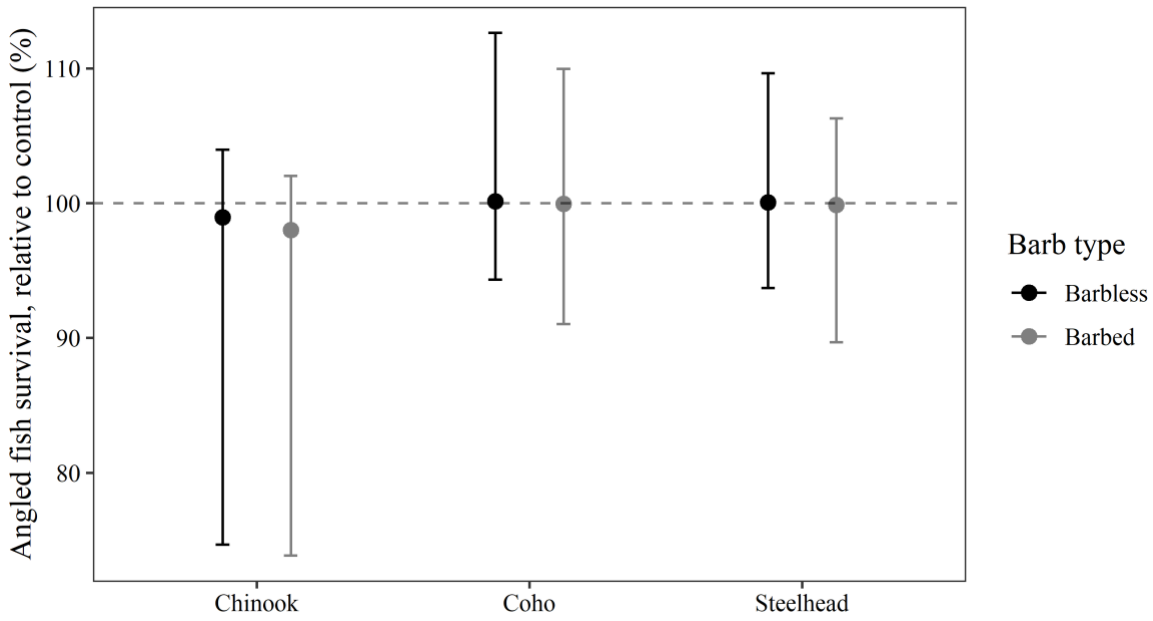

Figure 2. Predicted survival of angled fish relative to controls from the model expanded to include barb type.

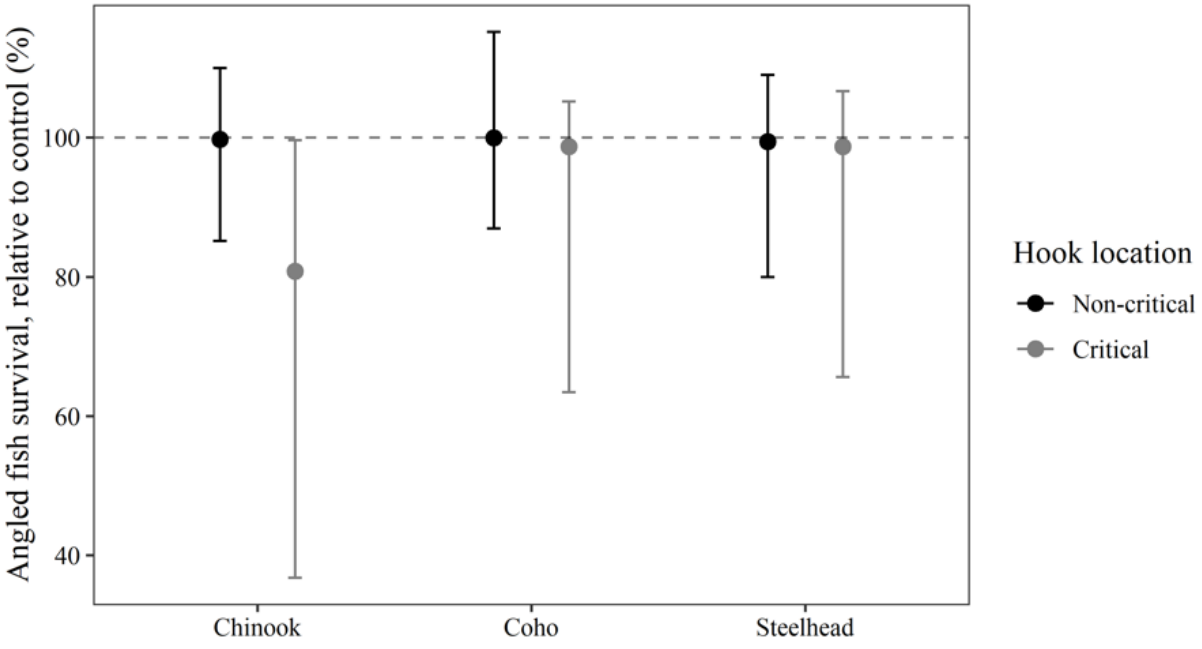

Figure 3. Predicted survival of catch-and-release angled fish, relative to controls, from the model expanded to include critical or non-critical hook location.