



# Summary of Washington Pacific Halibut Fisheries Management in 2016

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Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
600 Capital Way North  
Olympia, WA 98501

**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 <sup>1/</sup>	11,009	9,785	14.45	All Depth: May 1-June 3, Thu-Sun Nearshore: May 2-June 8, Mon-Wed

<sup>1/</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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.

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

<b>2013</b>	390	1,107	690
<b>2012</b>	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.

# WDFW POLICE

## 2016 HALIBUT REPORT

### A Strategic Approach to Protection



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Police



## “To protect our natural resources and the public we serve”

### Who are We?

The WDFW Law Enforcement Program has 144 commissioned law enforcement personnel statewide. Fish and Wildlife Officers (FWOs) are general authority peace officers deployed to six regions throughout the state and a Marine Division. Our Officers are responsible for enforcing a myriad of laws and regulations related to health and public safety, dangerous wildlife/human conflicts, fish and wildlife protection, hunting and fishing license regulations, habitat protection, and commercial fish and shellfish harvest. In addition, we enforce federal laws, Oregon state statutes, and county ordinances through memorandums of agreement. We conduct boating law enforcement on state and federal waters, and law enforcement in state and federal parks and forest lands. Our Officers conduct search and rescue operations on both land and waters. Because of our unique capabilities, assets, and jurisdiction, our Officers are often called upon to respond during severe weather to natural disasters and other critical incidents, to perform public-safety and search-and-rescue duties.

### What do we Do?



#### Officers' Responsibilities

FWOs respond to public safety issues such as dangerous wildlife encounters, natural disasters (including floods, fires, and severe storms), and general law enforcement calls for service. Fish and Wildlife Officers are often called upon to assist their local city, county, and other state law enforcement agencies, tribal authorities, and federal agencies. On an average, officers currently make more than 225,000 enforcement contacts annually.



#### Officers' Authority

The Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Program is primarily responsible for enforcing Title 77 - the Fish and Wildlife Code. FWOs enforce all criminal laws, including traffic violations, drugs, and warrants for arrest. Officers may also hold county commissions and are charged with enforcing county ordinances as applicable.

Officers also hold federal U.S. Fish and Wildlife and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) commissions, and have jurisdiction over federal violations, the most important of which are the Endangered Species Act and the Lacey Act. Officers collaborate and coordinate with these agencies and the U.S. Coast Guard.

# Overview

Halibut can be found throughout Puget Sound and offshore waters. This resource is shared among four user groups in Washington State: recreational, directed non-Indian commercial, non-Indian incidental, and Tribal fishermen. Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) police developed a patrol plan for 2016 that provides comprehensive protection throughout the entire year.

As halibut seasons and habitats overlap with other fisheries, directed halibut patrols often revealed federal and state violations related to other species. Conversely, halibut violations were also found during patrols intended to maintain compliance in other fisheries. Common halibut violations included mutilation of fish so that size or species could not be determined, failure to account for catch, fishing for and possession of rockfish or halibut in closed areas, closed-season fishing, exceeding limits, failing to submit catch for inspection (hidden fish), and fishing with no license.



# Strategic Planning

## The Patrol Plan's focus areas include:

- Elevating enforcement presence at sea and shore side during halibut-directed fisheries or when halibut can be legally retained incidental to other fisheries;
- Ensuring compliance with halibut hot spots that are closed to fishing during open halibut seasons (intended for yellow eye and canary rockfish protection);
- Providing a presence on the halibut grounds during season closures, to include during non-halibut fisheries in locations where halibut could be intercepted;
- Monitoring commercial off-loads;
- Inspecting wholesale and retail sellers to ensure lawful origin of halibut in commerce;
- Ensuring the safety of all persons engaging in commercial and recreational fisheries; and
- Conducting joint patrols with partners agencies such as Tribal, United States Coast Guard and local sheriffs' offices in order to expand patrol coverage.



# Patrol Highlights

**Recreational Season:** Three separate detachments of officers conducted saturation patrols in Marine Areas 1,2,3,4 and 5 prior to and during the recreational and commercial coastal halibut openers. WDFW police committed four patrol boats and deployed officers on United States Coast Guard (USCG) and the Clallam County Sheriff's vessels to expand the at-sea presence. In addition to DFW officers detecting recreational and commercial fishing violations, USCG boarding teams terminated several vessels voyages due to a lack of required safety equipment.



**Closed Area Commercial Fishing:** Officers onboard our 56-foot patrol boat encountered a buoy marking commercial hook and line gear deployed in an area closed to commercial fishing. A vessel was pulling away from the buoy and was detained. The operator, a tribal member, denied that the fishing gear belonged to him and claimed he had drifted south of his usual and accustomed fishing grounds by nearly five miles. Upon closer inspection of the buoy, the vessel name was faintly visible. Upon being confronted over this, the fisherman admitted he was intentionally fishing in an area closed to commercial fishing. Officers ensured that over three hundred halibut, rockfish and sablefish were released from the hooks. The case was referred to NOAA OLE for prosecution.



# Incidental Fisheries

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**Incidental Halibut Fishery:** Commercial salmon troll areas overlap halibut grounds. Trollers may legally retain halibut incidental to the salmon fishery, however limits apply. Commercial trollers were routinely inspected to ensure compliance, with one fisherman found to be over his limit of halibut. This case was prosecuted in State Court.

**Rockfish Violations:** Rockfish and halibut can be caught incidental to one another. Some areas that hold populations of halibut are also habitat for Yellow-eye and Canary rockfish. The Yellow-eye species is designated as “overfished” by the Pacific Fishery Management Council. Although recently canary rockfish populations have increased, restrictions are still in place. In order to reduce the impacts to rockfish, some areas are closed to fishing during the open season. One noteworthy rockfish case involved a vessel with twenty-three rockfish over the possession limit, including prohibited Canary and Yellow-eye.



**Plundering Rockfish:** Sometimes the weather is not conducive to traveling great distances for halibut, so anglers will often switch to targeting rockfish and lingcod. In LaPush, Officer Branscomb asked two nervous anglers if “fishing had been good.” The men responded that they had caught thirty-eight rockfish, but after inspecting the boat, he Officer Branscomb discovered another thirty-three they had stashed in a fish hold. Not only were the individuals in violation for being in possession of a gross over limit, they possessed an undersized lingcod as well.

# Premeditated Poaching

## Closed-Season Possession:

Commercial West Coast setline anglers targeting black cod regularly encounter halibut as by-catch, especially when they are using hook-and-line-style gear instead of groundfish pots. Except under limited circumstance, it is illegal to keep the halibut.

Officer Jacobson received a tip that a commercial blackcod fisherman had illegally retained halibut in a hidden compartment and was going to offload it after dark from his boat moored in Ilwaco. After several hours of surveillance, the fisherman loaded two large coolers into a waiting truck. The Officer inspected the coolers and found nine flatfish, two rockfish and over two hundred and twenty five pounds of undocumented and closed-season halibut. The fish were donated to a local charity and charges were forwarded to the prosecutor's office.



**A thorough search of the boat revealed a false wall in a fish holding area.**

# Commercial Focus

**Fish Company Inspections:** Wholesale fish dealers and processors are inspected throughout the season to ensure proper catch accounting and enforce possession limits. One commercial vessel was discovered to have delivered two hundred and eighteen pounds of halibut in excess of the limit. The overage was seized and state citations were issued to the captain.

During an inspection at a fish processing plant, Officer Do discovered undersized halibuts from two separate deliveries. The fish were seized, donated to charity and the captain was charged in State Court.



**Commercial-Directed Fishery:** Officers conducted vessel patrols during each of the open-directed commercial halibut fisheries. One vessel possessed a 106-pound overage and undersized halibut. The captain was charged in State Court.

# Total JEA Emphasis Patrols

**2016 Emphasis Patrols: 21 Participating WDFW Officers**

**Total Hours: 579.25**

*489.25 Combined Hours at Sea on Long Range Vessels*

*90 Combined Hours of Land Based Patrols*

**Total Contacts: 2,095**

*223 Commercial Contacts*

*1,872 Recreational Contacts*

**Warnings Issued: 121**

**Citations Issued: 103**





Washington Department of  
**FISH and WILDLIFE**

*“To Preserve, Protect and Perpetuate Fish, Wildlife and Ecosystems While Providing Sustainable Fish and Wildlife Recreational and Commercial Opportunities”*



*“To understand and predict changes in climate, weather, oceans, and coasts, to share that knowledge and information with others, and to conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources”*