

States still apart on spring chinook salmon allocation

Seasons slated to be adopted on Thursday

By ALLEN Thomas

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The month-old impasse between Washington and Oregon over spring chinook sport-commercial catch allocations in the Columbia River remained unclear Friday, even after Oregon approved what might be a slight compromise.

In December, Oregon adopted a base-sharing agreement of 55 percent sport and 45 percent commercial, with 5 percent negotiating flexibility. On Friday, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission agreed on a 60 percent sport-40 commercial allocation, but give agency director Roy Elicker no room to negotiate further.

Last week, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a policy calling for a base sharing of 65 percent sport and 35 percent commercial.

Washington interim director Phil Anderson said Friday the commission has not delegated to him authority to negotiate with Oregon.

Anderson will ask the commission if they want to give him that responsibility, or if a subset of the commission wants to handle resolution of the states' differences.

"I've got to hold my nose a little bit," said Zane Smith, an Oregon commission member from Springfield. "I don't like denying our director ability to negotiate... Unlike Washington, we have been willing to compromise and I don't think they give their director any leeway."

The differences between the two states are getting serious, as they are scheduled to meet on Thursday to adopt the specifics of the sport and commercial seasons.

Anderson said he believes the seasons can be started, while maintaining enough flexibility to tailor the final catch to whatever sport-commercial allocation the commissions finally reach.

Spring chinook allocation is among the most bitterly contested of Northwest natural resource management issues.

That's because Columbia River spring chinook are, arguably, the finest salmon in the world. They fetch the commercials \$10 a pound when caught early in the run. The fish also fuel a huge sport fishery of thousands of boats a day on the Columbia in April, and all the related spending.

The feud between the sport and commercial sides is getting increasingly ugly. Carter Kerns, an Oregon commission member from Pendleton, said the speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives is withholding a hearing on a hunting and fishing license fee increase until Oregon adopts the pro-sport allocation.

"My vote cannot be bought, threatened or coerced," Kerns said.

Smith said businesses like Joes can sell a variety of products, while commercial fishing families are in economic trouble.

"Those representatives of the (sport) industry sitting in large urban areas have a lot of options," Smith said. "They can sell skis, hiking boots, coats, tires, wheels, batteries, all kinds of stuff. Fishermen are stretched to the limit now."

The fight over fish allocation is part of the urban-rural divide, he added.

“I honestly don’t think the urban people fully understand the consequences of some of these decisions,” said Smith.

Oregon commission member Skip Klarquist of Portland disagreed.

“I don’t see all fishermen as being urban or the sports-fishing industry as being urban,” Klarquist said. “I don’t think that’s a fair evaluation.”

The Columbia River Compact meets to set the specific seasons at 10 a.m. Thursday at the Clackamas County Historical Society, 211 Tumwater Drive, Oregon City.