

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2014 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a recreational halibut meeting in Montesano, on October 7, 2013. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan for 2014, and refine the proposals adopted for public review at the September PFMC meeting.

We recommend the following changes to the Pacific halibut Catch Sharing Plan for 2014, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES. These changes are consistent with those adopted by the Council for public review.

Washington North Coast Subarea

For this subarea implement the following changes:

1. WDFW recommends revising the CSP language to more clearly describe the management closure and remove the provision for a nearshore fishery when there is not enough quota for another off-shore fishing day.

Rationale: A management closure during the third week following the season opening has been used for several years. The closure provides WDFW time to tally the early season catch against the quota and provide sufficient notice to stakeholders regarding additional fishing days. The closure also has the potential to increase the chances that the fishery will extend into June provided there is sufficient quota. The provision to allow a nearshore fishery has not been used for several years due to increased impacts to yelloweye rockfish that occur when the halibut fishery is directed to the nearshore area. Clarifying the language regarding the closure and removing the nearshore fishery language from the CSP plan would better match the intent of the management approach for this subarea.

Columbia River Subarea (Washington and Oregon)

For this subarea implement the following changes:

1. Revise the days of the week that the season is open from Friday through Sunday to Thursday through Sunday. Changing the days of the week that the fishery is open would also require changing the early season opening date from the first Friday in May to the first Thursday in May. The late season opening date would change from the first Friday in August to the first Thursday in August.

Rationale: This change would allow for more fishing opportunity in an area where the total season catch has been below the set aside. There is wide spread support for this proposal.

2. Revise the subarea allocation such that 1,500 pounds or 10% of the subarea allocation, whichever is less, is set aside for incidental catch in the nearshore area with the remaining allocation divided such that 80 percent is reserved for the early season and 20 percent is reserved for the late season. Groundfish retention with halibut onboard would be allowed seven days per week in the nearshore area. Groundfish, except Pacific cod and sablefish, would continue to be prohibited when halibut are onboard seaward of this line. The nearshore area would extend from Leadbetter Point to Cape Falcon, OR. The coordinates for the nearshore area off Washington are (Figure 1):

46°38.17' N. lat., 124°15.88' W. long.

46°16.00' N. lat., 124°15.88' W. long.

The intent is to connect to the 30 or 40 fathom depth contour off Oregon.

Rationale: This change would allow for halibut that are currently being caught incidentally while anglers are targeting bottomfish in the nearshore area to be retained. Halibut fishing effort in this area has been low in recent years and reserving some of the subarea allocation for incidental catch should not reduce the number of fishing days available to the early and late seasons. While the vast majority of halibut are caught deeper than 50 fathoms, WDFW data does show some discarded halibut in the area shallower than 40 fathoms. Allowing incidental halibut retention in the nearshore area will convert discarded fish into retained fish and improve the recreational fishing experience in this area.

Figure 1. Proposed nearshore area in the Washington portion of the Columbia River subarea



Proposals Considered but Rejected

North Coast Subarea:

1. Revise the days of the week that the fishery is open so that the fishery is open on Saturdays only after the first week of fishing which maintains the status quo open days per week of Thursday and Saturday.

Rationale: Changing the season structure to only one day per week after the first week of fishing would likely not extend the length of the season or address the derby nature of this fishery. While some anglers were in favor of the change, the majority of anglers supported the status quo season structure. The ports of Neah Bay and La Push are remote for most Washington residents and, when faced with only one day per week to fish for halibut, anglers may shift their effort to other areas. Most coastal and Puget Sound subareas are also experiencing high fishing effort and reduced seasons, this proposal could simply shift the problem to other subareas. Safety could also be an issue when anglers are faced with marginal ocean conditions and have only one day for

halibut fishing per week.

Columbia River Subarea:

3. Revise the bottomfish restrictions in this subarea such that lingcod retention would be allowed when halibut are onboard according to one of the following three options:
 - Allow lingcod retention when halibut are on board on Thursdays through Sundays from the first Thursday in May until the first Thursday in August or, until 80 percent of the subarea allocation is taken whichever occurs first, in the area seaward of 30 fathoms.
 - Allow lingcod retention when halibut are on board seven days per week in the area shoreward of 30 fathoms.
 - Allow lingcod retention throughout the entire halibut season.

Rationale: This change would allow lingcod to be retained when halibut are onboard during a portion of the Columbia River halibut season. Currently lingcod that are caught when halibut are onboard are discarded. However, allowing lingcod retention would likely increase encounters with yelloweye rockfish and potentially increase catch for both Washington and Oregon where very little buffer exists.

Proposed changes to the CSP language

(f) SPORT FISHERIES

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.

(ii) Washington north coast subarea.

WDFW Proposed CSP Changes for the 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) in May for two weeks, with ~~as scheduled pre-season, unless there is~~ a quota management closure scheduled for the third week. ~~If there is no quota management closure in May, If sufficient quota remains,~~ the fishery will reopen on the first following Thursday or Saturday. ~~in June as an all-depth fishery on Thursdays and Saturdays as long as sufficient~~

~~quota remains. This schedule allows~~ Subsequent openings will be scheduled to allow adequate public notice of any inseason action before each ~~Thursday~~ opening. ~~If there is not sufficient quota for an all-depth day, the fishery would reopen in the nearshore areas described below:~~

~~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.~~

~~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.

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*.

(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 an amount equal to the contribution from the Washington sport allocation from the Oregon/California sport allocation. The Columbia River subarea quota will be allocated as follows: 10% or 1,500 pounds, whichever is less, will be set aside to allow incidental halibut retention in the nearshore area with the remaining amount allocated such that 80 percent is reserved for an early season beginning in May. 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 the first ~~Friday~~ Thursday in May or May 1 if it is a Friday, Saturday or Sunday, ~~34~~ days per week, Thursday~~Friday~~ through Sunday until 80 percent of the subarea allocation is taken. The fishery will reopen on the first ~~Friday~~ Thursday in August and

continue 34 days per week, ~~Friday~~Thursday-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. [Groundfish is allowed to be taken, retained, possessed or landed with halibut onboard in the nearshore area seven days per week when allowed by groundfish regulations.](#) 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 [seaward of the nearshore area.](#)