

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON INSEASON
ADJUSTMENTS FOR 2018

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) would like to provide the following updates and recommendations regarding revisions to Washington recreational groundfish regulations for 2018.

In June 2016, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) confirmed the preferred alternatives recommended by WDFW in April for the Washington recreational groundfish seasons and regulations for 2017 and 2018 ([Supplemental WDFW Report F.6.a, April 2016](#)). Those management measures included allowing the retention of up to one canary rockfish in the Columbia River and south coast subareas (Marine Areas 1 and 2). At the time, there was uncertainty about angler behavior relative to potential targeting of canary rockfish after many years as a prohibited species. In addition, stakeholders were concerned about the potential for increased mortality of yelloweye rockfish if anglers mistakenly identified yelloweye rockfish as canary rockfish, particularly in the north coast (Marine Areas 3 and 4) subareas. In response, the preferred alternative took a conservative approach intended to allow canary retention in a flexible manner that would use data collected in 2017 to inform potential changes in the canary sublimit for 2018.

WDFW also evaluated changes to the daily rockfish sublimit as part of the biennial harvest specification and management measures analysis in response to lower Washington black rockfish harvest targets for 2017 and 2018. Given the timing of the biennial process, the analysis relied on data through 2015 that suggested that status quo rockfish limits could remain in place and still keep black rockfish catch under the Washington harvest target. However, when 2016 final data became available it was clear that a bag limit reduction would be necessary to keep catch of black rockfish within harvest targets beginning in 2017. In March 2017, WDFW proposed, and the Council adopted, a rockfish sublimit that was reduced from 10 to seven fish per day in combination with an aggregate groundfish bag limit that was reduced from 12 to nine fish per day ([I.3.a, Supplemental WDFW Report, March 2017](#)).

Based on the results of fishery performance in 2017, WDFW is proposing to increase the canary sublimit to two fish and allow canary retention in all marine areas. In addition, WDFW is proposing to allow the retention of three flatfish in addition to the status quo aggregate daily groundfish limit of nine beginning in 2018.

1. Increase the canary rockfish sublimit from one to two per angler and allow canary retention in all marine areas

Rationale: The 2017 final mortality estimate for canary rockfish in the Washington recreational fishery is 4.8 mt out of a 50 mt harvest guideline for 2017 and 2018. As described above, there were uncertainties relative to the degree of targeting and potential misidentification when analyzing projected canary rockfish mortalities for 2017 and 2018. WDFW analyzed canary rockfish mortality under a one or two sublimit in all management areas to provide the intended flexibility to consider an increase the canary sublimit and expansion of the management areas where canary retention could be allowed in 2018. The initial analysis assumed a high level of targeting to ensure that management measures were not set too liberally. The high target scenario assumed that all vessels fishing for groundfish would actively seek out canary rockfish to allow all anglers on that trip to retain two canary rockfish. Under the high target scenario, projected impacts for canary rockfish with retention allowed in all marine areas under a one fish sublimit was 66.1 mt and 137.1 mt under a two fish sublimit ([2017-2018 Harvest Specifications and Management Measures Analysis, June 2016](#)).

The canary rockfish bag limit analysis was refreshed using final 2017 data where up to one canary could be retained in the Columbia River and south coast subareas (Marine Areas 1 and 2). Assumptions about potential targeting were not applied to updated projections given the final 2017 estimate that suggests that anglers are not actively seeking out canary rockfish to a large degree. However, there is a substantial buffer between the 2018 harvest guideline and the updated projected impacts if angler behavior is different in 2018. Table 1 below shows final 2017 catch and projected canary rockfish mortality in 2018 under two sublimit alternatives for all marine areas. Based on new information, WDFW recommends the canary sublimit be increased to two and retention allowed in all marine areas (Marine Areas 1-4) beginning in 2018.

Table 1. Washington recreational canary rockfish harvest guideline (HG), final 2017 estimate and projected impacts (mt) under two sublimit alternatives with retention allowed in all marine areas.

2017 and 2018 HG	2017 Final Estimate	2018 Sublimit Alternatives	
		1 Canary	2 Canary
50	4.8	5.67	6.22

2. Allow the retention of three flatfish per angler per day in addition to the (status quo) aggregate groundfish limit of nine

Rationale:

When we proposed reducing the aggregate groundfish limit from 12 to nine fish per day, our stakeholder discussions primarily focused on the need to reduce the rockfish sublimit from ten to seven as a means to keep black rockfish catches within its harvest target. The aggregate groundfish

limit was kept at two fish above the rockfish sublimit to minimize rockfish bycatch associated with anglers targeting other groundfish, such as lingcod. While we were aware that a few charter operations and private anglers targeted flatfish, through our stakeholder discussions, we did not consider excluding flatfish from the aggregate groundfish limit reduction, which was an oversight on our part; however, the effect of the aggregated groundfish limit reduction on those who target flatfish has since been brought to our attention.

In response to stakeholder input, WDFW is proposing to include a flatfish limit of three fish per angler per day that would not be subject to the aggregate groundfish limit, which would remain at nine. The sublimits for all other groundfish species would also remain in place. Changes to the groundfish aggregate bag limit that includes flatfish have no beneficial impact on the rockfish population given that the preferred habitat for most flatfish species (soft sand or muddy bottom) is different from the preferred habitat for most rockfish species (pelagic and high relief rocks and boulders).

The purpose of this proposal is to provide some additional recreational fishing opportunity to Washington recreational anglers. This measure is not a “new” management measure because, in effect, it would not result in an increase in the daily bag limit above 12 fish per day, which was analyzed in the 2017-2018 Analytical Document as the status quo alternative, and because flatfish retention would only be allowed under current open season dates and status quo depth restrictions. Projected impacts for flatfish species in 2018 are expected to be similar to final estimates in 2016 before the aggregate limit was reduced (Table 2) and projected rockfish impacts are not expected to be affected by this proposed action.

Table 2. Washington recreational estimates for flatfish species in 2016 and 2017 and projected impacts for 2018 (numbers of fish).

2016	2017	2018
7,678	4,713	7,678

In summary, based on updated catch information from 2017, WDFW believes these management measures will increase fishing opportunity for Washington recreational anglers and keep recreational catch within Washington specific harvest targets without increasing impacts to overfished species. WDFW requests the Council approve these inseason changes for 2018.