

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON HIGHLY  
MIGRATORY SPECIES CHANGES TO ROUTINE MANAGEMENT FOR 2011-2012

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a public meeting to discuss the purpose and alternatives for a recreational bag limit for albacore tuna on May 26, 2010, in Westport, and will have another meeting on September 1, 2010, in Montesano.

Based on the results of the 2006 albacore tuna stock assessment, which indicated that overfishing was occurring, the U.S. committed through its participation in the international management of albacore to not increase its albacore fishing effort above current levels. Since then, most West Coast fisheries targeting albacore have either remained steady or exhibited a decline in fishing effort. One exception to that is the Washington recreational fishery, which has shown an increase in fishing effort (i.e., angler trips) in recent years.

The recreational albacore fishery is the one fishery in Washington that does not have any bag limits; all other fisheries either have species-specific bag limits, or are subject to the general food fish limit of two of each species per day. In addition to daily bag limits for other species, there are possession limits in place—one daily bag limit on board a vessel, and two daily bag limits while on land.

WDFW believes that having conservation measures in place for a fishery makes sound management sense. With multiple fisheries harvesting the same stock, which is the case with albacore, all fisheries, regardless of the relative amount they harvest, have a responsibility to contribute to the conservation of the stock by not overfishing. However, given that the Washington recreational fishery represents a very small fraction of the total West Coast albacore catch and effort, WDFW believes that having a bag limit which would significantly reduce the catch from recent levels is not warranted.

This then begs the question of what an appropriate limit should be. The Washington State Legislature defines recreational fishing as a “personal use” fishery, which means for the private use of the individual taking the fish. Given this definition, it could be argued that a bag limit should be set at or, in some cases, for purposes of conservation and catch sharing, below the amount that an individual could personally use.

WDFW recommends proceeding with consideration of a bag limit through the Council process, and approving a range of alternatives including status quo and bag limits of 10, 15, 20, and 25 albacore tuna per fishing trip for public review. Final selection of a preferred alternative would be scheduled for the Council’s November 2010 meeting.