



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Commission will be asked to adopt regulations for the 2025 recreational and commercial groundfish fisheries. The Commission will also be asked to review the commercial nearshore logbook report.

2025 Groundfish Fisheries Regulations

Nearshore groundfish species (approximately a dozen species of rockfish, cabezon, greenlings, and lingcod) are important components of Oregon’s nearshore ecosystem and support fisheries that are economically and culturally significant to coastal communities, businesses, and visitors. Permanent rules have been established by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) to achieve conservation and fishery objectives, and the Commission annually considers amendments taking into account new information and stakeholder input.

Groundfish fisheries are subject to joint state and federal management and are required to meet several accountability measures, including quotas and harvest guidelines, vessel monitoring, logbooks, and creel sampling to document fishing activity, such as but not limited to catch, and release or discard of fish at sea. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) collaborates with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC), and others on research, monitoring, and regulation development in a science-based public process. The department’s management is guided by the Food Fish Management Policy (ORS 506.109), the Wildlife Policy (ORS 496.012), the Native Fish Conservation Policy (Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) 635-007-0502 through -0509), the Climate and Ocean Change Policy (OAR 635-900-0001 through -0020), and public input. The primary state management goals are to maintain and restore groundfish stocks to provide substantial ecological, economic, and cultural benefits for present and future generations, and to provide equitable fishery opportunities within the conservation sideboards. Federal regulations must be consistent with the Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA), which has overarching conservation and utilization goals, in alignment with state management goals. The MSA explicitly includes protection of the marine ecosystem, recognition of evolutionary and ecosystem processes, and a requirement to take uncertainty and changing environmental conditions into account.

The Commission usually adopts federal groundfish rules by reference and may adopt additional measures to achieve objectives for Oregon’s commercial nearshore and recreational fisheries, such as season duration or allocation to user groups within the state. Brief descriptions of the fisheries and management approach are provided below. Additional detail can be found in [the Oregon Nearshore Strategy](#) and the federal [Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan](#).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

2025 Groundfish Fisheries Regulations

The department held two open meetings to discuss and seek input on commercial nearshore groundfish management measures: a meeting in Port Orford on September 10 (with both virtual

and in-person options) and a meeting in Tillamook on September 12 (in person only). Six commercial fishers and members of the public attended these two meetings. Staff also held meetings in April and June 2024 with the Commercial Nearshore Advisory Panel (CNAP) to discuss the 2024 fishery landings attainment and activity as the season progressed, and to obtain input on potential rule changes and management strategies for black rockfish for the 2025 season.

Input on recreational groundfish seasons and regulations for 2025 was obtained at a series of in-person open meetings in late July/early August (~70 total participants; one meeting was also available online). Staff also communicated regularly with the Marine Sportfishing Advisory Committee (SAC) to discuss the 2024 fishery landings attainment and activity as the season progressed, and to discuss potential rule changes for the 2025 season.

Additional input on both fisheries was received in person at the office and during the February 2024 Saltwater Sportsman Show as well as via email and phone.

In anticipation of the Commission consideration of the proposed rules, the department published notice of the proposed rulemaking (Attachment 2). Additionally, the public has an opportunity to provide comment prior to (in writing) or (orally) during the hearing that occurs at the Commission meeting.

ISSUE

2025 Groundfish Fisheries Regulations

ANALYSIS

In Oregon’s commercial nearshore sector, harvesters use small vessels and hook and line gear to target nearshore groundfish, including black rockfish and other species, generally in state waters. A restricted participation system and annual sector catch limits keep fishing-related mortality of nearshore groundfish species to sustainable levels. Bi-monthly vessel landing limits moderate the pace of the fishery so that it remains open year-round. All landed catch is fully accounted for, with requirements that buyers report all catch by species or management group to the department. Department staff sample commercial landings, and at-sea discards are estimated by NOAA Fisheries’ West Coast Groundfish Observer Program. Detailed statistics on this fishery are published annually in The Oregon Commercial Nearshore Fishery Update, available online at <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/publications/>.

In the recreational groundfish sector, anglers fish for rockfish, lingcod, cabezon, and other groundfish species (often referred to as “bottomfish”) with rod and reel. Roughly half of the overall effort occurs from private boats and half from charter or guide boats, few anglers fish for groundfish from shore. Catch controls include annual sector limits, daily bag limits, time/area closures, gear restrictions, and minimum size limits. In recent years, anglers have taken approximately 100,000 trips each year for groundfish, with black rockfish making up approximately 70 percent of the total catch. Effort is highest in the summer months (July and August), but year-round opportunity is important to many anglers, businesses, and coastal communities. The Marine Resources Program collects data on recreational effort and catch in the

ocean with a coastwide sampling program. An annual Sport Groundfish Newsletter is available online at <https://myodfw.com/sport-bottomfish-seasons>.

Options, analysis, and recommendations presented below are grouped into four sub-topics: (1) federal regulations, (2) state harvest guidelines for the commercial and recreational sectors, (3) commercial management measures, and (4) recreational management measures.

(1) FEDERAL REGULATIONS

Federal harvest specifications and management measures for west coast groundfish stocks are determined by the PFMC in a biennial cycle that relies on robust stock assessments, scientific advice, consideration of uncertainty and risk including changing environmental conditions, fishery impact analysis, and public input. Federal harvest specifications for 2025 and 2026 will be published in late 2024.

The primary federal regulations being adopted are annual harvest limits for several species and management groups. In 2023, the PFMC conducted new stock assessments for black and canary rockfishes, among others. The PFMC stock assessment process is a rigorous public process, reviewed by independent experts, then approved by the PFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee as the Best Scientific Information Available, per the MSA. The black rockfish assessment off Oregon indicated that while the stock is healthy, the estimated sustainable biomass is lower than the current harvest levels. To maintain the stock in the healthy zone, the allowable harvest has to be reduced by approximately 33 percent from 2024 to 2025. The canary rockfish assessment, which was done coastwide (WA, OR, and CA), also estimated the sustainable biomass to be lower than the current harvest levels and that the stock was in the precautionary zone. Therefore, allowable harvest has to be reduced by approximately 55 percent from 2024 to 2025 to help rebuild the stock to a healthy sustainable level.

Staff recommends the Commission adopt conforming state regulations by reference.

(2) STATE HARVEST GUIDELINES

State harvest guidelines (HGs) are annual amounts (in weight) of each species or management group allocated to the commercial and recreational fishery sectors in Oregon. HGs are the overall harvest objectives, and management measures such as trip limits or bag limits are designed to enable each sector to attain, but not exceed, its HGs. When cumulative sector catch is projected to reach an HG before the end of the year, staff will determine whether in-season rule changes are needed to avoid exceeding an annual catch limit while factoring in potential impacts to the other sector.

The Commission establishes HGs by distributing federal catch limits for Oregon stocks to each sector. The proportions allocated to each sector that were first applied in the early 2000s based on the then-recent and historic landings by each sector have not changed since that time, except to align with changes in stock groupings (i.e., there has not been any policy change in the share allocated to each sector).

Table 1 shows the recreational and commercial HGs that would result from applying the status quo allocation proportions for each species/management group to the 2025 federal allocations for Oregon fisheries. Recent years are included for reference. **Staff recommend adopting the proposed 2025 sector HGs in Table 1.**

Table 1. State HGs for commercial and recreational groundfish management groups, in metric tons.

Management Group Sector (status quo proportion)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 Proposed
Black Rockfish						
Commercial HG (24.0%)	122.9	122.9	122.9	122.9	122.9	82.4
Recreational HG (76.0%)	389.1	389.1	389.1	389.1	389.1	261.1
Blue and Deacon Rockfish						
Commercial HG (18.6%)	18.3	16.8	16.3	15.7	15.2	14.8
Recreational HG (81.4%)	80.1	73.7	71.2	68.8	66.7	64.9
Nearshore Rockfish						
Commercial HG (51.3%)	12.2	11.3	11.1	16.6	16.1	15.4
Recreational HG (48.7%)	11.6	10.8	10.5	15.8	15.2	14.7
Cabezon						
Commercial HG (64.3%)	30.2	35.0	33.5	32.4	31.6	31.0
Recreational HG (35.7%)	16.8	19.4	18.6	18.0	17.6	17.2
Greenling						
Commercial HG (75.1%)	118.3	108.1	103.8	100.7	98.4	96.6
Recreational HG (24.9%)	39.2	35.8	34.4	33.4	32.6	32.0

(3) COMMERCIAL NEARSHORE GROUND FISH FISHERY MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The primary objective for the commercial nearshore fishery is to provide opportunity to attain, but not exceed, the full commercial HG. A secondary objective is to provide a 12-month season with more opportunity in the summer to meet stronger market demand at that time of year. Historically, input from many south coast commercial nearshore harvesters and buyers has favored a 12-month season due to a relatively strong year-round market, whereas input from north coast participants has indicated a much more seasonal pattern of market demand, varying from very strong in the summer to much lower in the winter.

2024 Commercial Nearshore Season Recap

Commercial nearshore fishing effort rebounded from historic lows in 2020 and 2021 to near average in 2022 but decreased in 2023. Effort in early 2024 was higher than average but has tracked lower since mid-year at near 2023 levels and the historic low. Landings of black rockfish, cabezon, and greenling have tracked lower than average throughout the year. Landings of other nearshore rockfish have tracked close to the average. Blue and deacon rockfish landings (combined) are at a record high for the third year in a row, with landings projected to approach the commercial HG for the first time since establishing a species-specific HG in 2019. By mid-year, projections indicated fishing mortality for all management groups except blue and deacon rockfish would be below HGs at the end of the year, so the department increased bi-monthly vessel limits for other nearshore rockfish, cabezon, and greenling in Periods 4-6 (July-December). A more cautious approach was

taken for black rockfish and vessel limits were only increased for Period 4 (July-August), as projections indicated some risk of exceeding the HG if limits were raised for the rest of year. Near the end of Period 4, projections indicated low risk of exceeding the HG, so the department increased bi-monthly vessel limits for black rockfish in Periods 5-6 (September-December). Current projections indicate impacts will remain below HGs through the end of 2024, except blue and deacon rockfish which is projected to be very close to the HG (Table 2). The recreational fishery is anticipated to harvest less than its HG for blue and deacon rockfish, therefore even if the commercial HG is exceeded, there is no risk of exceeding any federal allocation.

Table 2. 2024 Commercial nearshore fishery HGs, impacts, and projected HG attainment, in metric tons. Impacts include landed catch and discard mortality.

	Commercial HG (2024)	Impacts through 10/02/2024 (mt)	Projected impacts through 12/31/2024 (mt) (% HG)
Black Rockfish	122.9	79.0	94.0 (76%)
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	15.2	10.9	15.3 (101%)
Cabazon	31.7	14.1	17.7 (56%)
Greenling	98.4	11.9	14.9 (15%)
Other Nearshore Rockfish	16.1	7.0	8.9 (55%)

2025 Commercial Nearshore Management Measures

Vessel Limits

This year, most public input focused on bi-monthly vessel limits for black rockfish and potential management strategies to address the upcoming reduction in the black rockfish HG from 122.9 mt (2020-2024) to 82.4 mt in 2025. Staff analyzed several black rockfish vessel limit scenarios, including: (1) 33 percent, 40 percent, and 45 percent reductions from 2023 levels applied across all bi-monthly periods; (2) steeper reductions in Periods 1, 2, 5, and 6 compared to Periods 3 and 4 due to stronger market demand in the summer; and (3) steeper reductions for nearshore endorsed permit holders compared to Black and Blue permit holders, as Black and Blue non-endorsed permit holders have fewer opportunities to land other species and would be most impacted by HG reductions. In almost all the scenarios examined, the 2025 black rockfish HG was exceeded by the end of the year, except for those with the most severe reductions (Table 3).

Results were presented to CNAP and all members, including Black and Blue permit holders, thought reductions should be applied fairly and equitably across the fleet. Panel members agreed that a good market exists for black rockfish in the winter months, so steeper reductions in limits during this time were not favored. Members also appreciated the opportunity to fish nearshore species during this time, as the crab fishery is often delayed. Several members favored a smaller reduction (33 percent) of limits and the risk of early closure or in-season adjustments rather than have a steeper reduction (45 percent) at the outset. Members cited that poor weather early and late in the season could limit their ability to fish and leave fish on the table. Additional feedback provided at the public meetings was mixed with some supporting the same approach as CNAP while others supported lower limits at the outset to increase the chances of a year-round season so that existing markets are not lost. The department closely monitors catch and adopts in-season changes as needed to avoid exceeding the HG. Even with a 33 percent decrease in vessel limits, if

2025 effort and catch is similar to 2024, these decreases will most likely necessitate in-season changes. Based on CNAP recommendations, public input, and projected attainment of the HG, **staff recommend in 2025 decreasing black rockfish vessel limits from 1,800 to 1,200 pounds for Periods 1 and 6, from 2,100 to 1,200 pounds for Periods 2 and 5, and from 2,400 to 1,600 pounds for Periods 3 and 4.**

Other nearshore rockfish limits are set at a constant level throughout the year as the vast majority are landed on the South Coast and enter the live fish market, which has less seasonality in demand than the fresh fish market. The other nearshore rockfish group HG increased substantially in 2023 due to a new stock assessment for copper rockfish, one species in the group. The group HG declined to 15.4 mt in 2024 due to some additional buffering at the federal level, 2025 impacts are not expected to approach the HG. Retention of quillback rockfish was prohibited starting in 2022 based on a stock assessment that indicated a healthy, but quite small, stock off Oregon. The assessment estimated such low sustainable yield that mortality from releasing incidentally caught fish may exceed it despite prohibiting landings. Increasing other nearshore rockfish limits could increase effort, which is likely to increase incidental quillback rockfish mortality.

Based on patterns of effort and HG attainment in 2024, anticipated HGs for 2025, and public input, **staff recommend no change to vessel limits for cabezon, greenling, and blue and deacon rockfish.**

Table 3. 2025 Projected commercial nearshore fishery impacts and HG attainment based on 2023 effort and catch, in metric tons.

	Commercial HG (2025)	Projected impacts (% HG)
Black Rockfish	82.4	85.9 (104%)
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	14.8	13.7 (93%)
Cabezon	31.0	19.8 (64%)
Greenling	96.6	13.7 (14%)
Other Nearshore Rockfish	15.4	10.4 (68%)

(4) RECREATIONAL GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The primary objectives for the recreational fishery are to keep total mortality within the recreational HGs and maintain a year-round season. Opportunity (number of open days and a bag limit high enough to entice anglers to go fishing) is the primary benefit to coastal communities, as compared to the primary benefit to the commercial sector being the total amount of fish harvested. Public input has regularly emphasized the importance of a full 12-month season that anglers and businesses can count on to not close early.

2024 Recreational Groundfish Season Recap

Throughout the 2024 season, the daily bag limit for the ‘General Marine Fish’ group was five fish, with a sub-bag limit of one cabezon (with cabezon closed by regulation until July 1). Retention of quillback and yelloweye rockfishes remained prohibited in 2024. Fishing was allowed at all depths during all months in 2024, which was the first year since 2003 without a seasonal depth restriction.

Fishing with longleader gear was allowed offshore of the 40-fathom line all year, with a separate bag limit of twelve midwater rockfish species; longleader gear is designed to avoid yelloweye rockfish bycatch (yelloweye rockfish status and measures are further discussed below).

Recreational groundfish effort was again high overall in 2024 with 90,279 angler trips through September compared to the 5-year average of just over 104,300 angler-trips per year (for a full year). In general, effort and catches through July were lower than projected but higher than projected in August. With variable weather, moderately high fuel prices, a decent albacore season for much of the coast, and a good coho salmon season, effort for bottomfish was lower than expected in September and into early October.

No in-season changes were necessary in 2024. Table 4 shows recreational impacts in 2024 for all quota-managed species/groups through September and projections through the end of the year. These numbers include estimates for shore and estuary catch and account for all groundfish mortality (including post-release mortality) from recreational fishing in Oregon^[1]. The Other Nearshore Rockfish group are projected to exceed the recreational HG; however, the commercial fishery is projected to be under its HG, therefore no federal catch limits will be exceeded.

Table 4. 2024 Recreational nearshore fishery HGs, impacts, and projected HG attainment, in metric tons.

	2024 Recreational Harvest Guideline	2024 Impacts through 9/29/2024	Projected impacts through 12/31/2024 (% of HG)
Black Rockfish	389.1	247.5	281.7 (72%)
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	66.7	28.3	30.9 (46%)
Cabezon	17.6	9.7	12.1 (69%)
Canary Rockfish (federal HG)	62.9	51.1	54.6 (87%)
Greenling	32.6	2.8	21.5 (66%)
Other Nearshore Rockfish	15.2	14.8	17.0 (112%)
Yelloweye Rockfish (federal HG)	7.2	3.7	4.1 (57%)

^[1] Some values in Table 4 differ slightly from the values shown on the Sport Groundfish Estimates webpage, https://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/finfish/groundfish_sport/estimates.asp, which shows only the ocean-boat catch targets and estimates.

2025 Recreational Management Measures

The daily bag limit is the primary tool used to achieve a 12-month season by moderating overall recreational catch, and, to some extent, effort. Based on recent fishery performance and the high and variable effort, **staff recommend a four-fish marine bag limit to start the year in 2025 and to increase this to a five-fish marine bag limit July 1. Staff also recommend a one-fish sub-bag limit of canary rockfish.** This is expected to provide a stable fishery throughout the year, with a low risk that the bag limit would need to be reduced in-season. A bag limit increase during the popular summer months provides the most opportunity since this is when many visitors come to the Oregon coast to vacation and fish and ocean conditions are much better.

Staff examined having the higher bag limit early in the year, which some anglers expressed interest in “as there isn't much else to fish for at that time of the year”. The number of people who participate in the groundfish fishery in the winter months are limited as compared to those who

fish during the summer months. A seasonal closure was also examined to try to maintain a five-fish bag limit when open; however, to reduce effort and catches of black rockfish enough to stay within the lower HG, the popular summer months of July and/or August would have to be closed. This was not supported by either private vessel anglers or charter operators. Finally, staff evaluated a sub-bag limit for black rockfish, such as a five-fish general marine bag limit but no more than four (or three) could be black rockfish. The last time there was a sub-bag limit on black rockfish several issues arose: (1) misidentification of black with blue and deacon rockfishes, (2) anglers catching and releasing many black rockfish to fill out their bag with other species, and (3) additional pressure on the other nearshore rockfish species, for which impacts are already close to the HGs.

Due to the decrease in the federal Oregon recreational share of the reduced canary rockfish annual catch limit, canary impacts need to be reduced. To accomplish this, a one-fish sub-bag limit of canary rockfish will be necessary in both the general bottomfish and longleader gear fisheries.

To again provide incentive to target healthy offshore midwater species while staying within the federal canary rockfish allocation, **staff recommend a ten-fish bag limit for the longleader gear fishery in 2025, with a one-fish sub-bag limit of canary rockfish.**

New for 2025, there is a separate ten-fish bag limit for sablefish (also called black cod) in federal regulations, with sablefish subsequently removed from the general marine species bag limit. The sablefish stock is healthy, with large recruitment events during the last several years. Based on the health of the stock, **staff recommend a new ten-fish bag limit for sablefish beginning in 2025 and removing sablefish from the general marine bag limit**, to provide anglers additional opportunity for this healthy species.

Due to yelloweye rockfish still rebuilding and the low sustainable biomass of quillback rockfish, **staff recommend that yelloweye and quillback rockfishes continue to be prohibited in 2025.**

Finally, as occurred in 2024, **staff recommend maintaining a year-round all-depth bottomfish fishery.** The department has slowly eased depth restrictions related to yelloweye rockfish in recent years as the stock status has improved and the federal allocation to Oregon's recreational fishery has increased. A seasonal depth restriction had been used for approximately 20 years to protect yelloweye rockfish while the stock rebuilds from an overfished status. Because yelloweye rockfish are less common inshore of 40 fathoms and post-release survival is higher in shallower water, restricting the bottomfish fishery to inshore of 40 fathoms, especially during high-effort periods, reduces fishing-related mortality. Having the fishery open at all-depth year-round for bottomfish fishing allows the fleet to spread out over a larger area for additional months, potentially reducing the concentration of effort on the nearshore reefs. Additionally, it provides opportunity for all-depth Pacific halibut anglers to keep bottomfish and Pacific halibut on the same trip all season, simplifying regulations and increasing overall opportunity.

Staff recommend no change to all other recreational groundfish regulations for 2025. Close monitoring of effort and catch will continue, and inseason adjustments will be made if determined necessary. Projected impacts in 2025 under all recommended measures are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Projected recreational groundfish impacts in 2025, in metric tons under the staff recommended season structure and bag limits. Effort and catches vary weekly, monthly, and annually, depending on weather, ocean conditions, and other fishing opportunities. Harvest will be monitored closely inseason and adjustments to the bag limit will be made if needed to keep harvest within HGs.

	Recommended 2025 Recreational HG	Projected 2025 Impacts assuming no inseason changes (% of HG)
Black Rockfish	261.1	288.7 (111%)
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	64.9	21.1 (33%)
Cabazon	17.2	19.8 (115%)
Canary Rockfish	26.0 (federal)	39.4 (152%)
Greenling	32.0	21.5 (67%)
Other Nearshore Rockfish	14.7	13.7 (93%)
Yelloweye Rockfish	6.9 (federal)	6.5 (94%)

OPTIONS

1. Adopt staff recommendations, as reflected in draft OARs:

a. Adopt updated federal groundfish regulations by reference.

b. Adopt revised harvest guidelines for 2025:

Management Group	Commercial HG (mt)	Recreational HG (mt)
Black Rockfish	82.4	261.1
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	14.8	64.9
Nearshore Rockfish	15.4	14.7
Cabazon	31.0	17.2
Greenling	96.6	32.0

c. Adopt revised commercial management measures for 2025:

i. Bimonthly vessel limits for black rockfish: 1,200 pounds in Periods 1, 2, 5 and 6 and 1,600 pounds in Periods 3 and 4.

d. Adopt revised recreational management measures for 2025:

i. General marine fish bag limit of four fish January through June; five fish July through December; one fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish.

ii. Longleader gear fishery bag limit: 10 fish; one fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish.

iii. Sablefish daily bag limit of 10 fish, remove sablefish from the general marine bag species.

iv. All other rules – no change.

2. Modify staff proposal for one or more items.

3. Status quo.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. Adopt staff recommendations for groundfish regulations, as reflected in the draft OARs in Attachment 3.

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to amend groundfish regulations as proposed by staff in Attachment 3.

Effective Date: January 1, 2025.