

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN FOR THE 2020 FISHERY

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) solicited public input via e-mail, phone, webinar, and public meetings to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific halibut (halibut in remainder of report) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for fisheries off of Oregon in 2020. Public meetings with recreational anglers occurred on August 5 in Salem, August 6 in Newport, August 7 in Brookings, and August 8 in North Bend, with a total of 25 people in attendance. The Newport meeting was webcast to allow remote participation. Based on public input, ODFW provides the following information for consideration by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in determining which alternatives to adopt for further public review.

Oregon Coastwide

Allow All-Depth Halibut Fishing and Longleader Gear Fishing on the Same Trip

The longleader gear fishery requires the use of specialized gear designed to fish off the bottom and avoid areas where yelloweye rockfish live (Figure 1). Fishing with this gear is currently allowed at any depth and time of year, including seaward of the 40 fathom seasonal depth restriction, and has a 10-fish bag limit of 10 mid-water rockfish species. Anglers have requested that this opportunity be allowed when also participating in the all-depth halibut fishery.

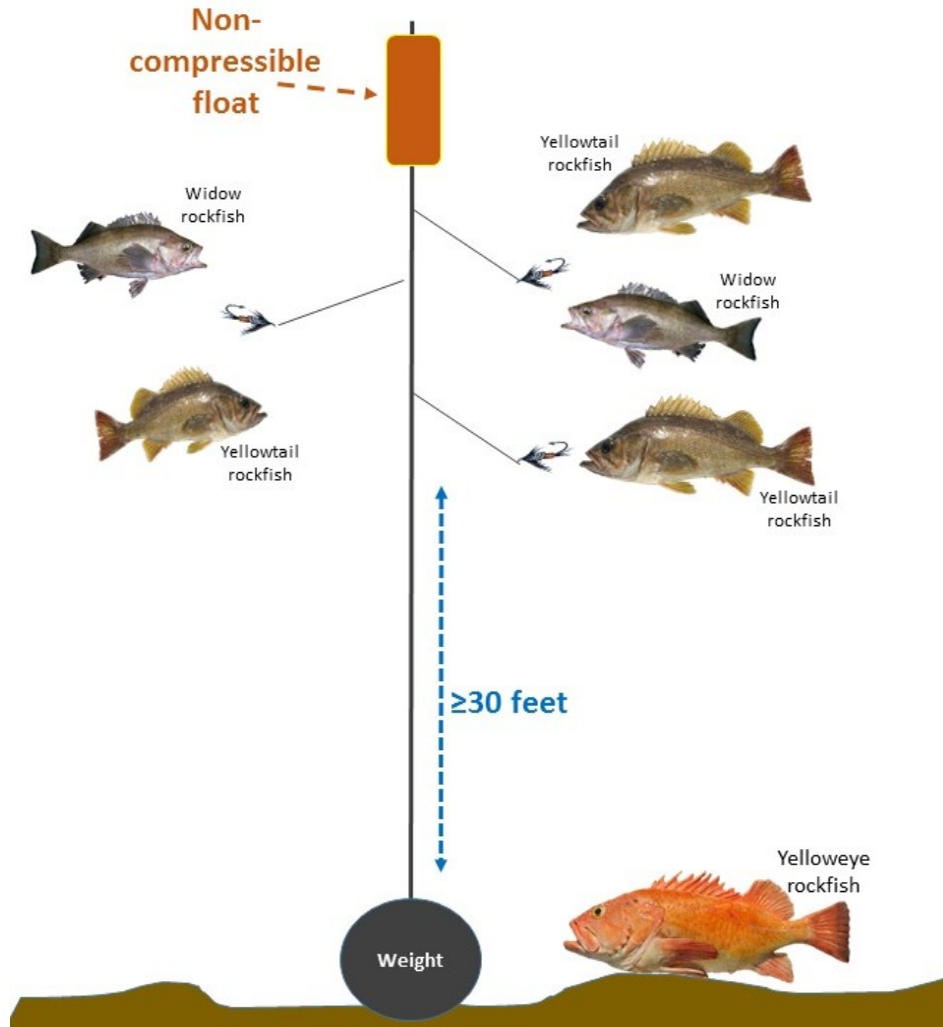
Status quo: Longleader gear fishing not allowed on the same trip as all-depth halibut

Alternative 1: Allow longleader gear fishing on the same trip as all-depth halibut

Rationale

Retention of most species of groundfish is prohibited when participating in the all-depth halibut fisheries to reduce the potential for interactions with and impacts to yelloweye rockfish. Since the longleader gear is specifically designed to avoid yelloweye rockfish and has been demonstrated successful in that goal, allowing it when fishing for all-depth halibut would add little, if any, additional risk to yelloweye rockfish. If halibut fishing is slow, it would allow anglers additional fishing opportunities while they are offshore.

Figure 1. Schematic of longleader gear. Requires at least 30 feet between the weight and the lowest hook along with a non-compressible float above the highest hook.



Columbia River and Southern Oregon Subareas

Revise the Southern Oregon Subarea Allocation

When the Area 2A quota is high, such as in 2019, the allocation to the Southern Oregon Subarea is higher than recent catches. This strands fish that could be utilized elsewhere, while at the same time, the Columbia River Subarea has seen increasing effort and very short seasons. While retaining the current percentage of the Area 2A allocation to the Southern Oregon Subarea, a new threshold could be established and poundage in excess of that amount moved preseason to the Columbia River Subarea.

Status quo: The Southern Oregon Subarea allocation is 3.91% of the Oregon sport allocation

Alternative 1: The Southern Oregon Subarea allocation is 3.91% of the Oregon sport

allocation up to a maximum of 8,000 pounds. Any poundage over that will be allocated to the Columbia River Subarea

Rationale

With the current high Area 2A quota (1.5 million pounds) that is expected to be in place for the next 3 years, the allocation to the Southern Oregon Subarea is higher than recent catches (Figure 2). This effectively strands fish that could be utilized elsewhere, particularly in the Columbia River Subarea. Putting in a threshold that is closer to recent catches, with some buffer to allow for higher catch, would provide adequate quota for the Southern Oregon Subarea. It would also transfer potentially unutilized fish (Table 1) to the Columbia River Subarea which has had reduced seasons in recent years, in time for that subarea to use the transferred quota.

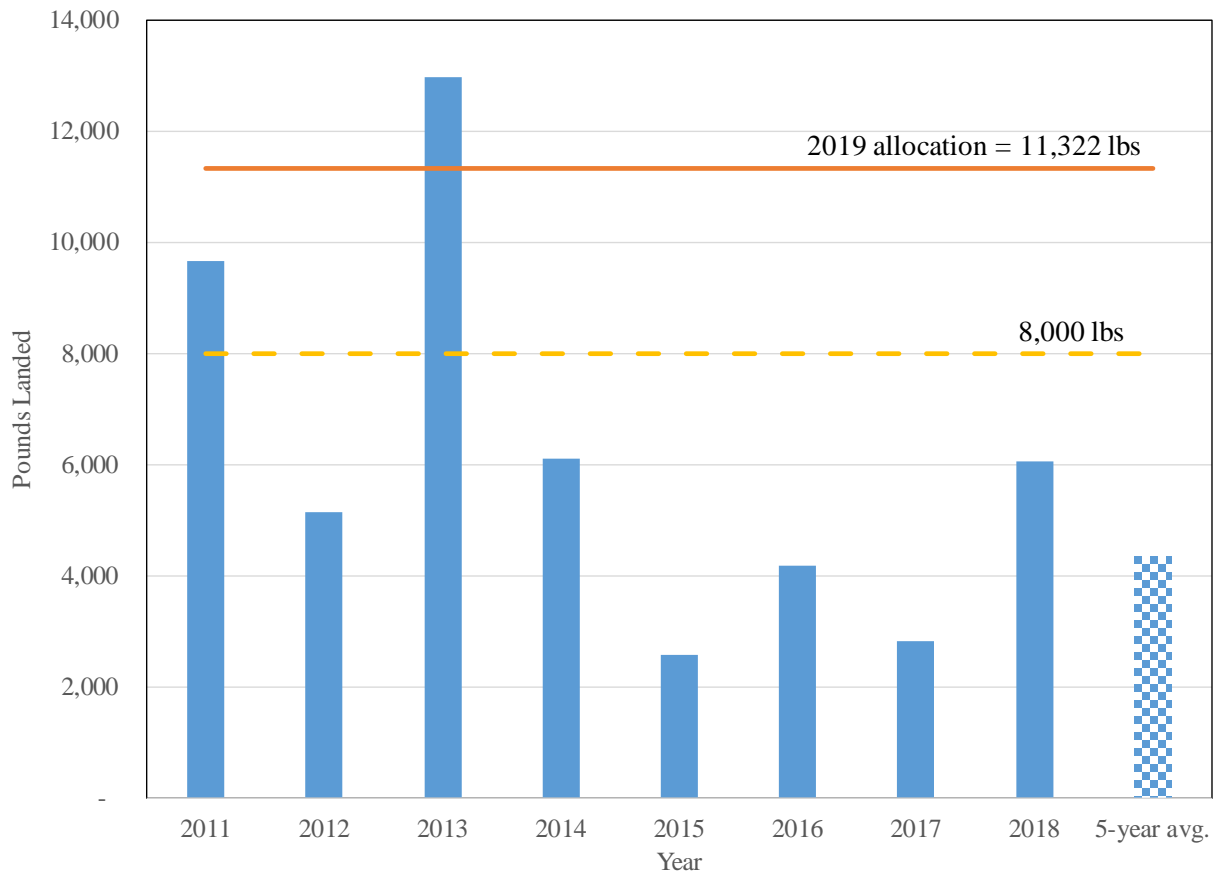


Figure 2. Annual Southern Oregon Subarea Catch 2011-2018, with the 2019 allocation and 8,000 pound threshold.

Under the flexible inseason management provisions already in the CSP, quota in any Oregon subarea that is projected to be unutilized by the season ending date can be transferred inseason to another Oregon subarea. For example, excess Southern Oregon Subarea quota can be transferred to another subarea inseason. However, although inseason transfers can enable quota to be used in the Central Coast Subarea’s summer all-depth or nearshore seasons, they do not meet the need in

the Columbia River, since that subarea’s all-depth fishery has ended in May or early June in recent years, which is earlier than an inseason transfer decision would be made.

Table 1. Total annual Southern Oregon Subarea quota (in pounds) and amount over 8,000 pounds that would have been available to be transferred to the Columbia River Subarea.

Year	Total Quota	Over 8,000 pounds
2014	3,712	-
2015	7,318	-
2016	8,605	605
2017	10,039	2,039
2018	8,982	982
2019	11,322	3,322
2020*	11,322	3,322
2021*	11,322	3,322
2022*	11,322	3,322

* assumed, based 1.5 million pounds Area 2A total allowable catch

Central Coast Subarea

Revise the Start Date of the Nearshore Fishery

The nearshore fishery start date has been June 1 for the last several years. In 2019, with the increased quota for Area 2A, and the resulting allocations for fisheries, there will likely be quota left unharvested in the nearshore fishery. Moving the start date to May 1 when the allocation is high would allow for additional opportunity to harvest the nearshore fishery quota.

Status quo: Opens June 1, seven days per week

Alternative 1: If the Central Coast Nearshore fishery allocation is 25,000 pounds or greater, the season will open May 1; if the allocation is less than 25,000 pounds the season will open June 1.

Rationale

The start of the nearshore fishery was moved to June 1 after several years of early attainment of the quota, which closed nearshore halibut fishing during much of the summer. By starting June 1, the nearshore fishery was open for more of the summer months. However, in years when the allocation has been high, there has been some poundage remaining at the end of the season with the June 1 start date. Opening on May 1 when the allocation is high would provide additional opportunity to harvest the entire allocation, while still having the fishery open during the summer months.

Revise the Days per Week Open in the Summer All-Depth Fishery

When allocations are high, adding one additional open day per week can allow for additional opportunity to harvest the allocated halibut poundage.

Status quo: Open the first Friday and Saturday in August, then every other Friday and Saturday until Oct. 31, or quota attainment.

Alternative 1: If the allocation projected to remain in the spring all-depth fishery after its conclusion plus the summer all-depth allocation total 60,000 pounds or more after the spring all-depth season concludes, a third open day may be added to the summer all-depth season open days

Alternative 1a. Thursday will be the additional open day

Alternative 1b. Sunday will be the additional open day

Rationale

Prior to 2010, the summer all-depth season was open three days per week, Friday-Sunday. Due to lower allocations and high catch rates, the season was changed to two days per week, Friday and Saturday, starting in 2010. The reduction in days open was intended to prevent exceeding the allocation in one opening, as happened in 2009. In 2015 and 2016 at moderate allocation levels, the fishery was open until the regulatory closure date of October 31, with some allocation unharvested. In 2017 and 2018 the season lasted into September. In 2019, even with opening every week, the fishery will likely be open until the regulatory closure and leave a lot of poundage unharvested. Having the option inseason to allow an additional day during each opening would allow for additional opportunity to harvest the allocation.

As mentioned above, previously when the summer fishery was open three days per week it was open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. This allowed for both weekend days to be open to all-depth fishing. However, the spring all-depth season is open Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. There was some concern expressed about having different days per week open in the spring and summer seasons, and the potential for confusion by anglers.

Adding a day per week would be an option that could be considered independent of, or in conjunction with, opening every week which is already in the Catch Sharing Plan, and would require consultation between ODFW, Council staff, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC).

Revise the Spring All-Depth Season Back-Up Days

In years with high allocations, such as 2019, if the weather and ocean conditions interfere with fishing opportunities during the spring all-depth fixed dates, there could be a lot of poundage left for the back-up dates. Having an inseason option to have back-up openings be allowed every week would allow for additional opportunity to harvest the allocation.

Status quo: Available back-up days are every other Thursday, Friday, and Saturday

Alternative 1: After the spring all-depth season fixed dates, ODFW, NMFS, IPHC and Council staff can confer and determine if back-up dates can be open every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday

Rationale

ODFW staff work with anglers pre-season to attempt to set the number of fixed dates in the spring all-depth season to have a good chance of taking the majority of the allocation without going over. Back-up dates are then available to harvest any remaining allocation. However in unusual years,

such as 2019, where there is a combination of high allocation and weather and ocean condition issues with several of the fixed openings, there can be a lot of allocation left after the fixed days. In 2019, there was approximately 110,000 pounds (out of the initial 171,000 pound allocation) remaining after the fixed dates. If a similar situation were to happen in the future, having the option inseason to have back-up dates open every week would allow for additional opportunity to harvest the allocation.

This would not guarantee open back-up dates every week. ODFW would have to project catch and quota remaining two weeks out, since catch estimates from one Thursday-Sunday opening would not be available prior to a potential opening beginning the following Thursday. An opening would only be offered if enough quota remained after the last catch estimates were made to cover two sets of back up dates (including one that has already occurred but not yet been estimated). Weather/ocean conditions could be taken into account by halibut managers in this evaluation. While the potential for weekly back-up dates could enable higher attainment of the allocation, there would be very short notice on whether weekly back-up dates would be open or not, which could complicate planning for halibut fishing trips.

Catch Sharing Plan Language

ODFW does not have proposed changes to the language in the Catch Sharing Plan for the above items at this time. As the alternatives are finalized, ODFW will draft the appropriate language revisions to the Catch Sharing Plan, in consultation with staff at the NMFS West Coast Region.