

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON INSEASON  
ADJUSTMENTS FOR 2012

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has recently become aware of areas off the Washington coast where recreational fishermen have been fishing to target bottomfish, primarily lingcod, and have had encounters with yelloweye rockfish. For the purposes of managing recreational halibut and bottomfish fisheries, WDFW divides our coast into four management areas. Two management areas along the northern coast are typically managed together and are commonly referred to as the north coast area. The other areas are the south coast area and the Columbia River area. The Columbia River area is separated from the south coast management area at Leadbetter Point and is shared with Oregon for halibut management purposes.

For over ten years, WDFW has had a large yelloweye rockfish conservation area (YRCA) off its north coast and there have been two smaller offshore YRCAs within the south coast area, one of which has been in place since 2006. In addition, we have utilized depth restrictions of 20 fm and 30 fm within these areas, respectively, to provide additional protection for overfished rockfish during the primary recreational bottomfish seasons. However, catches of yelloweye rockfish within the Columbia River area off Washington were essentially a few individual fish per year, and halibut and bottomfish effort was relatively low compared to the rest of the coast; therefore, we had not implemented any depth restrictions or created any YRCAs within this area.

Recently there has been increased interest by charter operations from Westport in fishing trips targeting lingcod in deep water in both the south coast and Columbia River management areas. Interest in the Columbia River area off Leadbetter point has also spread down to Ilwaco and northern Oregon. Earlier this year, a couple of those charter boats reported catching fairly large amounts of yelloweye rockfish while targeting bottomfish and lingcod. WDFW received additional reports of yelloweye encounters from charter boats targeting lingcod in the south coast late this summer. Needless to say, this has caused considerable alarm amongst the Washington and Oregon recreational fishing communities.

In response, WDFW took action through state emergency regulations to close areas in both the south coast (beginning September 3) and Columbia River areas (beginning Aug 27) to lingcod fishing to reduce impacts to yelloweye rockfish for the remainder of 2011. Following the emergency action WDFW worked with charter boats and fishing representatives in both Westport and Ilwaco to develop areas that are recommended for permanent closure to lingcod fishing for 2012 in federal regulations through inseason action (see Attachment 1). While the current catch data through August does not indicate that the Washington recreational harvest guideline for yelloweye rockfish will be exceeded in 2011, we believe these changes are necessary to keep yelloweye harvests within the Washington harvest guidelines in 2012 and beyond.

In addition to the final recommendation, WDFW considered other options such as alternative depths for closure, specific area closures (YRCAs) and the species that would be included in the restriction (i.e., halibut, bottomfish or lingcod only) and how the proposed regulation would align with current bottomfish restrictions. We support the measures described below because they will reduce encounters with yelloweye rockfish in deep water to the degree necessary to keep recreational yelloweye impacts within the harvest guideline and are easy for recreational fishermen to understand and enforcement to monitor.

Proposed changes to groundfish regulations for the south coast and Columbia River management areas; Washington Marine Areas 1 (Leadbetter Point to the Washington/Oregon border) and Washington Marine Area 2 (Queets River to Leadbetter Point):

- Close recreational lingcod fishing seaward of a line connecting the following coordinates from the Queets River (47°31.70' N. lat.) to 46°25.00' N. lat, 124°21.00' W. lon., year round except as allowed in Washington Marine Area 2 on days open to the primary halibut fishery:
  1. 47°31.70' N. lat            124°45.00' W. lon.
  2. 46°38.17' N. lat            124°30.00' W. lon.
  3. 46°38.17' N. lat            124°21.00' W. lon.
  4. 46°25.00' N. lat            124°21.00' W. lon.

Proposed Lingcod Fishing Restricted Area off the Washington Coast

