



Summary of Washington Pacific Halibut Fisheries Management in 2016

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**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
SUMMARY OF PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN 2016**

This report summarizes the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) management and enforcement activities for Pacific halibut fisheries in 2016. It includes a synopsis of Washington’s recreational catch and incidental halibut catch in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis. A summary of WDFW’s enforcement efforts relative to patrolling recreational and commercial halibut fisheries during 2016 is attached.

Washington’s Recreational Halibut Fisheries in 2016

Washington’s halibut fisheries are managed under the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for Area 2A. The CSP specifies how the Area 2A total allowable catch (TAC), as defined by IPHC, is allocated or “shared” among various state commercial and recreational sectors. For Washington, WDFW manages its recreational fisheries by subarea. These subareas are:

1. Puget Sound (inside waters east of the Sekiu River, including Puget Sound)
 - Eastern Region (inner Sound waters east of Low Point)
 - Western Region (Strait waters west of Low Point)
2. North Coast (waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca west of the Sekiu River and Pacific Ocean waters south to the Queets River)
3. South Coast (Pacific Ocean waters south of the Queets River to Leadbetter Point)
4. Columbia River (Pacific Ocean waters south of Leadbetter Point to Cape Falcon, Oregon)

A summary of Washington’s recreational halibut seasons for 2016 is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Washington recreational halibut seasons, catch, and average weight by subarea

Subarea	Quota (lbs)	Catch (lbs)	Avg Wt (lbs)	Season Dates
Puget Sound	57,393	102,699	19.24	East and West: May 7, May 12-14, May 26-29
North Coast	108,030	107,417	18.88	May 7, 12, 14, 28, June 11, June 23
South Coast	42,739	43,785	18.89	Primary: May 1, 3, 8, 10 Nearshore: May 2-22
Columbia River ^{1/}	11,009	9,785	14.45	All Depth: May 1-June 3, Thu-Sun Nearshore: May 2-June 8, Mon-Wed

^{1/} Columbia River harvest is Washington catch only.

Halibut are measured at the dock and the lengths of the samples are then converted to weight. Length data is collected throughout the season and applied to the number of halibut caught to project the total catch in pounds. In the coastal region, catches are then monitored on a weekly basis and the fisheries are closed when they are projected to attain their respective subarea quota.

North Coast Subarea

Quota attainment for the North Coast is achieved in very few days compared to other subareas in spite of the fact this area gets a large portion of the Washington recreational allocation. Since 2009, the general management structure has been designed to provide sufficient notification of fishery closures and re-openings resulting from in-season quota management. The fishery was typically structured to be open on Thursdays and Saturdays and scheduled to be open for the first two weeks (4-days) with a management closure during the third week to tally the early season catch and provide sufficient notice to anglers if sufficient quota is remaining to offer additional fishing days. However, after the subarea quota was achieved after only three days in 2015, the 2016 season structure was revised to open on the first Saturday in May and then continue with two days open the following week (Thursdays and Saturday) so that there would only be three days before the management closure. However, due to poor weather on several open fishing days, it took six days before reaching a total subarea catch of 107,417 pounds which was 613 pounds under the 2016 subarea allocation.

South Coast Subarea

The South Coast subarea is structured to open on the first Sunday in May and continue two days per week (Sunday and Tuesday) for three consecutive weeks before a management closure the following week. Similar to the north coast subarea, the management closure provides adequate time to monitor quota attainment and provide advance notice of a potential closure. Two thousand pounds or 10 percent of the subarea quota is reserved for incidental catch in the nearshore area which is open seven days per week. In 2016, the primary season was only open for four days and, similar to 2015, was closed prior to the management closure. Catch during the primary season totaled 41,684. 1,055 pounds of the nearshore set aside was remaining after adjusting to account for catch during the primary season. The nearshore subarea was open through May 22 after 2,102 pounds were caught resulting in a total subarea catch of 43,783 which was 1,046 pounds over the total South Coast subarea quota.

Columbia River Subarea

The Columbia River subarea is structured to open in all depths the first Thursday in May and continues four days per week, Thursday through Sunday until the set aside for the all-depth fishery is achieved. 500 pounds of the Columbia River allocation is set aside to allow halibut retention in the nearshore area when bottomfish are on board during days when the all-depth fishery is closed (Monday-Wednesday).

In 2016, the all-depth fishery opened on May 1 and continued four days per week, Thursday through Sunday through June 3. A total of 9,785 pounds of halibut were landed in the Washington portion of the Columbia River subarea during the all depth fishery. No halibut were landed in the nearshore fishery but the fishery was closed on June 8th when catch from the all-depth fishery reached 11,895 pounds (including catch from Washington and Oregon), 886 pounds over the subarea allocation.

Puget Sound Subarea

Inseason catch estimates were not available for the Puget Sound fishery in 2016 so fishing seasons were set after the quota was announced using historical catch data to project the season

length that would achieve but not exceed the subarea quota. Fishing effort and catch rates have increased in this area over the past several years and has resulted in fewer open days per week and shorter seasons overall.

WDFW held a public meeting in early February, following the IPHC Annual Meeting, to gather public input prior to setting the 2016 season. The Puget Sound region was open for a total 8 days which were applied to the entire Puget Sound region with 100 percent overlap of fishing days in both regions. In addition, the days open in the Puget Sound region also included some overlap with the open days in north coast subarea to further minimize the ability to fish in multiple areas and potentially reduce overall catch. The 2016 catch in the Puget Sound subarea was 102,699, 43,306 pounds over the allocation.

Puget Sound Recreational Halibut Catch Estimation Methodology

WDFW currently produces catch estimates for the Puget Sound recreational halibut fishery using data from two sources—creel surveys by port samplers collect catch information (without an estimate of effort) and total effort is derived from a random phone survey. Catch estimates are produced in two month increments (waves). Sampling coverage is driven by a requirement to maintain a minimum of a 20% sampling rate on marked-selective Chinook salmon fisheries and is limited by funding availability. Fortunately (from a sampling perspective), the Puget Sound halibut fishery occurs in only a few Marine Catch Areas (MCAs) when there is little salmon opportunity with a season of 8 days all within the month of May. In recent years, the sampling rate for the Puget Sound halibut fishery has ranged from 25-50%, achieving closer to 25% on average.

In 2015, WDFW began a pilot project in Marine Area 5 (western region) to implement a sampling approach more similar to the way recreational halibut are sampled on the coast and in the Puget Sound during high effort fisheries like recreational salmon. The 2015 project was successful and was expanded in 2016 to include more Puget Sound management areas where the recreational fishery occurs. Additional funding was approved to continue another year of the sampling project in all areas for 2017. This sampling approach will produce weekly estimates of catch that can be used for inseason quota monitoring and allow closure of the fishery upon projected attainment of the quota.

Canadian Halibut Landed Into Neah Bay

As part of WDFW’s port sampling efforts for recreational halibut fisheries, we also sample halibut caught in Canadian waters and landed into Neah Bay from March through October. The number of Canadian halibut landed into Neah Bay continues to decrease, with the 2016 total at 304 fish. Table 2 summarizes the Canadian halibut catch landed into Neah Bay for 2012-2016.

Table 2. Canadian halibut landings into Neah Bay, Washington, 2012-2016.

Year	# Boats	# Anglers	# Halibut
2016	230	608	304
2015	254	648	434
2014	295	797	629

2013	390	1,107	690
2012	335	833	595

Incidental Halibut Catch in the 2016 Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis, WA

The 2A Halibut CSP provides for incidental landings of halibut in the primary longline sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis, Washington, in years when the Area 2A TAC is greater than 900,000 lbs. The primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis will be allocated the Washington sport allocation that is in excess of 214,110 lb, provided a minimum of 10,000 pounds is available. The amount of halibut allowed in the directed sablefish fishery is capped at 70,000 lbs; any remaining allocation is transferred back to the Washington recreational fishery and divided among the subareas according to the methodology described in the CSP. The 2016 area 2A TAC was 1,140,000 pounds and the initial Washington sport allocation was 263,796 leaving 49,686 for incidental halibut landings in the longline sablefish fishery. The Pacific Fishery Management Council adopted a 110 pound halibut per 1,000 pound sablefish limit per landing with up to two additional halibut in excess of the 110 pounds per 1,000 pound landing ratio allowed per landing (both dressed weight, halibut with head-on). The sablefish fishery extends from April 1 through October 31 with associated halibut landings allowed beginning April 1.

Sixteen vessels made a total of 64 landings containing halibut in the tier-limit sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis. Incidental halibut retention in the sablefish fishery was open through October 31. The total catch of dressed, head-on halibut in the directed sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis at the conclusion of the fishery was 39,376 pounds which is 79 percent of the established quota. The incidental halibut landings in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis from 2012-2016 are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Incidental Halibut in the Sablefish Fishery North of Pt. Chehalis

Year	Vessels	Landings	Quota	Catch	% of Quota
2016	16	64	49,686	39,376	79.2
2015	8	37	10,348	9,797	94.7
2014	12	42	14,274	12,224	85.6
2013	14	53	21,173	14,151	66.8
2012	11	32	21,173	5,010	23.7

Summary

WDFW will continue to monitor and sample our recreational and commercial fisheries, including the amount of halibut caught in Canadian waters and landed into Neah Bay; continue to improve sampling and catch estimation methods for the Puget Sound region to keep catch within allocations; maintain our enforcement efforts during the halibut recreational fisheries; and monitor the efforts to document halibut bycatch in the West Coast commercial fisheries and recommend appropriate action through the Pacific Fishery Management Council.