

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON THE 2023 OREGON RECREATIONAL BOTTOMFISH FISHERY

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) monitors and manages the Oregon recreational bottomfish (groundfish) fishery inseason via data from the [Ocean Recreational Boat Survey](#) (ORBS) program. Effort, catch, and discard data are available monthly, on a one-month lag; however preliminary data may be available approximately ten days after the end of a statistical month. Additionally raw interview is available weekly to discern trends in effort and catch rates.

The 2023 recreational bottomfish fishery has been progressing pretty much as projected pre-season. There was some uncertainty in how reduced Chinook salmon opportunities might impact effort in the recreational bottomfish fishery pre-season. Through July, effort is tracking in line with the last four years, with approximately 65,000 angler trips. Total bottomfish angler trips are on pace to exceed 100,000 again in 2023.

To reduce pressure on more nearshore rockfish species (e.g., quillback rockfish), ODFW worked with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) through the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) process to increase the daily bag limit in the longleader gear fishery (Holloway Gear) from ten fish to fifteen fish beginning on March 1¹. The limit applies to ten species of midwater rockfish only, and lingcod are prohibited.

Based on final ORBS data through June and preliminary July data, ODFW staff noticed canary rockfish impacts were tracking higher than projected pre-season, and when making the inseason change to the longleader gear fishery. Impacts in July were 34 percent higher than projected pre-season, particularly from the longleader gear fishery. Staff looked at raw sampling data for the first week of August and saw that there was continued high effort in the bottomfish fishery and higher than projected landings of canary rockfish. If all of August continued with effort and canary rockfish landings as July and the first week of August, the Oregon recreational harvest guideline (HG) for canary rockfish would likely have been exceeded. The 2nd and much of the 3rd week in August, the Oregon offshore “wind machine” picked up, limiting most ocean effort, thus reducing canary rockfish catches.

On August 17, 2023, ODFW staff conferred with our advisory group about the progress of the bottomfish fishery, other recreational fishing opportunities, weather patterns, and how to potentially reduce the impacts to canary rockfish to stay within the HG. Staff proposed implementing a 5-fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish within the 15 fish longleader gear daily bag limit, reducing the longleader gear fishery bag limit back down to 10 fish, or closing the longleader gear fishery. Input from the advisors was split evenly between the first two options, none were in favor of the third option. Concerns with a sub-bag limit were complicated regulations as well as potential bycatch release mortality if an angler happened into a school that had a lot of canary rockfish in it. Reducing the overall bag limit for the longleader gear fishery would be a simpler regulation, however there were some concerns that it might not reduce canary rockfish impacts enough and additional actions would be necessary later in the season.

¹ https://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2023/02_Feb/022723.asp

Staff also consulted with the Oregon State Police Marine Fisheries Team to gather their input on the possible changes and which they thought would be the easiest for anglers to understand and simplest to enforce.

Based on all of the above, ODFW put in a temporary rule through the state process, to reduce the longleader gear fishery bag limit to ten fish beginning on Tuesday, September 5, 2023². ODFW is not asking for concurrent federal action at this time.

² https://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2023/08_Aug/082923.asp