



Washington
Department of
FISH and
WILDLIFE

Summary of Washington Pacific Halibut Fisheries Management in 2015

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**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
SUMMARY OF PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN 2015**

The purpose of this report is to summarize the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) management and enforcement activities for the 2015 Pacific halibut fisheries. 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 2015 is attached.

Washington's Recreational Halibut Fisheries in 2015

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 2015 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			West: May 15–16, May 21-24, May 29-30 East: May 8 – 9, May 15-16, May 21-24, May 28 – 30
North Coast	108,030	94,698	17.90	May 14, 16, 23
South Coast	42,739	42,733	17.77	Primary: May 3, 5, 10, 12 Nearshore: May 3 – July 19
Columbia River ^{1/}	10,254	8,056	16.65	All Depth: May 1 – June 2, Thu-Sun; Nearshore: May 4 – Sept 30, Mon-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 fishery in this area is structured to be open on Thursdays and Saturdays and is initially scheduled to be open for the first two weeks. A management closure is in place 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. The total catch in north coast subarea was 94,698 pounds after three days. No additional fishing days were allowed after the management closure. 2015 is the first time a Washington subarea season lasted fewer than four days.

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 2015, the primary season was only open for four days and was closed prior to the management closure. Catch during the primary season totaled 38,914 pounds leaving 1,825 pounds of the primary season allocation remaining. The residual quota from the primary season was transferred to the nearshore fishery where the season was open through July 19 after 3,819 pounds were caught leaving only 6 pounds of the total South Coast subarea quota remaining.

Columbia River Subarea

In 2015, the season structure for this subarea was revised to remove the early (80 percent), and late (20 percent), season subarea allocations. This change was in response to very low catch during the late season and was intended to ensure the quota is available during the peak of halibut fishing effort and to allow the all-depth fishery to continue uninterrupted. In addition, a change was made to reduce the allocation to the nearshore fishery to 500 pounds. The amount of halibut caught in the nearshore fishery was very low in 2014 and this change maintained the nearshore set aside at an amount that would accommodate recent catches in the nearshore area. The all-depth fishery continued to be open Thursday through Sunday and the nearshore fishery open Monday through Wednesday on days when the all-depth fishery is closed. Changes to groundfish regulations were also adopted in 2015 that would allow the retention of all flatfish species (other than halibut) to be retained, in addition to Pacific cod and sablefish when halibut is on board.

In 2015, the all-depth fishery opened on May 1 and continued four days per week, Thursday through Sunday through June 2. A total of 7,866 pounds of halibut were landed in the Washington portion of the Columbia River subarea during the all depth fishery. One hundred ninety pounds of halibut were landed in the Washington portion of the Columbia River subarea in the nearshore fishery that was open Mondays through Wednesdays from May 4 through September 30.

Puget Sound Subarea

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 the season length that will 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 2015 seasons. In setting the 2015 season, the number of days available was applied to the entire Puget Sound region with continued focus on setting the seasons in the two regions so they overlapped as much as possible and result in an overall shorter Puget Sound season. In 2015 the Puget Sound season was open a total of 11 days.

Puget Sound Recreational Halibut Catch Estimation Methodology

WDFW 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. 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 about 8-11 days (across two months—May and June—which are combined into one Wave). In recent years, the sampling rate for the Puget Sound halibut fishery has ranged from 25-50%, achieving closer to 25% on average.

In response to a recommendation by the federal Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), WDFW revised its port sampling site selection process to apply weights to the different sites. The weight values were developed to assist the sampling program in selecting the sites to be sampled and to correct for the sites that have a low probability of being selected. However, there is still some subjectivity involved in site selection, and initial weight values were assigned based on the likelihood of being sampled with the intent of achieving the required 20% sampling rate for Chinook salmon.

WDFW is in the process of reviewing its site weight assignments and determining the appropriate values for the sites for the halibut fishery. Once we have completed that review, we will revise the weights for the halibut sites and re-calculate our official catch estimates for 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 and provide those estimates to IPHC.

Additionally, WDFW is exploring opportunities to fund an intensive sampling effort, similar to the sampling approach in coastal areas, for the Puget Sound recreational halibut fisheries to help us ground-truth our assumptions, revised site weights, and catch estimation methodology. We look forward to working with IPHC staff as we work through the details of the site weighting process and develop the proposed intensive sampling plan.

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 continues to decrease, with the 2015 total at 434 fish. The amount of Canadian halibut landed into Neah Bay has decreased significantly 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 2 summarizes the Canadian halibut catch landed into Neah Bay for 2011-2015.

Table 2. Canadian halibut landings into Neah Bay, Washington, 2011-2015.

Year	# Boats	# Anglers	# Halibut
2015	254	648	434
2014	295	797	629
2013	390	1,107	690
2012	335	833	595
2011	425	1,253	880

Incidental Halibut Catch in the 2015 Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis, WA

The 2A Halibut Catch Sharing Plan 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 directed 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 Plan. The 2015 area 2A TAC was 970,000 pounds and the initial Washington sport allocation was 224,458 leaving 10,348 for incidental halibut landings in the longline sablefish fishery. The Pacific Fishery Management Council adopted a 75 pound halibut per 1,000 pound sablefish limit per landing with up to two additional halibut in excess of the 75 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.

Eight vessels made a total of 37 landings containing halibut in the directed tier-limit sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis. Incidental halibut retention in the sablefish fishery was prohibited effective September 1, when catch was projected to be near the allocation. The total catch of dressed, head-off halibut in the directed sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis at the conclusion of the fishery on September 1 was 9,797 pounds which is 95 percent of the established quota. The incidental halibut landings in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis from 2011-2015 are summarized in Table 3.

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

Year	Vessels	Landings	Quota	Catch	% of Quota
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
2011	n/a	n/a	0	n/a	n/a

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.