

NSIA

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. L



NORTHWEST SPORTFISHING
INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

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September 26, 2019

Heather Bartlett, Water Quality Program Manager
WA State Dept. of Ecology
Water Quality Program
PO Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Re: Washington State’s Proposed Changes to Water Quality Standards for Surface Waters of the State of Washington.

Honorable Heather Bartlett,

On behalf of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association (NSIA), I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed rule changes to Water Quality Standards for Surface Waters of the State of Washington (Draft EIS) to raise the total dissolved gas cap to 125% TDG in order help out migrating juvenile salmon and steelhead avoid powerhouse encounters. We appreciate the work of Ecology leadership and staff to adjust the standard to 125% TDG to benefit outmigrants, which will lead to greater abundance of adult returns.

NSIA is a trade organization consisting of hundreds of businesses and thousands of family wage jobs dependent on healthy fishery resources. For our businesses, the Columbia River is critical to the health of our industry. And like the Orca, our industry is suffering the consequences of greatly declining Columbia River salmon and steelhead returns. The 2019 spring chinook returns were only 60% of last year’s depressed returns, and less than 40% of the 10-year average. Sockeye and B-run steelhead returns are even more abysmal. These fish need bold action, as do the Orca, and the sportfishing industry.

This is why we testified last February, in Vancouver regarding our disappointment in only going to 120% TDG for 2019. This was a small, and long overdue correction to match Oregon’s gas standard, but only for 16 out of every 24 hours. The Orca are dying; our businesses are failing; we were asked to be bold by Governor Inslee, and a tweak that likely did not keep more baby fish out of the powerhouses was the best our region could muster for 2019. But, it was progress toward the appropriate spill levels.

Decades of empirical data compiled and analyzed in the Comparative Survival Study (CSS) demonstrate that smolt to adult survival rates (SARs) increase when spill is utilized to help smolts avoid passage through the powerhouses. I’ve attached Figure 2.10 from the December 2017 CSS Annual Review. Without breaching the four Lower Snake River dams, **only spill at 125% TDG 24 hours per day even approaches the four percent average SARs needed for long term recovery.**

Although we are disappointed in a spill test that does not meet the needs of the fish, Orca and fishing dependent communities, we understand that the region has agreed to a spill test to use 125% TDG at least 16 hours per day during outmigration. Therefore, we strongly object to the language in the proposed rule that reads:

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“A maximum TDG ((one hour average)) saturation level of one hundred twenty-five percent ((must not be exceeded)) calculated as an average of the two highest hourly TDG measures in a calendar day during spillage for fish passage. (B) To further aid fish passage during the spring spill season (generally from April through June), spill may be increased up to a maximum TDG saturation level of one hundred twenty-five percent calculated as an average of the two highest hourly TDG measures in a calendar day at the tailrace fixed site monitoring location.”

For decades the state of Washington held spill levels below what the State of Oregon and the collaborative science in CSS indicated was needed for outmigrants. We fear that requiring a ‘two highest hourly measures in a calendar day’ will have the same affect. Furthermore, this varies from the 12-hour average used in 2019 and used as a study design for the spill test. Simply put, we believe this language constrains spill, destroys the spill test, and will put more baby salmon and steelhead through the powerhouses. We trust this will be corrected for the benefit of the fish and for the integrity of the spill test.

As we have discussed with Ecology staff earlier this year, we remain concerned with the following language: “...the tailrace maximum TDG criteria applied at dams operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must be in accordance with legally valid Endangered Species Act consultation documents on Columbia River system operations including operations for fish passage.” We suggest Ecology work with the State of Oregon to find language that covers the intent of the sentence that is less problematic.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the rule change, and again thank you for your work on this important step to improve hydro management for salmon and steelhead. We look forward both increased spill and the regional conversations Governor Inslee is convening to discuss the full recovery of this amazing, salmon-producing river.

In Service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Liz Hamilton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Liz Hamilton, Executive Director
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association
503.631.8859

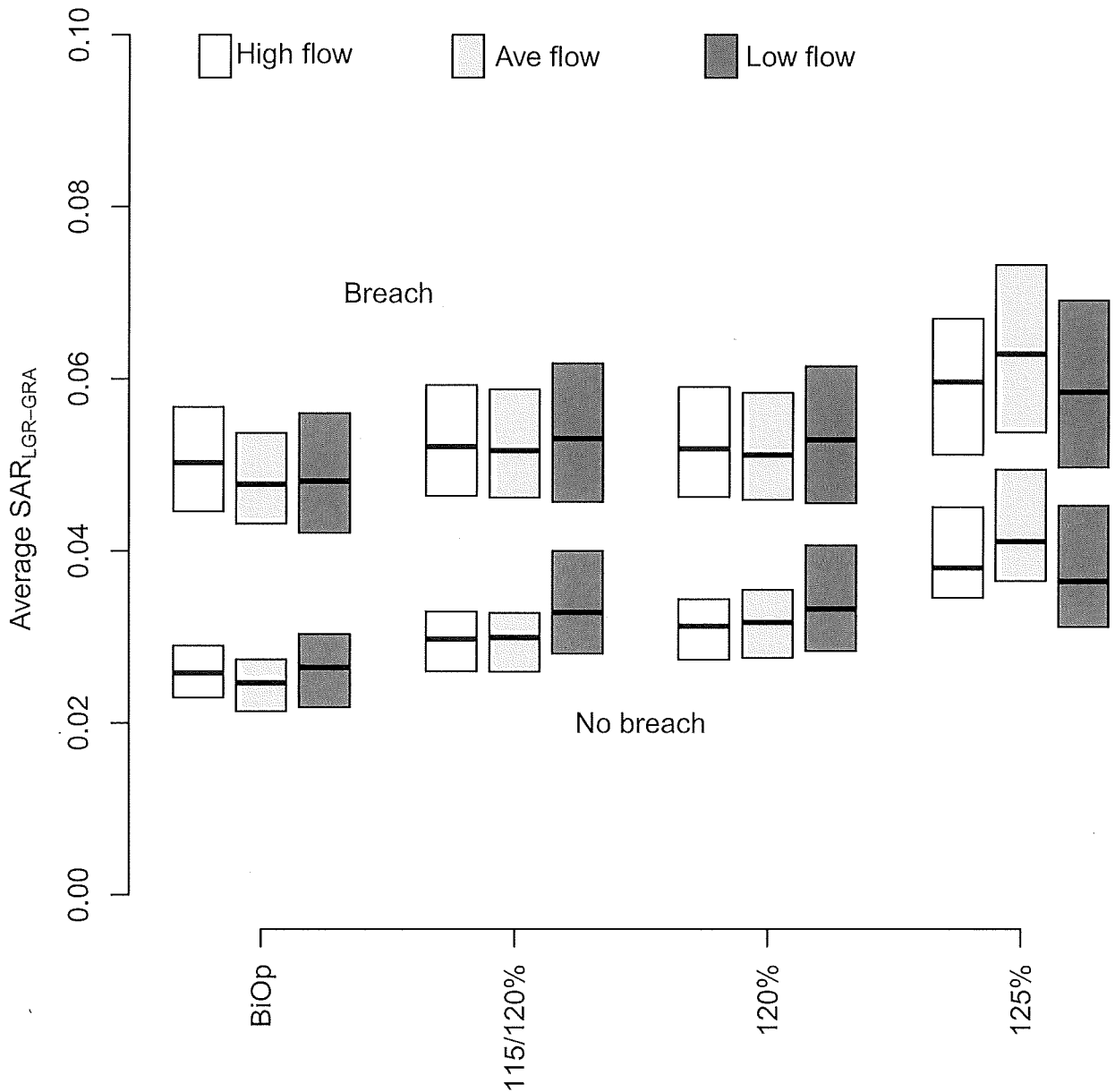


Figure 2.10: Sensitivity analysis of predicted long-term average SAR at LGR between 2036 and 2045 at all combinations of spill levels and flow levels. Each cluster of three bars represent high flow (white boxes), average flow (light grey boxes), and low flow (dark grey boxes). Boxes represent the 25%-75% quartiles. Median values are shown with dark horizontal lines inside boxes.