

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This agenda item requests the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission’s approval for the 2025 Sport and Commercial Pacific Halibut Regulations.

Pacific halibut science and management begins with 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 Pacific halibut surveys and stock assessment as well as other halibut-related research, and sets annual fishery catch limits for each of 10 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.

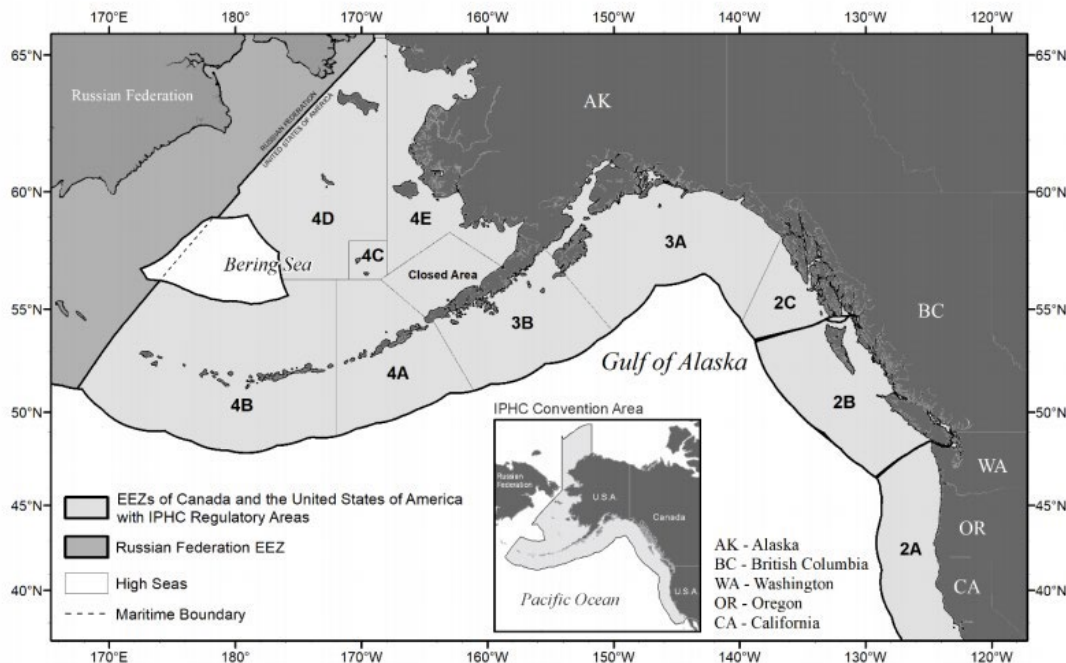


Figure 1. Map of the IPHC Convention Area (inset) and IPHC Regulatory Areas

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 usually adopts federal Pacific halibut fishery regulations by reference once published by NMFS. In addition, the Commission adopts open dates for the spring halibut fishery in Oregon’s central coast subarea.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The IPHC considers public input as well as advice from two industry advisory groups (Processor Advisory Board [PAG] and Conference Board [CB]) to balance trade-offs between stock productivity and economic impacts to harvesters and communities as they determine catch limits each year.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the PFMC use a multi-step process to gather public input on potential changes to sport Pacific halibut fisheries in Oregon.

- ODFW annually holds public meetings to discuss the sport fishery and develop proposals for the upcoming year. For the 2025 fishery, meetings occurred in late July and early August 2024 in Brookings, North Bend, Newport, and Salem. The Newport meeting was also available as a webinar to provide for remote participation. A total of 69 people took part in at least one of the meetings either in person or remotely.
- The PFMC reviews proposals in September and adopts a range of options for public review and comment. ODFW develops final recommendations based on stakeholder input which was solicited during a hybrid public meeting (in-person and online) in Newport on October 2 which 14 people participated in.
- The PFMC adopts final changes at its November meeting. Similar to IPHC, PFMC considers public input as well as advice from an industry advisory group (Groundfish Advisory Subpanel [GAP]).
- Following the IPHC's determination of quotas in late January each year, ODFW seeks input on the number and timing of open days in the Central Oregon Coast subarea's spring all-depth season. An online only (remote) meeting was held on February 10, with 16 public in attendance. ODFW then develops recommendations following the public meeting 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 (Attachments 5 and 6).
- 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 April Commission meeting.

ISSUE 1

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

ANALYSIS

2025 Catch Sharing Plan (CSP)

The IPHC considered updated information on Pacific halibut stock status and trends at its annual meeting in January 2025, and adopted a fishery catch limit of 1,530,000 pounds of Pacific halibut for Area 2A in 2025. This amount is 60,000 pounds higher than in 2024, though similar to the past six years. The IPHC Commissioners opted to extend the previous four-year agreement

(2019-2022) for Area 2A allocations to stabilize the Pacific halibut communities of Washington, Oregon and California for a third year (Attachment 4). The increase from 1.47 million pounds to 1.53 million pounds in 2025 accounts for estimated average annual halibut discards from the prior three years, which is not available during the year of fishing but must be accounted for once the information is made available the following year. As determined by the sharing arrangements in the PFMC's CSP, 2025 catch limits for individual fisheries in Area 2A are:

- Tribal fisheries (WA): 535,500 lbs. (35% of Area 2A)
- Commercial fisheries (WA/OR/CA): 375,312 lbs. (25%)
- WA sport fishery: 284,042 lbs. (19%)
- OR sport fishery: 295,367 lbs. (19%)
- CA sport fishery: 39,780 lbs. (3%)

The Oregon sport fishery is further broken into three different subareas with seasonal and/or depth-dependent allocations (Attachment 8):

- Columbia River Subarea (Leadbetter Pt. WA to Cape Falcon OR): 19,087 lbs. (2.3% of OR sport + 8,745 lbs. WA sport + remaining Southern OR Subarea quota of 3,549 lbs.)
 - o All-depth: 18,587 lbs.
 - o Nearshore: 500 lbs.
- Central Coast Subarea (Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt.): 277,024 lbs. (93.79% of OR sport)
 - o Spring all-depth: 207,768 lbs.
 - o Summer all-depth: 59,256 lbs.
 - o Nearshore: 10,000 lbs.
- Southern Oregon Subarea (Humbug Mt. to OR/CA border): 8,000 lbs. (3.91% of OR sport, capped at 8,000 lbs., 3,549 lbs. re-allocated to the Columbia River Subarea)
 - o No seasonal or depth restriction

There are three changes to the CSP that will affect Oregon sport Pacific halibut fisheries for 2025:

- Columbia River open dates – The Columbia River Subarea is managed jointly by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and ODFW. Per a request from WDFW, the Columbia River open dates may be on Sundays, Thursdays and Fridays instead of Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays (as occurred in 2024). This will allow anglers easier access to harvest Pacific halibut. Additionally, if 55 percent or more of the subarea sub-quota is still available as of May 25, Mondays and Tuesdays (except during the week when the commercial fishery is open) may also be opened up for all-depth fishing.
- Central Oregon Coast subarea seasons – new language added to the CSP to allow for more flexibility and less regulatory closures between the spring all-depth season and the summer all-depth season (summer all-depth season opens on August 1 instead of the first Thursday in August). Additionally, clauses have been put into the CSP to extend the summer all-depth season if quota is obtained rapidly.
- Central Oregon Coast subarea sub-quotas – Shift of quota to the spring all-depth season from the nearshore season during years of high quotas (Area 2A fishery catch limit of 1,200,000 pounds or greater). This will provide access to the quota during a year in which the nearshore fishery quota is effectively un-used as days open to all-depth halibut supersede season dates and regulations of nearshore halibut.

Sport Fishery – Oregon Central Coast Subarea 2024 Season Dates

ODFW recommends open “fixed” and “backup” dates for each year’s Central Oregon Coast subarea spring all-depth fishery to NMFS after considering public input.

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 1 through July 31, seven days per week.

ODFW is also recommending beginning the season with a 2-fish daily bag limit for the Central Oregon Coast and Southern Oregon Subareas.

The CSP has provisions to adjust open days and bag limits in season depending on how the season is progressing. As in past years, ODFW will coordinate with NMFS to make in season adjustments as needed to ensure Oregon anglers have the opportunity to harvest the allocation without exceeding the Oregon sport allocation.

Commercial Fisheries

As in 2020 through 2024, 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 NMFS if enough quota remains and could occur every other week after the previous opening. Vessel-size based limits will be determined and announced by NMFS prior to the first opening and are expected to be similar to 2024 levels, given the similar quota.

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

OPTIONS

1. Adopt staff recommendations that adopt federal rules by reference as reflected in Attachment 3.
2. Modify staff proposal for one or more items.

BACKGROUND

Option 1. Adopt staff recommendations that adopt federal rules by reference as reflected in Attachment 3.

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to adopt the staff recommendations for the 2025 sport and commercial Pacific halibut fisheries as shown in Attachment 3.

Effective Date: *Upon Filing*