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

Note: This report was updated on November 14, 2025 to correct the proposed season dates for the North Coast subarea shown in the Appendix.

On October 22, 2025 we held a virtual public meeting to discuss the proposed changes to the Washington sport portions of the Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) adopted for public review by the Council in September.[1] In this report, we highlight changes from September and refer the reader to our September Report for more background and detail.[2] Proposed dates for the season options under consideration are provided in an attachment in calendar form.

The issues addressed here include:

- The Puget Sound Subarea Start Date
- ODFW Columbia River Subarea Nearshore Fishery Proposals
- Columbia River Subarea Additional/"Back-up" Day Determination
- South Coast Subarea New Option

As a reminder, the South Coast was the only area for which changes to the status quo all-depth fishery seasons structures were proposed.

In addition, the WA sport season closed September 30. The preliminary inseason estimates for each subarea are provided immediately below. The approach has been to manage to subarea quotas in May and June and then to treat the quota as single pool for purposes of opening dates in August in September.

[1] A recording of the meeting is available at https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/halibut.
[2] The September Report also contained an error for the North Coast subarea in stating that there would be four days open per week beginning May 28. The correct date 6is June 1.

Subarea	Quota	Catch		Under (+) / Over (-)	% attained
Puget Sound	79,772	thru June 30	83,818		
		Aug 16-Sep 30	12,746		
		total	96,564	-16,792	121%
North Coast	130,409	thru June 30	87,690		
		Aug 16-Sep 30	35,064		
		total	122,754	7,655	94%
South Coast	65,177	thru June 30	36,675		
		Aug 17-Sep 30	14,519		
		total	51,194	13,983	79%
Columbia River	19,087	thru June 30	17,014		
		Aug 17-Sep 30	268		
		total	17,282	1,805	91%
All subareas	294,445	thru June 30	225,197		
		Aug 17-Sep 30	62,597		
		total	287,794	6,651	98%

Notes
The Columbia River quota does not include the 5,000 lbs transferred by ODFW to reopen in August
September estimates for Marine Areas 7-10 are not yet available but have typically been low or zero.

Puget Sound Subarea Start Date

Puget Sound's default opening date is the first Thursday in April. NMFS requested we consider delaying the 2026 opening to accommodate their challenges in getting the regulations in place by the season opening. It has been a challenge for them in recent years with regulations only going into effect within a day or so of the scheduled opening. In 2026, the first Thursday is April 2. Last year it was April 3.

With the federal government shutdown, we have not had the opportunity for further discussion with NMFS. While the status quo opening would be one day earlier in 2026, we would note that the IPHC meeting is scheduled for January 19-22, 2026. In 2025 it was held January 27-31. We assume this means NMFS will have the information needed to start their rulemaking process 10 days earlier than this year. We recognize that the staff losses NMFS experienced this year have had substantial effects on the agency's capacity to implement Council recommendations

In reviewing recent catch and effort data, the first week has seen substantial activity in Marine Area 6 (near Port Angeles). With the support of stakeholders participating in the Oct. 22 meeting, **we recommend keeping the April 2 start date and delaying by a week to April 9 only if necessary.**

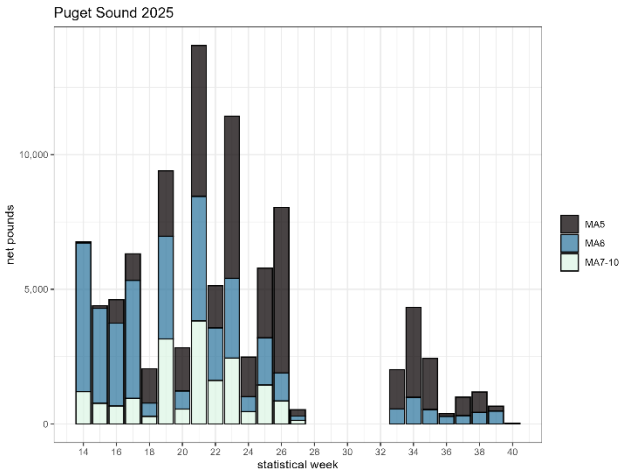


Figure 1. Preliminary Puget Sound halibut catch by statistical week in 2025 and WDFW Marine Area (MA). In 2025, Week 14 was April 3-6. Catch in Marine Areas 7-10 is estimated by two-month wave and assumed to follow the same weekly pattern as Marine Area 6.

Columbia River Subarea Nearshore Fishery

ODFW's September report highlighted issues with how changes to the all-depth season in recent years has caused issues with their sampling and estimation process for the nearshore halibut opportunity as well as confusion among the public. Among the two options proposed by ODFW for addressing these issues, **our recommendation is for proposal 2, which removes the nearshore fishery and allocates the 500 lbs to the all-depth fishery, at least for 2026.** The issue with proposal 1, which would open the nearshore seven days a week or any day that the all-depth fishery is closed, is that it would cause difficulties with the Ocean Sampling Program's sampling design. WDFW's sampling design differs from ODFW's in that we treat weekdays and weekend days as separate sampling units ("strata"). The concern is that proposal 1 would interfere with the random selection of weekdays in many weeks and become even more of a strain on sampling when salmon opens.

The nearshore fishery has been fished sparingly in recent years with no catch reported in 2025. We do understand the benefit the fishery offers anglers and the frustration of having to release a halibut if caught while fishing for bottomfish. The opportunity originated, however, back when there were fewer days scheduled for the all-depth fishery.

Stakeholders participating in the Oct. 22 understood the sampling challenges and while recognizing the value of the opportunity they supported at least pausing the nearshore fishery for 2026. WDFW's recommendation would be to revisit the nearshore fishery when planning future seasons and stand willing to work through the different sampling and estimation challenges.

Columbia River Subarea Additional Days

The 2025 season was the first time we attempted the potential back-up days in June. As a reminder, the days were to be opened if at least 55 percent of the quota remained as of May 25. The experience highlighted the need for clarification on the timing and method of determining

whether that threshold was met. We had hoped to work with NMFS on clarifying the process but have not had the opportunity to discuss further because of the federal government shutdown. We did suggest language in the draft Catch Sharing Plan to keep the issue highlighted and hope to work through options once NMFS is available.

South Coast Subarea New Option

After reviewing the options from September, South Coast stakeholders proposed a new option at the Oct. 22 public meeting:

> Four days per week in May (Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday) and status quo for June (Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday) while also forgoing the hiatus between late May and mid-June. This would result in the following dates being open in 2026 as long as sufficient quota remains:
>
> - Apr 30
> - May 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, 31
> - Jun 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18, 21, 23, 25, 28, 30

This new option also includes the Option 1 clarification that the objective is to use the subarea quota during the months of May and June and to utilize any remaining quota in August and September.

The effect of this option is difficult to analyze as there is no analog for having Thursday and Fridays open in this subarea. The Columbia River did see a boost in adding Fridays this past season but the degree to which other factors contributed is unknown. Adding Fridays may absorb some fishing effort that would have happened on Thursdays or Sundays. If so, the effect would be to something less than a full day of fishing. In the opposite scenario, adding Fridays may attract more effort overall and be like adding more than full day of fishing. We do not have a quantitative method for determining which of these scenarios is more likely.

In 2025, the South Coast only harvested 56 percent of its quota before June 30. While the effect of the additional days is uncertain, our Ocean Sampling Program provides us with catch estimates on each Tuesday or Wednesday following the close of the statistical week on the previous Sunday. **Given the objective of obtaining the subarea quota in May and June and the lower rates of attainment seen in 2025 and recent years, and considering the timely estimates of catch and ability of WDFW and NMFS to quickly respond inseason, we recommend this new option to the Council.**

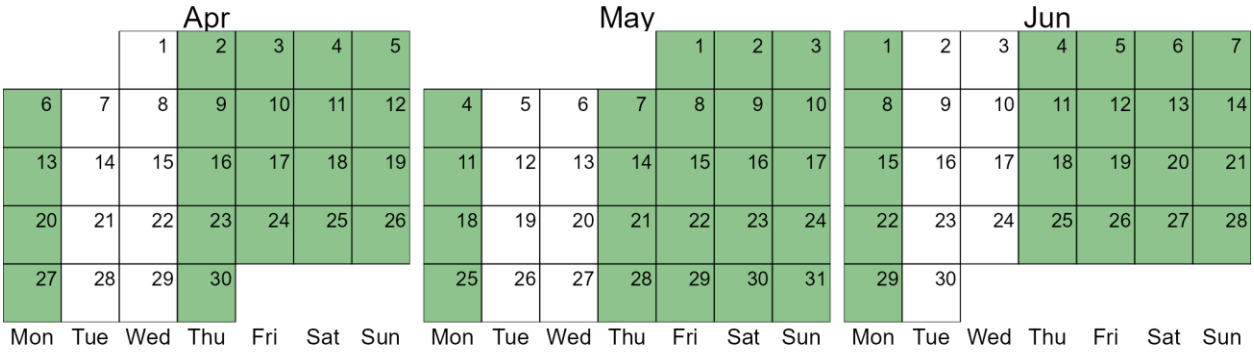
Appendix – 2026 Season Options

Puget Sound – Status Quo

FCEY at least 1.3 million lbs



FCEY below 1.3 million lbs

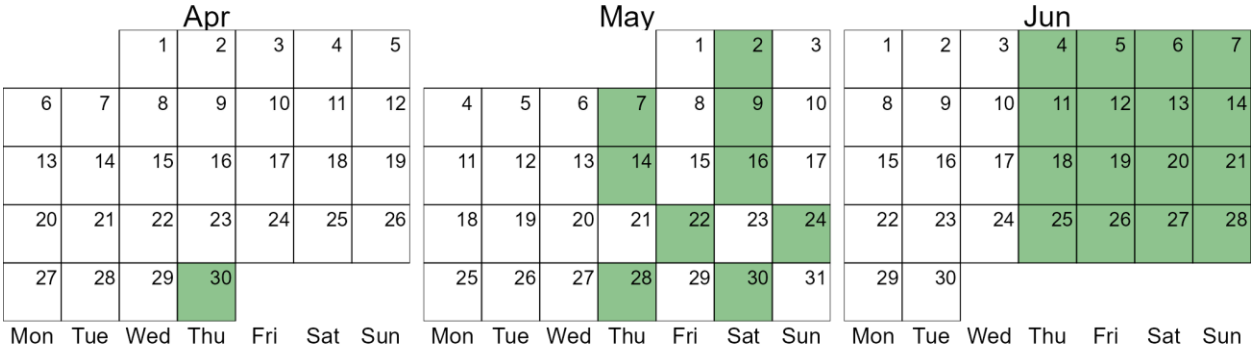


North Coast – Status Quo

FCEY at least 1.3 million lbs



FCEY below 1.3 million lbs

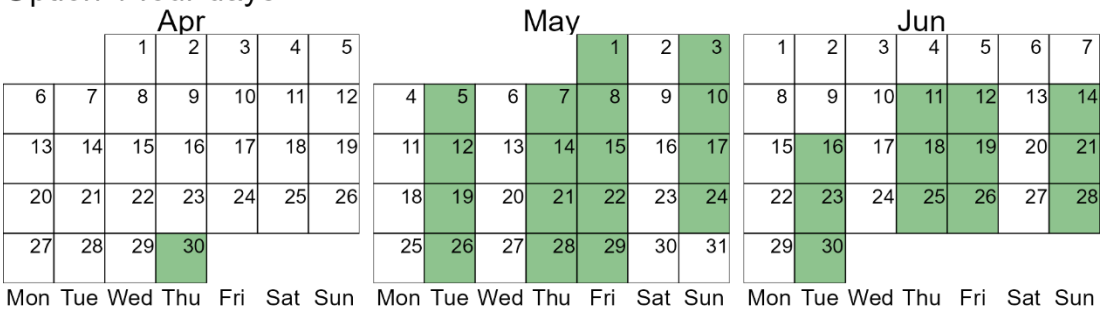


South Coast Subarea

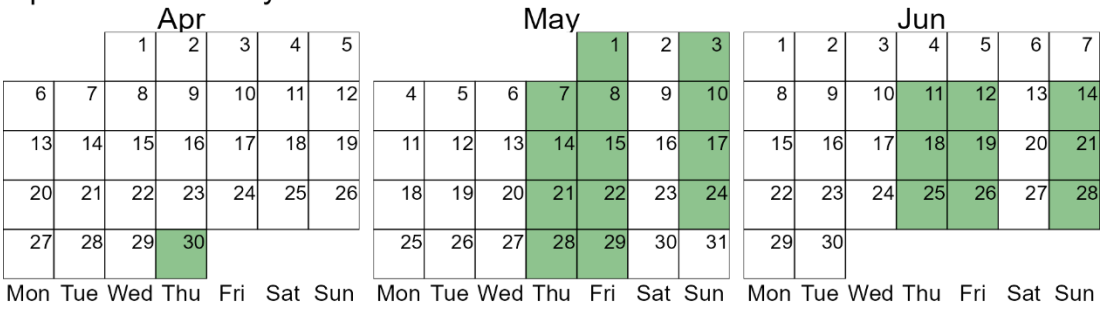
Status Quo



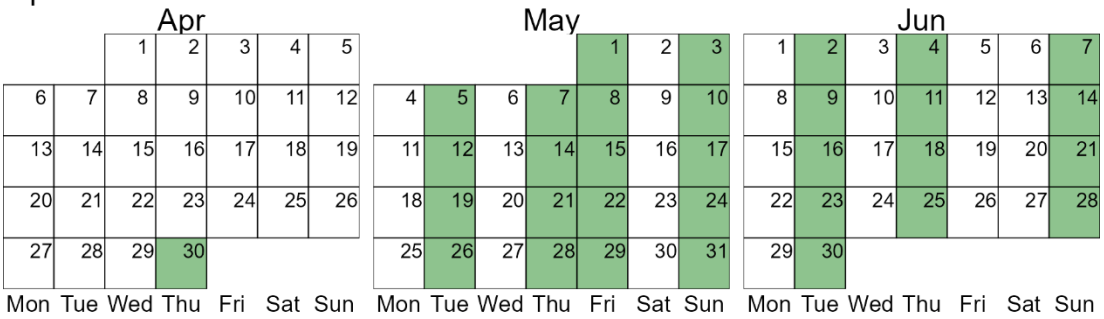
Option 1 four days



Option 1 three days



Option 2



Columbia River Subarea

FCEY at least 1.3 million lbs



FCEY below 1.3 million lbs

