

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2025 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a public meeting with recreational stakeholders on October 3, 2024. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and refine the proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for 2025 developed at the public meeting held by WDFW in August and adopted for public review at the September PFMC meeting ([Agenda Item F.1.a Supplemental WDFW Report 1](#)). The recommended changes to the CSP and details presented below support achieving Washington subarea and overall sport allocations.

2024 Preliminary Season Summary

The Washington recreational halibut season closed statewide on the regulatory end date or September 30, 2024. The preliminary total catch estimate is 293,280 pounds or 98 percent of the quota. The final catch estimate is pending catch information from interior marine areas of Puget Sound but is expected to be within the quota.

Remaining open through September 30 was possible because Washington was able to benefit from the newly implemented CSP provision that allows transfer between states of available quota identified in mid-August. Per this provision, after meeting with Council and state managers in mid-August, NMFS transferred quota to Washington in September. Had this provision not been in place, based on catch projections, we likely would have closed all subareas before September 30, canceling scheduled dates to avoid exceeding the quota. With preliminary total catch estimates expected to be within the Washington sport allocation, it's not likely that we will need the amount transferred to us and it remains available to other states if needed. We appreciate the flexibility this new feature adds to managing recreational opportunity and thank NMFS for undertaking the additional rulemaking to make it happen.

Washington Subareas

Stakeholder input during public meetings (August 13 and October 3) was supportive of continuing season structures similar to 2024, with some modest adjustments as captured below for each subarea. The sentiment was that the incremental steps taken in recent years to expand opportunity has reached a satisfactory balance between early season and late season opportunity while also meeting other fishery objectives. However, some stakeholders continue to express interest in opening the Puget Sound subarea in March instead of April. WDFW will explore if this could be feasible with agency fishery monitoring capacity and under federal rule-making timelines. The season recommendations in 2024 and again for the 2025 season reflect greater comfort that the proposed subarea schedules are not likely to risk closures before the end of May. However, some uncertainty remains, and flexibility in the number of days per week and the ability to share

allocation between subareas will remain important to meet allocation objectives for the Washington sport fishery.

While we have appreciated CSP provisions that have supported flexibility to add days open for halibut inseason, we also recognize this poses challenges in meeting federal obligations for public noticing. Because the 2025 Area 2A allocation won't be determined until late January 2025, the recommendations below include alternative season structures which are dependent on the 2A Fishery Constant Exploitable Yield (FCEY) for the north coast, Columbia River, and Puget Sound subareas. This approach was first introduced and recommended for Washington subareas in 2024, and we see continued benefit as it can reduce the need for inseason action. For 2025, the Columbia River subarea recommendation includes a new feature wherein a number of "back-up" days planned for June are contingent on a predetermined amount of quota remaining by a predetermined decision date in May. Specific to 2025, "back-up" days would open only if the Columbia River remaining subarea quota was at least 55 percent as of May 25. The intent with these approaches is to build flexibility into the CSP that is transparent and relies less on inseason actions.

Status quo CSP provisions stipulate season dates will be developed for all areas by the end of November each year for the following year. Inseason structure may include periodic closures to assess the remaining quota for subareas. Per the CSP, Puget Sound seasons will open in early May with flexibility to open in April. Coastal area all-depth fisheries, per the CSP, will open in early May with the flexibility to open on April 30 in years when April 30 falls on a Thursday. Columbia River dates will be determined after consultation between Oregon and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife.

WDFW Recommendation: Maintain the CSP language to allow individual subarea season structures to be contingent on the 2025 FCEY and modify the CSP language to include the "back-up" days feature for the Columbia River subarea.

Area specific status quo and 2025 options and recommendations are presented below.

Puget Sound Subarea (Marine Areas 5-10)

Status Quo:

If the 2025 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds, the season may be open up to seven days per week in April, May, and June.

- April 3 through June 30, **seven days per week.**

If the 2025 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds the season may be open up to five days per week in April, May, and June.

- April 3 **five days per week** through June 30, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday.

If quota remains, open up to seven days per week in August and September.

Option 1:

Same as Status Quo, except if the 2025 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds, Marine Areas 6-10 within the Puget Sound subarea would open Thursday, March 27, 2025. (Marine Area 5 would open April 3).

WDFW Recommendation: Status Quo

Rationale: Status quo maintains opportunity in the spring months which stakeholders prefer while aligning the schedule with the 2A FCEY allocation, and if quota remains additional dates can be scheduled inseason for August and September. Option 1 is not recommended for 2025 due to the federal annual rule-making process; it is currently challenging to have regulations in place for an April 3 season opening. In discussions with NMFS an idea for consideration for 2026 (and beyond) that might be a viable approach to alleviate this constraint was identified and will be explored further. However, other conservation and logistical challenges need to be addressed and will also require further review.

North Coast Subarea (Marine Areas 3 and 4)

Status Quo:

If the 2025 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds, the season may be open up to three days per week (Thursday, Friday, Saturday), except Memorial Day weekend which may be open Friday and Sunday.

- May 1 through May 17, **three days per week**, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and
- Friday, May 23 and Sunday, May 25 (Memorial Day weekend) and
- May 29, 30, 31.

If the 2025 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds, the season may be open **two days per week** in May (Thursday and Saturday) except Memorial Day weekend which may be open Friday and Sunday

- May 1 through May 17 **two days per week**, Thursday and Saturday, and
- Friday, May 23 and Sunday May 25 (Memorial Day weekend) and
- May 29 and 31.

The season in June may be open up to four days per week (regardless of the 2A FCEY).

- June 1 through June 29, **four days per week**, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

If quota remains, open up to seven days per week in August and September.

Option 1:

Status Quo, except add Saturday May 24 if the 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds and if the 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds open **three days per week** (Thursday, Friday, Saturday) in June.

WDFW Recommendation: Option 1

Rationale: Stakeholders in the North Coast subarea support Option 1 which largely incorporates Status Quo opportunity in May while also adding the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend if the 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds. This option reduces the schedule in June (three days per week instead of four days) compared to Status Quo should the 2A FCEY for 2025 be less than 1.3 million pounds.

South Coast Subarea (Marine Area 2)

Status Quo:

During May the fishery may be open up to three days per week (Thursday, Sunday and Tuesday) and if sufficient quota remains, then open up to eight days in June.

- May 1 through May 22, **three days per week**, Thursday, Sunday, and Tuesday, and
- Tuesday, May 27 and Thursday, May 29, and
- June 12 through 29 **three days per week**, Thursday, Sunday, and Tuesday (equals eight days).

If quota remains, open up to seven days per week in August and September.

Option 1: Status quo, except Sunday, May 25 would be added to the schedule.

WDFW Recommendation: Option 1

Rationale: Option 1 represents incorporation of stakeholder input which requested adding the Sunday (May 25, 2025) of Memorial Day weekend to the Status Quo schedule approved for public review at the PFMC September 2024 meeting. This addition provides continuity in the schedule and offers halibut fishing opportunity during a long holiday weekend.

Columbia River Subarea (Marine Area 1)

Status Quo:

During May and June, the fishery may be open up to three days per week (Thursday, Sunday and Tuesday).

- May 1 through June 30, **three days per week**, Thursday, Sunday, and Tuesday.

If quota remains, open up to seven days per week in August and September.

The nearshore fishery will be open Monday through Wednesday following the opening of the all-depth fishery, until the nearshore allocation is taken or September 30, whichever is earlier. On days when the all-depth halibut fishery is closed, taking, retaining, possessing, or landing halibut on groundfish trips is only allowed in the nearshore area.

Option 1:

If the 2025 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds, open:

- May 1 through May 30, **three days per week**, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday and

- June 1 – 29, **three days per week**, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday as fixed dates, with **two days per week**, Monday and Tuesday, as back-up dates to be opened if at least 55 percent of the subarea quota remains as of May 25, 2025.

If the 2025 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds, open

- May 1 through May 30, **three days per week**, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday and
- June 1 – 29, **three days per week**, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday.

If quota remains, open up to seven days per week in August and September.

The nearshore fishery will be open Monday through Wednesday following the opening of the all-depth fishery, until the nearshore allocation is taken or September 30, whichever is earlier. On days when the all-depth halibut fishery is closed, taking, retaining, possessing, or landing halibut on groundfish trips is only allowed in the nearshore area.

Option 2:

Same as Option 1, except should the FCEY be at least 1.3 million pounds the recreational fishery would not open on Monday, June 23 or Tuesday, June 24 (as back-up dates) to reduce interaction with the commercial directed halibut fishery which typically opens the Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday the last full week of June. Under this option, both fisheries would be open on Thursday.

WDFW Recommendation: Option 2

Rationale: Stakeholders in the Columbia River subarea requested a season structure that maintains a three-day per week schedule similar to 2024 but swaps Tuesday with Friday. Instead of opening Thursday, Sunday, and Tuesday, the Columbia River subarea would open Thursday, Friday, and Sunday. Columbia River stakeholders recognized the uncertainty associated with consecutive-day openers and for potential effort shift from other sub-areas closed on Friday but felt this structure supports local fishery needs.

Both Option 1 and 2 propose season dates dependent on the 2A FCEY for 2025. If the 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds the subarea would open Thursday, Friday, and Sunday in May and June as “fixed” days and include Monday(s) and Tuesday(s) in June as “back-up” days. Fixed dates and back-up dates would be set preseason; however, back-up date(s) are contingent on the amount of Columbia River subarea quota available in late May. Specifically for the 2025 season, the back-up dates are dependent on at least 55 percent of the Columbia River sub-area quota remaining as of May 25, 2025. Weekly inseason estimates are produced and generally available and posted publicly four to five days following the end of the weekly estimation period (i.e., Monday-Sunday statistical week).

The difference between Option 1 and Option 2 is the number of back-up dates. Option 1 would include Monday, June 23 and Tuesday, June 24 whereas Option 2 excludes these two days to reduce overlap of the recreational fishery and the first commercial directed halibut opener which is typically scheduled in the latter part of June. Option 2 does not eliminate the overlap since both fisheries would be open on Thursday, June 26, but seeks to balance fishery opportunity.

Under both Option 1 and Option 2, should the 2A FCEY be less than 1.3 million pounds, the Columbia “back-up” date feature is dropped, and no Monday or Tuesday would be open in June.

The nearshore fishery will be open Monday through Wednesday following the opening of the all-depth fishery, until the nearshore allocation is taken or September 30, whichever is earlier. On days when the all-depth halibut fishery is closed, taking, retaining, possessing, or landing halibut on groundfish trips is only allowed in the nearshore area.

2025 Proposed Season Dates

Based on the input we received, **WDFW recommends** the Council adopt the following season dates for Washington subareas:

All Washington Subareas

If quota remains after June 30, open up to seven days per week in August and September.

Puget Sound/Straits Subarea (Marine Area 5 - 10)

If the 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds,

- April 3 through June 30, seven days per week.

If the 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds,

- April 3 through June 30, five days per week (Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday).

North Coast (Marine Areas 3 and 4)

If the 2025 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds,

- May 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17 (Thursday, Friday, Saturday)
- May 23, 24, 25 (Friday, Saturday, Sunday - Memorial Day weekend)
- May 29, 30, 31 (Thursday, Friday, Saturday)
- June 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29 (Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday)

If the 2025 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds,

- May 1, 3, 8, 10, 15, 17 (Thursday, Saturday)
- May 23 and May 25 (Friday, Sunday - Memorial Day weekend)
- May 29, 31 (Thursday, Saturday)
- June 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28 (Thursday, Friday, Saturday)

South Coast (Marine Area 2)

- May 1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 27, 29 (Thursday, Sunday, Tuesday)
- June 12, 15, 17, 19, 22, 24, 26, 29 (Thursday, Sunday, Tuesday)

Columbia River (Marine Area 1)

If the 2025 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds,

- May 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, 18, 22, 23, 25, 29, 30

- June 1, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15, 19, 20, 22, 26, 27, 29 and
 - If at least 55 percent of the Columbia River sub-area quota remains as of May 25, 2025: then also June 9, 10, 16, 17, 30.

If the 2025 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds,

- May 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, 18, 22, 23, 25, 29, 30 and,
- June 1, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15, 19, 20, 22, 26, 27, 29

The nearshore fishery will be open Monday through Wednesday following the opening of the all-depth fishery, until the nearshore allocation is taken or September 30, whichever is earlier. On days when the all-depth halibut fishery is closed, taking, retaining, possessing, or landing halibut on groundfish trips is only allowed in the nearshore area.

Other Washington subarea regulations

Marine Areas 5 (Sekiu and Pillar Point)

It is lawful to retain Pacific cod in Marine Area 5 in waters seaward of the Bottomfish closure as defined in WAC 220-314-010 (2)(a) on days open for halibut.

It is lawful to retain lingcod May 1 through June 15, 2025, caught while angling in Marine Area 5 in waters seaward of the Bottomfish closure as defined in WAC 220-314-010 (2)(a) on days open for halibut. It is unlawful to retain lingcod in Marine Area 5 prior to May 1 and after June 15, 2025.

It is lawful to retain sablefish caught while angling in Marine Area 5 in waters seaward of the Bottomfish closure as defined in WAC 220-314-010 (2)(a) on days open for halibut. The sablefish daily limit in Marine Area 5 is 2.

Marine Areas 6-10 (East Juan de Fuca Strait, Puget Sound)

It is unlawful to retain lingcod, Pacific cod, or sablefish seaward of the Bottomfish closure as defined in WAC 220-314-010 (2)(a) on days open for halibut.

Marine Areas 11, 12 and 13: Closed.

It is unlawful to fish for, retain, possess, or land halibut into a port located within an area that is closed to halibut fishing, except it is lawful to land halibut into a port within Marine Area 4, that were lawfully retained in Marine Area 5.

Halibut caught in Canadian waters may be landed into a port located within a marine area that is closed to halibut fishing. See WAC 220-310-210 for rules on Canadian-origin halibut possession.

The annual limit is four halibut taken from state or offshore waters. This does not include Canadian waters; see WAC 220-310-210 for limits on Canadian-origin halibut.

A violation of this section is punishable under RCW 77.15.370 or RCW 77.15.380, depending on the violation.