

## WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2020 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 Montesano, on August 29, 2019. 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 2020. Based on that input and comments we have received regarding the 2019 halibut season, WDFW recommends the following alternatives be approved for public review.

### **Puget Sound Recreational Subarea**

Proposed Change: Provide flexibility for the Puget Sound sub-area to open in April.

Rationale: In previous years, portions of the Puget Sound sub-area (i.e., the “eastern region,” or WDFW Marine Catch Areas 6-10) opened in early to mid-April while other areas (i.e., the “western region”) typically opened in late May. When the Catch Sharing Plan was modified in 2017 to remove the reference to these separate regions, the opening date for the entire sub-area was shifted to May. Through our catch monitoring efforts and angler reports, it has been noted that the catch per unit of effort (CPUE) tends to decrease as the season progresses, particularly in the inner Sound (i.e., Marine Catch Areas 6-10). The Puget Sound sub-area has not fully achieved its quota in recent years and, with the higher quota for Area 2A, anglers have expressed a desire to open the fishery when CPUE rates are higher to increase the likelihood of achieving the Puget Sound sub-area allocation.

Additionally, WDFW intends to maintain the statewide season structure that we have employed since 2017. Therefore, if this CSP change were approved, then WDFW would open only a portion of Puget Sound (i.e., Marine Catch Areas 6-10) earlier than the rest of the Washington sub-areas. Marine Catch Area 5 would continue to open on the same date as Marine Catch Areas 1-4.

### **North Coast, South Coast, and Columbia River Subareas**

Proposed Change: In years when April 30<sup>th</sup> falls on a Thursday, provide flexibility for the season to open on April 30<sup>th</sup>.

Rationale: In 2017, the Washington halibut seasons were restructured to have the same opening date and at least one consistent season day of the week (e.g., Thursday). In 2019, the north coast and Puget Sound seasonal days of the week were aligned, and the south coast and Columbia River season days were also consistent. This approach has reduced effort shifts among subareas and lengthened the seasons in all areas compared to the staggered season approach.

If both of these CSP changes were approved, then WDFW would be interested in receiving stakeholder input on opening inner Puget Sound as early as April 16th and opening the remaining areas on April 30<sup>th</sup> for 2020 season.

### **All Washington Subareas**

Proposed Change: Revise the current CSP language to provide the flexibility to open up to three days per week.

Rationale: For the north coast, south coast and Puget Sound subareas the CSP language currently describes that the season may be open up to two days per week, which may include one weekday, and one weekend day. The Columbia River subarea currently allows season openings on a combination of days that include Thursday, Friday, and/or Sunday but specifies that the season would only be open two days per week.

While there is strong support for maintaining a similar season structure as in place in recent years, stakeholders have shown interest in including more consecutive days open, particularly in years when the quota is higher or, attainment is hampered by poor weather or low catch rates. These changes would simply provide more flexibility in establishing season dates if the quota was sufficient to offer more consecutive fishing days.

Following the September Council meeting, WDFW will have another stakeholder meeting on October 28th to discuss these alternatives further and identify specific recommended season dates for 2020, which we will share with the Council in November.