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October 6, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee Members

FROM: Windy Schoby, Fish and Wildlife Policy Analyst- Idaho, Kate Self, Fish and Wildlife Program Scientist

SUBJECT: Walleye Panel – State of the Science

BACKGROUND:

Presenters: Dr. Jonny Armstrong, Associate Professor, Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Sciences Oregon State University (virtual)

Andrew Murdoch, Eastern Washington Science Division Manager, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (virtual)

Marika Dobos, Fisheries Staff Biologist, Idaho Department of Fish and Game and Informal Walleye Workgroup Facilitator

Grant Waltz, Supervising Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (virtual)

Jason Vogel, Fisheries Research Division Director, Nez Perce Tribe

Dr. Matt Corsi, Fishery Research Manager, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Dr. Mike Quist, Assistant Unit Leader with the Idaho Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit/ Professor, Department of Fish and Wildlife Sciences, University of Idaho

Summary: Although walleye have been present since their introduction into the Columbia River Basin over 60 years ago, their abundance and distribution have increased dramatically in the Snake River over the past decade, including upstream of Lower Granite Dam. This expansion raises concerns about predation on both wild and hatchery stocks of juvenile salmon and steelhead, as well as lamprey, sturgeon, and other native fish that use the overlapping habitat for rearing and emigration.

Today's meeting will introduce the ecological effects of non-native and invasive species, review current state of the science regarding walleye in the Columbia and Snake basins, and consider broader food-web and predator-prey dynamics that may be contributing to their expansion.

Dr. Jonny Armstrong of Oregon State University and Andrew Murdoch of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will begin by reviewing findings from their paper, "Complementary prey phenologies enhance invasional meltdown: a case study in the Columbia River Basin". Marika Dobos of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Grant Waltz of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Jason Vogel of the Nez Perce Tribe will then present on current walleye research, trends and demographic data from monitoring efforts, and ongoing collaboration in the Basin. Finally, Dr. Matt Corsi of Idaho Fish and Game and Dr. Mike Quist of the University of Idaho will draw on their experience planning, implementing, and evaluating large-scale fish-predator predation suppression projects. Together, they will help frame a discussion of what is known, what remains uncertain, and where additional research, monitoring, and coordination could provide the greatest management value.

Today's panel is intended as an initial step in implementing the Program's Predator Management strategy in concern with regional objectives. By bringing this group together, the Committee can establish a common understanding of the current state of walleye, identify the most consequential uncertainties, and begin considering the information and coordination needed to support effective management actions. The goal of the series of presenters is to help the region discuss and identify the scientific and logistical needs, coordination efforts, and near-term actions needed to respond to this emerging issue.

Relevance: The 2014 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program had strategies for 'Non-native and Invasive Species' and 'Predator Management', both designed to evaluate potential adverse impacts from invasives, prevent their establishment and dispersal, support their removal and eradication and finally called for coordination and education with the region on efforts to track and monitor data on species distribution and movement.

¹ Walleye are native to the Great Lakes and Mississippi River drainage basins

² A sport fishery had developed in Lake Roosevelt, Washington, by the 1960s

The 2020 Addendum reinforced this direction, calling on Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation NOAA Fisheries, state fish and wildlife agencies and Columbia Basin tribes to adequately sustain and support efforts to reduce, increase and revise predation efforts as necessary.

These ideas were reinforced and significantly expanded upon in the recently adopted [2026 Fish and Wildlife Program](#). Updated measures focused on predator fish and, for the first time, specifically addresses walleye. These measures are primarily contained within the Predator Management strategy with related ecosystem implications being echoed through the Non-Native and Invasive Species strategy and the Habitat Restoration and Protection strategy. Perhaps most importantly, Predator Management was included as a Priority for Near-Term Implementation in the 2026 Program.

The Program calls for effective assessment and management of predation in the areas most likely to increase salmon and steelhead survival. It also recognizes the importance of understanding whether predation may offset biological benefits achieved through substantial regional investments in habitat, hatcheries, fish passage, spill, flow and other mitigation measures.

The expanding presence of walleye in the Snake River provides a timely opportunity to implement this Program direction. Doing so will require coordination among the region to better understand the magnitude of the issue and identify research, monitoring, and management actions that may be warranted.

Predator management requires more program resources and efforts year by year. It will require substantial investment by those involved in the program, including the Council, Bonneville Power Administration, the Corps of Engineers, state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, tribes, and others. The region must work together to continue developing a more effective systemwide, ecosystem-based approach for assessing and addressing the impacts of fish, avian, and pinniped predation on salmon and steelhead and other fish species important to the Program.

Background: Outside of their native range¹, walleye are effective and opportunistic predators that can collapse local fisheries and food webs. Authorized and unauthorized introductions of walleye have been widespread due to their prized value as sportfish and table fare. While management objectives differ by waterbody, walleye are classified as a gamefish by Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Walleye spread throughout the Columbia River basin following an unauthorized introduction to Lake Roosevelt in the mid-20th century².

¹ Walleye are native to the Great Lakes and Mississippi River drainage basins

² A sport fishery had developed in Lake Roosevelt, Washington, by the 1960s

What is changing is the distribution and apparent abundance of walleye in portions of the Snake River and the increasing overlap with migrating and rearing salmon, steelhead, lamprey, and other native fishes. At the same time, emerging research is improving the region's understanding of the ecological conditions that may contribute to the establishment and expansion of non-native predators. This includes work examining how food-web dynamics, prey availability and phenology, reservoir conditions, and interactions among non-native species may influence predator populations and their impacts on native fishes.

Important questions remain regarding walleye abundance, distribution, and movement; the magnitude, timing, and location of predation impacts; food-web and predator-prey dynamics; and the feasibility and effectiveness of potential management actions. Regional fish and wildlife managers are already collaborating to improve this understanding through monitoring, research, tagging, and other efforts through an informal Walleye Workgroup.

The recent expansion of walleye into portions of the Snake River warrants improved scientific understanding while the region still has an opportunity to evaluate potential responses and develop coordinated management approaches.

In response to the urgency of the matter, the three states have collaboratively adopted this Policy Statement: **Idaho, Oregon and Washington (three States) consider walleye in the Snake River from the mouth to Hells Canyon Dam as an incompatible species with native salmonids. The presence of walleye within this reach compromises salmon and steelhead recovery. In response, the three States plan research and management actions aimed at reducing the walleye population. To help support these efforts, we encourage anglers to harvest the walleye they encounter.**

Research and monitoring can proceed alongside consideration of near-term actions rather than waiting for all scientific uncertainties to be resolved.

More information:

- [Armstrong, Jonathan B., et al. "Complementary prey phenologies enhance invasional meltdown: a case study in the Columbia River Basin." *Biological Invasions* 28.4 \(2026\): 90.](#)
- March 2024 Fish and Wildlife Committee Presentation: [Expansion of Non-native Walleye: Another Threat to Salmon and Steelhead](#): Marika Dobos and Dr. John Powell, Idaho Department of Fish and Game ([link](#) | [video](#))
- [A Review of Predation Impacts and Management Effectiveness for the Columbia River Basin \(ISRP 2019\)](#)

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