

**Proposal for an Exempted Fishery Permit  
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Enhanced Yelloweye Recreational Fishery Biological Sampling**

In 2002, the Pacific Fishery Management Council declared yelloweye rockfish as overfished under provisions of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Act. A designation of overfished requires development of a rebuilding plan outlining management actions necessary to meet stock recovery criteria. To achieve rebuilt status, conservation measures, including prohibiting retention, depth restrictions, and area closures, have been implemented during ensuing years. As a result, managers have little data to manage this constraining species. For example, total tonnage of yelloweye rockfish bycatch in Washington's recreational fisheries is estimated without any current information on the size or age of incidentally caught yelloweye rockfish from the recreational fishery.

Additionally, as WDFW considered management measures for the 2019-2020 biennial management period, where the Washington recreational harvest guideline was significantly higher than had been in place for nearly 15 years, there was no data to inform how total mortality might change if retention of yelloweye rockfish were no longer prohibited.

Through this exempted fishery permit (EFP), the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) proposes to collect yelloweye rockfish from select recreational vessels to enhance biological characterization of this component of the recreational fishery and to gain insight on the impacts of limited, highly monitored, retention of yelloweye rockfish that can be used in evaluating management measures in the future.

***1. Applicants must submit a completed application in writing that includes, but is not limited to, the following information:***

***a. Applicant:***

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Olympia, WA 98501

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***b. Date of application:***

January 27, 2020

***c. Purpose and goals of the experiment, and a general description of the arrangements for the disposition of all species harvested under the EFP***

The purpose of this project is to describe the biological characteristics – length, age, weight – of yelloweye rockfish bycatch in Washington's recreational fisheries. This research will

also provide information needed to evaluate the fecundity, growth, demographics, and distribution of yelloweye rockfish. A secondary objective would be to test limited retention of yelloweye rockfish to inform future management decisions. The goal is to have select private anglers and charter operators retain yelloweye rockfish incidentally caught during standard fishing operations or trips. Participating anglers will retain yelloweye rockfish for immediate (i.e., upon arrival in port) delivery to WDFW staff or a designated alternate. WDFW will process and provide any fish suitable for human consumption post sampling to local charities or food banks. Fish not suitable for human consumption will be disposed of.

***d. Valid justification explaining why issuance of an EFP is warranted***

More than any other single groundfish species, yelloweye rockfish constrains both commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries; fishery catch, a customary source of biological and population trend data, is now severely limited or lacking altogether. In particular, almost no current biological information is available from yelloweye rockfish bycatch in Washington's recreational fisheries due to the prohibition of landing recreationally caught yelloweye rockfish at any Washington port.

Exempting select Washington private and charter recreational anglers from the prohibition on yelloweye rockfish retention provides WDFW access to these fish for biological sampling. Addressing this data gap will improve stock assessment, estimates of biomass, the average weight estimates for the recreational fishery, and management of the recreational fishery.

Conservative management during the rebuilding period has improved the status of the yelloweye stock ([Gertseva, V. and Cope, J.M. 2017](#)) and the current rebuilding plan ([Gertseva, V. and Cope, J.M. 2018](#)) forecasts that the stock will be rebuilt in 2025, much earlier than anticipated in the 2011 rebuilding analysis. An excerpt from the research and data needs section of the 2017 stock assessment highlighted that additional information on yelloweye rockfish is critical for management of the resource:

it is essential to continue yelloweye data collection, especially in this recent period when commercial and recreational catches are considerably lower than the historical period, to provide a fuller picture of age structure and population dynamics. Further length and age collections will also refine estimate of year class strength in the late 2000s, which will improve estimates of stock status and productivity.

The EFP would address this need by allowing select recreational anglers to retain yelloweye rockfish and provide them to WDFW staff.

***e. A statement of whether the proposed experimental fishing has broader significance than the applicant's individual goals***

Addressing the data gap will enable stock assessment scientists to better characterize the size and age composition of the recreational fishery yelloweye rockfish bycatch, which in turn, will improve the assessment of this species, with potential benefit for both recreational and commercial fisheries.

***f. A statement whether the applicant intends to continue the EFP activities for more than one year. NMFS issues EFPs for only one year at a time. However, if an EFP proposal has a multi-year focus, this information should be included in the proposal.***

Yes, WDFW intends to continue the program for more than one year so as to evaluate the feasibility and benefits of establishing a long-term program by regulation.

***g. Number of vessels and processors covered under the EFP, as well as vessel names, skipper names, and vessel ID and permit numbers.***

WDFW anticipates working with approximately 10 private and charter vessels to conduct this EFP. WDFW has reached out to a group of recreational and charter operators and confirmed their willingness to participate in this EFP. Once the EFP is approved, WDFW will provide a final list of participants with complete details once the EFP has been approved.

***h. A description of the species to be harvested under the EFP and the amount(s) of such harvest necessary to conduct the experiment; this description should include estimates of harvest impacts to non-target species***

This EFP is sought to collect more yelloweye rockfish for fishery dependent monitoring. Only this species requires an exemption to make incidentally caught fish from the recreational fishery available for sampling. The proposed project does not intend to create targeting of yelloweye rockfish by project participants and would simply turn normally discarded fish in the recreational fishery to retained fish- at 100 percent mortality. The only additional impact to yelloweye rockfish anticipated would be the mortality of the fish that would have survived had they been discarded instead of retained.

Project participants would be subject to interviews conducted by the WDFW Ocean Sampling Program, retained yelloweye rockfish will be reported and recorded as “dead/retained” to avoid skewing/biasing estimates of recreational catch and discard. At this point, we expect the core mortality from fish collected through this EFP to be taken from the Washington recreational harvest guideline.

Impact to non-project species as a result of this project are not anticipated as the project seeks only to sample yelloweye rockfish encountered through standard recreational fishery activity/operations.

***i. A reasonable justification for the amount of EFP fish to be harvested. For statistical purposes, this could include a power analysis or other means to estimate a reasonable amount or number of fish. Any other justification that supports the amount of fish proposed for EFP activities should also be included.***

There about 2000 yelloweye rockfish discarded annually by recreation anglers in Washington. About 40 percent are from fishing trips targeting Pacific halibut and another 50 percent from bottomfish trips. Our sampling goal is to obtain up to 200 individual yelloweye rockfish from recreational charter and private anglers in Washington’s recreational Pacific halibut and recreational groundfish fisheries. Each fish will be sampled for length, weight, sex, otolith, DNA and ovary samples. These data will provide information on size and age composition and improve average weight estimation for in-

season catch monitoring. Detailed catch location information will be documented when possible.

***j. A description of a mechanism, such as at-sea or dockside fishery monitoring, to ensure that the harvest or impact limits for targeted and incidental species are not exceeded, and are accurately accounted for and reported***

WDFW staff will coordinate closely with participating private anglers and charter operators to monitor fishing plans and arrange for delivery of any retained yelloweye rockfish upon return to port. For any given day (fishing trip), participants will only retain yelloweye rockfish if directed to do so in advance by WDFW. WDFW staff will ensure close communication between ports to ensure the number of retained yelloweye rockfish does not exceed the study's objective.

***k. A description of the proposed data collection methods, including procedures to ensure and evaluate data quality during the experiment, and data analysis methodology and timeline of stages through completion***

Standard protocols will be followed for sampling. Data will be electronically recorded and entered into the WDFW Biological Database System and uploaded to RecFIN.

***l. A description of how vessels will be chosen to participate in the EFP***

Selection of participants will consider operators with a history of cooperation with WDFW sampling programs and will be selected based on the following criteria: 1) demonstrate solid fish identification skills, 2) substantial historical participation in the recreational halibut and bottomfish fishery, 3) willingness to adhere to study protocols, 4) no groundfish or halibut related violations and, 5) plans for fishing during 2021 Pacific halibut openers or on trips targeting groundfish.

***m. For each vessel covered by the EFP, the approximate time(s) and place(s) fishing will occur, and the type, size, and amount of gear to be used***

Participating private and charter operators will be subject to all season, gear, bag limits or other regulations in place in 2021 that apply to the recreational fishery. The only exception will be the specific authorization under the proposed EFP to retain yelloweye rockfish for delivery to WDFW in port.

***n. Applicant signature***