

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2018 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a recreational halibut meeting to identify and discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) in Olympia, on August 28, 2017. Stakeholders from the coastal and Puget Sound management areas provided their input on the season structure and management measures for the recreational halibut fishery for 2018. Based on that input and comments we have received regarding the 2017 halibut season, WDFW recommends the following alternatives be approved for public review.

Statewide Season and Quota Management

1. Retain the current statewide season structure (i.e., manage the north coast, south coast, and Puget Sound subareas under a common season) with either:
 - a. *Status Quo Quota Management*: Each subarea receives and is managed to achieve, but not exceed, its own separate allocation, or
 - b. *Shared Quota Management*: The south coast, north coast, and Puget Sound subarea quotas are pooled and managed under a shared quota to provide a minimum number of days (e.g., 5 or 6) for an initial statewide season. Following that initial statewide season, the remaining shared quota would be distributed among the subareas using status quo allocation formulas.

Rationale: WDFW has been working with stakeholders to develop a statewide season structures that maximizes season length in each subarea and provides some certainty with regard to the specific number of fishing days that will be available. In 2017, the season in the north coast, south coast and Puget Sound was structured to be open on concurrent days, which reduced effort shifts among subareas and lengthened the seasons in all areas compared to the staggered season approach.

However, effort and catch per unit of effort varies among the subareas and status quo allocations do not equitably provide for the same level of opportunity in all areas in terms of number of fishing days. In June, WDFW introduced some preliminary alternatives that might provide some assurances to recreational anglers that the season might last as long as five or six days in years when the 2A TAC is similar to 2017.

Washington Recreational Halibut Allocations

2. Revise the CSP to provide for halibut retention in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis when the 2A TAC is 1,100,000 pounds or more, which would provide 20,000 pounds of incidental halibut. The remaining halibut would be redistributed to the Washington recreational subareas according to the quota management structure described

above (i.e., either back to each subarea under Alternative 1a, or as a shared quota under Alternative 1b). On July 1, the remaining Washington recreational halibut quota from the north coast, south coast, and Puget Sound subareas would be transferred to the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis.

Rationale: After the initial couple of days, it takes about 50,000 pounds of halibut to accommodate one day of fishing under the statewide season. Some anglers have argued that the incidental retention of halibut in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis should not be allowed at all while others recognize the historical participation by some sablefish harvesters in a directed halibut fishery off northern Washington that closed in the mid-1990s. Shifting 50,000 pounds of halibut back to the Washington recreational fishery would likely provide for one additional day of fishing and, in most years, would accommodate the amount that has been incidentally retained by the sablefish fishery since the directed fishery closed.

Annual Bag Limit:

1. Revise the CSP to implement an annual bag limit.

Rationale: Stakeholders have indicated their support for an annual bag limit as another alternative to potentially extend the number of fishing days. WDFW staff have analyzed the angler catch reports provided on mandatory Catch Record Cards for the recreational halibut fishery. Approximately 84 percent of anglers reported catching only one or two halibut per year and therefore, an annual limit higher than two would have little to no effect relative to extending the season.

Columbia River:

1. Change the days of the week that the all depth fishery would be open from Thursday through Sunday to Thursday, Friday, and Sunday.

Rationale: The recreational halibut quota in the Columbia River all-depth fishery has been taken more quickly in recent years. In 2017 the all-depth fishery was open 14 days compared to 19 days in 2016. A proposal from stakeholders from the Washington portion of the Columbia River would close recreational halibut fishing on Saturday's during the all-depth fishery to spread the season out while still retaining one weekend day along with two week days.

Following the September Council meeting, WDFW will have another stakeholder meeting to discuss these alternatives further and identify specific season date options for the north coast, south coast and Puget Sound for 2018. Our intent is to bring forward season structure, management, and allocation recommendations to provide for fair and meaningful fishing opportunities for all Washington halibut fisheries.