

## WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2018 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) met with recreational halibut anglers on August 28, and October 12, 2017. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for 2018, and refine the proposals adopted for public review at the September PFMC meeting. Based on those discussions, we recommend the following 2018 season structure and changes to the Pacific halibut CSP, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES. These changes are consistent with those adopted by the Council for public review. Proposed changes to the CSP are provided in track changes at the end of this report.

### **Statewide Season and Quota Management:**

1. Retain the current statewide season structure (i.e., manage the north coast, south coast, and Puget sound subareas under a common season with status quo quota management).

Based on the input we received, WDFW recommends the Council adopt the following season dates for the South Coast, North Coast, and Puget Sound subareas for 2018:

- Friday, May 11; Sunday, May 13; Friday, May 25; Sunday, May 27; Thursday, June 7; Saturday, June 9; Saturday, June 16; Thursday, June 21; Saturday, June 23; Thursday, June 28; and Saturday, June 30.

Rationale: In 2017, WDFW recommended and the PFMC approved a season structure that has consistent season dates for all Washington subareas except the Columbia River. The 2017 season was viewed as a success with regard to the statewide season approach and the majority of stakeholders continue to support the concept of consistent season dates. The final season date recommendations are the result of significant compromises and were developed with input reflecting a variety of opinions and issues of importance, from different operations (private versus charter) and areas (coast versus Puget Sound).

In addition to setting the 2018 season dates, stakeholders also overwhelmingly supported status quo allocation management where each subarea receives and is managed to achieve, but not exceed, its own separate allocation. Although we are not recommending a shared quota management approach, representatives from the South Coast and North Coast proposed a process that would allow stakeholder and WDFW consultation after the first few days of the season to discuss and assess any remaining quota in these two management areas with the flexibility to transfer fish between areas when there is general consensus of the areas impacted in an open transparent manner. No changes are proposed as this flexibility is already provided for in the CSP. There was not consensus from stakeholders in the Puget Sound subarea to follow a similar approach.

### **Sablefish Incidental Allowance:**

2. Revise the CSP to follow the status quo allocation formula but reduce the maximum amount that goes to incidental halibut retention in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis from 70,000 to 50,000 pounds when the Area 2A TAC is less than 1.5 million pounds. When the Area 2A TAC is 1.5 million pounds or more, increase the maximum allocation to 70,000 pounds.

Rationale: WDFW has been exploring potential changes to the CSP that would shift allocation from the incidental sablefish fishery to the recreational fishery. The intent is to provide some additional flexibility to recreational fisheries that are highly constrained by their allocations while not significantly impacting the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis. The status quo scaled approach that determines the allocation to the sablefish fishery would continue to provide for a minimum amount to the recreational fishery as a priority. However, this change would revise the cap to the incidental sablefish fishery from 70,000 pounds to 50,000 pounds when the area 2A TAC is less than 1.5 million pounds. This change will shift some halibut to recreational fisheries in years when the 2A TAC is sufficient (e.g., 2017). We expect this change to have minimal, if any, impact on the sablefish fishery as the revised lower cap is anticipated to continue to provide sufficient allocation to the primary sablefish fishery based on historical landing reports which show that incidental halibut catch has not reached 50,000 pounds since 2006 ([Agenda Item H.2, Attachment 1, March 2017](#)). The proposed change also allows for the cap to increase to 70,000 pounds when the 2A TAC is higher (i.e., 1.5 million pounds or more).

The proposal approved for public review in September was developed to minimize impacts to the sablefish fishery while adjusting the cap to avoid stranding quota and was supported by stakeholders during public meetings. Throughout our discussions on this topic, there was recognition of the history of this particular allocation and sensitivity to unnecessary impacts to the sablefish fishery, including turning retained fish into discards.

#### **Annual Bag Limit:**

3. Revise the CSP to implement an annual bag limit of four fish.

Rationale: The primary objective for an annual bag limit is to spread halibut fishing opportunity across more individual participants by reducing the amount of halibut that anglers can collectively retain. WDFW catch record card data from 2012-2016 estimates that 87 percent of anglers report catching two or fewer halibut per year while only one percent of anglers retain more than six halibut per year. However, the majority of the stakeholders expressed support for an annual bag limit with many in favor of going as low as two fish. Others would be comfortable with a higher limit and some want it to continue to be unlimited. Based on the data and stakeholder input, we are recommending phasing in an annual bag limit starting at four fish, reviewing the results and gathering additional public input to gauge the need for additional changes in the future.

#### **Columbia River:**

4. Revise the CSP for the Columbia River subarea to change the days of the week that the all depth fishery is open from Thursday through Sunday to Thursday, Friday, and Sunday.

Rationale: The intent of this change is to address increased effort in the Washington portion of the Columbia River subarea that has resulted in shorter season length in recent years. Stakeholders support closing recreational halibut fishing on Saturday to spread the season out over a longer period. This change would return the season structure back to being open three days per week that was in place from 2009 through 2013.

*EXCERPT FROM 2017 CATCH SHARING PLAN*

(e) NON-INDIAN COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

(3) Incidental catch in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis.

~~If the~~ Dependent on the Area 2A TAC ~~is greater than 900,000 lb (408.2 mt)~~, the primary directed sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis will be allocated the Washington sport allocation that is in excess of 214,110 lb (97.1 mt), provided a minimum of 10,000 lb (4.5 mt) is available (i.e., the Washington sport allocation is 224,110 lb (101.7 mt) or greater). If the amount above 214,110 lb (97.1 mt) is less than 10,000 lb (4.5 mt), then the excess will be allocated to the Washington sport subareas according to section (f) of this Plan. The amount of halibut allocated to the sablefish fishery will be shared as follows: up to ~~70,000~~50,000 lb of halibut to the primary sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis. Any remaining allocation will be distributed to the Washington sport fishery among the four subareas according to the sharing described in the Plan, Section (f)(1).

The Council will recommend landing restrictions at its spring public meeting each year to control the amount of halibut caught incidentally in this fishery. The landing restrictions will be based on the amount of the allocation and other pertinent factors, and may include catch or landing ratios, landing limits, or other means to control the rate of halibut landings. NMFS will publish the landing restrictions annually in the *Federal Register*.

Under Pacific Coast groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.230, fishing with limited entry fixed gear is prohibited within the North Coast Commercial Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area (YRCA) and the Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA). The North Coast Commercial Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area YRCA is an area off the northern Washington coast, overlapping the northern part of North Coast Recreational YRCA. The Non-Trawl RCA is an area off the Washington coast. These closed areas are defined by straight lines connecting latitude and longitude coordinates. Coordinates for the North Coast Commercial YRCA are specified in groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.70(b). Coordinates for the Non-Trawl RCA are specified in groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.73.

(f) SPORT FISHERIES

The non-Indian sport fisheries are allocated 69.3 percent of the non-Indian share, which is approximately 45.0 percent of the Area 2A TAC. The allocation is further divided as subquotas among seven geographic subareas.

- (1) Subarea management. The sport fishery is divided into seven 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. Season dates will be developed by the end of November each year for the following year. Seasons will open in early May and will be open up to two days per week and may include one weekday and one weekend day. Season structure will may include periodic closures to assess the remaining quota for the subarea. If sufficient quota remains, additional openings may be implemented. The fishery will continue until the quota is projected to be taken, or September 30, whichever is earlier. 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.). Season dates will be developed by the end of November each year for the following year. Seasons will open in early May and will be open up to two days per week and may include one weekday and one weekend day. Season structure will may include periodic closures to assess the remaining quota for the subarea. If sufficient quota remains, additional openings may be implemented.

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 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.

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 660.70(a) and will be described 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 south coast subarea quota will be allocated as follows: 10 percent or 2,000 pounds, whichever is less, will be set aside for the nearshore fishery with the remaining amount allocated to the primary fishery. During days open to the primary fishery and seaward of the 30-fm line lingcod may be taken, retained and possessed, when allowed by groundfish regulations. Season dates for the primary fishery will be developed by the end of November each year for the following year. The primary seasons will open in early May and will be open up to two days per week and may include ~~ing~~ one weekday and one weekend day. The primary season structure will may include periodic closures to assess the remaining quota for the subarea. If sufficient quota remains, additional openings may be implemented. If there is insufficient quota remaining to reopen the primary fishery for another fishing day, the remaining primary fishery quota will be added to the nearshore quota. The nearshore fishery takes place, in the area from 47°31.70' N. lat. south to 46°58.00' N. lat. and east of a boundary line approximating the 30 fathom depth contour as defined by the following coordinates:

47°31.70' N. lat., 124°37.03' W. long.;  
47°25.67' N. lat., 124°34.79' W. long.;  
47°12.82' N. lat., 124°29.12' W. long.; and  
46°58.00' N. lat., 124°24.24' W. long.

The nearshore fishery will open the first Saturday subsequent to the closure of the primary fishery and will be open seven days per week 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.

Recreational fishing for groundfish and halibut is prohibited within two YRCA's off Washington's southern coast. The South Coast Recreational YRCA and the Westport Offshore YRCA are defined by straight lines connecting latitude and longitude coordinates. Coordinates for these Recreational YRCAs are specified in groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.70 (d) and (e) and will be described annually in federal halibut regulations published in the *Federal Register*.

(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 2.3 percent of the Oregon sport allocation. 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 Columbia River subarea seasons are as follows:

(A) A nearshore fishery is allocated 500 pounds of the Columbia River subarea allocation, to allow incidental halibut retention on groundfish trips in the area shoreward of the boundary

line approximating the 30 fathom (55 m) depth contour extending from Leadbetter Point, WA (46°38.17' N. lat., 124°15.88' W. long.) to the Washington-Oregon border (46°16.00' N. lat., 124°15.88' W. long.) and from there, connecting to the boundary line approximating the 40 fathom (73 m) depth contour in Oregon. Coordinates will be specifically defined at 50 CFR 660.71 through 660.74. The nearshore fishery will be open Monday through Wednesday following the opening of the all-depth fishery, until the nearshore allocation is taken or September 30, whichever is earlier. Taking, retaining, possessing or landing halibut on groundfish trips is only allowed in the nearshore area on days not open to all-depth Pacific halibut fisheries. The daily bag limit is one halibut per person, with no size limit.

(B) The remaining Columbia River subarea allocation will be allocated for an all-depth fishery beginning in May. The all-depth fishery will open on the first Thursday in May or May 1 if it is a Friday, ~~Saturday~~ or Sunday, 4 days per week, Thursday, ~~Friday and through~~ Sunday until the subarea allocation is taken, or until September 30, whichever is earlier. Subsequent to the closure, if there is insufficient quota remaining in the Columbia River subarea for another fishing day, then any remaining quota may be transferred in season 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 when halibut are on board the vessel with the following exceptions. When allowed by groundfish regulations sablefish, Pacific cod, flatfish species may be retained, and lingcod caught north of the Washington-Oregon border (46°16.00' N. lat.) may be retained during the month of May.