

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES FOR THE PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERY

On July 28, 2026, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a recreational halibut public meeting via webinar to identify and discuss proposed 2027 Washington and Columbia River season structures and proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP). This report summarizes the input we received, provides a brief update on the 2026 halibut fishery, describes ideas for changes to the halibut fishery for 2027, and describes proposed changes to the CSP.

2026 Halibut Season Overview (Preliminary)

The structure of the recreational halibut season in 2026 was intended to increase opportunity to harvest the quota in the traditional spring halibut season across all Washington subareas and the Columbia River subarea shared with Oregon. The 2026 season opened April 2 in the Puget Sound subarea (WDFW Marine Areas 5–10), 7 days per week through June 30. All coastal subareas (WDFW Marine Areas 1–4) opened on April 30 following different weekly schedules through June (see Appendix 1 for subarea-specific details).

All Washington subareas and the Columbia River subarea are currently open (as of August 20). As of June 30, there were 135,071 pounds (46%) of the quota remaining. WDFW held a public webinar on June 30 to seek input on the late season structure (August and September). Based on public input and concurrence from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for the Columbia River, WDFW submitted a proposal to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for inseason action. Proposed late season structures were intended to provide opportunity across all subareas and to promote full utilization of the Washington and Columbia River subareas. The proposed schedule for achieving these two objectives, contingent on available statewide allocation, included opening all subareas 7 days week, starting on August 16 for the North Coast and Puget Sound subareas, and opening the South Coast and Columbia River subareas on August 8.

Proposed Season Structures for 2027

Stakeholder input was generally supportive of continuing season structures similar to 2026, with some adjustments as captured below. There was a general desire to maintain consistent, predictable season structures across years, especially during the April through June portion of the season.

Puget Sound Subarea

Status Quo:

The subarea may be open up to 7 days per week in April, May, and June if the Area 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds. If the Area 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds, then the subarea may be open up to 5 days per week (Thursday through Monday) in April, May, and June. If sufficient quota remains, the subarea may be open up to 7 days per week in August and September.

Rationale: Stakeholders from Puget Sound support status quo.

North Coast

Status Quo:

The subarea will open in early May, with the flexibility to open on April 30 in years when April 30 falls on a Thursday. The subarea may be open up to 3 days per week (Thursday through Saturday) in May if the Area 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds. If the Area 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds, then the subarea may be open in May up to 2 days per week (Thursday and Saturday) except Memorial Day weekend, which may be open Friday and Sunday. The subarea may be open in June up to 4 days per week (Thursday through Sunday). If sufficient quota remains, the subarea may be open up to 7 days per week in August and September.

Options:

1. The subarea will open in early May, with the flexibility to open on April 30 in years when April 30 falls on a Thursday. The subarea may be open up to 4 days per week (Thursday through Sunday) in May and June. If sufficient quota remains, the subarea may be open up to 7 days per week in August and September.

Rationale: Stakeholders in the North Coast subarea are supportive of stable and predictable season dates between years, but do not see a need to reduce days based on the Area 2A FCEY and support opening the subarea 4 days per week for all of May and June.

2. Add Monday to the Memorial Day weekend fishing days.

Rationale: Memorial Day has not historically been opened in Washington coastal subareas. Prior to 2020, the subarea quota could be reached very quickly; however, the pace of the fishery has since slowed, and in response fishing opportunity has incrementally been expanded over the years.

South Coast

Status Quo:

The all-depth fishery will open in early May, with the flexibility to open on April 30 in years when April 30 falls on a Thursday. The all-depth fishery may be open up to 4 days per week (Thursday, Friday, Sunday, and Tuesday) in May, and up to 3 days per week (Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday) in June. If sufficient quota remains, the subarea may be open up to 7 days per week in August and September.

Options:

1. Modify the nearshore fishery, as follows:
 - a. Move the nearshore fishery boundary from 30 fathoms to 50 fathoms.

- b. Allow the nearshore fishery to be open on weekend days in July and August, when the all-depth fishery is closed, nearshore harvest would be counted towards the all-depth quota.

Rationale: To better conform with groundfish management, stakeholders are interested in discussing the possibility of shifting the nearshore fishery boundary from 30 fathoms to 50 fathoms and allowing for halibut retention on the days listed above, when closed to the all-depth fishery, and counted towards the overall subarea quota. This idea is currently under development and should be considered a general concept only.

2. Add Monday to the Memorial Day weekend fishing days.

Rationale: Memorial Day has not historically been opened in Washington coastal subareas. Prior to 2020, the subarea quota could be reached very quickly; however, the pace of the fishery has since slowed, and in response fishing opportunity has incrementally been expanded over the years.

3. Open the subarea on deepwater lingcod days in June.

Rationale: Allowing halibut retention on deepwater lingcod days is not anticipated to result in substantial catches, but would provide additional opportunity for anglers to retain halibut.

Columbia River

Status Quo:

The all-depth fishery will open in early in May, with the flexibility to open on April 30 in years when April 30 falls on a Thursday. If the Area 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds, the subarea may be open up to 3 days per week (Thursday, Friday, and Sunday) in May and June; in June, Monday and Tuesday may be opened through inseason action if there is sufficient quota, based on catch and effort in May and projections for June (Monday and Tuesday would be added as soon as practicable in June, and would not include days open to the non-tribal directed commercial halibut fishery). If the Area 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds, the subarea may be open up to 3 days per week, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday, during the months of May and June. If sufficient quota remains, the subarea may be open up to 7 days per week in August and September.

Options:

1. In June, open the subarea 5 days per week (Thursday, Friday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday; except for days open to the non-tribal directed commercial fishery). If catch estimates indicate that the subarea quota will be reached before June 30, Mondays and Tuesdays may be closed through inseason action.

Rationale: Mondays and Tuesdays in June were added through inseason action in both 2025 and 2026, the only years this option has been in place. Catch estimates in May are not ready until partway into June, and so it is not feasible to add backup dates at the start of June. If catch estimates indicate reaching the quota sooner than June 30, the flexibility

to remove those dates through inseason action would be in place. This is option is likely to reduce administrative burden, allow for more open days in June, and provide for more advance planning.

2. Add Monday to the Memorial Day weekend fishing days.

Rationale: Memorial Day has not historically been opened in Washington coastal subareas. Prior to 2020, the subarea quota could be reached very quickly; however, the pace of the fishery has since slowed, and in response fishing opportunity has incrementally been expanded over the years.

Other Proposals

Inseason management flexibility for all Washington subareas in August and September

WDFW proposes to clarify in the management objective for the Washington recreational fishery (CSP section 6.9) that to achieve maximum opportunity, consideration of the statewide quota is used when establishing late season (August and September) fishing dates. Subarea catches have varied in recent years, with some subareas catching more than their quotas and some subareas catching less. Managing late season fishing dates to the statewide quota has successfully allowed a high percentage of the Washington recreational quota to be caught. This does not change current management practices; WDFW is proposing this change to the management objective to provide transparency in the rationale used in setting late season fishing dates. WDFW will work with NMFS and Council staff in developing specific language for review at the November Council meeting.

CSP edits

WDFW has identified a few sections of the CSP that would benefit from updates to more accurately describe the fishery as it currently operates, and to clarify language. WDFW intends to work with NMFS and PFMC staff, and ODFW staff for sections relevant to the Columba River, to review these proposals and develop clarifications, as necessary, prior to the November Council meeting.

- Clarify dendrogram footnote D and section 5.8 to explicitly state how the portion of the allocation not used in the sablefish fishery (due to not meeting the minimum allocation, or anything over the maximum) is distributed among subareas.
- Use clearer, plain language in *Section 5.8. Incidental halibut catch in the primary directed sablefish fishery.*
- *Section 6.7 Possession limits* for Washington states that there is a 2-fish daily bag limit on land and a 1-fish daily bag limit on the vessel, this does not accurately reflect that the daily bag limit is 1 fish and the possession limit is 2 fish.
- Remove bag limit language from subarea inseason adjustment sections throughout *Section 6.9 Washington Coast subareas*, as it is already noted under landing restrictions sections.

- 6.9.3 *South Coast* language uses the terms “primary” and “all-depth” interchangeably, for consistency change “primary” to “all-depth”.

Next Steps

WDFW will hold a stakeholder meeting in October to discuss the alternatives for the 2027 season structure, including specific changes to the CSP language needed to accommodate final recommendations.

Appendix A. 2026 Washington and Columbia River Recreational Pacific Halibut Season Dates

Puget Sound Subarea

- April 2 – June 30 (seven days per week)
- August 16 – September 30 (seven days per week; added through inseason action)

North Coast Subarea

- April 30 – May 16 (three days per week: Thursday, Friday, and Saturday)
- May 22 – 24 (Memorial Day weekend: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday)
- May 28 – 30 (three days per week: Thursday, Friday, and Saturday)
- June 4 – June 28 (four days per week: Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday)
- August 16 – September 30 (seven days per week; added through inseason action)

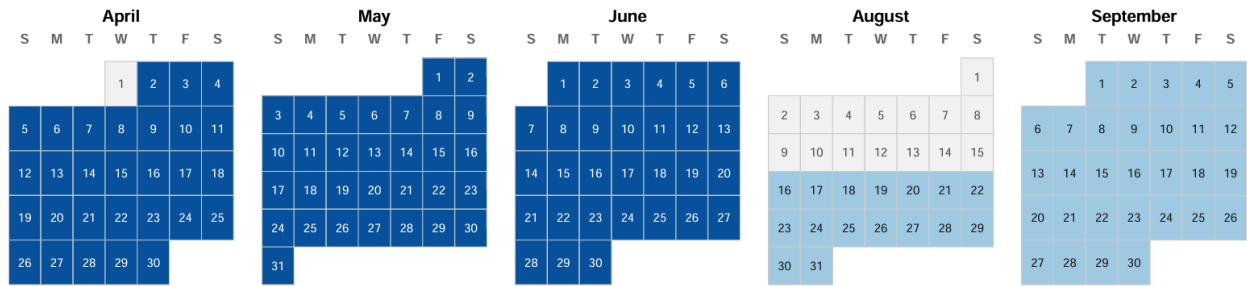
South Coast Subarea

- Apr 30 – May 31 (four days per week: Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday)
- Jun 2 – June 30 (three days per week: Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday)
- August 8 – September 30 (seven days per week; added through inseason action)

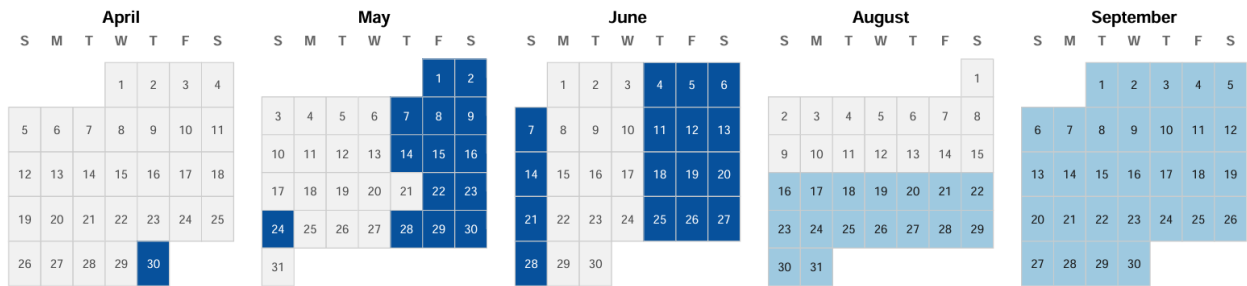
Columbia River Subarea

- April 30 – May 31 (three days per week: Thursday, Friday, and Sunday)
- June 4 – 7 (three days per week: Thursday, Friday, and Sunday)
- June 8 – 28 (five days per week: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday; Mondays and Tuesdays added through inseason action)
- August 8 – September 30 (seven days per week; added through inseason action)

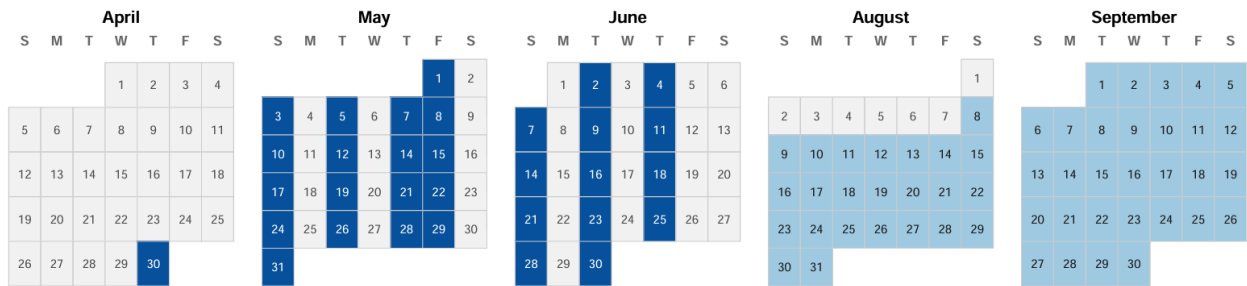
Puget Sound



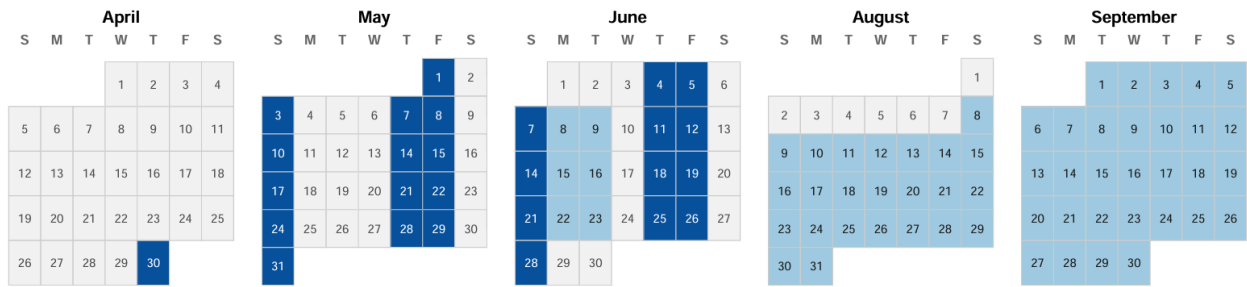
North Coast



South Coast



Columbia River



closed open open (inseason action)

Figure 1. 2026 Calendar showing Washington and Columbia River recreational Pacific halibut season dates.