

Overview of the 2009 Oregon Sport Pacific Halibut Fishery



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Marine Resources Program

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2009 Oregon Sport Pacific Halibut Fishery

Introduction

Allocation

Since 1995, the Oregon-California sport Pacific halibut fishery has received 20.6 percent of the Area 2A catch limit as indicated in the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) “Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan” (CSP). Beginning in 2005, 5.0 percent of the Oregon-California sport allowable catch was allocated to the Columbia River subarea (Leadbetter Point, Washington to Cape Falcon, Oregon), 92.0 percent to the Oregon Central Coast subarea (Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain), and 3.0 percent to the South of Humbug Mt. subarea (Figure 1).

Sport Catch Survey

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates the sport catch of Pacific halibut through a port-based sampling survey where boats are counted as they exit each port. Dockside sampling of returning boats is used to determine the average number of anglers fishing and halibut caught per boat. This information, stratified by private and charter boats, is combined to estimate the number of Pacific halibut landed by port. In 2009, samplers in each port were instructed to measure the length of all halibut from every other boat sampled, for both the private and charter fleets. This information was used to estimate total weight of fish landed. In 2009, coastwide samplers collectively sampled 4,071 halibut or 35 percent of the estimated 11,741 fish that were landed into Oregon (Table 1). Samplers also scanned 3,165 halibut for PIT tags out of the ports of Garibaldi, Depoe Bay, Newport and Charleston with one tag recovered in Newport.

Groundfish Retention

Since 2005, retention of all groundfish except sablefish has been prohibited in the Columbia River and Oregon Central Coast subareas if Pacific halibut were aboard the vessel. For 2006-08, retention of both sablefish and Pacific cod was allowed in the Columbia River subarea. For the Oregon Central Coast subarea this provision only applied on days when the halibut fishery was open in all-depths. Groundfish retention was allowed in the nearshore fishery when the all-depth fishery was closed because many halibut caught in the nearshore area are taken incidentally in the groundfish targeted fishery. The intent of prohibiting groundfish retention was to prevent targeting of groundfish species in the halibut directed fishery and subsequent incidental take of yelloweye rockfish and canary rockfish, both determined by the PFMC to be overfished. Sablefish and Pacific cod were allowed as they are rarely targeted and are often taken incidentally in the directed halibut fishery. Retention of groundfish species with Pacific halibut aboard the vessel was allowed in the South of Humbug Mt. subarea because halibut are generally not targeted in this areas and are usually incidentally encountered by other directed fisheries.

Since 2005, the high relief area of Stonewall Bank, located approximately 15 miles off Newport, has been closed to halibut fishing (Figure 2). The intent of this provision was to reduce the incidental take of yelloweye rockfish and canary rockfish.

Discussion

Columbia River Subarea (Leadbetter Point, Washington to Cape Falcon, Oregon)

Since 2006, the fishery had two openings, spring and summer. Between 2006 and 2008, the spring fishery was open May 1 through June 1 seven days per week. Beginning in 2009, the spring fishery was open 3 days per week (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) and was allocated 70 percent of the subarea catch limit. The summer fishery received the remaining allocation and was open Friday, Saturday and Sundays starting August 7 and continuing through the regulatory closure of September 27. A total of 12,737 pounds were harvested in 2009, which was 81 percent of the catch limit of 15,735 pounds. An estimated 3,242 pounds (25 percent of the total subarea catch) were landed into Oregon ports; 3,008 pounds in the spring fishery and 234 pounds in the summer fishery (Table 1). The total Oregon-California contribution to the subarea catch limit was 9,787 pounds, or 62 percent of the subarea's allocation; the Washington contribution was 38 percent.

Oregon Central Coast Subarea (Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain)

The fishery in this subarea has two components, a shallow nearshore fishery and a directed all-depth fishery.

Nearshore fishery

Since 2004, the nearshore halibut fishery has been open shoreward of the 40-fathom curve. This is a change from prior years when the fishery was open shoreward of the 30-fathom curve. The line was moved to the 40-fathom curve to match a new management line used to minimize the impact on yelloweye and canary rockfish in the sport groundfish fishery off Oregon. One consistent management line for both groundfish and halibut fisheries simplified compliance and enforcement.

Although some anglers target halibut in the nearshore area, much of the harvest occurs as incidental take in the recreational groundfish fishery.

The 2009 nearshore halibut fishery was allocated 14,407 pounds, or 8 percent of the Central Oregon subarea catch limit. The nearshore fishery was scheduled to be open from May 1 through October 31, seven days per week. However, the first summer all-depth opening, exceeded the entire subarea remaining quota, therefore the nearshore fishery was closed after August 16. The nearshore fishery had landed 9,141 pounds at the time of the closure.

Many nearshore anglers were unhappy with the August closure and provided feedback on inseason management of the halibut fisheries and suggestions for the 2010 catch sharing plan.

All-depth fishery

The directed all-depth fishery is allocated 92 percent of the Oregon Central Coast subarea catch limit. The fishery is split into spring (May-July) and summer (August-October) seasons with approximately 75 percent of the catch limit (124,261 pounds) allocated to the spring fishery and 25 percent (41,420 pounds) allocated to the summer fishery.

The 2009 spring fishery was managed with two open periods, each with fishing allowed Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The first open period was managed under the fixed-day approach in use since 1995: a number of fixed dates are set preseason so anglers can plan their fishing in advance and not be surprised by an inseason closure. The intent is to not exceed the spring catch limit. Any remaining poundage is available for a second open period in the spring; these “make-up” dates are also set preseason. The first period (fixed-day season) was open for 12 days on May 14-16, 21-23, 28-30 and June 4-6. The second period (make-up dates) was open for 6 days on June 18-20 and July 2- 4 (every other weekend). The combined catch from both periods in the spring fishery was 122,402 pounds (Table 1), 99 percent of the catch limit. The remaining 1,859 pounds were added to the summer all-depth fishery allocation for a revised catch limit of 43,279 pounds.

The 2009 summer fishery was set preseason to open every other Friday through Sunday from August 7 through October 31. The fishery opened August 7 and closed August 9, at which time the entire remaining Central Oregon subarea quota was exceeded (all-depth and nearshore). The total summer fishery catch was 52,330 pounds (Table 1), exceeding the revised summer fishery catch limit by 9,051 pounds. Since the entire subarea quota was exceeded, fisheries managers decided it was necessary to close the nearshore fishery as well.

The catch during the open weekend of the summer fishery was the highest rate (pounds per day) since 2002. Factors that influenced the harvest rate were: exceptionally good weather; tuna fishing opportunities relatively close to shore (25-fish bag limit); Coho salmon on the bite (3-fish bag limit); and Dungeness crab fishing (10-crab bag limit). The opportunity to catch and retain a variety of species on a single trip enticed many more anglers out on the water than were anticipated.

Post season, anglers expressed concerns about how quickly the summer all-depth quota was attained and provided feedback and suggestions for the catch sharing plan to slow down the summer all-depth fishery, as well as preventing the all-depth fishery from impacting the nearshore fishery.

Combined Nearshore and All-Depth Fisheries

The combined catch from the nearshore and all-depth fisheries was 182,913 pounds or 102 percent of the 180,088-pound total allocation for the Central Oregon subarea.

South of Humbug Mountain Subarea

Pacific halibut are rarely targeted in this subarea as this area is located in the southern edge of the species' range. California catch estimates are not available at this time. Forty eight pounds of halibut were estimated landed into Oregon from this subarea. The catch limit for the subarea was 5,872 pounds.

Summary

The combined catch of Pacific halibut in the 2009 Oregon sport fishery is estimated at 187,163 pounds. The catch was comprised of an estimated 11,741 fish averaging 16 pounds net weight (Table 1).

Table 1. 2009 Oregon Sport Fishery Catch Data

Subarea	Season	No. of Halibut Measured	Average Weight (net lbs.)	Catch (No. of Halibut)	Total Pounds (net weight)
Columbia River					
Spring Ore. Side	May 1-2	27	13.3	65	863
	May 7-9	34	17.4	34	591
	May 14-16	39	11.2	50	559
	May 21-23	0	0.0	0	0
	May 28-29	35	20.7	48	995
	Total	135	15.3	197	3,008
Summer Ore. Side					
	Aug 7-9	5	20	7	138
	Aug 14-16	0	0	0	0
	Aug 21-22	0	19	2	38
	Aug 28-30	0	0	0	0
	Sept 4-6	0	0	0	0
	Sept 11-13	4	15	4	58
	Total	9	18	13	234
Central Coast					
Spring All Depths	May 14-16	878	15.5	2,408	37,417
	May 21-23	121	12.3	168	2,072
	May 28-30	421	15.2	883	13,386
	June 4-6	662	16.1	1,699	27,362
	June 18-20	325	17.1	922	15,726
	July 2-4	441	16.6	1,593	26,440
	Total	2,848	16.0	7,673	122,402
Central Coast					
Summer All Depths	Aug. 7-9	896	16	3,333	52,330
	Total	896	16	3,333	52,330
Central Coast					
<40 Fathoms	May 1-Aug 16	182	17	523	9,141
South Coast (South of Humbug Mt.)					
All Depths	May 1-Oct. 31	1	24	2	48
Total Harvest		4,071	16	11,741	187,163

Figure 1. Map with Oregon Pacific halibut sport regulation locations



Figure 2. Area closed to Pacific halibut angling on Stonewall Bank.

