

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON THE 2018 OREGON RECREATIONAL GROUND FISH FISHERY PROGRESS

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) monitors and manages the Oregon recreational bottomfish (groundfish) fishery inseason via data from the [Ocean Recreational Boat Survey](#) (ORBS) program. Effort, catch, and discard estimates are available monthly, on a one month lag; however, preliminary estimates have been available in 2018 approximately one week after the end of a statistical month.

Initial Fishery Structure and Regulations

Several noteworthy changes were made to state rules and procedures for the recreational groundfish fishery in 2018. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (OFWC) adopted new harvest guidelines (HGs) for our recreational and commercial nearshore fisheries based on federal harvest specifications for 2018, and lowered the marine fish daily bag limit from 7 to 5 fish (10 fish in federal rule). Black rockfish is now the primary constraint on Oregon's recreational groundfish fishery. After public input on the trade-offs between season length and bag limit, a full-year season goal was retained, with the understanding that a 5-fish bag limit carried some risk of exceeding the recreational HG for black rockfish if effort was high, and that ODFW would take inseason action to prevent that if necessary.

ODFW also revised its preseason modeling and projection methodology to incorporate the high 2017 effort levels, and to better represent the uncertainty and wide range of potential impacts. Inseason procedures were changed to increase the speed with which preliminary catch estimates and projections are available for use by ODFW fishery managers; this is now within 7 days of the end of a statistical month for most non-winter months. ODFW has also consulted with its Marine Sportfishing Advisory Committee (SAC) more often in 2018 in order to exchange information on season progress, and seek input on potential inseason changes.

In addition to the lower daily bag limit for the traditional bottomfish fishery in 2018, the new midwater offshore ("longleader") rockfish fishery has relieved some pressure on nearshore species such as black rockfish, cabezon, and minor nearshore rockfish. To encourage participation in this fishery, the OFWC established a separate bag limit of 10 fish, for eight select species only (yellowtail, widow, canary, greenstriped, redstripe, bocaccio, chilipepper, and silvergray rockfish). Anglers must fish outside of the 40 fathom line, and may not retain any other groundfish species. Participation in the longleader fishery so far in 2018 has been varied: relatively low overall, but with significant effort by private anglers out of Winchester Bay (which has little bottomfish habitat inside of 30 fathoms), as well as by several charter operations in other ports.

2018 Season Tracking and Progress

Bottomfish effort continues to be high. Projections made in early June indicated that black rockfish, nearshore rockfish complex species, and yelloweye rockfish were all on track to be very close to or over their respective HGs by the end of the year. Based on discussions with ODFW's Marine SAC, ODFW reduced the marine fish daily bag limit from 5 to 4 fish per person, effective July 1, 2018. The reduction was intended to avoid a repeat of the 2017 unscheduled early season

closure which had severe negative impacts to coastal communities in Oregon, and to hopefully preserve the fall all-depth opportunity scheduled to begin on October 1.

ODFW reviewed preliminary sampling data weekly during August, as catch accumulates rapidly during this high-effort period. Early indications were that black rockfish catch rates had dropped and there was no longer any risk to the HG. For cabezon, although retention was only allowed beginning on July 1, preliminary data showed high encounter rates and a relatively high average weight of sampled fish. Based on projections made in mid-month, cabezon was closed to retention on August 17 in order to ensure that total impacts, including mortality from released fish through the end of the year, remain under the recreational HG, and pose no risk to the 2018 annual catch limit (ACL). This was the shortest ever recreational cabezon season in Oregon (seven weeks).

ODFW received preliminary data for the full month of August (through September 2) on September 8. Table 1 shows current estimates and full-year projections based on those data and status quo management measures.

Table 1. Current and projected impacts in Oregon recreational fisheries, based on data through September 2, 2018 and status quo regulations

Species	Through Sept 2 (mt)	Year End Projections (mt)	OR Rec. Harvest Guideline (mt)
Black Rockfish	238.1	292.3	381.5
Cabezon	13.06	13.3	16.1
Nearshore Rockfish Complex	27.15	32.5	32.8
Yelloweye Rockfish	3.06	3.4	3.0

Following preliminary indications in late August that yelloweye rockfish was tracking high, ODFW considered moving our bottomfish fishery in from 30 to 20 fathoms. ODFW consulted the Marine SAC on August 30 to discuss the preliminary information and potential inseason changes. SAC members reported that moving the depth restriction line in to 20 fathoms would be highly disruptive to many ports, cutting off access to important fishing grounds, reducing or eliminating opportunity. ODFW weighed this input against the expected savings of approximately 0.1 mt of yelloweye rockfish mortality, and concluded that the potential benefit did not outweigh the costs to fishing communities and that implementing the restriction in this situation would not be consistent with the National Standard 8 guidance to minimize adverse economic impacts; therefore, no change has been made to the 30 fathom depth restriction.

Marine SAC members also provided ODFW with information on the potential impacts of inseason depth restrictions later this year, highlighting the importance of the fall all-depth opportunity when Oregon’s recreational fishery opens to all depths on October 1: charter offices already have quite a few trips booked for that time, and private anglers plan trips for that opportunity as well.

Finally, most SAC members and many others have requested that ODFW raise the daily bag limit back to 5 fish if possible, since black rockfish attainment is now projected to be well under the recreational HG. One charter office reported the cancellation of a number of bookings due to the reduced bag limit, and many others report that their customers who went out were unhappy with the small amount of fish they could keep, and wouldn’t come again with such a low limit. ODFW

models suggest that raising the bag limit back to 5 fish would not jeopardize the black rockfish HG, and would result in additional yelloweye rockfish mortality equal to or less than 0.1 mt.

ODFW recommends the Council review updated mortality projections, which are expected to be provided by the Groundfish Management Team at this meeting, and consider whether there is sufficient room under the yelloweye rockfish ACL to accommodate the inseason needs of all fisheries for the remainder of 2018. ODFW would prefer to proceed with no change to the depth management line and season, and reversing our earlier bag limit reduction if possible.

We note that returning to a 5 fish bag limit could increase our impacts to the Minor Nearshore Rockfish North complex to 0.1 mt over our recreational HG. As our commercial HG is expected to be attained, this could result in a very small overage relative to Oregon’s share of the ACL north of 40°10’, but we do not believe this would jeopardize the ACL overall.

To inform Council discussion and ODFW decision-making, in Table 2 we provide projections associated with several scenarios: status quo, reversing the bag limit reduction, and an additional depth restriction if it is critical to achieve even a small reduction in yelloweye rockfish impacts:

- 1) Status quo: 4 fish bag limit, no change to the depth restriction line or season (fishing limited to shoreward of the 30 fathom management line through September 30, and open to all depths from October 1-December 31).
- 2) Return to pre-season bag limit: 5 fish. Depth restrictions remain status quo.
- 3) Additional depth restriction: Fishing limited to shoreward of 20 fathoms through the remainder of the year. Bag limit remains at 4 fish.

Table 2. Projected year-end impacts in Oregon recreational fisheries under several inseason management scenarios

Species	Scenario 1 – Status Quo	Scenario 2 – Return to 5 Fish Bag Limit	Scenario 3 – Additional Depth Restriction
Black Rockfish	292.3	295.4	294.7
Cabazon	13.3	13.4	13.3
Nearshore Rockfish Complex	32.5	32.9	32.4
Yelloweye Rockfish	3.4	3.5	3.3

Under all options, cabezon would remain prohibited for the remainder of the year.

ODFW will implement any inseason actions for Oregon’s recreational groundfish fishery in state rule, and is not requesting conforming action by the Council or the National Marine Fisheries Service.