

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN FOR THE 2016 FISHERY

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) solicited public comment on the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) approved proposals for changes to the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for fisheries in 2016. ODFW hosted a series of public meetings in Brookings (Oct. 12), North Bend (Oct. 13), and Newport (Oct. 15) and used an online survey to gather public input on the proposals. The Newport public meeting was also webcast, so that anglers who were unable to attend in person, could still hear the discussions and weigh in. Thirty individuals attended the public meetings in person, one attended via the webinar, staff received emails or phone calls from eight individuals, and 76 took the online survey.

Proposed Changes to the Catch Sharing Plan

Columbia River Subarea

All-Depth Season Open Dates

The Columbia River Subarea all-depth season is currently limited to four days per week, Thurs-Sun. During the public input process, ODFW received a proposal to increase the days open per week to seven. The all-depth fishery would open May 1, seven days per week until the all-depth allocation was taken.

Alternatives

Status Quo: season is open 4 days per week, Thurs-Sun

Alternative 1: season is open 7 days per week

Rationale

Prior to 2015 the Columbia River Subarea all-depth fishery was broken into two seasons, spring and summer, with individual allocations. Beginning in 2015, the all-depth fishery was combined into one season opening May 1, four days per week (Thurs-Sun) until the quota was caught or September 30. In recent years, the summer all-depth season had closed on the regulatory date of September 30, with quota remaining. In 2015, the combined all-depth fishery closed on June 3, at which time there was not enough quota remaining for additional open days. Input ODFW received about the 2015 season is that the weather in May was perfect and led to greater effort and catches than would normally be expected.

The input ODFW received on this proposal was not definitive, therefore given how the 2015 fishery progressed; we believe that increasing the days of the week open may not be warranted at this time. Therefore, **ODFW recommends maintaining the status quo open days per week (Thurs-Sun).**

Central Coast Subarea

Seasons and allocations

The Central Oregon Coast Subarea is currently broken into a nearshore, a spring all-depth, and a summer all-depth season. ODFW received a proposal from our Sport Advisory Committee during the public input process regarding the summer all-depth season, reallocating the summer all-depth allocation 75 percent to the spring all-depth season and 25 percent to the nearshore season.

Alternatives

Status Quo: The Central Oregon Coast Subarea allocations are 12 percent for the nearshore, 63 percent for the spring all-depth, and 25 percent for the summer all-depth.

Alternative 1: The summer all-depth allocation would be reallocated 75 percent to the spring all-depth and 25 percent to the nearshore. The Central Oregon Coast allocations would then be 81.75 percent for the spring all-depth and 18.25 percent for the nearshore. There would then be no summer all-depth season.

Rationale

The Central Oregon Coast Subarea is currently divided into three seasons (nearshore, spring all-depth, and summer all-depth) to provide a variety of halibut fishing opportunities. The summer all-depth season was set up to allow for all-depth halibut fishing later in the summer, when the weather is thought to be better, and more families have vacation time. During 2009-2014, the summer all-depth season lasted 2-4 days. This has been due to a combination of good weather and opportunities to also catch other species, such as albacore tuna, encouraging more participation.

During the summer all-depth season, encounters with yelloweye rockfish have been reported to be higher than during the spring all-depth season (Figure 1). This may be due to a combination of the yelloweye rockfish being either more prevalent in the area, more “on the bite”, or with short seasons, anglers may not be as willing to move from known halibut grounds when they do encounter yelloweye rockfish.

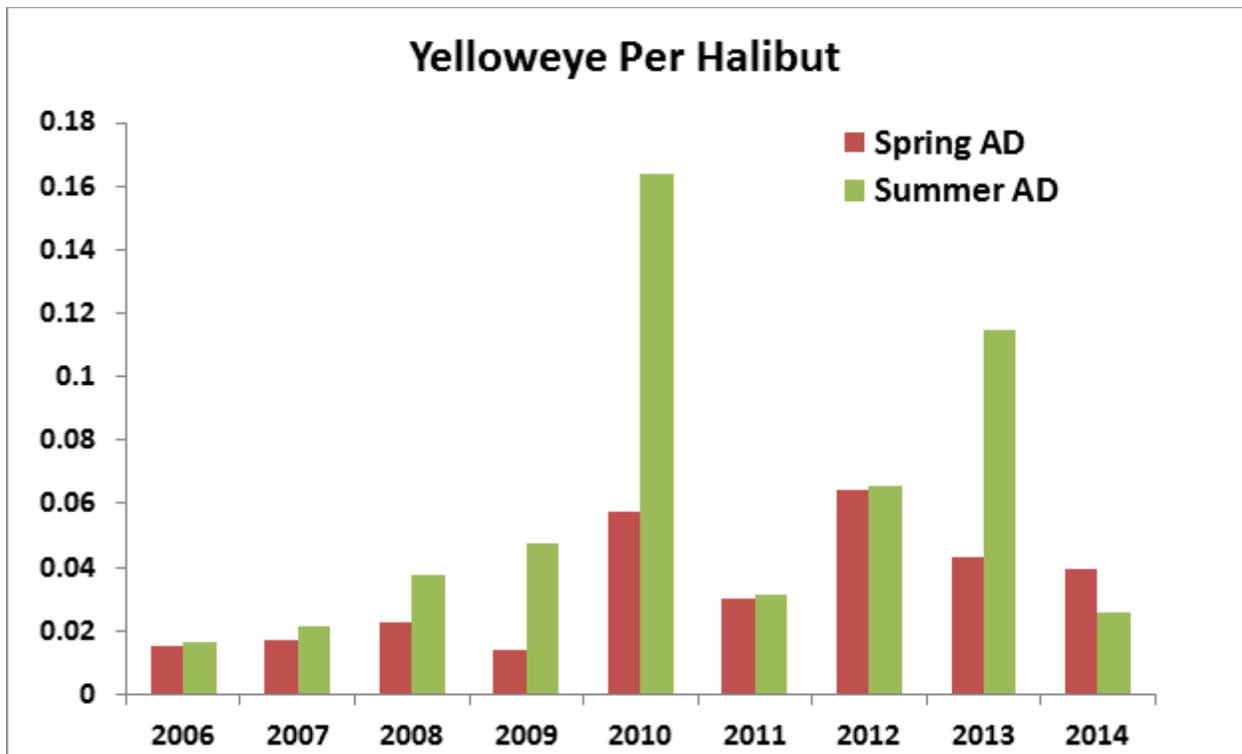


Figure 1. Yelloweye rockfish encounters per number of Pacific halibut landed in the Central Oregon Coast Subarea spring and summer all-depth seasons, 2006-2014.

This proposal was developed by ODFW’s Marine Program Sport Advisory Committee (SAC), and continues to have their support. During the public outreach process, ODFW did not receive strong input in favor or against the status quo season or the proposed change. The online survey results slightly favored maintaining status quo (Figure 2) while those who attended the public meetings tended a bit more toward Alternative 1. ODFW places high value on input received from its Sport Advisory Committee; however, given the magnitude of this possible change, ODFW believes that it is important to have more thorough public discussion prior to making a decision. ODFW staff are concerned that many anglers were not aware that eliminating the summer season was under consideration, and therefore did not weigh in. For this reason, **ODFW recommends maintaining the status quo Central Oregon Coast Subarea season structure for 2016.** ODFW intends to bring this proposal back in 2016 for discussions on the 2017 Catch Sharing Plan, and will make sure it is highlighted as a possible change when the public input process is advertised. Additionally, ODFW will continue work on outreach and education of anglers on yelloweye rockfish avoidance as well as the use of recompression devices.

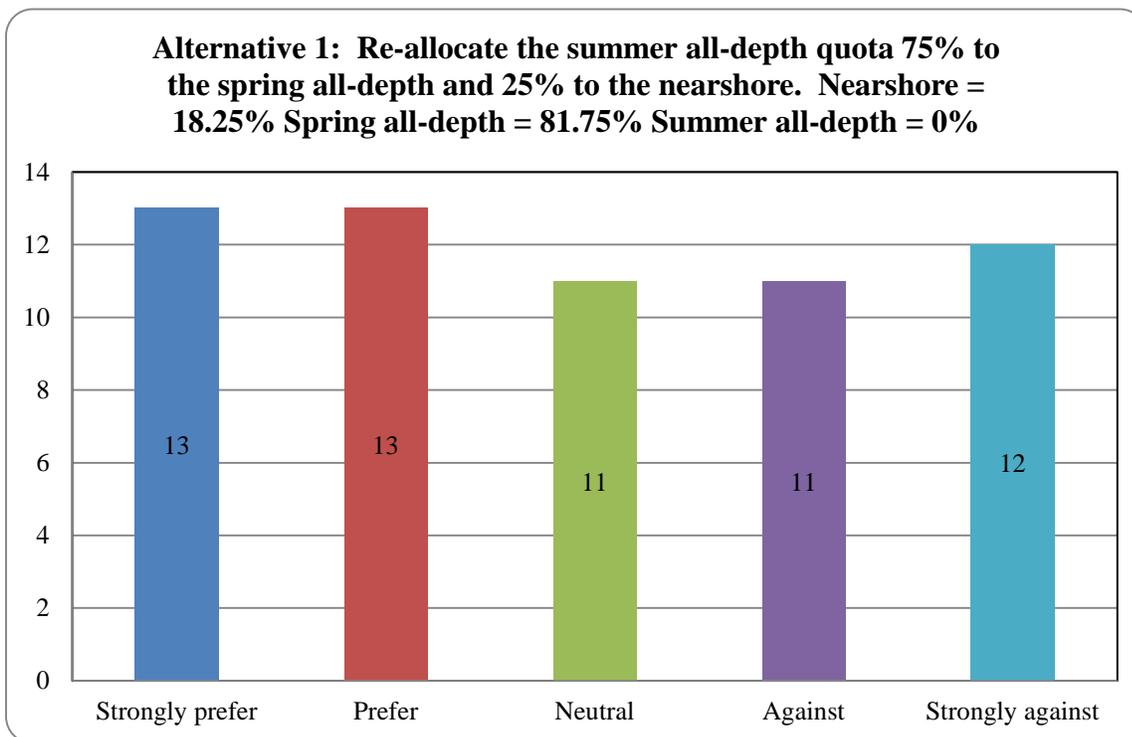
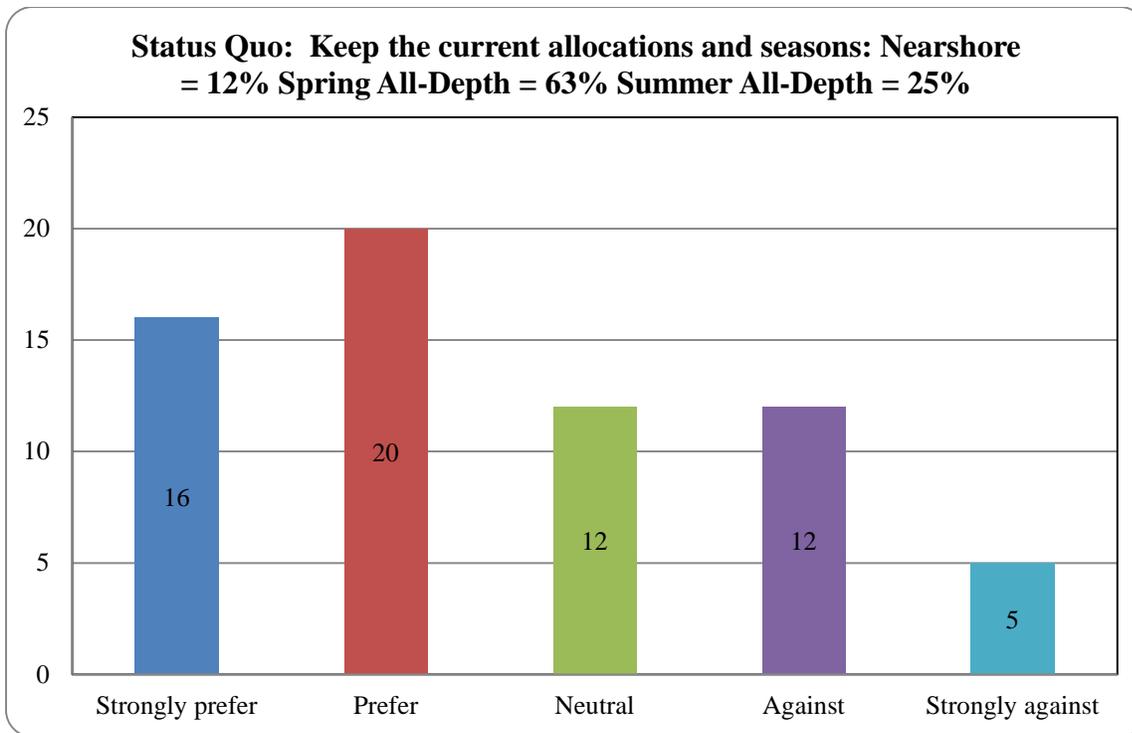


Figure 2. Online survey results from the questions about the Central Oregon Coast Subarea season structure.

Nearshore Season

The Central Oregon Coast nearshore fishery currently opens July 1. ODFW received a proposal to move the start date back to May 1, as it was prior to 2014. The fishery would remain open seven days per week until October 31, or the quota is attained.

Alternatives

Status Quo: The Central Oregon Coast Subarea nearshore fishery opens July 1, seven days per week until October 31, or quota attainment.

Alternative 1: The Central Oregon Coast Subarea nearshore fishery opens May 1, seven days per week until October 31, or quota attainment.

Alternative 2a: The Central Oregon Coast Subarea nearshore fishery opens May 1, seven days per week until October 31 or quota attainment, with 75 percent of the nearshore allocation. 25 percent of the nearshore fishery allocation will be set-aside and available beginning July 1.

Alternative 2b: The Central Oregon Coast Subarea nearshore fishery opens May 1, seven days per week until October 31 or quota attainment, with 50 percent of the nearshore allocation. 50 percent of the nearshore fishery allocation will be set-aside and available beginning July 1.

Rationale

Prior to 2013, the nearshore fishery opened May 1, seven days per week through October 31, or quota attainment. In 2009, the quota was attained and the fishery closed on August 16; in 2010 July 17; in 2011 July 5; and in 2012 July 22. The early closures led to the days of the week in 2013 being limited to try to spread the nearshore fishery out across more months. That did not work, and 2013 actually had the fewest days open for the nearshore season, as it created sort of a derby mentality. For 2014, the nearshore fishery went back to being open seven days per week, with the opening delayed until July 1. The intent was to have the nearshore fishery occur more in the middle summer months. Additionally, with all-depth seasons occurring in May, June and August, having the nearshore fishery open in July allowed for some halibut fishing opportunities in the four peak recreational fishing months off of the Oregon coast. The 2014 nearshore fishery had good effort and catches the first two weeks, then slowly declined. Anglers out of some ports reported that they were unable to find halibut in the nearshore areas they normally fished in May and June. The 2014 nearshore fishery closed, with 6,150 pounds of allocation unharvested. In 2015 the nearshore allocation was attained in the late September. Due to the all-depth fishery projected to not attain its entire allocation, 3,000 pounds from the all-depth fishery were moved to the nearshore season to keep it open a few weeks longer.

In May and June, in Oregon, bottomfish and halibut are normally the only marine recreational fisheries open, whereas in July and August there are also salmon and tuna opportunities. Moving the start date earlier in the year will allow for additional halibut fishing opportunities during a time when there isn't much else to fish for. Participants in the public meetings were in favor of this, even with the understanding that the nearshore fishery could meet its quota and close by late June or early July.

During the August Newport public meeting, following up on the discussion of the May 1 start date, there was an additional proposal to split the nearshore fishery into two seasons. The main

nearshore season would open May 1, seven days per week. A specified amount of nearshore fishery allocation would be set-aside to become available July 1. The nearshore fishery would open May 1, seven days per week, and if quota for that portion is attained prior to July 1, the early nearshore fishery would close. The nearshore fishery would then reopen for a late season with the allocation set-aside, and would run seven days per week until October 31, or quota attainment. If the nearshore fishery that opens May 1 has not attained its allocation by July 1, the July 1 set-aside would be added to the remaining allocation, and the fishery would continue uninterrupted until October 31, or quota attainment. The intent of this split season is to compromise between those who prefer fishing in May-June and those who prefer July-September. Additionally, this will spread halibut fishing opportunities out.

Public input on this was somewhat mixed. There was no clear preference for either start date or the split season. There was some concern that splitting the nearshore season will add one more layer of complexity to the already complex sport halibut regulations and season structures. This led to discussion about keeping the nearshore fishery as one continuous season, but moving the start date to somewhere between May 1 and July 1. Therefore, **ODFW recommends starting the Central Oregon Coast nearshore season June 1, running 7 days per week until October 31, or the allocation is attained.** The June 1 start date was not one of the specific proposals forwarded in September, however ODFW believes it is within the range of alternatives.

Southern Oregon Subarea

Retention of Other Species

Current rules prohibit retention of groundfish outside of 30 fathoms when fishing for halibut in the Southern Oregon Subarea. The purpose of the rule is to reduce yelloweye rockfish discard mortality from the all-depth halibut fishery. If halibut anglers were permitted to retain groundfish associated with deep reef habitats (e.g., lingcod and shelf rockfish species), they would be expected to intentionally target deep reefs in order to catch these groundfish species during their halibut trip, which could increase encounters with yelloweye rockfish.

However, the current rule excludes halibut anglers from retaining bycatch of groundfish species that have healthy populations and are not associated with deep reef habitat (e.g., flatfish species). Since the purpose of this rule is to dissuade targeting of deep reefs, modifying the current rule to allow species not associated with those deep water reefs would increase harvest opportunities with little risk of increasing yelloweye rockfish discard mortality.

Alternatives

Status Quo: When fishing for Pacific halibut, bottomfish species may not be taken outside of 30 fathoms.

Alternative 1: Allow retention of other species of flatfish, Pacific cod, and sablefish outside of 30 fathoms, when fishing for halibut.

Rationale

ODFW recommends allowing retention of other species of flatfish, Pacific cod, and sablefish when halibut fishing in the Southern Oregon Subarea. Retention of Pacific cod and sablefish has been allowed for several years in other Oregon subareas on all-depth days. Beginning in 2015 retention of other species of flatfish was also allowed. Alternative 1 would provide for consistent regulations on what other species may be retained across all Oregon

Subareas. Yelloweye rockfish discard mortality is expected to be the same because the alternative still prohibits the take of deep reef associated groundfish (i.e., rockfish species and lingcod), thereby reducing the incentive for halibut anglers to target groundfish over deep reefs before or after halibut fishing.

Proposed Language Modifications for the CSP

(f) SPORT FISHERIES

The non-Indian sport fisheries are allocated 69.3 percent of the non-Indian share, which is approximately 45.0 percent of the Area 2A TAC. The allocation is further divided as subquotas among seven geographic subareas.

- (1) Subarea management. The sport fishery is divided into seven sport fishery subareas, each having separate allocations and management measures as follows.

...

(v) Oregon central coast subarea.

This subarea extends from Cape Falcon (45°46.00' N. lat.) to Humbug Mountain, Oregon (42°40.50' N. lat.) and is allocated ~~93.79~~ **96** percent of the Oregon sport allocation, ~~after the allocation to the Columbia River Subarea has been subtracted.~~ If the overall 2A TAC is 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt) or greater, the structuring objectives for this subarea are to provide two periods of fishing opportunity in Spring and in Summer in productive deeper water areas along the coast, and provide a period of fishing opportunity in the summer for nearshore waters. If the overall 2A TAC is less than 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt), the structuring objectives for this subarea are to provide a period of fishing opportunity beginning in Spring in productive deeper water areas along the coast, and provide a period of fishing opportunity in nearshore waters. Any poundage remaining unharvested in the Spring all-depth subquota will be added to either the Summer all-depth sub-quota or the nearshore subquota based on need, determined via joint consultation between IPHC, NMFS and ODFW. If the 2A TAC exceeds 700,000 pounds, any poundage that is not needed to extend the inside 40-fathom (73 m) fishery through October 31 will be added to the Summer all-depth season if it can be used, and any poundage remaining unharvested from the Summer all-depth fishery will be added to the inside 40-fathom (73 m) fishery subquota, if it can be used. If inseason it is determined via joint consultation between IPHC, NMFS and ODFW, that the combined all-depth and inside 40-fathom (73 m) fisheries will not harvest the entire quota to the subarea, quota may be transferred inseason to another subarea south of Leadbetter Point, WA by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline. The daily bag limit is one halibut per person, unless otherwise specified, with no size limit. During days open to all-depth halibut fishing, no groundfish may be taken and retained, possessed or landed, except sablefish, Pacific cod and flatfish species when allowed by groundfish regulations, if halibut are on board the vessel.

Recreational fishing for groundfish and halibut is prohibited within the Stonewall Bank YRCA. The Stonewall Bank YRCA is an area off central Oregon, near Stonewall Bank, and is defined by straight lines connecting latitude and longitude coordinates. Coordinates for the Stonewall Bank YRCA are specified in groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.70 (f) and will be described annually in federal halibut regulations published in the *Federal Register*.

ODFW will sponsor a public input process shortly after the IPHC annual meeting to develop recommendations to NMFS on the open dates for each season each year. The three seasons for this subarea are as follows.

A. The first season (nearshore fishery) opens ~~June 1~~ ~~July 1~~, 7 days per week, only in waters inside the 40-fathom (73 m) curve. The fishery continues until the subquota is taken, or until October 31, whichever is earlier and is allocated 12 percent of the subarea quota if the 2A TAC is above 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt) or greater or 25 percent of the subarea quota if the 2A TAC is less than 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt). Any overage in the all-depth fisheries would not affect achievement of allocation set aside for the inside 40-fathom (73 m) curve fishery.

B. The second season (Spring fishery) is an all-depth fishery with two potential openings and is allocated 63 percent of the subarea quota if the TAC is 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt) or greater, or 75 percent of the subarea quota if the 2A TAC is less than 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt). Fixed season dates will be established pre-season for the first Spring opening and will not be modified in-season except if the combined Oregon all-depth Spring and Summer season total quotas are estimated to be achieved. Recent year catch rates will be used as a guideline for estimating the catch rate for the Spring fishery each year. The number of fixed season days established will be based on the projected catch per day with the intent of not exceeding the subarea subquota for this season. The first opening will be structured for 2 days per week (Friday and Saturday) if the season is for 4 or fewer fishing days. The fishery will be structured for 3 days per week (Thursday through Saturday) if the season is for 5 or more fishing days. The fixed season dates will occur in consecutive weeks starting the second Thursday in May (if the season is 5 or more fishing days) or second Friday in May (if the season is 4 or fewer fishing days), with possible exceptions to avoid adverse tidal conditions. If, following the “fixed” dates, quota for this season remains unharvested, a second opening will be held. If it is determined appropriate through joint consultation between IPHC, NMFS and ODFW, fishing may be allowed on one or more additional days. Notice of the opening(s) will be announced by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline. The fishery will be open every other week on Thursday through Saturday except that week(s) may be skipped to avoid adverse tidal conditions. The potential open Thursdays through Saturdays will be identified pre-season. The fishery will continue until there is insufficient quota for an additional day of fishing or July 31, whichever is earlier if the 2A TAC is 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt) or greater. If the 2A TAC is less than 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt) the fishery will continue until there is insufficient quota for an additional day of fishing or October 31, whichever is earlier.

C. The last season (summer fishery) is an all-depth fishery that begins on the first Friday in August and is allocated 25 percent of the subarea quota if the 2A TAC is 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt) or greater. If the 2A TAC is less than 700,000 pounds (317.5 mt) then 0 percent of the subarea quota will be allocated to this season. The fishery will be structured to be open every other week on Friday and Saturday except that week(s) may be skipped to avoid adverse tidal conditions. The fishery will continue until there is insufficient quota remaining to reopen for another fishing day or October 31, whichever is earlier. The potential open Fridays and Saturdays will be identified preseason. If after the first scheduled open period, the remaining Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain entire season quota (combined all-depth and inside 40-fathom (73 m) quotas) is 60,000 lb (27.2 mt) or more, the fishery will re-open on every Friday and Saturday (versus every other Friday and Saturday), if determined to be appropriate through joint consultation between IPHC, NMFS, and ODFW. The inseason action will be announced by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline. If after the Labor Day weekend, the remaining Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain entire season quota (combined all-depth and inside 40-fathom (73 m) quotas) is 30,000 lb (13.6 mt) or more and the fishery is not already open every Friday and Saturday, the fishery will re-open on every Friday and Saturday (versus every other Friday and Saturday), if determined to be appropriate through joint consultation between IPHC, NMFS, and ODFW. After the Labor Day weekend, the IPHC, NMFS, and ODFW will consult to determine whether increasing the Oregon Central Coast bag limit to two fish is warranted with the intent that the quota for the subarea is taken by September 30. If the quota is not taken by September 30, the season will remain open, maintaining the bag limit in effect at that time, through October 31 or quota attainment, whichever is earlier. The inseason action will be announced by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline.

(vi) Southern Oregon Subarea

This sport fishery is allocated ~~3.91~~ **4.0** percent of the Oregon sport allocation, ~~after the allocation to the Columbia River Subarea has been subtracted.~~ This area is defined as the area south of Humbug Mountain, OR (42° 40.50' N. lat.) to the Oregon/California Border (42° 00.00' N. lat.). This fishery will open May 1, seven days per week until the subquota is taken or October 31, whichever is earlier. 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, Pacific cod, and flatfish species, in areas closed to groundfish, if halibut are on board the vessel.**