

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN

On September 4, 2025, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a recreational halibut meeting via webinar to identify and discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP). This report summarizes the input we received and the 2025 halibut fishery season through August and identifies the proposed CSP recreational season options for 2026 recommended for public review.

2025 Halibut Season Overview – Preliminary

The structure of the recreational halibut season in 2025 continued to focus on fully utilizing Washington sport allocation (i.e., quota) to provide fishing opportunity across all Washington subareas as managers and stakeholders strive to adjust to inseason fishery dynamics. The 2025 CSP changes once again acknowledged the objective to focus fishing opportunity during April, May, and June while allowing remaining quota to be targeted in August and September. Because the 2026 Area 2A allocation won't be determined until after the final season structure has been adopted by the Council at the November 2025 meeting, the recommendations below build on those adopted in 2024 and utilized in 2025 to include alternative season structures which are dependent on the 2A Fishery Constant Exploitable Yield (FCEY). In addition, changes adopted for the Columbia River subarea in 2025 reflect the desire for inseason flexibility by identifying several "back-up" days in June that would open only if the Columbia River remaining subarea quota is at least 55 percent as of May 25. The intent of this approach is to build flexibility into the CSP that is transparent and relies less on inseason actions.

The 2025 season opened April 3 in Puget Sound and the Straits (Marine Areas (MAs) 5–10) 7 days per week through June. All coastal areas, MAs 1-4, opened on May 1 following different weekly schedules through June (see Appendix 1 for area specific details). Highlighted here are the primary modifications to the CSP in 2025 compared to prior year(s).

- 1) The North Coast subarea added an additional open day (Saturday) during the Memorial Day weekend given that the 2A FCEY was at least 1.3 million pounds.
- 2) The South Coast subarea included an additional open day (Sunday) during the Memorial Day weekend given that the 2A FCEY was at least 1.3 million pounds.
- 3) The Columbia River subarea added the option to open additional back up days in June if at least 55 percent of the subarea quota remained as of May 25, 2025. In addition, this subarea was not open on Monday, June 23 or Tuesday, June 24 (as back-up days) to reduce interaction with the commercial directed halibut fishery.

All subareas are currently open with 28,145 pounds of quota remaining. The Columbia River subarea was able to remain open because Washington was able to benefit from the CSP provision that allows transfer of available quota between states in mid-August. Per this provision, after meeting with Council and state managers in mid-August, NMFS transferred 5,000 pounds of quota from Oregon to Washington. With the quota transfer from ODFW, the Washington statewide quota attainment is about 91 percent through August.

WDFW held a public webinar June 25 to seek input on the late season fishery structure and based on the input submitted a proposal to NMFS for inseason action. Consistent with flexibility described by the CSP, the proposal relaxed adherence to subarea quotas which meant scheduling could aim for full utilization of Washington's quota while also providing opportunity across all subareas. The proposed schedule for achieving these two objectives, although contingent on available quota, included opening the North Coast and Puget Sound subareas daily starting August 16 and opening the South Coast and Columbia River subareas beginning August 17, Sunday through Friday. Although there is Washington sport quota remaining, WDFW has requested a meeting with state managers, Council staff and NMFS to discuss the possibility of additional quota transfer to keep Washington subareas open through the September 30 season end date. The flexibility to share subarea quotas continues to be an extremely valuable management tool.

Proposed Changes to the CSP for 2026

Stakeholder input during a September 4 public meeting was generally supportive of continuing season structures similar to 2025, with some modest adjustments as captured below for the South Coast and Columbia River subareas. No proposed changes were submitted for the Puget Sound and North Coast subareas. The sentiment was that the incremental steps taken in recent years to expand opportunity as reflected in the 2025 season structure has reached a satisfactory balance between early season and late season opportunity while also meeting other fishery objectives.

Status quo CSP provisions stipulate season dates will be developed for all areas by the end of November each year for the following year. Per the CSP, Puget Sound seasons will open in early May with flexibility to open in April, and during April, May, and June season structure may include periodic closures to assess the remaining quota for the subarea. 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. Area specific status quo and 2026 options are presented below.

Puget Sound Subarea (MAs 5-10)

Status Quo:

If the 2026 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.

- Open April 2 through June 30, **seven days per week**.

If the 2026 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 2 **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.

Rationale: Stakeholders from Puget Sound support Status Quo which continues the general season structure from the 2025 CSP, including a reduced schedule should the 2A FCEY for 2026 be less than 1.3 million pounds.

North Coast

Status Quo:

If the 2026 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds, the season may be open up to three days per week (Thursday through Saturday), except Memorial Day weekend which may be open Friday through Sunday.

- Open April 30 through May 16, **three days per week**, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and
- Friday, May 22, Saturday, May 23 and Sunday, May 24 (Memorial Day weekend).

If the 2026 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

- Open April 30 through May 16 **two days per week**, Thursday and Saturday, and
- Friday, May 22 and Sunday May 24 (Memorial Day weekend).

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

- May 28 through June 28, **four days per week**, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

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

Rationale: Stakeholders in the North Coast subarea support Status Quo which adds the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend if the 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds and continues to consider a reduced schedule should the 2A FCEY for 2026 be less than 1.3 million pounds.

South Coast

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 nine days in June.

- Open April 30 through May 21, **three days per week**, Thursday, Sunday, and Tuesday, and
- Sunday, May 24, Tuesday, May 26 and Thursday, May 28
- June 11 through 30 **three days per week**, Thursday, Sunday and Tuesday (equals nine days).

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

Option 1:

- Clarify the South Coast subarea objective that the season will be structured to utilize the subarea quota during the months of May and June with any remaining quota utilized in August and September. The season will open in early May, with the flexibility to open on April 30 when April 30 falls on a Thursday. Season structure may include periodic closures to assess the remaining quota for the subarea.
- Revise the CSP to allow the fishery to be open up to nine days in June under Status Quo season structure.

- Analyze a 2A FCEY threshold that would allow consideration to open the season up to four days per week or, open up to three days per week on different days per week compared to status quo, in May and June. Use 1.4 million pounds as the starting point for the analysis.
 - If **four days per week** the days open would be, **Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday**
 - If **three days per week** the days open would be, **Thursday, Friday, Sunday**

Rationale: Stakeholders in the South Coast subarea support an approach that focuses halibut fishing effort during the early season in May and June with an option to target any remaining quota during either a nearshore fishery and/or during the late season in August and September.

The CSP specifies that the season would open up to eight days in June but applying a Status Quo approach, there would be nine open days in June 2026.

Option 1 would allow for an analysis of a 2A FCEY threshold that could consider opening an additional day per week or, open three days per week but different days per week (Thursday, Friday, Sunday) compared to status quo. The proposal to set the threshold at 1.4 million pounds compared to the 2A FCEY threshold of 1.3 million pounds used in other subareas is intended to address the significant fishing capacity of the South Coast subarea. That is, adding one additional day per week, or changing the days of the week that are open, could substantially increase the pace of quota attainment and therefore the 2A FCEY threshold may need to be higher for the South Coast subarea. Consideration of a 2A FCEY threshold of 1.4 million pounds is intended to initiate an analysis during the public review process and inform but not determine the final threshold recommendation.

Columbia River

Status Quo:

If the 2026 2A FCEY is at least 1.3 million pounds, open:

- April 30 through May 31, **three days per week**, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday and
- June 4 – 28, **three days per week**, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday as fixed dates, with **two days per week**, Monday and Tuesday, as back-up dates (June 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23) to be opened if a pre-determined amount of the sub-area quota remains after a date that is also pre-determined.

If the 2026 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million pounds, open

- April 30 through May 31, **three days per week**, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday and
- June 4 through 28, **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 1: Maintain the Status Quo season structure, except revise the CSP language to clarify how the decision on the **additional dates** for the month of June would be made, including whether the amount of quota remaining should be the only factor on which the decision should be made.

Rationale: Stakeholders in the Columbia River subarea support the Status Quo season structure adopted in 2025 including the ability to add backup dates during the month of June if the subarea quota attainment is at or lower than 55 percent. Back-up dates would be selected and announced preseason, however, opening any back-up date(s) is dependent on 55 percent of the Columbia River sub-area quota remaining as of May 25. Implementing the backup date provision in 2025 highlighted the need for clarity in whether the determination would be based on actual or projected catch as of May 25. WDFW will work with NMFS to clarify language in the CSP to meet the intent of providing regulatory transparency in the approach to add additional fishing dates in June dependent on quota remaining at a specific point in time. Consideration for Columbia River late season opportunity could also be contingent solely on the availability of statewide quota.

WDFW supports the options proposed for public review as recommended by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, [E.1.a, ODFW Report 1, September 2025](#).

All Washington Subareas

Inseason management flexibility

We also received a recommendation, with which we concur, that the CSP be edited to clarify the objectives for the Washington sport quota. Since the pandemic, the objective has been to manage strictly to subarea quotas in April, May, and June to maintain the traditional opportunities for each. When quota remains after June 30, the objective has shifted to managing to the WA sport quota overall in August and September. While subarea quotas may be used to prioritize closures, catch has tended to vary among the subareas in August and September with some catching more and other less than their share. The pooling of these up and downs has successfully allowed a high percentage of the WA Sport quota to be caught. In some years, formal transfers of quota could be helpful but in others it will be possible to realize the benefits of the quota without the administrative effort needed to make such transfers. The CSP, at least in places, may not reflect this management approach for the late season.

The flexibility afforded in the CSP has yielded substantial benefits by supporting the addition of opportunity through inseason action. WDFW greatly appreciates NMFS's recognition of the challenges faced in setting season dates and thanks them for their efforts to revise federal regulations inseason to allow for additional fishing days. WDFW will continue to work with NMFS to explore potential approaches in the CSP to further enhance inseason management flexibility consistent with NMFS's regulatory process and in a manner that provides sufficient notice and transparency to the public.

Annual halibut bag limit

While the four fish annual limit in Washington is not included as a provision of the CSP, this has been a discussion point. In particular, there has been interest in increasing the annual limit to six fish. Stakeholder opinions have been divided on this topic with some in support, others preferring status quo, and some suggesting an option where additional fish could be added to the annual limit

during the late season. Stakeholders pointed to improving the ability to attain the quota, particularly in areas like the Puget Sound where quota has been left unharvested in recent years. Those preferring status quo expressed concerns with returning to conditions where the early season quota is taken very quickly and that a four fish annual limit allows more access to more fishery participants. Those supporting increasing the annual limit later in the season commented that this allows for a flexible approach to increasing the limit.

In 2023, WDFW announced an increase to the annual limit to six fish when opening the late season (August and September). This provided anglers that had filled their four-fish limit during the spring season additional opportunity and according to angler input would serve as an incentive for them to take other anglers halibut fishing. In 2024 and 2025, WDFW implemented a six fish annual bag limit at the outset of the spring season and retained it for the late season. Either approach (full year or late season only) may be an option for 2026 depending on the 2A FECY.

Next Steps

WDFW will hold a stakeholder meeting in October to discuss the alternatives for the 2026 season structure and to confirm recommended season dates for 2026, which we will share with the Council in November including specific changes to the CSP language needed to accommodate the final recommendation.

Appendix 1. Washington Pacific Halibut Season Structure and Dates for 2025

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)

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

North Coast (Marine Areas 3 and 4)

- 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)

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)

- May 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, 18, 22, 23, 25, 29, 30 (Thursday, Friday, Sunday)
- June 1, 5, 6, 8, **9, 10**, 12, 13, 15, **16, 17**, 19, 20, 22, 26, 27, 29, **30*** (Thursday, Friday, Sunday as fixed dates, with two days per week (Monday and Tuesday), added as back up dates.

*Note: dates in bold were added on June 3.

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.