

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED
CHANGES TO CATCH SHARING PLAN
AND 2009 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a recreational halibut meeting to develop and consider proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Catch Sharing Plan for 2009, in Montesano, on August 19, 2008.

There was a considerable amount of discussion during the season as well as at the public meeting with regard to ensuring that the public receives adequate notice in advance of halibut season openers and closures. As most of the Washington recreational halibut fishing occurs in fairly remote areas, providing advance notice of season changes allows anglers to revise travel plans, as needed. To help facilitate this, WDFW is proposing to identify specific weeks preseason that would be closed to halibut fishing in both the North Coast and South Coast subareas. These closures are intended to provide staff time to tally the catch and provide notice for additional openings if sufficient quota remains.

Based on the public input we received, we would support the following changes to the 2009 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES, be approved for public review, in addition to the status quo alternative. Suggested revisions to the Catch Sharing Plan language to incorporate the changes below are provided in Agenda Item E.3.b, WDFW Attachment 1.

Washington North Coast Sub-area

For this area, implement the following changes:

- a) Remove the provision to divide the subarea quota between May and June;
- b) Restructure the season from three staggered days per week (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) to two staggered days per week (Thursday and Saturday); and
- c) Change the re-opening date in June from the first Tuesday after June 16 to the first Thursday in June.

Rationale –

a) Removing the quota split between May and June is intended to provide stability and reduce the number of inseason actions (i.e., closures and reopeners). The effort in the North Coast recreational halibut fishery has grown such that it takes a significant amount of halibut quota remaining to reopen the fishery for another offshore fishing day. The May season is usually scheduled to ensure that there is adequate quota set aside for June; as such, when there is not sufficient quota to reopen in May, any remaining quota is then rolled over in June. For the past couple of years, this has resulted in a higher allocation for the June fishery than what was specified in the Catch Sharing Plan (e.g., 43% in 2007 and 35% in 2008, rather than 28%). In the future, if the Area 2A quota is reduced and, subsequently, the North Coast quota is reduced, then this problem could be exacerbated.

b) Reducing the number of days open from three to two is intended to meet the intent of providing fishing days in June is preserved. The selection of Thursday and Saturday is intended to continue to provide one weekend day of fishing per week. By having only one

closed day in between open days, this also provides an opportunity for anglers to remain in port and continue fishing for halibut, if they so desire.

c) The season structure will provide fishing in June and provide opportunity prior to the opening of the salmon season, which typically occurs around July 1.

Washington South Coast Sub-area

For this area, implement the following changes:

- a) As an option, specify that the nearshore set-aside would be 10% of the subquota, or 2,000 pounds, whichever is less.
- b) Starting the third week in May the primary fishery will only be open on Sundays until the quota for the offshore season is reached
- c) Specify that the season will be open in the nearshore areas on Thursday through Saturday during the primary season and Thursday through Sunday after the primary season.
- d) Specify that, in addition to the South Coast YRCA, recreational fishing for groundfish and halibut is prohibited in the Westport Offshore YRCA.

Rationale –

- a) Setting a cap on the nearshore set aside ensures that the majority of the quota is reserved for the primary offshore fishery, which remains a priority; this cap is especially important in years with higher subarea quotas. On the other hand, by keeping the 10% specified, if the Area 2A quota is reduced and, subsequently, the South Coast quota is reduced, then the set aside would be proportionately reduced as well. The nearshore set aside is intended to allow anglers to retain incidental catches of halibut while targeting bottomfish in the northern nearshore area. It is anticipated that a set aside of 2,000 pounds will accommodate incidental catches, while a larger set aside is unlikely to be utilized by the fishery.
- b) Reducing the number of days open from two to one is intended to stretch out the season while continuing to provide one weekend day of fishing per week.
- c) Increasing the number of days that the nearshore fishery is open during the primary season and after the offshore quota is reached will allow access to the set aside quota and provide for the retention of incidentally caught halibut.
- d) The Council's approved Management Measures for 2009-2010 include a new YRCA in the South Coast subarea that will be closed to recreational halibut fishing effective January 1, 2009.

(f) SPORT FISHERIES

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The non-Indian sport fisheries are allocated 68.3 percent of the non-Indian share, which is approximately 44.4 percent of the Area 2A TAC. The allocation is further divided as subquotas among six geographic subareas.

- (1) Subarea management. The sport fishery is divided into six sport fishery subareas, each having separate allocations and management measures as follows.

- (i) Washington inside waters (Puget Sound) subarea.

This sport fishery subarea is allocated 23.5 percent of the first 130,845 lb (59.4 mt) allocated to the Washington sport fishery, and 32 percent of the Washington sport allocation between 130,845 lb (59.4 mt) and 224,110 lb (101.7 mt) (except as provided in section (e)(3) of this Plan). This subarea is defined as all U.S. waters east of the mouth of the Sekiu River, as defined by a line extending from 48° 17.30' N. lat., 124° 23.70' W. long. north to 48° 24.10' N. lat., 124° 23.70' W. long., including Puget Sound. The structuring objective for this subarea is to provide a stable sport fishing opportunity and maximize the season length. To that end, the Puget Sound subarea may be divided into two regions with separate seasons to achieve a fair harvest opportunity within the subarea. Due to inability to monitor the catch in this area inseason, fixed seasons, which may vary and apply to different regions within the subarea, will be established preseason based on projected catch per day and number of days to achievement of the quota. Inseason adjustments may be made, and estimates of actual catch will be made postseason. The fishery will open in April or May and continue until a date established preseason (and published in the sport fishery regulations) when the quota is predicted to be taken, or until September 30, whichever is earlier. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will develop recommendations to NMFS on the opening date and weekly structure of the fishery each year. The daily bag limit is one fish per person, with no size limit.

- (ii) Washington north coast subarea.

This sport fishery subarea is allocated 62.2 percent of the first 130,845 lb (59.4 mt) allocated to the Washington sport fishery, and 32 percent of the Washington sport allocation between 130,845 lb (59.4 mt) and 224,110 lb (101.7 mt) (except as provided in section (e)(3) of this Plan). This subarea is defined as all U.S. waters west of the mouth of the Sekiu River, as defined above in paragraph (f)(1)(i), and north of the Queets River (47° 31.70' N. lat.). The management objective for this subarea is to provide a quality recreational fishing opportunity during May and June. The fishery will open on the first Thursday between May 9 and 15, and continue 2 days per week (Thursday, and Saturday). Subsequent to a quota management closure in May, the fishery will reopen on the first Thursday of June. The fishery would continue as an all depth fishery on Thursdays and Saturdays, with allowance for a weekly closure to ensure adequate public notice

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of the in-season action. Subsequent to a quota management closure in June, the fishery would continue to be open on Thursdays and Saturdays as an all depth fishery if sufficient quota remains. If there is not sufficient quota for an all-depth day, the fishery would reopen in the nearshore areas described below:

- A. WDFW Marine Catch Area 4B, which is all waters west of the Sekiu River mouth, as defined by a line extending from 48° 17.30' N. lat., 124° 23.70' W. long. north to 48° 24.10' N. lat., 124° 23.70' W. long., to the Bonilla-Tatoosh line, as defined by a line connecting the light on Tatoosh Island, WA, with the light on Bonilla Point on Vancouver Island, British Columbia (at 48° 35.73' N. lat., 124° 43.00' W. long.) south of the International Boundary between the U.S. and Canada (at 48° 29.62' N. lat., 124° 43.55' W. long.), and north of the point where that line intersects with the boundary of the U.S. territorial sea.
- B. Shoreward of the recreational halibut 30-fm boundary line, a modified line approximating the 30 fm depth contour from the Bonilla-Tatoosh line south to the Queets River. Coordinates for the closed area will be specifically defined annually in federal halibut regulations published in the *Federal Register*.

No sport fishing for halibut is allowed after September 30. If the fishery is closed prior to September 30, and there is insufficient quota remaining to reopen the nearshore areas for another fishing day, then any remaining quota may be transferred inseason to another Washington coastal subarea by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline. The daily bag limit in all fisheries is one halibut per person with no size limit.

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Recreational fishing for groundfish and halibut is prohibited within the North Coast Recreational Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area (YRCA). The North Coast Recreational YRCA is a C-shaped area off the northern Washington coast and is defined by straight lines connecting latitude and longitude coordinates. Coordinates for the North Coast Recreational YRCA are specified in groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.390 and will be specifically defined annually in federal halibut regulations published in the *Federal Register*.

(iii) Washington south coast subarea.

This sport fishery is allocated 12.3 percent of the first 130,845 lb (59.4 mt) allocated to the Washington sport fishery, and 32 percent of the Washington sport allocation between 130,845 lb (59.4 mt) and 224,110 lb (101.7 mt) (except as provided in section (e)(3) of this Plan). This subarea is defined as waters south of the Queets River (47° 31.70' N. lat.) and north of Leadbetter Point (46° 38.17' N. lat.). The structuring objective for this subarea is to maximize the season length, while maintaining a quality fishing experience. The south coast subarea quota will be allocated as follows: 10% or 2,000 pounds, whichever is less, will be set

aside for the nearshore fishery with the remaining amount allocated to the primary fishery. Beginning in 2009, the fishery will open on May 1, if it is a Sunday; otherwise, the fishery will open on the first Sunday following May 1. The primary fishery will be open two days per week, Sunday and Tuesday, in all areas, except where prohibited, and the nearshore fishery will be open three days per week, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday in addition to any days that the primary fishery is open, in the area from 47°25.00' N. lat. south to 46°58.00' N. lat. and east of 124°30.00' W. long. Starting the third week in May, the primary fishery will be open on Sundays only until the quota for the offshore season is reached or September 30, whichever is earlier. Subsequent to this closure, if there is insufficient quota remaining to reopen the primary fishery for another fishing day, then any remaining quota may be used to accommodate incidental catch in the nearshore area from 47°25.00' N. lat. south to 46°58.00' N. lat. and east of 124°30.00' W. long. on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays until the remaining quota is projected to be taken. If the fishery is closed prior to September 30, and there is insufficient quota remaining to reopen the nearshore areas for another fishing day, then any remaining quota may be transferred inseason to another Washington coastal subarea by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline. The daily bag limit is one halibut per person, with no size limit.

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Recreational fishing for groundfish and halibut is prohibited within the two South Coast Recreational YRCAs. The South Coast Recreational YRCA and the Westport Offshore YRCA are areas off the southern Washington coast that are defined by straight lines connecting latitude and longitude coordinates. Coordinates for the two South Coast Recreational YRCAs are specified in groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.390 and will be specifically defined annually in federal halibut regulations published in the *Federal Register*.

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(iv) Columbia River subarea.

This sport fishery subarea is allocated 2.0 percent of the first 130,845 lb (59.4 mt) allocated to the Washington sport fishery, and 4.0 percent of the Washington sport allocation between 130,845 lb (59.4 mt) and 224,110 lb (101.7 mt) (except as provided in section (e)(3) of this Plan). This subarea is also allocated 5.0 percent of the Oregon/California sport allocation or an amount equal to the contribution from the Washington sport allocation, whichever is greater. This subarea is defined as waters south of Leadbetter Point, WA (46°38.17' N. lat.) and north of Cape Falcon, OR (45°46.00' N. lat.). The fishery will open on May 1, and continue 7 days per week until 70 percent of the subarea allocation is taken or until the third Sunday in July, whichever is earlier. The fishery will reopen on the first Friday in August and continue 3 days per week, Friday-Sunday until the remainder of the subarea quota has been taken, or until September 30, whichever is earlier. Subsequent to this closure, if there is insufficient quota remaining in the Columbia River subarea for another fishing day, then any remaining quota may be transferred inseason to another Washington and/or Oregon subarea by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline. Any remaining quota

would be transferred to each state in proportion to its contribution. The daily bag limit is one halibut per person, with no size limit. No groundfish may be taken and retained, possessed or landed, except sablefish and Pacific cod when allowed by groundfish regulations, if halibut are on board the vessel.