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**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON
PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE 2004 PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has modified two of its proposed changes (# 2 and # 5) to the 2004 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A after receiving public input. Attached is a revised strikeout/underlined version of the proposed changes to the current Catch Sharing Plan language.

1. Removing the requirement to “sponsor a public workshop shortly after the IPHC annual meeting” to develop the season structure for the Puget Sound recreational fishery.

Rationale: In the past, we have held public meetings to discuss the Puget Sound season structure (e.g., opening dates, season length) following the IPHC annual meeting. However, we reached agreement with our constituents who participate in the Puget Sound sport halibut fishery to keep the current regulations in place for a few years to evaluate their effectiveness. As such, there have not been any proposed changes to the season structure in recent years, nor any issues identified for discussion. Therefore, we wanted to remove the requirement to have an annual meeting in the absence of issues for discussion. We set the seasons following the IPHC annual meeting, using the approach that has been agreed upon, and communicate with our Puget Sound sport anglers via mail and e-mail. We then provide a public comment period following this notification prior to adopting the regulations for the seasons. If there are issues that need to be discussed prior to setting the annual seasons, then we would schedule a public meeting at that time. We also have an annual public process to review all Department sportfishing rules and consider regulatory changes at the end of every calendar year.

2. Change the opening date of the north coast subarea fishery from May 1 to the first Tuesday between May 9 and May 15.

Rationale: Harvest rates in the north coast subarea fishery has increased significantly over the past few years such that the May quota can be achieved within a few weeks. We have received information from participants that the weather tends to be more favorable toward the end of May, and that some people would like to have the opportunity to fish during Memorial Day weekend (an opportunity that has not been available recently). By moving the opening day to the 2nd or 3rd week of May, it would increase the likelihood that the fishery could last through the end of May.

The previous proposal that was approved for public review had a date-certain opening date of May 15, which is supported by some north coast fishery participants. Other fishing representatives, however, would like to retain the original opening date of May 1. All participants share the objective of having as long and productive a halibut season as possible. The resulting proposal is viewed as a compromise between the two positions.

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3. Change the opening date of the north coast area June fishery from the third Wednesday in June to “during the third week of June.”

Rationale: The north coast subarea was open June 18-21 this year, and harvest rates were less-than-expected as the result of poor tide conditions. Keeping the June opening to the third week of June would be consistent with the original intent of having a June fishery, while removing the requirement to open on Wednesday would allow us the flexibility to choose a date inseason. This would allow us to review tidal information prior to setting a date.

4. Add a statement to the north coast, south coast, and Columbia River subareas that, subsequent to a closure prior to September 30, if there is insufficient quota remaining to reopen that given subarea for another fishing day, then any remaining quota may be transferred inseason to another Washington coastal subarea by National Marine Fisheries Service via an update to the recreational halibut hotline.

Rationale: Subarea fisheries are closed in advance when quotas are projected to be attained. While we try to achieve each subarea’s respective quota without exceeding it, we are often off the mark with harvest projections as a result of poor weather conditions or changes in effort. Additionally, depending on the subarea, there may be some quota remaining, but it is not sufficient to reopen the fishery for a another day. By allowing the transfer of the quota remaining from a subarea that has closed to another subarea, we can better achieve the overall recreational quota without impacting the subarea we would be transferring from.

5. For the south coast subarea, have an automatic switch from a five-day/week fishery to a seven-day/week fishery beginning on July 1 to capture most of the coastal recreational salmon season.

Rationale: There have been significant coastal salmon recreational fishing opportunities over the past few years during the latter portion of the halibut season. Typically, the south coast halibut season is a five-day/week fishery (closed Fridays and Saturdays); however, the salmon season in the south coast area is also a five-day/week fishery (closed Fridays and Saturdays). Once the salmon season is open, most charter operations choose to target salmon, rather than halibut, during the weekdays. This change would allow anglers to take halibut trips on weekends (when the salmon fishery is closed), which would help the subarea to achieve its halibut quota. Keeping the halibut fishery open during the weekdays just adds more fishing opportunity, even though the catch during the week is relatively small. The halibut sport fishery in this subarea begins on May 1, while the sport salmon season generally begins on or about July 1. (Note: In 2003, it opened in mid-June, but in other recent years, it has opened as late as mid-July.) Therefore, fishery participants in this area may expect a five-day/week fishery for the first two months of the halibut season, followed by a seven-day/week fishery through the remainder of the season.

The previous proposal that was approved for public review had the switch from five to seven days occurring on the opening day of the salmon season, which is set during the annual North of Falcon process and finalized in April. The date-certain switch date of July 1 would accomplish the same objective while giving anglers more scheduling predictability (prior to April).

(f) SPORT FISHERIES

(1) (i) Washington inside waters (Puget Sound) subarea.

This sport fishery subarea is allocated 23.5 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 east of the mouth of the Sekiu River, 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., including Puget Sound. The structuring objective for this subarea is to provide a stable sport fishing opportunity and maximize the season length. To that end, the Puget Sound subarea may be divided into two regions with separate seasons to achieve a fair harvest opportunity within the subarea. Due to inability to monitor the catch in this area inseason, fixed seasons, which may vary and apply to different regions within the subarea, will be established preseason based on projected catch per day and number of days to achievement of the quota. Inseason adjustments may be made, and estimates of actual catch will be made postseason. The fishery will open in April or May and continue until a date established preseason (and published in the sport fishery regulations) when the quota is predicted to be taken, or until September 30, whichever is earlier. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will ~~sponsor a public workshop shortly after the IPHC annual meeting to develop~~ recommendations to NMFS on the opening date and weekly structure of the fishery each year. The daily bag limit is one fish per person, with no size limit.

(ii) Washington 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°31'42" N. lat.). The management objective for this subarea is to provide a quality recreational fishing opportunity during May and the latter part of June. To meet this objective, the north coast subarea quota will be allocated as follows: 72% for the month of May and 28% for the latter part of June. The fishery will open on **the first Tuesday between May 9 and 15**, and continue 5 days per week (Tuesday through Saturday) until the May allocation is projected to be taken. ~~If May 15 falls on a Sunday or Monday, the fishery will open on the following Tuesday.~~ The fishery will then reopen **on during the third Wednesday week** in June and continue until the remaining quota is projected to be taken, 5 days per week (Tuesday through Saturday.) 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 this subarea 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. A "C-shaped" yelloweye rockfish conservation area that is closed to recreational groundfish and halibut fishing is defined by the following coordinates in the order listed:

48°18' N. lat.; 125°18' W. long.;
48°18' N. lat.; 124°59' W. long.;

48°11' N. lat.; 124°59' W. long.;
48°11' N. lat.; 125°11' W. long.;
48°04' N. lat.; 125°11' W. long.;
48°04' N. lat.; 124°59' W. long.;
48°00' N. lat.; 124°59' W. long.;
48°00' N. lat.; 125°18' W. long.;
and connecting back to 48°18' N. lat.; 125°18' W. long.

(iii) Washington south coast subarea.

This sport fishery is allocated 12.3 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 waters south of the Queets River (47°31'42" N. lat.) and north of Leadbetter Point (46°38'10" N. lat.). The structuring objective for this subarea is to maximize the season length, while maintaining a quality fishing experience. The fishery will open on May 1. If May 1 falls on a Friday or Saturday, the fishery will open on the following Sunday. The fishery will be open Sunday through Thursday in all areas, except where prohibited, and the fishery will be open 7 days per week in the area from Queets River south to 47°00'00" N. lat. and east of 124°40'00". **Beginning July 1, the halibut fishery will be open 7 days per week.** The fishery will continue until September 30, or until the quota is achieved, whichever occurs first. Subsequent to this closure, ~~if any remaining quota is insufficient for an offshore fishery, but is sufficient for a nearshore fishery, the area from the Queets River south to 47°00'00" N. lat. and east of 124°40'00" W. long. will reopen for 7 days per week until either the remaining subarea quota is estimated to have been taken and the season is closed by the IPHC, or until September 30, whichever occurs first.~~ **if there is insufficient quota remaining to reopen this subarea 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 is one halibut per person, with no size limit.

(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 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 also is allocated 2.0 percent of the Oregon/California sport allocation. This subarea is defined as waters south of Leadbetter Point, WA (46°38'10" N. lat.) and north of Cape Falcon, OR (45°46'00" N. lat.). The fishery will open on May 1, and continue 7 days per week until the subquota is estimated to have been taken, or September 30, whichever is earlier. **Subsequent to this closure, if there is insufficient quota remaining to reopen this subarea 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 is the first halibut taken, per person, of 32 inches (81.3 cm) or greater in length.