

## WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2015 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) met with recreational halibut anglers on October 6, 2014. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for 2015, and refine the proposals adopted for public review at the September PFMC meeting.

We recommend the following changes to the Pacific halibut CSP for 2015, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES. These changes are consistent with those adopted by the Council for public review.

### **Columbia River Subarea (Washington and Oregon):**

For this subarea implement the following changes:

1. Reduce the nearshore set aside from 1,500 pounds to 500 pounds.

Rationale: The amount of halibut caught in the nearshore fishery has been very low in 2014. This change would maintain the nearshore set aside at an amount that would accommodate recent catches in the nearshore area on days when the all-depth fishery is closed.

2. Retain the current opening date and manage the fishery to one season (i.e., remove the season structure that splits the subarea quota between the early (80 percent) and late seasons (20 percent).

Rationale: Since 2008, fishing effort has significantly declined during the late season off Washington and Oregon. Managing to one season will ensure the quota is available during the peak of halibut fishing effort and allow the all-depth fishery to continue uninterrupted.

3. Increase the number of days that the nearshore area is open from Monday through Wednesday to Monday through Friday. This would include two days of overlap (Thursday and Friday) between the nearshore and all-depth fisheries.

Rationale: Currently, on days that the nearshore is open (Monday through Wednesday); anglers may retain all groundfish, including lingcod, with halibut onboard. On all-depth days (Thursday through Sunday), anglers may not retain any groundfish, except Pacific cod and sablefish, with halibut onboard regardless of area fished (i.e., nearshore or offshore). Initially, the nearshore fishery was developed to allow anglers targeting bottomfish to retain an incidentally caught halibut when fishing in the nearshore area. We view the addition of two more nearshore days per week as a small first step to providing increased fishing opportunities in a conservative manner. Extending the nearshore fishery to Monday through Friday adds two weekdays, which typically have less fishing effort than weekend days, and would allow us to see if there are issues with anglers understanding regulations or enforcement issues are a problem.

Regarding concerns about yelloweye rockfish bycatch, we note that we will monitor the fishery inseason and track changes in yelloweye encounters on trips with halibut onboard.

A draft of how these changes, if adopted, may be incorporated into the CSP language is included at the end of the report.

Regarding changes to the Columbia River subarea proposed by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), we provide the following thoughts for consideration:

**Allocations**

In general, WDFW supports maintaining an equal contribution to the Columbia River subarea and providing recreational fishing opportunities to achieve but not exceed the subarea quota. The coordinated management approach for the Columbia River area reflects the overlap between residents of Washington and Oregon that fish out of each state’s ports between Cape Falcon, Oregon and Leadbetter Point, Washington. We have heard that anglers from either state may prefer to fish for halibut out of Ilwaco simply because it is somewhat closer to the halibut fishing grounds than ports in northern Oregon, saving anglers both time and money. We also recognize the importance for states to have the flexibility to adjust their subarea allocations to maximize fishing opportunity and address shifts in fishing effort that occur over time.

ODFW’s Alternative 1 would reduce the contribution amount to 75 percent of Washington’s contribution, which would reduce the overall subarea allocation by approximately 1,500 pounds. Alternative 2 would reduce Oregon’s contribution to 50 percent of Washington’s contribution and reduce the overall subarea allocation by approximately 3,000 pounds.

Table 1 summarizes catch from 2012 to 2014 under the two allocation alternatives. During this time period, the Columbia River subarea allocation was the same and Washington and Oregon contributed equally to the allocation. Catch under Alternative 1 suggests that the Columbia River halibut seasons would potentially be unaffected if future catch and effort remained similar to recent years. If the Columbia River allocation under Alternative 2 was in place this year, the season would have likely closed early to avoid catch exceeding the subarea allocation.

Table 1. Columbia River allocation alternatives and recreational halibut catch 2012-2014

Year	2A TAC	Status Quo (SQ)	Alternative 1 (75%)	Alternative 2 (50%)
		Total Catch	Difference in SQ Catch to Allocation	Difference in SQ Catch to Allocation
2014	960,000	9,052	1,355	-132
2013	990,000	6,468	3,939	2,453
2012	989,000	7,958	2,449	963

However, catch and effort can be variable, particularly in the Columbia River subarea, where fishing effort targeting halibut can be affected by other fishing opportunities such as salmon, albacore tuna, and sturgeon. In the future, more recreational fishing effort could be focused on halibut fishing depending on the abundance and fishing opportunity offered for other recreational species in the Columbia River and other areas. In fact, Columbia River fishermen based in Washington have been working with WDFW to increase angler interest in the recreational halibut fishery in this area. As changes to the CSP are made, such as increasing the days of the week that the fishery is open, more anglers may choose to fish in the Columbia River subarea.

This variability is important to consider as either of the proposed allocation alternatives could result in shorter seasons if angler effort were to increase from status quo.

Another important consideration is the impact of the allocation alternatives if the 2A Total Allowable Catch (TAC) is lower than what it has been in recent years. Table 2 looks at the Columbia River subarea allocation alternatives under the status quo 2A TAC of 960,000 pounds and two lower TAC scenarios including the 2014 “Blue Line” TAC (720,000 pounds) considered at the 2014 International Pacific Halibut Commission Annual Meeting and one between 960,000 pounds and 720,000 pounds. The analysis uses the 2014 total catch as a proxy to evaluate the Columbia River allocation alternatives under a range of 2A TACs. It is fair to say that the Columbia River halibut fishery would be restricted under the lowest 2A TAC, even under status quo allocation contributions. However, Columbia River halibut seasons will be additionally restricted under both allocation alternatives when the 2A TAC is lower.

Table 2. Columbia River allocation alternatives under a range of 2A TAC scenarios and 2014 halibut catch

2A TAC	Status Quo (SQ)		Alternative 1 (75%)		Alternative 2 (50%)	
	Total Allocation	2014 Total Catch	Total Allocation	Difference in SQ Catch	Total Allocation	Difference in SQ Catch
960,000	11,895	9,052	10,407	1,355	8,921	-132
810,000	10,182	9,052	8,909	-143	7,637	-1,416
720,000	8,469	9,052	7,411	-1,641	6,353	-2,700

The allocation changes proposed for the Columbia River should be considered cumulatively with other allocation changes being considered at this meeting. If a portion of the Area 2A non-treaty sport allocation is shifted to the California sport allocation, changes to the Columbia River subarea allocation will be further reduced from the allocation alternatives proposed here.

## Draft Suggested Changes to Catch Sharing Plan Language:

### (f) (1) (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 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 management objective for this subarea is to provide a quality recreational fishing opportunity that achieves but not exceeds the subarea allocation. The Columbia River subarea seasons are as follows:

- a. A nearshore fishery is allocated ~~10 percent or 1,500-500~~ pounds of the Columbia River subarea allocation, ~~whichever is less,~~ 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-Friday~~ following the opening of the ~~early season~~-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 Monday through Friday 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 ~~such that 80 percent is reserved for an early season to the~~ all-depth fishery beginning in May ~~and 20 percent reserved for a late season all depth fishery beginning in August.~~ The ~~early season~~-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 through Sunday until the ~~early season portion of the subarea allocation is taken. The fishery will reopen for the late season all depth fishery on the first Thursday in August and continue 4 days per week, Thursday-Sunday until the~~ remainder of the subarea quota has been taken, or until September 30, whichever is earlier. ~~The early and late seasons will run continuously, unless closed due to quota attainment. Any remaining early season all depth quota will automatically be available to the late season all depth fishery.~~ 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 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. 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.