

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON 2019 CATCH  
SHARING PLAN AND ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a conference call with recreational halibut anglers to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for 2019. Based on that input, WDFW recommends the following alternatives for public review.

**Columbia River:**

1. Revise the description of the season opening date so that it more closely aligns with the opening date in the other Washington subareas. Consider the following options:
  - a. Option 1: Open the second Thursday in May
  - b. Option 2: Open the second Friday in May
  - c. Option 3: Consult with stakeholders and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to determine the season opening date prior to the November Council meeting.

Rationale: In 2017, WDFW implemented a statewide season approach that opens the recreational halibut fishery in all Washington subareas except the Columbia River on the same dates. This change was intended to reduce effort shift from one area to another, which occurs when season openings are staggered. WDFW views the statewide season structure as a success as we have seen the season spread out over a longer period, particularly in the north coast and Puget Sound subareas.

There has been a general increase in halibut fishing effort in the Washington portion of the Columbia River subarea in recent years, which led to the proposal to reduce their season from four days per week (Thursday-Sunday) to three days (Thursday, Friday, Sunday). However, rather than the anticipated positive response, the Columbia River subarea was negatively impacted this year when it opened a week before the other Washington subareas. Because of the effort shift, the Columbia River subarea halibut season lasted only five days.

Revising the season opening so that it more closely aligns with the other subareas would address this effort shift, potentially adding one or two days to the Columbia River season. Options 1 and 2 reflect recent openings in the other Washington subareas; however, the statewide season setting process allows for collaboration with stakeholders in different subareas, and the annual season dates reflect a significant amount of input and compromise to meet preferences that vary by subarea. The CSP provides the flexibility to open the season anytime in May making it somewhat difficult to determine what the best opening date for the Columbia River might be. Option 3 would give WDFW time to work with stakeholders and consult with ODFW prior to each November Council meeting to recommend a season opening date that would reduce the potential for effort shift in the Columbia River subarea.

2. Revise the days of the week that the season is open
  - a. Option 1: Status quo (Thursday, Friday, Sunday)
  - b. Option 2: Friday and Sunday

Rationale: In 2018, the days of the week this subarea is open was revised to reduce the number of days per week that the fishery was open from four days per week to three days per week. The intent of this change was to extend the season over a longer period by eliminating Saturdays. Option 2 would reduce the fishery to two staggered days per week to help accomplish this objective similar to the approach taken for the Washington statewide season. Given the popularity of the recreational halibut fishery in Washington, there is very little difference in the catch on a weekday compared to a weekend day.

### **South Coast:**

1. Revise the CSP language to remove the set aside of 10 percent or 2,000 pounds for the nearshore fishery and allow the nearshore fishery to be open after the primary (all-depth) fishery closes, if sufficient quota remains.

Rationale: Currently, a portion of the south coast allocation is reserved for a nearshore fishery that opens after the primary (all-depth) fishery closes. The nearshore set aside was established to allow anglers to keep a halibut caught incidentally when bottomfish fishing in the nearshore area after the all- depth halibut fishery is closed. Occasionally, the primary fishery uses a portion of or all of the set aside, resulting in the nearshore fishery lasting a short amount of time or not opening at all. This change is not intended to eliminate the nearshore fishery, but to clarify that it is contingent upon having sufficient quota after the primary fishery has closed.

Following the September Council meeting, WDFW will have another stakeholder meeting to discuss these alternatives further, develop the recommended statewide season dates, and the preferred opening date for the Columbia River for 2019.