At their meeting on February 5-6, 2010, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted sportfishing rule proposals for the next three-year cycle (2010-2012). The rules adopted will be effective May 1, 2010.

Among the rules adopted were proposals affecting recreational bottomfish fishing in a portion of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) Marine Catch Area 4, which extends from Cape Alava north and into the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the Sekiu River. The primary intent of these changes is to protect some of the Puget Sound rockfish stocks which are of concern, such as canary, yelloweye, and bocaccio, as well as other nearshore stocks, such as copper, china, and quillback rockfish, whose status is unknown, while still allowing anglers to catch healthier stocks, such as black rockfish and lingcod.

Within Area 4B, which extends from the entrance to the Strait (Bonilla-Tatoosh line) to the Sekiu River, the bottomfish bag limit will be reduced from 10 fish to 6 fish, and only black and blue rockfish can be retained. While the status of blue rockfish is also unknown, their similarity in appearance to black rockfish makes compliance with a prohibition on blue rockfish difficult to achieve.

Additional measures to protect Puget Sound rockfish include the adoption of a 20-fm depth restriction for Area 4B as well as all of the inner Puget Sound areas. Anglers would not be able to fish for or retain bottomfish seaward of a line approximating the 20-fm depth contour, except on days that the halibut fishery is open. In outer Area 4 (Cape Alava to Bonilla-Tatoosh), WDFW already has a 20-fm depth restriction in place from May 21 through September 30, except on halibut fishing days.

We do not anticipate that any action is needed on the part of the Council or the National Marine Fisheries Service as the action taken is within state waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound.