

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON 2023 AND 2024 GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held four meetings with stakeholders to review and discuss proposed recreational management measures for 2023 and 2024. At the most recent meeting on May 3, 2022, we reviewed the preliminary preferred alternatives (PPA) approved by the Council for public review in April. This report summarizes the discussions with stakeholders and recommends a final preferred alternative (FPA), which is the same as the PPA, for Washington recreational fisheries in 2023 and 2024.

The Council adopted the FPA annual catch limit (ACL) for the Washington vermilion rockfish contribution to the Shelf Rockfish Complex north of 40° 10' N. lat. and the ACL contributions for Washington copper and quillback rockfishes, both of which are managed in the Nearshore Rockfish Complex north of 40° 10' N. lat., at their meeting in April 2022. The component ACL contributions for these species are all lower than what has been taken in the Washington recreational fishery in recent years. The FPA management measures for 2023 and 2024 are based on WDFW analysis and stakeholder input focused at reducing catch of these three species.

Bag Limits and Sub limits Coastwide (Marine Areas 1 – 4)

FPA Recommendation:

1. Prohibit the retention of copper rockfish, quillback rockfish, and vermilion rockfish in May, June, and July.

Discussion:

This measure would maintain the season length, depth restrictions, and daily and sub-bag limits currently in place but would prohibit the retention of copper, quillback, and vermilion rockfishes during the months of May, June, and July. The FPA for copper rockfish and quillback rockfish are projected to keep mortality below the species specific ACL contributions. Prohibiting the retention of vermilion rockfish in May, June, and July is expected to reduce mortality but not enough to stay below the Washington ACL contribution to the stock complex. The same is true for prohibiting retention over the whole season, although the catch projection expects mortality to be reduced closer to the ACL contribution. Conditions in the fishery in 2019 and during the pandemic have added to the uncertainty in our catch projections. For more details on the analysis, see [Agenda Item F.6, Attachment 2, June 2022](#).

The recommended FPA reflects that the recent stock assessment results for vermilion rockfish determined the stock be healthy. In addition to utilizing the best scientific information, the justification for recommending the FPA for vermilion rockfish is that it aligns with the prohibition for copper rockfish and quillback rockfish and addresses the need to continue collecting data. There is no commercial catch of vermilion rockfish off Washington, and if retention in the

recreational fishery is prohibited entirely, the data flow needed for stock assessments would be fully cut off. For additional information, see [Agenda Item F.4.a, WDFW Report 1, April 2022](#).

The 2023-2024 management cycle presents challenging circumstances for managing vermilion rockfish in particular but also for copper rockfish and quillback rockfish. The recommended FPA utilizes the best scientific information available from recent stock assessments in a way that seeks to maintain stability for Washington recreational fisheries in the near term that is in balance with the need to continue the collection of critical data that informs future stock assessments. This data flow is particularly important in Washington given that Washington does not have a nearshore commercial fishery and relies primarily on data from the recreational fishery to inform stock assessments.

Current mortality, shown as the average mortality from 2019 and 2021, are summarized in Table 1 below along with FPA Washington harvest guidelines (HGs) and projected mortality for the FPA. Due to pandemic related recreational fishery closures in spring 2020 and protracted closures of some coastal Washington ports which severely limited access to fishing grounds, the mortality data from 2020 were deemed unrepresentative and not included.

Table 1. Average 2019 and 2021 final mortality, 2023-2024 HG/ACT, and 2023-2024 projected mortality (mt) for the Washington recreational fishery under the FPA.

Stock or Complex	2019 and 2021 (avg) Final Mortality	2023 WA HG/ACT	2024 WA HG/ACT	2023-2024 Projected Mortality FPA
Canary Rockfish	26.5	41.5	40.9	39.45
YELLOWEYE ROCKFISH (ACT)	3.23	10.4	10.4	3.23
Black Rockfish	181.8	290.0	289.0	213.10
Lingcod	175.05			175.05
Nearshore Rockfish Complex	8.7	18.3	17.8	6.89
<i>Blue Rockfish</i>	<i>1.1</i>	<i>5.9</i>	<i>5.8</i>	<i>1.15</i>
<i>Quillback Rockfish</i>	<i>2.56</i>	<i>2.2</i>	<i>2.2</i>	<i>1.82</i>
<i>Copper Rockfish</i>	<i>2.88</i>	<i>1.9</i>	<i>1.9</i>	<i>1.82</i>
<i>China Rockfish</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>8.3</i>	<i>8.0</i>	<i>2.11</i>
Yellowtail Rockfish	54.9			62.41
Vermilion Rockfish	1.97	0.7	0.7	1.50
WA Cabezon/Kelp Greenling	9.1	19.8	17.1	9.06
<i>Cabezon</i>	<i>7.8</i>	<i>14.2</i>	<i>11.6</i>	<i>7.81</i>
<i>Kelp Greenling</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>5.5</i>	<i>5.5</i>	<i>1.25</i>