

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN FOR THE 2025 FISHERY

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) solicited public input via e-mail, phone, and four public meetings in Oregon¹, one of which was webcast, to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific halibut (halibut in remainder of report) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for fisheries off Oregon in 2025. Forty-nine members of the public attended meetings in person, nineteen participated in the webinar, and others reached out via phone, email and office visits throughout the year to provide feedback regarding sport halibut fisheries. ODFW considered the public input and how recent fisheries have progressed and provides the following proposals for consideration by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in determining which alternatives to adopt for further public review for the 2025 fishery.

Proposed Changes for the 2025 Catch Sharing Plan

Central Oregon Coast Subarea

For the last several years anglers expressed a desire to have (and keep) the Central Oregon Coast subarea spring and summer all-depth seasons open seven days per week. The week-long opener is desired to spread the angling effort throughout the week and allow opportunity that better accommodates a variety of work schedules, reduces crowding at boat ramps, and enables the ability to take advantage of optimal weather windows. ODFW has received a lot of positive feedback with the fishery open seven days per week in recent years, instead of the more traditional two or three-day openers that were in place in prior years.

In the Central Oregon Coast subarea, quota attainment has been below 80% since 2019, the first of six continuous years of higher quotas (~1.5 million pounds) throughout the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Regulatory Area 2A fisheries. If the Central Oregon Coast subarea continues to see quotas at or above 250,000 pounds, the nearshore fishery (restricted to inside of the 40-fathom regulatory line) may become obsolete. For 2024, the spring all-depth season was open seven days per week from May 1 through the season's regulatory end date of July 31, and the summer all-depth season began August 1 and is anticipated to be open through October 31, seven days per week. Thus the 31,939 pounds of quota allocated to the nearshore fishery will be either rolled-up into the subarea's all-depth quotas, used as a buffer for the two other Oregon subareas, or go unused (pending an allocation shift to a neighboring state). Per the request from Oregon anglers to have the fishery open at all-depth, seven days per week, and to minimize the inseason changes that have been necessary the past few years, ODFW offers the following proposals be forwarded for additional public review prior to the November Council meeting.

Option 1: If Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is 1,200,000 lbs. or greater, allocate 10,000 pounds of sub-quota to the Central Oregon Coast nearshore fishery and shift the remaining sub-quota to the Central Oregon Coast subarea all-depth seasons.

¹ https://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2024/07_Jul/071824.asp

Option 2: Remove language from the CSP limiting the Central Oregon Coast subarea all-depth seasons to a two or three-day opener per week.

Option 3: Start the Central Oregon Coast subarea summer all-depth fishery on August 1 instead of the first Thursday in August.

Option 4: If the entire Central Oregon Coast subarea quota is below 50,000 pounds prior to August 1, the summer all-depth season will be open every other week.

Option 5: If the entire Central Oregon Coast subarea quota is 30,000 pounds or greater following Labor Day Weekend, the summer all-depth season will be open every week.

ODFW proposes the following language for the 2025 CSP if the options above are adopted during the November Council meeting:

CSP section 6.11.1.d.i. Nearshore

Proposed CSP Language:

The nearshore fishery is allocated 10,000 lbs. of the Central Oregon Coast subarea quota if Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is 1,200,000 lbs. or greater, 12 percent if Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is 700,000 lbs. or greater and less than 1,200,000 lbs., or 25 percent if Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is less than 700,000 lbs.

The nearshore season opens June 1, seven days per week, only in waters inside the 40-fathom (73 m) regulatory line, unless the sub-quota is 25,000 lbs. or greater, then it opens May 1. The fishery continues until the sub-quota is taken, or until October 31, whichever is earlier. This fishery is superseded by the all-depth fisheries when both are open.

CSP section 6.11.1.d.ii. Spring all-depth

Proposed CSP Language:

The spring season sub-quota is 75 percent of the Central Oregon Coast subarea quota if Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is 1,200,000 lbs. or greater, 63 percent if Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is 700,000 lbs. or greater and less than 1,200,000 lbs., or 75 percent if Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is less than 700,000 lbs.

The spring season is an all-depth fishery that may begin as early as May 1, up to seven days per week, with two distinct opening types (“Fixed” and “Back-up”).

Fixed dates will be established preseason prior to the first spring opener and will not be modified inseason except if the combined Oregon all-depth spring and summer season total quotas are estimated to be achieved, then any remaining Fixed dates will be closed. The number of Fixed dates will be based on the projected harvest per day with the intent of not exceeding the subarea sub-quota for the season. Recent year catch rates and harvest weights will be used as a guideline for setting up the spring season each year. Additionally, ODFW will sponsor a public input process shortly after the IPHC annual meeting to develop recommendations to NMFS on the open dates for the Fixed and Backup dates each year.

If current year trends and projections indicate that the sub-quota for the spring all-depth season will remain unharvested following the Fixed dates, additional openings may occur.

ODFW will consult with IPHC, NMFS, and PFMC to determine if any (and how many) Back-up dates will open. Notice of the opening(s) will be announced by NMFS. See section 6.8.2 for Notice Procedures. Back-up dates will be identified preseason, though announced inseason.

If Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is 700,000 lbs. or greater, then the fishery will continue until there is insufficient quota available for an additional day of fishing or July 31, whichever is earlier. The summer all-depth season will then open in August (6.11.1.d.iii). If Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is less than 700,000 lbs., then the fishery will continue until there is insufficient quota available for an additional day of fishing or October 31, whichever is earlier.

CSP section 6.11.1.d.iii. Summer all-depth

Proposed CSP Language:

The Summer season sub-quota is 25 percent, or 25 percent minus the 10,000 lbs. allocated to the nearshore fishery, of the Central Oregon Coast Subarea quota if Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is 700,000 lbs. or greater. If Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is less than 700,000 lbs., the summer all-depth season is void. If a sub-quota is allocated to this season, the season will begin on August 1 and continue until there is insufficient quota available for an additional day of fishing or October 31, whichever is earlier.

If the entire Central Oregon Coast subarea remaining allocation is greater than (or projected to be greater than) 50,000 lbs. upon the completion of the spring all-depth season (July 31), the summer all-depth season will be open seven days per week every week beginning August 1. If the remaining subarea quota is less than 50,000 lbs., the summer all-depth season will open every other week, with the first opener beginning on August 1 through the first Sunday of August and closed for the following full week in August (Monday through Sunday). The season will continue (either every week or every other week) until there is insufficient quota available for an additional day of fishing or October 31, whichever is earlier.

If after the Labor Day weekend the entire remaining quota for the Central Oregon Coast subarea (combined all-depth and nearshore sub-quotas) is 30,000 lbs. or more and the fishery is not already open every week, the fishery will then be opened every week if determined to be appropriate through joint consultation between IPHC, NMFS, PFMC, and ODFW.

Rationale

Due to the high quota this year, the all-depth seasons began on May 1, at seven days per week, and will likely remain open through the regulatory closure of October 31. Therefore, the nearshore fishery will not be utilized in 2024. During years of high quotas, the Central Oregon Coast subarea all-depth fisheries can better utilize the quota and provide anglers additional opportunity to harvest Pacific halibut in densely populated areas seaward of the 40-fathom regulatory line. However, during years of lower quotas, the less densely populated nearshore fishery will again be necessary for anglers to provide halibut opportunity as all-depth halibut days may be limited.

The CSP currently specifies that the summer all-depth season begins on the first Thursday (or Friday) in August and continues until there is insufficient quota for an additional day of fishing or October 31, whichever is earlier. An August 1 start date simplifies the CSP as the Central Oregon Coast subarea transitions away from three-day (or two-day) openers to seven days per week. Removing the Thursday and Friday specified start dates, streamlines the process and removes any forced all-depth closures that could add regulatory complexities and cause angler confusion following the July 31 regulatory closure of the spring all-depth season. Additionally, starting the summer all-depth fishery at seven days per week instead of relying on an inseason change to maximize angler opportunity to harvest the allowable quota both simplifies the regulations and is supported by Oregon recreational anglers. During years of lower quotas, the fishery will be open every other week to extend the fishery farther into the summer months.

No Proposed Changes to Other Subareas or Seasons

ODFW is not proposing any changes to the Columbia River or Southern Oregon subareas.

Language clean-up

Under section 6.11.1.c., the intent is to take the entire Central Oregon Coast Subarea allocation by October 31, not September 30. The Central Oregon Coast and Southern Oregon subareas are open until October 31.