

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2016 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) met with recreational halibut anglers on September 25, 2015. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for 2016, and refine the proposals adopted for public review at the September PFMC meeting.

We recommend the following changes to the Pacific halibut CSP for 2016, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES. These changes are consistent with those adopted by the Council for public review.

Proposed Changes to the North Coast Subarea:

1. Revise the season opening date in the north coast subarea to be the first Saturday in May. The season structure would maintain the Thursday and Saturday opening during the second week in May and the management closure already in place during the third week in May.

Rationale: The subarea quota is taken very quickly in the North Coast subarea. To the dismay of halibut anglers, the season lasted only three days in 2015, and the public was given short notice of the closure. Changes to the season structure have focused on providing sufficient time for WDFW to assess the catch and notify anglers of potential openings and closures. The current season structure was based on an assumption that four fishing days could be accommodated during the first two weeks of the season prior to the management closure the third week, which had been the case for several years until the 2015 season.

By revising the season opening date to be a week earlier and having only one open day during the initial week, WDFW would have three days of fishery data available during the scheduled closed week to review. While this does not address the concern about a shorter season, this would address the amount of time needed for advance public notice.

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

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 appreciate that the public review process provides us with the opportunity to gather feedback from stakeholders in both Washington and Oregon. After discussing this during our public meeting in September, we do not support revising the season structure for the Columbia River all depth fishery from four days per week (Thursday – Sunday) to seven days per week.

Catch and effort has been variable in the Columbia River subarea, where fishing effort targeting halibut can be affected by other fishing opportunities such as salmon, albacore tuna, and sturgeon. Recent CSP changes in this subarea have focused on providing recreational fishing

opportunities that achieve but not exceed the subarea quota. 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. While the season has remained open most of the summer without achieving the quota in recent years, the 2015 season closed in early June. If fishing effort and success is similar to 2015 in the future, a seven day per week fishery could result in achieving the quota even earlier.

Additionally, the way the CSP is written with regard to the nearshore fishery, the retention allowance for groundfish on halibut trips is only on days when the all-depth fishery is closed. It is unclear how this action affects the groundfish retention provisions generally, and whether, under the proposed revised season for the Columbia River specifically, groundfish retention on halibut trips would be prohibited or allowed. As we have heard from Washington anglers over the past few years, WDFW supports allowing groundfish retention, including lingcod, on halibut trips to promote angler efficiency and participation in the halibut fishery in this subarea.

In summary, WDFW recommends revising the season opening date in the north coast subarea to be the first Saturday in May, and does not endorse expanding the days of the week in the Columbia River subarea at this time. Our suggested CSP language changes for the north coast subarea are on the following page.

WDFW suggested language changes to the CSP for the north coast subarea:

(f) SPORT FISHERIES

(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°31.70' 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~~ **Saturday in** May. ~~9 and 15, and continue 2 days per week (Thursday and Saturday) in May for two weeks,~~ **The fishery will continue for two days (Thursday and Saturday) the following week in May** with a quota management closure scheduled for the third week. If sufficient quota remains, then ~~fishery will reopen on the following Thursday or Saturday.~~ **A**ny openings after the quota management closure will be scheduled to allow adequate public notice ~~of any inseason action~~ before each opening.

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 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*.