

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2020 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a meeting with recreational halibut anglers on October 28, 2019. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for 2020, and refine the proposals adopted for public review at the September PFMC meeting. Base on those discussions, we recommend the following 2020 halibut season structure and changes to the Pacific halibut CSP, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES. These changes area consistent with those adopted by the Council for public review.

Puget Sound Recreational Subarea:

1. Revise the CSP to provide the flexibility for the Puget Sound sub-area to open in April.

Rationale: Prior to 2010, the eastern region of the Puget Sound sub-area (Marine Areas 6 –10) opened in mid-April while other areas (Marine Areas 1 – 5) typically opened in May. Historical catch data shows that CPUE in the eastern region drops off as the season progresses. The earlier opening in the more eastern areas of the Puget Sound provides anglers with the opportunity to catch halibut before they are thought to migrate through the Sound to more westerly management areas. This proposed change would provide Washington anglers with more access to the higher recreational halibut quota for 2A in sub-areas where the quota has not been achieved in recent years.

To maintain the general statewide season structure that has been in place since 2017, WDFW proposes to only open Marine Areas 6 – 10 earlier than the rest of the Washington sub-areas, Marine Area 5 would continue to open on the same date as Marine Areas 1 – 4.

North Coast, South Coast, and Columbia River Subareas:

1. Revise the CSP to provide the flexibility to open the north coast, south coast, and Columbia River sub-areas on April 30 in years when April 30 falls on a Thursday.

Rationale: This proposed change would allow all subareas to be open on Thursday, April 30 (if they were not already open as proposed for Marine Areas 6 – 10) and then the following first Saturday or Sunday in May. The season structure for all Washington sub-areas was revised in 2017 to open all areas on the same date and offer as many consistent season dates as possible. The intent of this approach was to reduce effort shifts between sub-areas and lengthen the season compared to an approach where sub-area openings are staggered. Since then, season openings have been structured to align with all sub-areas while also recognizing the preference for traditional halibut fishing dates (e.g., Saturdays in the north coast subarea and Sundays in the south coast subareas).

All Washington Subareas:

1. Revise the CSP language to provide the flexibility to open up to three days per week.

Rationale: Currently, the CSP language for the north coast, south coast and Puget Sound 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.

Statewide Season Dates:

Based on the input we received, WDFW recommends the Council adopt the following season dates for the South Coast, North Coast and Puget Sound sub-areas for 2020:

Marine Areas 6 - 10:

April 16 through May 16, three days per week, Thursday, Friday, Saturday
Memorial Day weekend, open Friday, through Sunday, May 22, 23, and 24
May 28 through June 28, three days per week, Thursday, Friday, Saturday

Marine Area 5:

April 30 through May 16, two days per week, Thursday, and Saturday
Memorial Day weekend, open Friday, through Sunday, May 22, 23, and 24
May 28 through June 28, three days per week, Thursday, Friday, Saturday

Marine Areas 3 and 4:

April 30 through May 16, two days per week, Thursday and Saturday
Memorial Day weekend, open Friday and Sunday, May 22, and 24
May 28 through June 28, two days per week, Thursday and Saturday

Marine Area 2:

April 30 through May 17, two days per week, Thursday and Sunday
Memorial Day weekend, open Thursday, May 21
If sufficient quota remains, open June 18, 21, 25, 28

Marine Area 1:

Open April 30 through May 17, two days per week, Thursday and Sunday
Memorial Day weekend, open Thursday, May 21
May 28 through June 28, open two days per week, Thursday and Sunday