

# Wild Stocks Of Fish Get Top Priority

**By KEN DURBIN**  
The Fish and Wildlife Commission has adopted a policy giving wild stocks of fish "first and highest consideration" in its management programs. The exact wording has undergone a gradual meta-

morphosis during the past several months. It was first drafted by staff fishery biologists in the Fish and Wildlife Department, then modified in several public workshops and in response to suggestions received in the mail. Finally, it was amended slightly again

by the Fish and Wildlife Commission in adopting it at a recent meeting in Portland. As finally passed, the policy reads like this: "The protection and enhancement of wild stocks will be given first and highest consideration. Hatchery or

foreign stocks of fish will be released only where deemed necessary to provide optimum benefits from the resource. Management options in priority order, harvest strategies, and other constraints will be:

1. **Manage exclusively for wild fish:** Harvest will be regulated to maintain production potential, genetic integrity, and genetic and size diversity of the fish populations. Extra protection will be provided depressed stocks that are being revived.

2. **Manage for wild plus hatchery fish:** Harvest will be regulated so that added fishing pressure created by, and for, hatchery fish does not significantly reduce future production of wild fish. Indigenous stocks will be utilized as the hatchery product wherever practical. Competition between wild and hatchery

fish will be investigated and avoided to the extent deemed practical.

3. **Manage exclusively for hatchery fish:** Harvest restrictions will not be imposed to protect wild fish populations. Benefits from hatchery fish will be maximized.

"The following guidelines will be followed to carry out this policy. They will be implemented to the extent of available technical knowledge, funds, manpower, and cooperation of other public and private interests:

1. Aquatic and terrestrial habitat must be actively protected, rehabilitated and enhanced.
2. Written management plans will be developed for all waters of the state. The plans will identify physical and biological capacities, limiting environmental factors, and the fish management scheme best suited to each area.
3. Department management activities that may create substantial adverse impact upon wild fish will be made known and alternatives explained prior to implementation.
4. The Commission will periodically review progress in implementing this policy."

The Commission deleted another guideline which read, "The Department shall, within 12 months after this policy is adopted, establish a minimum of three streams, or portions thereof, to be managed exclusively for wild fish." Members said a short-term goal should not be part of a long-range policy. But at the same time, the Commission directed the staff to present a minimum of three streams of a quality nature for wild fish management exclusively by the time angling regulations are set this fall.

Wally Hublou, staff biologist in charge of the Department's fish management program, indicated the staff would do this and would probably also have written management plans ready by that time.

The policy was adopted to put more emphasis on the management of wild stocks and to spell out the use of hatchery fish in relation to wild fish. It does not mean hatchery fish programs will be discontinued or that anglers will see reductions in numbers of fish available for angling.

It does mean there may be regulation changes on waters that are selected exclusively for wild fish management that would prevent overharvest; regulations, in other words, that would balance harvest in these waters with the capacity of the individual waters to produce fish without stocking.

There will still be waters which, because they are not very productive, or where, because of pollution, habitat deterioration or other factors, can no longer support an adequate wild fish population. In these waters hatchery fish may be used in conjunction with wild stocks. In this case the hatchery fish would be used in a way to minimize impact on wild stocks and emphasis would still be on protecting the wild stocks.

Finally, there will still be waters that simply won't support wild fish, perhaps because of excessive water temperatures late in the summer, low water during a portion of the year, or other factors. In these waters hatchery fish could still be used to provide angling during part of the year.

The policy will mean a shift in fish management emphasis and changes in both angling regulations and management programs on some, but by no means all, waters.

Perhaps one of the policy's most important features is its emphasis on habitat. Wild fish management depends entirely on good habitat. Without that, it is impossible to have wild fish.

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