



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 15, 2016

Recreational Fishing Community Statement Regarding 2016 North of Falcon Salmon Season Setting Process

The inability of Puget Sound tribes and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to reach agreement on the 2016 Puget Sound salmon fisheries is an unprecedented failure of the North of Falcon season setting process. This failure leaves sport, commercial and tribal fishers all without fishing opportunity this year, and leaves uncertainty on the long-term future of salmon fishing in Washington state.

Both tribal and WDFW negotiators involved in the 32-year-old North of Falcon season setting negotiation process have long been aware that the process was flawed. It is time for a change and an impasse in negotiations this year may finally bring about necessary improvements to a currently broken co-management relationship.

The recreational fishing community in Washington strongly supports WDFW and the strong, principled stance taken in this year's negotiations with the tribes. From the start of the annual process, and throughout the duration of public meetings and tribal discussion, WDFW held conservation as its primary concern.

"We especially want to express our appreciation for the effort of WDFW Director Jim Unsworth as he attempted to make the North of Falcon co-management process a success," said Pat Pattillo, spokesman for the Puget Sound sport fishing industry and former WDFW policy fish management biologist.

By working closely with the recreational fishing community, Pattillo said that WDFW constructed a scientifically sound and cautious fishing plan to address the predicted critical condition of coho and the ongoing ESA-listed status of regional Chinook salmon.

"Unfortunately, the tribes refused to consider WDFW's very reasonable plan that called for the tribes to craft similarly conservative seasons for their own fisheries," said Pattillo. "They instead focused on attacking the state's sport fisheries, demanding not only that WDFW close fisheries targeting wild coho, but rejecting the state's plan to meet its conservation priority by using proven management techniques such as mark-selective, or catch-and-release fisheries."

Agreement on conservation objectives was illusive, Pattillo explained, but the tribal rejection of WDFW's proposed fishing plan challenged a fundamental tenet of the North of Falcon co-manager negotiation process – respect of each party's needs and acceptance of the unique but different values placed on how fisheries are conducted. WDFW and the recreational community support the tribes' right to conduct tribal fisheries in any manner or by any method they might choose.

"Clearly the North of Falcon process needs a fundamental change," said Pattillo.

The focus on sport fisheries left little time to consider tribal fishing plans or to discover mutually acceptable management objectives to guide the process toward a decision. Unfortunately, WDFW didn't receive season proposals for tribal fisheries until the very last week of scheduled meetings. Once those plans were revealed, it was apparent that while calling for absolutely zero impact on coho in the state's fisheries, the tribes were planning fisheries directed at coho or that caught coho incidental to fishing for other species. If North of Falcon is to be a successful negotiation process for co-management in the future, then the parties must establish and rigorously adhere to schedules for effective engagement that prevent or avoid last-hour decisions.

"The recreational community urges WDFW to continue to pursue a mutually acceptable solution to the scheduled season-setting process, which resulted in an indecisive outcome this year," said Pattillo. "It is vitally important that the Puget Sound tribes and the state of Washington make fundamental changes to the North of Falcon process to ensure future success."