



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

Summary of Washington Pacific Halibut Fisheries Management in 2011

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**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
SUMMARY OF PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN 2011**

The purpose of this report is to summarize the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) management and enforcement activities in the 2011 Pacific halibut fisheries. It includes a synopsis of Washington’s recreational catch and a summary of WDFW’s enforcement efforts relative to patrolling the North Coast (Neah Bay and La Push) recreational halibut fisheries (Appendix A).

Washington’s Recreational Halibut Fisheries in 2011

Washington’s halibut fisheries are managed under the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A. The catch sharing plan 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 2011 is described in Table 1.

Table 1.

Subarea	Quota (lbs)	Catch (lbs)	Avg Wt (lbs)	Season Dates
Puget Sound	58,155	45,856	22.7	West: May 26-June 18 East: May 5-May 29
North Coast	108,792	103,741	21.0	May 12, 14, 19, 21 June 2, 4, 16, 30
South Coast	43,500	45,100	17.2	Primary: May 1, 3, 8, 10, 15, 17, 22 Nearshore: May 2- July 31 7-days / week
Columbia River ^{1/}	13,436	7,657	15.1	Early: May 5-June 4 Thu-Sat; Late: Aug 5- Sept 30 Fri-Sun

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

Halibut are measured at the dock and the lengths of the samples are then converted to weights. On the coast, lengths are taken throughout the season on a weekly basis and applied to the number of halibut caught to project the total catch in pounds. The catches are then monitored and the fisheries are closed when they are projected to attain their respective subarea quota.

North Coast Subarea

The general management structure for the north coast subarea has remained unchanged since 2009 when revisions were made to provide better notification of fishery closures and re-openings resulting from in-season quota management. The improved public notification process was accomplished by identifying two weeks pre-season that the halibut fishery would be closed to monitor quota attainment and provide advanced notice as to when potential openings would occur if sufficient quota remained. For 2011, the fishery continued to operate under a single quota rather than a split quota divided between May and June and was open two days per week (Thursday and Saturday). Table 2 shows that a reasonable amount of quota continues to be available for fishing opportunity in June even with the elimination of the quota split in 2009.

Table 2. North Coast recreational halibut quota divisions and catches in May and June, 2007-11.

Year	N. Coast Quota	May Catch	Percent May	June Catch	Percent June
2007	116,199	66,430	60%	44,627	40%
2008	109,992	64,747	61%	42,105	39%
2009	108,030	67,058	65%	35,724	35%
2010	101,179	57,812	61%	37,202	39%
2011	108,792	57,763	55%	47,478	45%

South Coast Subarea

The South Coast subarea was open two days per week (Sunday and Tuesday) in 2011, except for the fourth week in May when the primary (offshore) season was open on Sunday only. This approach provides adequate time to monitor quota attainment and provide advance notice of a potential closure. It also balances the harvest opportunity between those who prefer to fish on weekends and those who like to fish on weekdays. The nearshore fishery was open seven days per week to improve access to the nearshore set-aside and reduce the amount of incidentally caught halibut that would otherwise be discarded on days the primary season is closed or after the halibut season is over.

Columbia River Subarea

The Columbia River subarea has operated under the same management structure since 2006 when the subarea quota was divided into an early season (70%), starting the first Thursday in May or May 1 if it is a Friday or Saturday, and a late season (30%) that opens on the first Friday in August. The early season is open Thursday through Saturday and the late season is open Friday through Sunday. This subarea has not attained its quota in the last five years and Washington anglers in particular expressed an interest in shifting more of the quota to the earlier season. Oregon anglers had expressed concerns about Oregon contributing more than half of the Columbia River subarea quota in recent years. To address both of these issues the Council revised the Catch Sharing Plan for 2012.

Puget Sound Subarea

In 2011, there were an estimated 2,019 halibut caught in the Puget Sound recreational halibut fishery. The estimated average weight in the fishery —based on 846 fish sampled by WDFW— was 22.7 lbs. This average weight results in a total estimated catch of 45,856 lbs, 12,229 lbs under the quota for this subarea. The detailed catch information by month and Marine Catch Area is described in Appendix B.

Inseason catch estimates are not available for the Puget Sound fishery so fishing seasons are set after the quota is announced using historical catch data to project quota attainment. The method used to set the seasons was adjusted in 2009 to address higher than anticipated catch rates. The changes resulted in fewer open days per week and a shorter season overall. The fishery continued to operate under this new season structure in 2011. WDFW held a public meeting in early February, following the IPHC Annual Meeting, to gather public input prior to setting the 2011 seasons. The 2011 seasons were very similar to 2010 with the eastern region opening in early May through May 29 and the western region opening later, on May 26, its traditional opening on the Thursday before Memorial Day, through June 18. Both regions were open three days per week (Thursday-Saturday) with the exception of Memorial Day weekend when they both were open Thursday through Sunday.

The federal Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) reviewed our Puget Sound sampling and catch estimation methodology in November 2010. Based on their recommendations, improvements to sampling methodologies that formalize site selection procedures and track the information in our database were made in 2011. These changes improved our baseline survey, which is used during the halibut season, but did not affect the Pacific halibut catch estimates.

Table 3. Puget Sound catch estimates, by region, for 2011.

Area	2011	
	# Halibut	Lbs
Eastern Region	1,149	26,096
Western Region	870	19,760
Total	2,019	45,856

Canadian Halibut Landed Into Neah Bay

As part of WDFW’s port sampling efforts for recreational halibut fisheries, we also sample the halibut caught in Canadian waters and landed into Neah Bay from March through October. The number of Canadian halibut landed into Neah Bay totaled 880 for 2011; this is approximately 30 percent less than in 2010. The amount of Canadian halibut landed into Neah Bay has decreased significantly since 2007 likely due to increasing restrictions implemented by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada on recreational halibut regulations and licensing requirements for the waters adjacent to Neah Bay. Table 4 summarizes the Canadian halibut catch landed into Neah Bay for 2007-2011.

Table 4. Canadian halibut landings into Neah Bay, Washington, in 2007-2011.

Year	# Boats	# Anglers	# Halibut
2007	1,579	6,820	9,977
2008	834	3,412	4,778
2009	624	1,956	1,609
2010	539	1,629	1,245
2011	425	1,253	880

Summary

WDFW plans to 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 take a precautionary approach when setting our Puget Sound season; 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.

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Statewide Marine Division has concentrated enforcement activities around the recreational halibut season along the north coast for the past several years. The 2011 season was no exception. Enforcement patrols were designed to address Washington’s halibut rules and offer a level of protection for other species that can be encountered while pursuing halibut, particularly yelloweye and canary rockfish that are designated as overfished. Additionally, cross-border activities associated with Washington residents fishing in Canada were monitored.

Concurrent enforcement activities that occurred during the 2011 halibut patrols included, but were not limited to: (1) ensuring compliance with the recreational and commercial Rockfish Conservation Area bottomfish closures; (2) enforcing canary and yelloweye rockfish non-retention rules in the recreational fishery; (3) monitoring and maintaining compliance with Canadian-caught halibut landings; (4) enforcing rules of the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary; (5) monitoring vessel safety compliance; (7) and ensuring general compliance with groundfish fishing regulations.

The following is a summary of patrol activities directed at Washington’s 2011 north coast recreational halibut fishery.

May 12 & 14, 2011 Opener

The opening week of the recreational halibut fishery was spent working on and participating in an emphasis patrol along the north coast of Washington. Most of the enforcement activity was focused on boat patrols, utilizing three WDFW rigid-hull inflatable vessels deployed out of La Push and Neah Bay, and one Clallam County vessel out of Neah Bay. Those efforts were supplemented by dock patrols at Neah Bay, La Push, and Snow Creek, and a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter surveillance flight from Port Angeles.

Most of the violations were minor offenses that were handled with verbal warnings; however several citations and notices of infractions (NOIs) were issued: fish in unlawful condition; possession of closed season halibut; possession of closed season rockfish (within the “C”-shaped Rockfish Conservation Area); possession of canary rockfish; and license violations.

The North Coast emphasis patrol has been scaled back over the past few years in response to a relatively high compliance rate, a split season opener, and concerns from the public about being boarded too many times. Non-fisheries boardings by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Coast Guard, and Clallam County Sheriff are a relatively new phenomenon, and the frequent interruption of a deep water fishery has generated increased complaints of harassment.

2011 Opening Weekend Activity Summary:

MAY 12 & 14	# OF ANGLERS CONTACTED	# OF VIOLATIONS	CITATIONS	WARNINGS	REFERRALS
LA PUSH	240	18	8	9	1
NEAH BAY	385	63	13	50	0

Opening Weekend Comparisons:

YEAR	# OF ANGLERS CONTACTED	# OF VIOLATIONS	MEAN COMPLIANCE %
2007	1,057	110	89.6%
2008	424	38	91.0%
2009	1,309	265	79.8%
2010	763	136	82.2%
2011	625	81	87.0%
Average	836	126	84.9%

May 19 & 21, 2011

A coastal halibut boat patrol was conducted in Marine Areas 3 (La Push) and 4 (Neah Bay). Violations included: possession of an over limit of halibut; possession of closed season rockfish; and failure to record catch on a catch record card (CRC).

June 2 & 4, 2011

A boat patrol of Marine Area 4 (Neah Bay) was conducted during the two-day (and off day) coastal halibut opening. Violations included: failure to record halibut on CRC; no fishing license in possession; possession of rockfish in unlawful condition; possession of closed season rockfish; and possession of undersize lingcod. A dock patrol in Marine Area 3 (La Push) found two individuals in possession of an over limit of rockfish.

June 16, 2011

Two days of boat patrols were conducted in Marine Area 4 (Neah Bay) & 5 (Sekiu) to monitor the coastal halibut opener, the last day of the Puget Sound (Area 5) halibut season, and the opening of the coastal salmon season. Citations and warnings were given for violations that included: fishing halibut in closed waters; possession of fish in unlawful condition; possession of undersize lingcod; fish with barbed hooks; failure to record catch on CRC; fishing with more than one line; and fishing in areas with unlawful catch aboard the vessel.

June 30, 2011

Three boat patrols were conducted in Marine Area 4 (Neah Bay) during and after the coastal halibut season. Contact with one recreational boat returning to Neah Bay from outside the 20-fathom bottomfish closure revealed that they had failed to submit approximately 68 rockfish and 4 lingcod. At the marina, officers found other fishermen associated with the fisherman who had earlier failed to submit their catch and additional violations including overlimit of rockfish and undersize lingcod were discovered.

A dock patrol in Marine Area 3 (LaPush) resulted in lingcod overlimit and fishing bottomfish in closed waters violations.

Efforts in addition to directed patrols:

Throughout the summer of 2011, officers from Detachment Eight dedicated a significant amount of time patrolling the north coast of Washington state and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Most of the activity was centered on the halibut, groundfish, and selective fishery salmon season, however, all aspects of fisheries enforcement, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary enforcement, vessel safety, and all other laws of the state were addressed.

2011 Puget Sound Halibut Estimates by Month and Area

Table 1. Number of Halibut by Month and Area

Month	Catch Area				Grand Total
	5	6	7	9	
May	426	1,019	10	120	1,575
June	444				444
Grand Total	870	1,019	10	120	2,019

Table 2. Pounds of Halibut by Month and Area

Month	Catch Area				Grand Total
	5	6	7	9	
May	9,675	23,144	227	2,725	35,772
June	10,084	0	0	0	10,084
Grand Total	19,760	23,144	227	2,725	45,856

Avg. wt. 22.7 lbs.