



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Pacific halibut science and management are primarily the purview of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), an international organization established by a Convention between Canada and the United States in 1923. The IPHC conducts annual halibut surveys and stock assessment as well as other halibut-related research, and sets annual fishery catch limits for each of ten areas across the stock's range in U.S. and Canadian waters (Figure 1). Oregon is located within IPHC regulatory Area 2A, which also encompasses Washington and California.

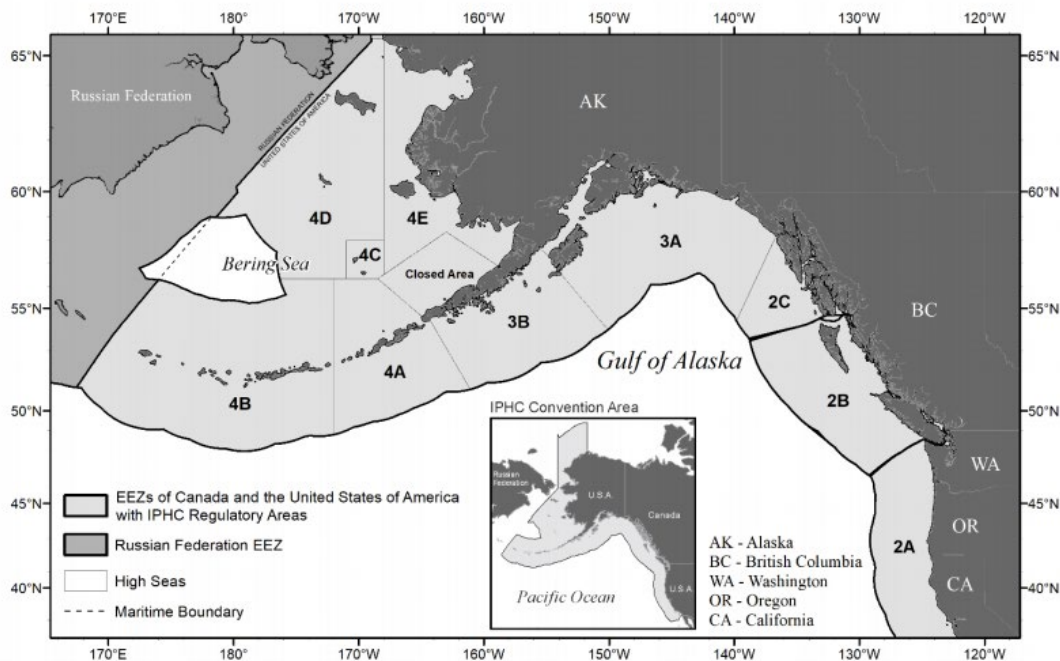


Figure 1. Map of the IPHC Convention Area (inset) and IPHC Regulatory Areas

Within Area 2A, fishery allocations, catch limits, and management measures are determined annually by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), documented in the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP), and adopted into federal rules.

The Commission adopts Pacific halibut fishery regulations by reference to federal rules published by NMFS. In addition, the Commission adopts open dates for the sport spring halibut fishery on Oregon's central coast. This agenda item presents the 2021 sport and commercial Pacific halibut fishery regulations for the Commission's consideration.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The IPHC considers public input as well as advice from two industry advisory groups to balance trade-offs between stock productivity and economic impacts to fishery participants and communities as they determine catch limits each year.

ODFW and the PFMC use a multi-step process to gather public input on potential changes to sport Pacific halibut fisheries in Oregon.

- ODFW holds public meetings in fishing communities to discuss the sport fishery and develop proposals for the upcoming year. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions and limitations in 2020, in person meetings were replaced with a single virtual meeting, on July 28.
- Proposals are reviewed at PFMC's September meeting, and approved proposals are forwarded for additional public review and comment. ODFW develops final recommendations based on stakeholder input. For 2021, ODFW conducted an online survey in October 2020.
- The PFMC adopts final changes at its November meeting, which are implemented via federal rule for the upcoming year.
- Following the IPHC's determination of quotas in late January or early February each year, ODFW seeks input on the number and timing of open days in the Central Coast subarea's spring all-depth sport season. This meeting was held virtually on February 8, aided with an online survey. ODFW develops recommendations based on this input and conveys them directly to NMFS.
- NMFS publishes proposed halibut fishery regulations in the Federal Register, considers public comment received (if any), then publishes a final rule.

Until recently, the directed commercial Pacific halibut fishery in Area 2A was managed by IPHC without direct involvement by ODFW or the PFMC. In 2020, the IPHC lengthened the open periods to three-day fishing windows (58 hours), replacing the long-standing 10-hour periods, to improve safety by providing a longer window to harvest individual vessel limits. The majority of effort and landings in this fishery occur in Oregon, and to ensure that participants had a venue to discuss the nuances of the season, ODFW held a virtual public meeting with commercial halibut fishers and buyers on July 29, 2020. ODFW port biologists also shared information with the halibut fleet and conveyed the interests and concerns of many participants to ODFW fishery managers. ODFW summarized the input received and provided it to the PFMC for consideration as the PFMC developed a recommendation to the IPHC for 2021.

ISSUE 1

Annual catch limits and management measures for sport and commercial Pacific halibut fisheries.

ANALYSIS

Catch Sharing Plan 2021

The IPHC adopted a 2021 Area 2A fishery catch limit of 1,510,000 pounds of Pacific halibut. This amount is 10,000 pounds higher than in 2020, and is projected to remain in place for 2022 unless a significant conservation concern arises.

As determined by the sharing arrangements in the PFMC's CSP, 2021 catch limits for individual fisheries in Area 2A are:

- Tribal fisheries (WA): 528,500 lbs. (35% of Area 2A)
- Commercial fishery (WA/OR/CA): 301,321 lbs. (20%)
- WA sport fishery: 349,414 lbs. (23%)
- OR sport fishery: 291,506 lbs. (19%)
- CA sport fishery: 39,260 lbs. (3%)

The Oregon sport fishery is broken out further into three different subareas with seasonal and/or depth-dependent allocations:

- Columbia River Subarea (Leadbetter Pt. WA, to Cape Falcon OR): 18,662 lbs. (2.3% of OR sport + 8,560 lbs. WA sport + remaining Southern OR Subarea quota)
 - All-depth: 18,162 lbs.
 - Nearshore: 500 lbs.
- Central Coast Subarea (Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt.): 273,403 lbs. (93.79% of OR sport)
 - Spring all-depth: 172,224 lbs.
 - Summer all-depth: 68,351 lbs.
 - Nearshore: 32,808 lbs.
- Southern Oregon Subarea (Humbug Mt. to OR/CA border): 8,000 lbs. (3.91% of OR sport, capped at 8,000 lbs.)
 - No seasonal or depth restriction

There is one change to the CSP that will affect Oregon sport Pacific halibut fisheries for 2021:

- Anglers will have the opportunity to combine all-depth halibut and longleader rockfish gear fishing on the same trip. This change, which was also approved in groundfish regulations by the Commission in December, 2020, increases angler opportunity by permitting retention of more species on all-depth halibut days than were previously allowed.
 - The additional opportunity is only allowed seaward of the 40-fathom depth regulatory line during the months of June, July and August; months when the regular bottomfish fishery is restricted to shoreward of the 40-fathom depth regulatory line.
 - Furthermore, once a rockfish species is retained, anglers may no longer fish for Pacific halibut on that trip.

For further detail on the proposed catch limits and seasons, please see Attachment 8.

Central Coast Subarea 2021 Season Dates

After considering public input, ODFW recommends open “fixed” and “backup” dates for each year’s Central Coast Subarea spring sport all-depth fishery to NMFS.

Background information and a summary of public input are contained in a memo transmitting ODFW’s recommendation to NMFS (Attachment 7). The recommended dates are:

- Spring fishery fixed open dates: May 13, 14, 15; May 20, 21, 22; June 3, 4, 5; June 10, 11, 12; June 17, 18, 19; and July 1, 2, 3.
- Spring fishery backup dates: July 15, 16, 17 and July 29, 30, 31.

The CSP has provisions to adjust open days and bag limits inseason if it appears that a subarea’s catch limit will not be taken. As in past years, ODFW will coordinate with NMFS and the IPHC to make inseason adjustments as needed to ensure Oregon anglers have the opportunity to harvest the allocation.

Commercial Pacific halibut fisheries

The directed commercial fishery will occur in 3-day (58-hour) open fishing periods. The first opening will start at 0800 on the fourth Tuesday in June and end at 1800 on the subsequent Thursday. Additional openings (up to 58 hours each) may be announced by IPHC if enough quota remains, and will occur two weeks after the previous opening. Vessel limits will be determined and announced by IPHC prior to the first opening, and are expected to be similar to 2020 levels.

Landing limit options for halibut retention in the commercial salmon troll fishery were developed by the Council at its March 2021 Council meeting and will be finalized at its April meeting. These limits are based on a ratio of halibut to salmon with an overall halibut trip limit.

Staff recommends that the Commission adopt, by reference, federal catch limits and regulations for all Pacific Halibut fisheries without modification.

OPTIONS

1. Staff recommendations (adopt federal rules by reference), as reflected in Attachment 3.
2. Modify staff proposal for one or more items.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1. Option 1

DRAFT MOTION

I move to adopt the staff recommendations for the 2021 sport and commercial Pacific Halibut fisheries as shown in Attachment 3.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon filing.