

Washington holds firm on spring chinook

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The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission held firm on its insistence for more spring chinook salmon in the sport fishery this year, thwarting a move by its Oregon counterparts to increase commercial harvests.

In a telephone conference call Wednesday morning, Washington commissioners held fast to a 65 percent/35 percent sharing allocation (sport/commercial) agreed upon by a joint-state committee late last year.

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission is just as insistent on a 60/40 split.

"The Washington commission will not allow any seasons to be set until the allocation issue is resolved," said a department spokesman. "At tomorrow's joint state hearing, only public testimony will be taken on the possible sport fishing options."

That, of course, refers to Thursday's meeting of the Columbia River Compact, scheduled to start at 10 a.m. in the Museum of the Oregon Territory, overlooking Willamette Falls off U.S. 99W in Oregon City.

With both sides dug in, though, the issue of setting seasons is moot.

There are a few things that can be done at the meeting, such as some relatively benign sturgeon issues, etc., but the spring chinook allocation and season-setting apparently won't be decided.

The news was too fresh Wednesday afternoon for Oregon officials to react or even say whether Willamette River spring fishing seasons will be enacted any time soon.

Left undecided for too long, the states could ultimately find themselves in the very uncomfortable position of separate fishing seasons on each side of the Columbia River and, thus, loss of reciprocal license use in the river. In other words, Oregon anglers would have to stay on the Oregon side and vice versa for Washington.

That's probably less likely, though, than some adjustment in Oregon's thinking. Washington commissioners have been steadfastly unanimous in their backing of the joint committee's recommendation.

Oregon's commission originally split on the 60/40 figure (starting it at 55/45), but made few friends in its own conference call this week, criticizing critics who included Oregon legislators about to take up a sportfishing fee increase bill.

Commissioner Zane Smith of Springfield elicited a gasp from a listen-only audience in Clackamas when he said the sportfishing industry (specifically Joe's) could sell batteries and auto parts instead of fishing tackle whereas netters downriver were isolated from other income.

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