

SUPPLEMENTAL OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON INITIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2019-2020

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) proposes consideration of a change to the management of Oregon blue and deacon rockfish (BDR), Oregon black rockfish, and the Nearshore Rockfish North of 40° 10' N lat. stock complex for 2019-2020 and beyond.

Background

A stock complex is defined in federal regulation ([National Standard 1](#)) and the [Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan](#) (Section 4.7.3) as a group of stocks that are sufficiently similar in geographic distribution, life history, and vulnerabilities to the fishery such that the impact of management actions on the stocks is similar. Stocks may be grouped into complexes for various reasons, including co-occurring stocks that cannot be targeted independently of one another, where there is insufficient data to measure their status, or when it is not feasible for fishermen to distinguish individual stocks among their catch.

Currently, the Nearshore Rockfish North complex consists of black and yellow, blue/deacon (CA), blue/deacon (OR & WA), brown, calico, China, copper, gopher, grass, kelp, olive, and quillback rockfishes, and treefish. Within this group, there are some similarities and some differences between stocks in terms of the defining criteria for a complex. Blue and deacon rockfishes in particular may be significantly different from the more strongly benthic-associated stocks in the complex in terms of vulnerability to the fishery, ability of fishermen to selectively target them, and ability to identify them. In addition, beginning in 2019, the component ABC contribution of Oregon BDR to the Nearshore Rockfish North Complex harvest specifications, assuming the Council approves the 2017 assessment and the recommended harvest control rules, will be 103.0 mt – several times more than the next largest contributor (China rockfish, which will have a 2018 ABC of 26.8 mt), and even greater compared to the other nearshore stocks (2018 ABCs range from 0.0 to 10.6 mt). These factors warrant consideration of management approaches other than continuing to include blue and deacon rockfish in the Nearshore Rockfish North Complex beginning in 2019.

Alternative (1): Oregon Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex

ODFW proposes analysis of an alternative in which Oregon BDR are removed from the Nearshore Rockfish North Complex, and grouped together with Oregon black rockfish to create a new Oregon Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex. Black rockfish and BDR are a good fit for the definition of a stock complex. They are more midwater than many other nearshore species, which means that they are frequently caught together and it is extremely difficult for many anglers to target one without catching the other; their similar appearances can make identification and distinguishing between black rockfish and BDR difficult; and the impact of management actions is expected to be similar. Anglers and commercial nearshore fishermen report that BDR are less desirable than

black rockfish and therefore attempt to target primarily black rockfish; therefore, management in a complex with black

Beginning in 2019 there will be state-specific ACLs or ACL contributions for each of these stocks. This offers a relatively straightforward opportunity to combine them into an Oregon Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex, which could potentially reduce management complexity and provide some flexibility and stability to fisheries. There was uncertainty associated with both the 2015 Oregon black rockfish assessment and the 2017 Oregon BDR assessment, with some evidence suggesting that the assessment results are a conservative estimate of the absolute biomass of these stocks off Oregon. Both assessments resulted in a Category 2 designation, acknowledging the higher level of uncertainty and resulting in a larger ABC buffer (sigma) to account for this scientific uncertainty. If an Oregon Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex is created, the state of Oregon would then set harvest guidelines for black rockfish and for blue/deacon rockfish based on their component ACL contributions, and would monitor and track catch to enable management to these harvest guidelines (Table 1). The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission would continue to allocate these harvest guideline to the recreational and commercial sectors within Oregon, as is current practice.

Table 1. OR Black Rockfish and BDR ACLs for 2019-2026 (assuming approval of the 2017 assessment and default harvest control rules for OR BDR); and proposed combined ACL for an OR Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex.

Year	OR Black Rockfish ACL (mt)	OR BDR ACL (mt)	Proposed OR Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish ACL (mt)
2019	515	103	618
2020	512	99.8	611.8
2021	510	96.9	606.9
2022	508	94.1	602.1
2023	506	91.4	597.4
2024	504	89.1	593.1
2025	503	87.1	590.1
2026	502	85.5	587.5

Alternative (2): Oregon Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex

Another alternative would be to remove Oregon BDR from the Nearshore Rockfish North Complex and create a new Oregon Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex, for management as an individual unit. Because separate assessments were conducted for California and Oregon, and the relative proportion of blue vs. deacon rockfish is likely different between the states, it may not make sense to combine the Oregon and California (North of 40°10') BDR stocks, and maintain with state-specific specifications (OFL, ABC, and annual catch limit; ACL). This alternative may offer less flexibility than an Oregon Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex.

Alternative (3): Status Quo

Finally, a third alternative is to maintain status quo and continue to manage Oregon BDR in the Nearshore Rockfish North Complex. The Council and the states attempt to track and manage nearshore rockfish stocks to their component ACL contributions. Management in a complex affords the opportunity for increased flexibility, which can be useful when there are factors such as co-occurring stocks, similar fishery practices and management approaches, and uncertainty in stock assessments. However, large variation in the potential yield of stocks within a complex may lessen managers' ability to design measures suitable for the complex as a whole without creating too much risk or constraint (or both) for some component stocks.

In conclusion, ODFW proposes including analysis of two new alternatives for Oregon BDR in the 2019-2020 harvest specifications and management measures development process, in addition to status quo:

- (1) Combine with Oregon black rockfish to manage as an Oregon Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex, with state-specified harvest guidelines for the component stocks,
- (2) Create an Oregon Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex, and
- (3) Status quo: continue as a component of the Nearshore Rockfish North Complex.

It will be important to understand the potential implications of removing Oregon BDR from the Nearshore Rockfish North Complex, and of creating a new Oregon Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex or an Oregon Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex, on these stocks as well as those that would remain in the Nearshore Rockfish North Complex, and on the fishery sectors and communities that may be affected. ODFW extends our appreciation in advance to the Groundfish Management Team for their extensive analysis in support of the biennial harvest specifications and management measures process.