

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
North of Falcon Background Information

What is the North of Falcon process?

Each year state, federal and tribal fishery managers gather to plan the Northwest's recreational and commercial salmon fisheries. This pre-season planning process is generally known as the "North of Falcon" process, which involves a series of public meetings involving federal, state, tribal and industry representatives and other concerned citizens.

The North of Falcon planning process coincides with the March and April meetings of the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC), the federal authority responsible for setting ocean salmon seasons 3 to 200 miles off the Pacific coast. In addition to the two PFMC meetings, the states of Washington and Oregon and the Treaty Tribes sponsor additional meetings to discuss alternative fishing seasons that meet conservation and allocation objectives. Fishery managers generally refer to the entire set of pre-season meetings as North of Falcon. The name refers to Cape Falcon in northern Oregon, which marks the southern border of active management for Washington salmon stocks. See our [North of Falcon timeline](#) for more information.

What is the first step in the North of Falcon process?

The North of Falcon process starts in late February/early March when the run-size forecasts are first available. Wild and hatchery run sizes for all salmon species from various areas of the state are considered in planning fisheries for the upcoming season. Expected Alaska and Canadian harvest levels are also considered, as fishery managers and the public consider the seasons that will meet conservation goals for all salmon stocks.

What happens at the March and April council meetings?

At the March PFMC meeting, preliminary decisions are made about possible ocean fishing seasons. During the April PFMC meeting, the council finalizes recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce regarding ocean commercial troll and recreational fishing seasons and catch limits off the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California. Public testimony is received at both of these council meetings as well as hearings scheduled between the two meetings.

What happens at the North of Falcon meetings?

The two North of Falcon meetings are an opportunity for discussion, analysis and negotiation among all interested parties. Participants investigate the biological consequences of options for the outside (ocean) and inside (Puget Sound, coastal, and Columbia River) fisheries and try to achieve a consensus on an overall management plan for the upcoming fishing year. The process is supported by technical analyses provided by professional biologists from various state, tribal and federal management agencies.

In between the two North of Falcon meetings there are several other public meetings in March and April to discuss regional fisheries issues.

What does the final management plan look like?

There are several pieces to the final pre-season plan. Besides the PFMC recommendations for the ocean fisheries, the State of Washington and the Treaty Tribes develop written agreements governing various terminal areas (e.g. Grays Harbor, Skagit River). After the April PFMC meeting, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife adopts recreational and commercial fishing regulations. Recreational fishing regulations are published in a sportfishing pamphlet, and commercial regulations are sent to all licensed commercial fishers, buyers and industry representative organizations.

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Glossary

AEQ: Adult equivalents (number of wild salmon that would have returned to the river if not killed in fisheries)

CERC: Critical exploitation rate ceiling (maximum fishery impacts allowed when a stock is in critically low abundance, see Escapement LAT)

Constraining stock: Wild fish for a particular river that is estimated to be the most over-impacted that will limit (or reduce) fishing opportunities

CWT: Coded-wire tag (placed in nose of juvenile salmon and recovered from adults that return to estimate where the fish is from)

Encounters: Number of fish harvested plus released fish

ESA: Endangered Species Act

ERC: Exploitation rate ceiling (maximum allowable rate of returning wild salmon that can be killed in fisheries without compromising stock recovery)

Escapement LAT: Escapement Low Abundance Threshold (minimum number of naturally spawning salmon needed to recover that stock; if below then stock is in critical status)

Exploitation Rate (ER): Percent of total mortality (i.e., in fisheries and on spawning grounds) that occurs in fisheries, including landed and non-landed fishery mortality components

Forecast: Estimated number of adult salmon that will return

FRAM: Fisheries Regulation Assessment Model (used to combine forecasts and harvest of fisheries to estimate number of wild fish that will return to the rivers to spawn)

LCN: Lower Columbia Natural Tule Chinook (sometimes called LCR, Lower Columbia River, tule)

Release Mortality Rate: Percent of fish released that die due to the encounter with handling

MSF: Mark-selective fisheries (hatchery targeted fishery where wild fish are released)

Escapement: Number of wild salmon returning to the spawning grounds for a particular stock

NOF: North of Falcon (process to establish salmon seasons for state and tribal fisheries)

NT: Non-treaty fisheries (sport and commercial including net and troll)

SUS: Southern United States (WA, OR, CA)

SUS PT ER: Southern U.S. (WA, OR, CA) pre-terminal exploitation rate (caught in marine waters within the southern U.S.)

T: Treaty fisheries (tribal ceremonial/subsistence and commercial: net, freshwater net, troll (tr))

Total ER: Total exploitation rate for Alaska, Canada, and southern U.S.