

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON BIENNIAL
MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2021-2022

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will analyze routine changes to management measures for recreational fisheries such as season dates, bag limits, and depth restrictions for the 2021-2022 biennial groundfish cycle. In response to management changes implemented for 2019 and 2020, WDFW will review the most recent catch and effort data (through 2019) along with preliminary annual catch limits and state specific harvest guidelines or annual catch limits considered at this meeting to develop a range of management measures that will result in catch that meets, but does not exceed, allowable harvest amounts for 2021 and 2022.

Management measures analyzed for 2019 and 2020 were primarily focused on reducing restrictions on recreational fisheries intended to limit encounters with yelloweye and canary rockfish. Canary rockfish was declared rebuilt in 2015 ([Thorson and Wetzel](#)) and the 2017 yelloweye stock assessment ([Gertzeva and Cope](#)) showed that the progress toward rebuilding for yelloweye rockfish was much faster than anticipated. However, even with higher recreational harvest guidelines than had been in place for many years, WDFW, with support from Washington recreational anglers, took a very precautionary approach to reducing restrictions to ensure that harvest guidelines were not exceeded. This precaution was warranted because of the uncertainty in how encounters with yelloweye and canary rockfish would respond to relaxation of the restrictive management that was in place for over 15 years for these species.

The primary management tools to reduce encounters with yelloweye and canary rockfish in the Washington recreational fishery have been depth restrictions and area closures. Catch information from our recreational Ocean Sampling Program (OSP), which includes depth, provides data to analyze the impacts of depth restrictions. However, more discrete spatial data, such as that collected from logbooks or on-board observers, is not collected for the Washington recreational fishery. WDFW has relied on anecdotal information from recreational anglers to implement recreational bottomfish closures in areas where there could be higher encounters with yelloweye and canary rockfish (hot spots), often in areas where anglers target lingcod. WDFW has used area closures as a precautionary management tool despite not being able to project rockfish savings quantitatively.

As a specific example of the approach, a small rockfish conservation area off the south coast (Westport) subarea was analyzed and implemented during the 2007-2008 biennial harvest specification and management cycle. This closure, referred to as the Westport South Coast RCA, which is three by one nautical mile in size, was implemented in response to higher yelloweye and canary rockfish encounters during 2006. WDFW added another small closure in the same general area through the 2009-2010 biennial harvest specification and management cycle, which is two by one nautical mile, is referred to as the Westport Offshore RCA. Both of these areas have remained closed to recreational groundfish and halibut fishing to reduce encounters with yelloweye and canary rockfish. However, with canary rockfish now being rebuilt and the higher recreational harvest guideline for yelloweye rockfish, the additional restrictions of these small closed areas are no longer necessary and can provide anglers with access to healthy lingcod and canary rockfish stocks.

Recreational yelloweye and canary rockfish total mortality in 2019, under less constraining depth restrictions implemented for the 2019-2020 biennial cycle suggests that additional restrictions, such as area closures, can be considered for the 2021-22 biennial management cycle (Table 1). The 2021 and 2022 yelloweye rockfish annual catch limit (ACL) under the default harvest control rule is 50 and 51 mt respectively, slightly higher than the 2019 and 2020 ACLs of 48 and 49 mt. WDFW continues to support the approach of being highly selective of which management measures are included with the biennial management analysis package while taking up other priorities with standalone or smaller-packaged analyses and decision processes. For the prospective changes to the recreational area closures, WDFW believes it would be most efficient, both in terms of analysis and public input, to consider them as part of the 2021-22 management measures package.

Table 1. 2019 Washington recreational yelloweye and canary rockfish total mortality through September 2019 and the 2020 HG (canary rockfish) or ACT (yelloweye rockfish).

Species	Total mortality (mt)	HG or ACT
Yelloweye rockfish	4.3	8.1
Canary rockfish	14.0	44.4

As with the establishment of the area closures, the analysis of their removal will remain qualitative as the potential effect on catch is uncertain. More importantly, however, if these area closures were removed, WDFW would continue to monitor catches throughout the season and take emergency action if catch estimates are projected to exceed the Washington recreational limits for canary and yelloweye rockfish. Reinstatement of the area closures, as well as adjustments to bag limits and depth restrictions, are tools that would remain available.

In summary, WDFW believes that removal of these area closures is consistent with the Council's precautionary approach for yelloweye rockfish, particularly as we continue to be committed to managing our recreational fisheries to ensure the Washington yelloweye ACT is not exceeded.