

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN FOR THE 2024 FISHERY

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) solicited public input via e-mail, phone, and a public meeting hosted in Newport, Oregon on September 26, which was webcast, to discuss the proposed changes to the Pacific halibut (halibut in remainder of report) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) forwarded by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) during the September Council meeting. Six members of the public attended the meeting in person, 30 participated via the webinar, and many others reached out via phone and email to provide feedback regarding sport halibut fisheries. ODFW considered the public input and provides the following information for consideration by the Council in determining which alternatives to adopt for the 2024 halibut fishery.

Proposed Changes for the 2024 Catch Sharing Plan

Between State Allocation Shift

Oregon anglers oppose any allocation shift of the Oregon quota to California. Prior to, during, and after the September public meetings, Oregon sport anglers strongly voiced their disapproval of any halibut allocation shift from the Oregon sport fisheries to the California sport fisheries.

The Oregon Central Coast subarea (which accounts for 93.79% of the Oregon sport allocation) has been split between a spring, summer, and nearshore only fishery to extend fishing opportunities into the summer and potentially fall months. Historically, the two all-depth seasons had been limited to two or three-days of fishing per week, prior to the higher quotas that began in 2019. The nearshore halibut fishery operates seven-days per week as mainly a bycatch fishery allowing anglers who target bottomfish to retain a halibut if caught incidentally during days when the all-depth fishery is closed. In addition to set seasons and fishing days per week, Oregon anglers have an annual limit of six halibut per year.

Oregon anglers raised the concern that the season structure intended to extend the fishery into the later summer months during periods of low allocation has instead stranded unused quota over the past few years providing credence to this allocation shift proposal. Anglers voiced their frustration that a lack of opportunity during high(er) quota years and perceived overly conservative management by ODFW may now result in the displacement of quota, stating that under a more liberal season structure, it is likely that the Oregon recreational halibut quota would have been fully harvested.

Furthermore, there was a request to shift quota to the Columbia River Subarea prior to any allocation shift to California, as the Columbia River Subarea has few fishing days, due to quota attainment.

For more information on the history of the Oregon recreational halibut fishery, please see [Agenda Item D.1.a, ODFW Report 1, September 2023](#).

Status quo: No Allocation Shift

Alternative 1: Move 2 percent of the OR sport allocation and 1 percent of the WA sport allocation to the CA sport allocation

Alternative 2: Move 1 percent of the OR sport allocation and 0.5 percent of the WA sport allocation to the CA sport allocation

Alternative 3: Move 0.6 percent of the OR sport allocation and 0.4 percent of the WA sport allocation to the CA sport allocation

Inseason Flexibility Provision

ODFW is in support of an inseason flexibility provision that could provide an alternative means to more fully utilize the non-tribal portion of the Area 2A allocation. Currently the Columbia River Subarea is managed in a similar manner between Oregon and Washington. With open communication between all three west coast states and NMFS, a portal to transfer any (or all) projected unused quota between the states could be an effective tool, however additional details would need to be ironed out.

If this concept was available for 2023, a ‘trigger date’ of July 15 or August 1 would have yielded a low amount of projected unused quota from the Oregon sport allocation (1,032 pounds remaining from the Central Oregon Coast spring all-depth fishery). Anglers harvested an average of 15,669 pounds per week in the all-depth fishery prior to the summer season that began in August. During the month of August, sport anglers shifted their attention to coho salmon and albacore tuna rather than halibut, bringing the estimated average down to 5,998 pounds per week. By Labor Day Weekend, it was clear that the entire Oregon sport allocation will not be harvested in 2023, with a current estimate of about 55,000 pounds (19 percent) projected to be left unharvested.

As recent as 2018, the Central Oregon Coast summer all-depth season was open a total of six days (three two-day openings) while exceeding 50,000 pounds of halibut landed. The fish were much larger that year than in any year since, though the 2012-year class that has dominated the catches of recent years continues to grow, further complicating projections for the summer halibut fishery that is already influenced by coho salmon, albacore tuna and weather.

Central Oregon Coast All-Depth Open Days

Oregon sport anglers voiced their approval of adding more flexibility to the CSP to allow for more fishing days during the spring all-depth fishing season, when the allocation allows. For more information regarding the Central Oregon Coast proposal and draft CSP language, please see [Agenda Item D.1.a, ODFW Report 2, September 2023](#).

Status quo: Oregon Central Coast Spring All-depth Back-up dates may be established every other week, except week(s) may be skipped to avoid adverse tidal conditions. The potential Back-up dates will be identified preseason.

Alternative 1 (ODFW recommendation): Oregon Central Coast Spring All-depth Back-up dates may be established every week, except week(s) may be skipped to avoid adverse tidal conditions. The potential Back-up dates will be identified preseason.