

**Concise Explanatory Statement (CES) for
2025 Coastal Commercial Salmon Fishery Regulations**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) filed the Preproposal Statement of Inquiry (CR-101) on January 21, 2025 (WSR 25-03-122), and the Proposed Rulemaking (CR-102) for the 2025 Coastal Commercial Salmon Fishery on May 6, 2025 (WSR 25-10-091). This proposed rule-making package is comprised of amendments to:

- WAC 220-354-250 – Willapa Bay salmon fall fishery, and
- WAC 220-354-290 – Grays Harbor salmon fall fishery.

WDFW’s Concise Explanatory Statement (CES) for this rule-making package is divided into two sections, as follows:

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Section A. Willapa Bay Commercial Salmon Fishery Regulations

Rules amended as part of this rulemaking:

WAC 220-354-250 – Willapa Bay salmon fall fishery

Rules repealed as part of this rulemaking:

N/A

Rules created as part of this rulemaking:

N/A

1. Background/Summary of Project

This Concise Explanatory Statement (CES) describes the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW or the Department) reasons for adopting the 2025 coastal commercial salmon fishing rules and responds to public comments received on the proposed rules. The rules, once adopted, will be set forth in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 220-354-250. The adopted rules provide a schedule to open the 2025 fall commercial gillnet salmon fisheries (Chinook salmon, coho, and chum) in Willapa Bay.

Rulemaking by WDFW is guided by resource management policies adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC or Commission) at its regularly or specially scheduled meetings that are open to the public. Those policies can be found at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/commission/policies>

In addition, WDFW’s Director and staff interact with the Commission by reporting on policy implementation, and the effect of rule development and implementation, as part of the Commission’s public meetings. Commission meeting agendas, and staff reports to the Commission, are available at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/commission/meetings>

Due to the complexity of the annual salmon season setting process, the Commission typically delegates the authority to the Director, as authorized by law, to adopt the rules to implement the outcomes of the process, while providing policy guidance as described above. For example, the North of Falcon Policy (C-3608) contains policy objectives to guide fishery rulemaking and provides an expressed delegation of rule-making authority to the Director.

As discussed below, the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) sets forth a rule making process by which input is solicited from the public during the preproposal (CR-101) phase to aid in the development of proposed rules. This public process is then carried through as the rules, once proposed (CR-102), undergo additional public review and comment. The Director employs agency staff to assist in the rule-making process but retains the final delegated decision-making authority on such rules. After consideration of the public comments received and staff recommendations, the Director signs the Rule-making Order (CR-103P) adopting the final rules.

The APA process for these proposed rules began with the filing of the Preproposal Statement of Inquiry (CR-101) on January 21, 2025 (WSR 25-03-122). Thereafter, WDFW relied upon several forums to gather information and interact with regional fishery managers and constituent groups to develop the proposed

rules that were presented in the CR-102 filed on May 6, 2025 (WSR 25-10-091) and available for formal public review and comment.

These rule-making processes are described in more detail as follows:

North of Falcon (NOF)/Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) processes used to develop proposed rules (the “Pre-notice Inquiry” (CR-101) stage of rulemaking)

State, federal, tribal fishery managers, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) work collaboratively with recreational and commercial stakeholders during the NOF and PFMC meetings to develop fishery options based on the best available science. Data and information examined and considered include expected annual salmon returns; Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirements, expressed as annual stock-specific exploitation rates; treaty fishing rights of Northwest Tribes; and resource management policies of the FWC. The name “North of Falcon” refers to Cape Falcon, Oregon, which is the southern border of active management for Washington salmon stocks. This process consists of a series of public meetings involving federal, state, and tribal representatives, who work together with input from recreational, commercial fishing, and conservation interests.

The NOF planning process deliberately overlaps with the March and April meetings of the PFMC, the federal authority responsible for setting ocean salmon seasons within the Exclusive Economic Zone, which extends from 3 to 200 miles off the Pacific coast. Work with federal fishery managers and fishing interests in offshore waters is essential to ensure coordinated state and federal fisheries for salmon stocks that migrate freely between state and federal waters.

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 harvest sharing objectives. Additionally, WDFW solicits input from advisory groups whose representatives represent a diverse range of user group interests.

The development of salmon fishing seasons begins with the completion of surveys of the previous year’s spawning grounds and hatchery return estimates by state and tribal biologists. These biologists apportion catch in each area to specific management groups and calculate a total run-size for each group. Biologists complete this analysis, also known as a run-reconstruction, each fall or early winter. Based on total run size and the associated survival rates, state and tribal biologists forecast the number of salmon and steelhead returning for the coming year. State and tribal biologists, in coordination with PFMC participants, typically complete the forecasts each year by late-February. From the run-size forecasts, fisheries managers determine the number of fish available for directed or incidental harvest according to the management objectives. Once the forecasts and the number of fish available for harvest are determined, state and treaty fisheries managers begin the process of developing specific annual fishing regulation proposals to achieve, but not exceed, those harvest levels.

WDFW presented the statewide 2025 run forecasts for stocks originating from rivers of Puget Sound, coastal Washington, and the Columbia River on February 28, 2025, in-person and virtually via Zoom. This meeting was followed by regional breakout sessions for specific areas of interest (Coastal, Puget Sound Recreational, and Puget Sound Commercial) where WDFW staff further discussed 2025 forecasts and resource utilization implications in detail. During these breakout sessions, WDFW solicited fishery suggestions from those in attendance.

The first 2025 NOF public meeting specifically for Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor was held virtually on March 12, 2025, via Zoom. This meeting was designed to present regional forecast returns for local

salmon stocks in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor, discuss management and conservation objectives for each harbor, and collect input from the public. WDFW also presented other information that would be pertinent for 2025 salmon planning such as the APA and NOF meeting schedule.

The first North of Falcon meeting was held on March 19, 2025, in-person at the Office Building 2 Auditorium in Olympia and virtually via Zoom with the public and included regional breakouts for specific areas of interest (Coastal, Puget Sound Recreational, and Puget Sound Commercial) to further discuss management and conservation objectives and collect input from the public for proposed fishery packages.

The second North of Falcon meeting was held on March 25, 2025, in Lynnwood, WA with the public in person. The purpose of this meeting was to have additional breakout discussions to focus on specific areas of interest and continue to collect public input and suggestions for fishery season structures.

WDFW held the second regionally focused North of Falcon public meeting specifically for Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor on April 2, 2025, virtually via Zoom. The purpose of this meeting was to provide the public with information on the 2025 NOF process and ocean quotas, discuss management and conservation objectives, review initial Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor terminal area management model (TAMM) runs, engage the public in dialog regarding fisheries, and collect public input on fishing season structures for the 2025 commercial and recreational fisheries in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor.

Based upon information and outreach generated through these public meeting forums, a draft rule was developed for consideration in the public rule-making process that follows the filing of a proposed rule. Accordingly, the CR-102 filed on May 6, 2025 (WSR 25-10-091) described WDFW's proposed rules for the 2025 Willapa Bay coastal commercial salmon fisheries.

A formal rule-making public hearing was held on June 12, 2025. The public comment period was open from May 6 through June 13, 2025, as required by the Administrative Procedure Act. WDFW received four written public comments on this rulemaking directly to agency staff via email, two comments were submitted via the online public comment portal during this period, and zero individuals testified at the public hearing held on June 12, 2025, regarding Willapa Bay fisheries.

The intent for the 2025 Willapa Bay commercial rules package, once adopted, is to replace and supersede the commercial fishing season established in 2024. Thus, the suite of rules encompassed in amended WAC 220-354-250 are a complete rules package for the 2025 fishing season consisting of those portions carried forward from 2024, together with revisions needed to update the fishing season to meet conservation and harvest objectives for 2025 based upon current forecasts of salmon abundance.

WAC 220-354-250 specifies the permissible commercial gear and methods of harvest that must be utilized, specifically the locations and the duration of the fall commercial salmon season for fisheries occurring between August 13 and December 31 annually.

In 2025, approximately 44 days of commercial harvest is authorized for Chinook salmon, coho, and chum during the fall period using a combination of selective (i.e., only hatchery-origin Chinook salmon with a clipped adipose fin can be retained) and non-selective fishing gear and techniques (Table 1).

Table 1. Willapa Bay commercial gillnet season for the 2025 adopted rule.

<u>Area</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Max. Mesh Size</u>
2N, 2M, 2R	6:00 a.m. through 6:00 p.m.	8/13, 8/16	Tangle Net 4.25"
2N, 2R	6:00 a.m. through 6:00 p.m.	8/18, 8/20, 8/23, 8/26, 8/30	Tangle Net 4.25"
2M	6:00 a.m. through 6:00 p.m.	8/30	Tangle Net 4.25"
2N, 2M, 2R	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/8, 9/10	Tangle Net 4.25"
2N, 2R, 2T	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/12	Tangle Net 4.25"
2N, 2M, 2R, 2T	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/14, 9/15, 9/16, 9/18, 9/19	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/17	6.5"
2U	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/14, 9/17, 9/19	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R, 2T	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/21, 9/22, 9/23, 9/25, 9/26	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/24	6.5"
2U	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/22, 9/24, 9/26	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R, 2T	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/28, 9/29, 9/30, 10/2, 10/3	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/1	6.5"
2U	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	9/29, 10/1, 10/3	6.5"
2M, 2T	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/6, 10/7, 10/9, 10/10	6.5"
2N, 2R	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/6, 10/7, 10/8, 10/9, 10/10	6.5"
2U	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/6, 10/8, 10/9, 10/10	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/12, 10/13	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R, 2T, 2U	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/14	6.5"
2T	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/15	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R, 2T	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/16	6.5"
2U	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/17	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R, 2T	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/19, 10/20	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R, 2T, 2U	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/22	6.5"

2N, 2M, 2R	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/25	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R, 2T	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	10/26, 10/30	6.5"
2N, 2M, 2R, 2T, 2U	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	11/3	6.5"
2U	7:00 a.m. through 7:00 p.m.	11/13, 11/17, 11/20, 11/24, 11/28	6.5"

Fishery mandates and Commission Policy

The adopted rules were developed pursuant to the authorities found in RCW Title 77, including those provisions in RCW 77.04.012 that establish conservation as the paramount objective *“to conserve the wildlife and food fish, game fish, and shellfish resources in a manner that does not impair the resource.”* Where consistent with that conservation objective, WDFW must also *“seek to maintain the economic well-being and stability of the fishing industry in the state;” “promote orderly fisheries;”* and *“enhance and improve recreational and commercial fishing in this state.”* These broad statewide objectives do not necessarily focus on one region, one fish species or one segment of harvesters. The term “fishing industry of the state” includes both commercial and recreational interests. While these objectives are applied on a statewide basis, WDFW considers regional interests, individual fishing sectors, and the interests of varying gear-type groups when undertaking its efforts to promote statewide management interests.

The adopted rules were also developed based upon policies of the FWC to promote the conservation and recovery of wild salmon and sustainable fisheries:

- Anadromous Salmon and Steelhead Hatchery Policy – C-3624
- 2024-2028 North of Falcon (NOF) Policy – C-3608
- Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy – C-3622
- Policy Guidelines for PFMC Representation – C-3603

Overview of WDFW’s Consideration of Management Objective

Hatchery and fisheries management practices in Willapa Bay have developed through a complex history over the last decade during which the management of salmon resources experienced dramatic changes. Historically, harvest rates on Willapa Bay Chinook salmon exceeded 90% and hatchery-origin fish comprised most of the spawners in the Willapa and Naselle rivers. For many decades prior to 2000, salmon were managed with hatchery supplementation of natural-origin fish. The focus was to attain an aggregate escapement of fish for spawning purposes without any differentiation between hatchery and natural-origin fish.

In the early 2000s, the Hatchery Scientific Review Group (HSRG) reviewed the state’s hatchery programs and practices to assure our state’s salmonid resources were managed for long-term health and sustainable harvest. Increasingly, there was concern hatchery and natural-origin fish needed to be managed with greater care to ensure a healthy wild population of salmon. In 2003, an increased focus on the conservation of natural-origin Chinook salmon was initiated. However, at that time, hatchery fish were not marked (adipose fin clipped); thus, making it difficult to distinguish between hatchery and natural-origin fish. Accordingly, WDFW was limited to the identification of an aggregate harvest rate for all Chinook salmon.

The continued downward trend of natural-origin Chinook salmon combined and expected return of mass marked (adipose fin clipped) hatchery-origin Chinook salmon in Willapa Bay, led WDFW to initiate a process focused on rebuilding and enhancing conservation of natural-origin Chinook salmon stocks.

WDFW worked with the Willapa Bay Salmon Advisory Group (WBSAG) to develop a draft Willapa Bay Management Plan (2010 Willapa Plan) in January 2010. The Plan provided a framework for a transition in hatchery and fishery management strategies for salmon fisheries. Prior to 2010, the primary objective had been the harvest of hatchery-origin Chinook salmon. In contrast, the 2010 Willapa Plan described an enhanced focus on conservation to promote sustainable fisheries while reducing the likelihood Washington coastal Chinook salmon may be listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Key components of the 2010 Willapa Plan were:

- Establish the Naselle River as the primary Chinook salmon population requiring the highest level of protection for natural origin fish;
- Limit the mortality rate on Naselle River natural-origin Chinook salmon to 30%;
- Reduce production of hatchery Chinook salmon in the Naselle River;
- Maintain total production of hatchery Chinook salmon by increased production in Nemah and Willapa rivers; and
- Institute mark selective fisheries bay-wide.

During a review that occurred in 2014 of the performance of the 2010 plan, WDFW found insufficient progress was being made towards achieving its natural-origin Chinook salmon spawner escapement objectives and coupled with the 2014 forecast for natural-origin Chinook salmon returns, indicated additional conservation actions should be implemented in 2014. These actions were directed at enhancing conservation actions for the primary (Naselle River) and contributing (North River and Smith Creek) populations. Therefore, WDFW proposed additional, more conservative, fishery and hatchery management actions in 2014. Specifically, to address the declining trend in natural-origin spawners for the Naselle River Chinook salmon population, a mortality rate of no more than 20% on the Naselle River population was employed with the intent to exceed the average of 2006-2012 natural-origin spawner escapement (1,059 fish).

Because the recreational fishery generally has a low impact (*i.e.*, mortalities associated with mark selective fisheries), the commercial fishery absorbed most of the reduction in mortality rate. Historically, the commercial fishery comprised most of the mortalities on natural-origin Chinook salmon. For example, pre-season planning in 2013 predicted the commercial fleet would harvest 28.3% of the Naselle River natural-origin Chinook salmon out of the combined predicted impact of 29.8%. The recreational fishery comprised only 1.5% of the total natural-origin Chinook salmon impact. The entire recreational fishery could be closed and the reduction from a 30% mortality rate to 20% would not be achieved. With the reduction in the pre-season targeted mortality rate, preliminary estimates suggest the actual mortality rate on Naselle River natural-origin Chinook salmon was 38% in 2014.

Development and Implementation of the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy (C-3622)

In the fall of 2014, WDFW initiated the development of a policy to advance the conservation and restoration of wild salmon; the policy also considered the need to maintain or enhance the economic well-being and stability of the fishing industry in the state. In addition, the policy directed WDFW to provide the public with outdoor recreational experiences, fair distribution of fishing opportunities throughout the Willapa Bay Basin, and improvement of technical rigor in fishery management. The Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy, C-3622, was approved by the Commission, effective June 13, 2015. This adopted policy included substantial changes in fishery management and hatchery production that were intended to restore natural-origin Chinook and chum salmon, while ensuring the continued health of coho salmon.

This policy provided a cohesive set of principles and guidance to promote the conservation of wild salmon and steelhead and improve WDFW's management of salmon in the Willapa Bay Basin. The Commission recognized management decisions must be informed by fishery monitoring (biological and economic) and adaptive management will be necessary to achieve the stated purpose of this policy.

2. Reasons for adopting the rule

WDFW considered all the information gathered for the proposed 2025 Willapa Bay salmon fall fishing season. WDFW carefully reviewed all input from the public regarding preferred fishing rules during North of Falcon public meetings (the CR-101 APA Pre-notice Inquiry stage) and the rule-making process used to provide notice and comment on proposed rules (CR-102 filing of proposed rules, additional comment solicitation, and a rule-making hearing). WDFW considered and relied upon the best technical and scientific information available to state fishery management experts, including pre-season forecasts of the abundance of salmon stocks and data that will be used during the season to update forecasts. Important characteristics of the Willapa Bay commercial salmon fishery were considered, including the catch likely to result from the proposed rules, providing significant harvest opportunities, and the economic value of these fisheries. WDFW also considered fishing schedules of state recreational fisheries as these schedules must be coordinated with the commercial fishing schedules in Willapa Bay.

As adopted, WAC 220-354-250 would open the fall commercial salmon fishery for Chinook salmon, coho, and chum salmon in Willapa Bay. The adopted rules are partially selective in that they require the release of natural-origin (unmarked) Chinook salmon from August 13 through November 28, 2025, and it is lawful to retain coho and chum during that same timeframe. Natural-origin Chinook salmon and chum are not target species for commercial fisheries but are incidentally encountered during the harvest of hatchery Chinook salmon and coho. The forecasted run size for natural-origin Chinook salmon returning to Willapa Bay indicates there will be insufficient numbers to allow directed fisheries on natural-origin Chinook salmon, which are identified by the presence of an intact adipose fin (unmarked fish).

Fishing dates and locations were modeled to account for incidental encounters of non-target salmon to provide meaningful commercial fishery consistent with conservation objectives. In addition, the season, time, place, and manner open for fishing were shaped to reduce the interaction between recreational and commercial fisheries, which furthers the objective of maintaining orderly fisheries. Sharing between commercial and recreational harvest groups was considered to provide meaningful harvest opportunities for both groups within the context of historic sharing patterns in this area of the Washington coast.

Overview of WDFW's Consideration of Management Objectives

The Commission adopted a new Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy (C-3622) in September of 2023, replacing the sunset policy enacted in 2015 and in place until December 2022. The purpose of Policy C-3622 is to set management objectives and to provide management guidance for natural (in-river) and hatchery production, and recreational and commercial harvest of fall Chinook, coho, and chum salmon populations in Willapa Bay. The policy delegates the Commission's rule-making authority to the Director. This reflects the Commission's practice of providing policy guidance to the Director and staff as they work to develop fishing seasons and rules governing those seasons each year. In that regard, the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy reflects the Commission's principal expression of policy guidance for achieving conservation objectives and harvest allocation objectives between the recreational and commercial sectors. The adoption of the policy followed an extensive Commission and public process with multiple public comment opportunities. While the policy details specific objectives, it also

recognizes the uncertainty associated with fishery management and provides general management guidance to WDFW on the utilization of adaptive management and sharing between the recreational and commercial sectors to provide appropriate flexibility in the implementation of the policy guidance.

Conservation and management objectives for fisheries in the Willapa Bay Basin are based on language contained within Policy C-3622 and include:

- Actively manage to not exceed 20% total impacts for natural-origin Chinook salmon on Willapa River;
- Actively manage to not exceed 20% total impacts for natural-origin Chinook salmon on Naselle River; and
- Actively manage to meet the aggregate natural origin escapement goal for coho and the aggregate naturally spawning escapement goal for chum.

All other items in the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy, C-3622, will remain in effect for 2025, together with the various other policy guidance positions adopted by the Commission that inform and are considered by the Director when developing and adopting annual fishing seasons/regulations.

Regulations for the 2025 Willapa Bay commercial fisheries were evaluated with respect to objectives in the policy for the 2025 salmon season only. These objectives were shared with industry representatives, stakeholders, and the public during the NOF process. General or commercial pre-season planning objectives were:

1. The fishery management objectives for fall Chinook salmon in 2025 are to:
 - a. Not exceed a 20% impact rate on Willapa and Naselle rivers natural origin fall Chinook salmon during Willapa Bay fisheries. Within the impact rate cap, the priority shall be to maintain a full season of recreational fisheries for Chinook salmon in the Willapa Bay Basin; and
2. The fishery management objectives for coho and chum salmon, are to:
 - a. Achieve spawner goals; and
 - b. Provide recreational fishing opportunities in the marine area and tributaries.

Rationale of Management Objectives

WDFW believes that the 2025 Willapa Bay commercial salmon fishing regulations will result in fisheries consistent with the conservation and shared objectives to not exceed a 20% impact rate on Willapa and Naselle rivers natural origin fall Chinook salmon during Willapa Bay fisheries, while maintaining a full season of recreational fisheries for Chinook salmon in the Willapa Bay basin and to manage coho and chum fisheries to achieve spawner goals and provide recreational fishing opportunities in the marine area and tributaries based on the following rationale:

Preseason modeling of planned recreational and commercial fisheries is estimated to result in an impact rate of 17.9% and 19.1% on Willapa River and Naselle River natural origin Chinook, respectively. Combined fisheries modeled in Willapa Bay are expected to result in achievement of escapement goals for both Willapa Bay coho and chum stocks. The WDFW Willapa Bay escapement goal for natural origin coho is 13,600 fish. The modeled fisheries predict escapement of 14,013 natural origin coho and 33,170 hatchery origin coho returning to the spawning grounds. The combined predicted escapement also exceeds the 17,200 naturally spawning coho goal established by PFMC. The number of Willapa Bay

chum predicted to escape in the adopted fishery is 48,569, exceeding the spawner escapement goal of 35,400.

There are no specific time and area restrictions for commercial fisheries in 2M, 2N, 2P, and 2R set forth in the newly adopted Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy, C-3622. The Policy states, “*commercial fisheries will be scheduled to avoid conflict with the recreational fisheries that primarily occur in the northern portion of Willapa Bay during August and the first half of September.*” The commercial fishery in the adopted rule is scheduled to begin on August 13th in the southern portion of Willapa Bay in commercial catch areas 2N, 2M, and 2R, and September 12th in the northern portion of Willapa Bay in commercial catch areas 2T and 2U.

Commercial fisheries in the adopted rule will be monitored using a combination of on-board sampling, daily fish ticket evaluation, and sampling of the landed catch. These data will be used to evaluate actual catch versus what was projected in the Willapa Bay TAMM. In-season management actions, which are typically implemented via emergency regulations given the pace at which information is developed and fisheries proceed, will be initiated if commercial landings exceed expected catch and/or impacts compared to projected preseason estimates to avoid the risk of not meeting conservation objectives.

Commercial fisheries are expected to catch 6,551 hatchery Chinook salmon in 2025, while predicted natural origin fall Chinook salmon exploitation rates for commercial fisheries from the Willapa Bay TAMM are 17.9% for Willapa and North rivers and 19.1% for Naselle River after accounting for recreational fishery harvest and impacts.

Table 2. Escapement goal and exploitation rate objectives for salmon fisheries in Willapa Bay for the 2025 season.

Stock	Objective Type	Objective Criteria	Modeled Result
Willapa Bay natural origin coho	Escapement Goal	13,600	14,013
Willapa Bay naturally spawning chum	Escapement Goal	35,400	48,569
Willapa River natural origin Chinook	Exploitation Rate	< 20%	17.9%
North River Natural origin Chinook	Exploitation Rate	< 20%	17.9%
Naselle River Natural origin Chinook	Exploitation Rate	< 20%	19.1%

Willapa Bay chum stocks have made their spawner escapement objective eight of the last nine years and have reached this objective for two consecutive years (Table 3). As described in the Table 2 above, the management objective for Willapa Bay chum for 2025 is to meet or exceed the naturally spawning escapement goal of 35,400. The predicted naturally spawning escapement for Willapa Bay chum is 48,569 in the adopted rule.

Table 3. Estimated chum naturally spawning escapements (NOS) for 2015-2024. Bold values indicate estimated escapement exceeds the escapement goal.

Year	Estimated Natural Origin Spawners: Escapement Goal 35,400
2015	44,960
2016	80,284
2017	21,749
2018	41,012
2019	43,357
2020	54,979
2021	76,987
2022	74,628
2023	52,606
2024	85,752

WDFW staff considered the available relevant data and public input surrounding the 2025 Willapa Bay commercial salmon season schedule. The adopted regulations meet the primary conservation constraints in the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy C-3622. With the increase in Chinook salmon production at the Naselle Hatchery, the FWC directed WDFW to implement test fisheries to determine Chinook salmon stock composition in August to further improve in-season update tools. The coho catch is consistent with the policy guidance of prioritizing coho for the commercial sector and meets the allowable conservation constraint for natural-origin Chinook salmon. The adopted rules also continue to reduce conflict in the upper area of the bay between the recreational and commercial sectors by prohibiting commercial fishing in areas frequented by recreational anglers. Finally, the adopted rules are expected to result in approximately \$1,087,035 of ex-vessel value for the commercial sector.

WDFW carefully reviewed all input from industry representatives during the NOF public meetings and the state’s rule making process. WDFW’s 2025 Willapa Bay commercial salmon fishing regulations comply with its statutory mandate and are consistent with the management objectives for these fisheries.

3. Differences between the text of the proposed rule and the rule as adopted:

No changes were made between the rule proposed in the CR-102 and the rule to be adopted in the CR-103P.

4. Public comments, responses to comments, and consideration of comments:

Following publication of the CR-102 and proposed rules, a formal rule making public hearing was held on June 12, 2025, virtually via Zoom. The public comment period was open May 6 through June 13, 2025, as required by the APA. The June 12th hearing provided the public with an opportunity to comment on the proposed rules published in WSR 25-10-091 (WAC 220-354-250, Willapa Bay salmon fall fishery).

There was a total of six public comments received during the public comment period regarding Willapa Bay fisheries. Four public comments were provided directly to agency staff via email, two public comments were provided using WDFW's online portal, and no individuals testified or provided comments during the public hearing held on June 12, 2025. In addition, WDFW considered substantive comments received during the NOF process. WDFW carefully reviewed the information gathered during the rule development process following issuance of the CR-101, together with all input (verbal and written) from fishing industry representatives, recreational anglers, and the public. WDFW relied upon internal technical and scientific expertise for NOF and PFMC planning processes.

WDFW fishery managers evaluated preseason forecast abundance of salmon stocks returning to Willapa Bay in combination with historic harvest data from fisheries occurring in the Willapa Bay watershed.

Important characteristics of the Willapa Bay commercial salmon fishery that were considered:

- Total number of licensed vessels potentially participating in each fishery;
- Number of vessels that have participated in each fishery in recent years;
- Outcomes regarding target and non-target species catch in recent years;
- Potential for transfer of effort from other fisheries in other areas (i.e., Columbia River, Grays Harbor);
- Catch likely to result from the adopted rules and associated conservation impacts;
- Economic value of these commercial fisheries;
- Ability to acquire broodstock necessary to achieve hatchery production goals;
- Rule simplification; and
- The relationship between commercial and recreational fisheries for orderly fisheries.

WDFW also considered fishing preferences of the recreational fishery in terms of time, area, tidal cycles, and potential for gear or fishing sector conflict.

Public comments received during the rule-making period have been summarized into the following points with WDFW's response(s) below.

Comment #1: Commenter suggests planning fisheries to the 20% management objective on natural origin Chinook salmon for both Willapa and Naselle rivers rather than leaving a buffer when the policy states not to exceed 20% total impact rate.

The management objectives in the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy C-3622 adopted in September 2023 are to actively manage to not exceed a 20% harvest rate on natural origin Chinook salmon for Willapa and Naselle rivers separately. The current harvest rates in the adopted rules are 17.9% and 19.1% for Willapa and Naselle natural origin Chinook salmon, respectively. The current objectives in the adopted fisheries are below the 20% management objective threshold identified by C-3622. While we understand there are remaining harvestable fish available within the 20% management objective to schedule additional time, the Department feels that providing a small buffer to account for the possibility of a poor return in-season, while remaining below the 20% harvest rate is beneficial to management objective post-season.

Comment #2: Commenter objects to commercial gillnetting in the south bay particularly in area 2N near the mouth of the Nemah River because it does not allow for recreational priority of Chinook in tributary fisheries.

The original Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy C-3622 was effective and in use from 2015-2023. In that version, one guideline did not allow commercial fishing opportunities prior to Labor Day. Based on public feedback and staff recommendation, the FWC provided the Department interim guidance to allow commercial gillnetting in the south end of the bay (areas 2M, 2N, and 2R) prior to Labor Day, suspending a portion of Fishery Management Guiding Principle #6 of the Fall Chinook Salmon species-specific guidance in Policy C-3622 for years 2019 - 2023. As previously stated in this document, the FWC updated and adopted a new Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy C-3622 in September 2023 for use beginning in the 2024 salmon season setting process. In this newly adopted policy, the Fall Chinook Fishery Management portion of Harvest Management section 7 states, “*Commercial fisheries will be scheduled to avoid conflict with recreational fisheries that primarily occur in the northern portion of Willapa Bay during August and the first half of September.*” The commercial fishing area listed in the comment is in the southern portion of Willapa Bay not the northern portion and hence, do not violate the current policy C-3622. The 20% management objective for Willapa and Naselle rivers provided for an increase in the total number of natural origin Chinook salmon impacts available for the prosecution of both the commercial and recreational fisheries. The management objectives reflect a reasonable rate of harvest, while ensuring long-term conservation objectives are attained.

Specific allocation between recreational and commercial fisheries, while an aspect of our fisheries planning, is not the primary metric for priority as defined by policy. The Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy (C-3622) stipulates, “*Fall chinook fisheries shall be managed to achieve a general priority for recreational fisheries, but to provide for meaningful fishing opportunity for both recreational and commercial fisheries. This general priority shall be accomplished with a management intent to provide the first opportunity for directed fall Chinook fishing to the mixed stock recreational fishery in the northern portion of Willapa Bay (Marine Areas 2T and 2U) as well as an opportunity for recreational fisheries in Willapa Bay tributaries.*” Planned marine and freshwater recreational fisheries for the adopted 2025 salmon season maintain the first opportunity for directed fall Chinook fishing in the mixed stock recreational fishery in the northern area of Willapa Bay and hatchery freshwater tributaries June 21st and August 1st, 2025, respectively, which is consistent with the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy.

Comment #3: Commenter suggests a reduction to the live box requirement for natural origin Chinook starting October 1.

This suggestion was provided during this year’s North of Falcon virtual open public meeting held on March 12th, 2025. Department staff believed this may be a viable suggestion for the upcoming 2025 salmon commercial season and committed to review and evaluate recent commercial data before deciding whether to move forward with this suggestion in the proposed rules. In the Willapa Bay commercial fishery, natural origin (unmarked) Chinook are required to be placed in a recovery box and remain in the box until they are not lethargic and/or bleeding and must be released to the bay prior to landing or docking. A review of commercial onboard observer data from the 2015 – 2024 fishing seasons indicate considerable natural origin Chinook encounters the first two weeks of October across all commercial fishing areas in Willapa Bay. There are very few natural origin Chinook encounters the last two weeks of October for these same years. The Department also considered wild steelhead encounters during this same timeframe in the 10 years of historical commercial data as those wild steelhead are also required to be placed into a recovery box prior to release. Based on these data, the Department believed a reduction in the live box requirement would not have a significant impact on natural origin Chinook after the first two weeks of October. Therefore, the Department agreed to change the live box requirement from two

operable recovery boxes or one box with two chambers when fishing to one operable recovery box or one chamber of a two chambered recovery box October 19 through November 28, 2025, in all commercial fishing areas in Willapa Bay.

Comment #4: Commenter suggests planning the commercial fishery in Willapa Bay seven days per week after September 15 to harvest additional available coho.

In the 2023 Policy C-3622, the Fall Coho Fishery Management portion of Harvest Management section 7 states “Coho salmon fisheries shall be managed to achieve a general priority for commercial fisheries, but to provide for meaningful fishing opportunity for both recreational and commercial fisheries when run sizes are sufficient to support fisheries. The Willapa Bay commercial fishery will be managed to the extent that it does not preclude Willapa Bay mixed-stock recreational fishing opportunity or tributary recreational fishing opportunity. Commercial coho target fisheries shall be managed in Willapa Bay areas to achieve the aggregate natural origin spawning escapement goals and recreational opportunity for tributary recreational coho fishing.” The 5-year average natural and hatchery runsizes for years 2020 – 2024 were 25,518 and 71,654, respectively. The 2025 natural and hatchery coho modeled runsizes are within the 5-year average at 25,194 and 70,195, respectively. Willapa Bay has two management objectives for coho based on the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy C-3622. The first is the naturally spawning escapement goal of 17,200, which includes natural and hatchery fish. The second is the natural origin escapement goal of 13,600, an internal WDFW goal. For 2025, the naturally spawning coho escapement estimate is 47,183, and the natural origin coho escapement estimate is 14,013. The predicted escapement estimates for 2025 are expected to exceed both management objectives stipulated in the policy for coho. Currently in the planned commercial and recreational fisheries, there are only 413 additional natural origin coho above the management objective of 13,600 fish. By planning additional commercial fishing days up to 7 days per week starting September 15 and using the Willapa Bay Terminal Area Management Model (TAMM), the commercial fishery will catch 52.5% more hatchery coho and 94.8% more natural coho than the currently planned commercial fishery. These additional impacts to natural origin coho would prevent the Department from achieving the management objectives for coho, specifically the natural origin escapement.

The commercial fishery will also continue to accrue natural origin Chinook impacts throughout the duration of the fishery based on Chinook run timing even while targeting coho later in the season. The management objectives in the Willapa Bay Salmon Management Policy C-3622 are to actively manage to not exceed 20% natural origin Chinook salmon impacts for Willapa and Naselle rivers separately. The current impact rates in the adopted rules are 17.9% and 19.1% for Willapa and Naselle natural origin Chinook salmon, respectively. By adding the additional days in the commercial fishery for 2025, the Department would no longer meet the natural origin Chinook management objective set forth in the policy because of the additional impacts accrued through any days added.

Conclusion

WDFW values public input and designs fisheries predicated on, in part, written and oral comments of constituents. WDFW carefully reviewed input from all sectors during the NOF public meetings and throughout WDFW’s rule making process in accordance with the APA. The APA process provides several mechanisms for evaluating comments and allows for revisions to the rules proposed in a CR-102. While the APA does not guarantee changes, it does provide the public with the opportunity to comment and requires WDFW to thoughtfully consider and respond to those comments, either by making further revisions or by explaining why WDFW has chosen not to do so.

This process included analysis of comments associated with commercial fisheries planning such as shifts in hatchery Chinook salmon production, forecasting methodology, and the maintenance of harvest rates in the adopted policy C-3622. In addition, because the commercial and recreational fisheries interact, the recreational fishery planning was also considered when planning the commercial fishery including comments focusing on the effects of harvest outside of Willapa Bay, forecasting methodology, spatial and temporal distribution of fishing effort, and the interplay between daily limits and season length.

The adopted rules are a result of integrating public comments and meeting the primary conservation objectives identified in Policy C-3622 for 2025. This year's process has shown that Department staff acted in good faith in discussions with the public, shared and discussed conservation and management objectives early and often, listened and considered public input and values, and developed a fishery proposal for the 2025 Willapa Bay salmon fisheries that meets conservation and management objectives identified pre-season. WDFW's 2025 Willapa Bay commercial salmon fishing regulations comply with its statutory mandate and are consistent with WDFW's management objectives for these fisheries.

Section B. Grays Harbor Commercial Salmon Fishery Regulations

Rules amended as part of this rulemaking:

WAC 220-354-290 – Grays Harbor salmon fall fishery

Rules repealed as part of this rulemaking:

N/A

Rules created as part of this rulemaking:

N/A

1. Background/Summary of Project

This Concise Explanatory Statement (CES) describes the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW or the Department) reasons for adopting the 2025 coastal commercial salmon fishing rules and responds to public comments received on the proposed rules. The rules, once adopted, will be set forth in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 220-354-290. The adopted rules provide a schedule to open the 2025 fall commercial gillnet salmon fisheries (Chinook salmon, coho, and chum) in Grays Harbor.

Rulemaking by WDFW is guided by resource management policies adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC or Commission) at its regularly or specially scheduled meetings that are open to the public. Those policies can be found at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/commission/policies>

In addition, WDFW’s Director and staff interact with the Commission by reporting on policy implementation, and the effect of rule development and implementation, as part of the Commission’s public meetings. Commission meeting agendas, and staff reports to the Commission, are available at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/commission/meetings>

Due to the complexity of the annual salmon season setting process, the Commission typically delegates the authority to the Director, as authorized by law, to adopt the rules to implement the outcomes of the process while providing policy guidance as described above. For example, the North of Falcon Policy (C-3608) contains policy objectives to guide fishery rulemaking and provides an expressed delegation of rule-making authority to the Director.

As discussed below, the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) envisions a rule making process by which input is solicited from the public during the preproposal (CR-101) phase to aid in the development of proposed rules. This public process is then carried through as the rules, once proposed (CR-102), undergo additional public review and comment. The Director employs agency staff to assist in the rule-making process but retains the final delegated decision-making authority on such rules. After consideration of the public comments received and staff recommendations, the Director signs the Rule-making Order (CR-103P) adopting the final rules.

The APA process for these proposed rules began with the filing of the Preproposal Statement of Inquiry (CR-101) on January 21, 2025 (WSR 25-03-122). Thereafter, WDFW relied upon several forums to gather information and interact with regional fishery managers and constituent groups to develop the

proposed rules that were presented in the CR-102 filed on May 6, 2025 (WSR 25-10-091) and available for formal public review and comment.

These rule-making processes are described in more detail as follows:

North of Falcon (NOF)/Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) processes used to develop proposed rules (the “Pre-notice Inquiry” (CR-101) stage of rulemaking)

State, federal, and tribal fishery managers, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) work collaboratively with recreational and commercial stakeholders during the NOF and PFMC meetings to develop fishery options based on the best available science. Data and information examined and considered include expected annual salmon returns; Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirements, expressed as annual stock-specific exploitation rates; treaty fishing rights of Northwest Tribes; and resource management policies of the Fish and Wildlife Commission. The name “North of Falcon” refers to Cape Falcon, Oregon, which is the southern border of active management for Washington salmon stocks. This process consists of a series of public meetings involving federal, state, and tribal representatives, who work together with input from recreational, commercial fishing, and conservation interests.

The NOF planning process deliberately overlaps with the March and April meetings of the PFMC, the federal authority responsible for setting ocean salmon seasons within the Exclusive Economic Zone, which extends from 3 to 200 miles off the Pacific coast. Work with federal fishery managers and fishing interests in offshore waters is essential to ensure coordinated state and federal fisheries for salmon stocks that migrate freely between state and federal waters.

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 harvest sharing objectives. Additionally, WDFW solicits input from the public representing a diverse range of user group interests.

The development of salmon fishing seasons begins with the completion of surveys of the previous year’s spawning grounds and hatchery return estimates by state and tribal biologists. These biologists apportion catch in each area to specific management groups and calculate a total run-size for each group. Biologists complete this analysis, also known as a run-reconstruction, each fall or early winter. Based on total run size and the associated survival rates, state and tribal biologists forecast the number of salmon and steelhead returning for the coming year. State and tribal biologists, in coordination with PFMC participants, typically complete the forecasts each year by late-February. From the run-size forecasts, fisheries managers determine the number of fish available for directed or incidental harvest according to the management objectives. Once the forecasts and the number of fish available for harvest are determined, state and tribal fisheries managers begin the process of developing specific annual fishing regulation proposals to achieve, but not exceed, those harvest levels.

The state facilitates the development of annual fishing regulations through consultation with the public. WDFW presented the statewide 2025 run forecasts for stocks originating from rivers of Puget Sound, coastal Washington (including Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor), and the Columbia River on February 28, 2025, in person at the Office Building 2 Auditorium in Olympia and via Zoom webinar. WDFW also presented other information that would be pertinent for 2025 salmon planning such as the APA and NOF meeting schedule. This meeting was followed by regional breakout sessions where WDFW staff further

discussed 2025 forecasts and resource utilization implications in detail. During these breakout sessions, WDFW solicited fishery suggestions from those in attendance. Notice of all NOF public meetings were available on the WDFW website by late February and provided in a news release.

WDFW held a regionally focused Grays Harbor public NOF meeting on March 12, 2025, via Zoom webinar. During this meeting WDFW provided the public with information on the 2025 season planning process. Information provided included 2025 PFMC Proposed Ocean Alternatives, Marine Areas 1-4 Annual Ocean Quotas, forecast review, initial fishery model review using this year's forecasted abundance with last year's fishery schedule (New Abundance Last Year's Fisheries (NALF)), and fishery considerations. WDFW also engaged the public in dialog regarding fisheries, collected input on fishing season structure for commercial and recreational fisheries. Fishery suggestions received from the public in written form or by phone were presented in meeting materials.

The first North of Falcon meeting was held on March 19, 2025. The meeting was in person at the Office Building 2 Auditorium in Olympia and via Zoom webinar with the public and included regional breakouts for specific areas of interest (Coastal, Puget Sound Recreational, and Puget Sound Commercial) to further discuss management and conservation objectives and collect input from the public for proposed fishery packages.

A final joint Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay NOF fisheries discussion was held on April 2, 2025, via Zoom webinar. The purpose of this meeting was to review the preliminary fisheries proposals based on public feedback and public input.

During the 2025 NOF season planning process, the tribal co-managers and WDFW also conducted technical meetings and policy level discussions to agree upon conservation objectives, run size forecasts, and estimates of the allowable treaty and non-treaty catch shares for the various salmon runs considered in defining fishing levels. WDFW and the tribes also developed fishing schedules for both treaty - and non-treaty salmon fisheries.

Based upon all the information and outreach generated through these forums, a draft rule was developed for consideration in the public rule-making process that follows the filing of a proposed rule. Accordingly, the CR-102 filed on May 6, 2025 (WSR 25-10-091) was the initial rule-making proposal for 2025 Grays Harbor commercial salmon fisheries.

A formal rule-making public hearing was held on June 12, 2025. Public comments were open from May 6, 2025, through June 13, 2025, as required by the APA. WDFW received no written comments during this period.

The intent is for the 2025 Grays Harbor commercial rules package, once adopted, to replace and supersede the commercial fishing season established in 2024. Thus, the suite of rules encompassed in amended WAC 220-354-290 are a complete rules package for the 2025 fishing season consisting of those portions carried forward from 2024, together with revisions needed to update the fishing season to meet conservation and harvest objectives for 2025 based upon current forecasts of salmon abundance.

The adopted rule amends WAC 220-354-290 that opened the commercial salmon fisheries in Grays Harbor, as defined in WAC 220-301-020. It reflects 2025 conservation and allocation objectives given current year run abundance. WAC 220-354-290 specifies the fall commercial salmon season, and the permissible commercial gear and methods of harvest that must be utilized. Selective fishing techniques

are employed to improve the survival probability for species required to be released. In addition, the adopted rule specifies locations and durations of the fall commercial salmon season occurring between August 16 and December 31 annually.

The adopted 2025 fishing schedule is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Grays Harbor commercial gillnet season for 2025.

Area	Time	Date(s)	Maximum Mesh Size
2A, 2D	12:01 p.m. through 8:00 p.m.	October 23	6.50”
2A, 2D	8:00 a.m. through 8:00 p.m.	October 24	6.50”
2A, 2D	8:00 a.m. through 8:00 p.m.	October 27	6.50”
2A, 2D	8:00 a.m. through 8:00 p.m.	October 28	6.50”
2A, 2D	6:00 a.m. through 4:00 p.m.	October 29	6.50”
2A, 2D	12:01 p.m. through 8:00 p.m.	November 6	6.50”
2A, 2D	8:00 a.m. through 8:00 p.m.	November 7	6.50”

The notice of intent date in section (9)(b) of WAC 220-354-290 was changed from September 20 to October 1.

Fishery mandates and Commission Policy

The adopted rules were developed pursuant to the authorities found in RCW Title 77, including those provisions in RCW 77.04.012 that establish conservation as the paramount objective, “*to conserve the wildlife and food fish, game fish, and shellfish resources in a manner that does not impair the resource.*” Where consistent with that conservation objective, WDFW must also “*seek to maintain the economic well-being and stability of the fishing industry in the state;*” “*promote orderly fisheries;*” and “*enhance and improve recreational and commercial fishing in this state.*” These broad statewide objectives do not necessarily focus on one region, one fish species or one segment of harvesters. The term “fishing industry of the state” includes both commercial and recreational interests. While these objectives are applied on a statewide basis, WDFW considers regional interests, individual fishing sectors, and the interests of varying gear-type groups when undertaking its efforts to promote statewide management interests.

The adopted rules were also developed based upon policies of the FWC to promote the conservation and recovery of wild salmon and sustainable fisheries:

- Anadromous Salmon and Steelhead Hatchery Policy C-3624
- 2024-2028 North of Falcon (NOF) Policy – C-3608
- Policy Guidelines for PFMC Representation – C-3603

2. Reasons for adopting the rules

Based on the initial modeling review (NALF) Grays Harbor Chinook and Grays Harbor Coho could not meet the spawning escapement objectives in 2025 using the 2024 fishing package. Change to the 2024 rules are needed to meet the management objectives spelled out in the processes discussed above. To make the appropriate adjustments to the rules, WDFW worked with tribal co-managers and carefully

reviewed the information gathered during the rule development process together with all input (verbal and written) from fishing industry representatives, recreational anglers, and the public. This includes all information obtained during both the 2025 North of Falcon salmon season process and WDFW's formal rule-making process. WDFW considered and relied upon the best technical and scientific expertise within the agency for NOF and PFMC planning processes. WDFW fishery management experts evaluated pre-season forecast abundance of salmon stocks returning to Grays Harbor in combination with historic harvest data from fisheries occurring in the Grays Harbor watershed.

The following important characteristics of the Grays Harbor commercial salmon fishery were considered:

- Total number of licensed vessels potentially participating in each fishery.
- Number of vessels which participated in each fishery in recent years.
- Outcomes in terms of target and non-target species catch in recent years.
- Tidal cycles.
- Potential transfer of effort from fisheries in other areas, e.g., Willapa Bay.
- Catch and associated conservation impacts.
- Economic value of these commercial fisheries.
- Relationship between treaty commercial, non-treaty commercial, and recreational fisheries.

Evaluation of all the information discussed above led to adjustments to the early fishing days of the schedule. The two days scheduled during the first week of October were removed, one day was rescheduled to later in the season to reduce impacts on Chinook and Coho salmon. This adjustment also concentrated effort later in the season targeting the abundance of Chum and hatchery Coho based on forecasts. Based upon this outreach and rule development process, WDFW concludes the final adopted 2025 Grays Harbor commercial fishing regulations are consistent with WDFW's statutory management mandates, and with identified agency management objectives based upon the following rationale:

1. Fisheries will be managed with the intent of achieving escapement goals for natural spawning salmon, Table 2.

Fisheries modeled in Grays Harbor are expected to result in reaching or exceeding escapement goals:

- Grays Harbor natural spawning Chinook
 - It is WDFW's intent to develop fisheries that provide escapement to achieve both the Chehalis and Humptulips natural spawning goals for Chinook independently. However, fisheries evaluations by PFMC, the Pacific Salmon Treaty, and fisheries management by co-managers use the Grays Harbor natural spawning aggregate goal of 13,326. Evaluations of all fisheries will result in 13,338 natural spawning Chinook escaping to Grays Harbor spawning grounds.
 - Grays Harbor chum goal of 21,000.
 - The Chehalis River natural spawning coho goal of 28,506.
2. Humptulips natural coho will be managed to limit WDFW-managed fisheries to 5% or less and not to the escapement goal, because the forecasted abundance is less than the goal of 6,894. Managing to 5% or less provides opportunity to target hatchery origin coho.

Table 2: Management objectives and expected modeled results of all WDFW-managed fisheries in Grays Harbor (does not include modeled treaty fishery impacts).

Stock	Objective Type	Objective Criteria	Expected Modeled Results
Grays Harbor fall Chinook	Escapement Goal	13,326	13,338
Humptulips coho	Harvest Impact Rate	≤ 5%	2.68%
Chehalis coho	Escapement Goal	28,506	33,810
Grays Harbor Chum	Escapement Goal	21,000	72,065

3. If it becomes apparent that a scheduled fishery will exceed preseason harvest rates, and the overage will put at risk the attainment of conservation objectives, WDFW shall implement in-season management actions that are projected to enhance the effectiveness of fishery management relative to the attainment of the conservation objectives and impact sharing in the preseason fishery plan.

Commercial fisheries in the adopted rule will be monitored using a combination of on-board observation, daily fish ticket evaluation, and sampling landed catch. These data will be used to compare actual catch to the preseason predictions in the Grays Harbor Terminal Area Management Model (TAMM or pre-season planning model). In-season management actions will be initiated, if necessary, to attain management and conservation objectives identified in the 2025 NOF process.

4. The fishery management objectives for fall Chinook salmon:
 - Fisheries will be managed with the intent of achieving escapement goals for natural spawning Chinook.
 - Limit commercial fishery impacts to the incidental harvest of fall Chinook during fisheries directed at other species.
 - There are no fall Chinook directed commercial fisheries in the adopted rule. All commercial fisheries occur after the fall Chinook management period. The predicted encounters of fall Chinook are less than the predicted catch of the target species in all weeks of fishing.
5. Humptulips natural origin coho stock will be managed with the intent to limit incidental impacts from WDFW-managed fisheries targeting other stocks to no more than 5%. Chehalis natural spawning coho will be managed to achieve the escapement goal.
 - The expected impact of the adopted rule on Humptulips natural coho will be 0.20% (all WDFW fisheries result in 2.68%).
 - The expected escapement of Chehalis natural spawning coho is 33,810.
6. Fisheries will be managed with the intent of achieving the escapement goal for chum salmon. The scheduled fisheries in the adopted rule are expected to result in a harvest of 14,628 Grays Harbor chum. The forecasted run size of Grays Harbor chum is 151,913. The expected escapement resulting from non-treaty fisheries is 72,065 compared to the goal of 21,000.

Overall, the intention is for the 2025 Grays Harbor commercial rules package is to replace and supersede the commercial fishing season established in 2024. The 2025 season is being developed based on current abundance forecasts and are adapted to conservation needs based on these abundance forecasts. The adopted 2025 fall commercial salmon season for Areas 2A and 2D will open for one 8-hour day in late October, three 12-hour days in late-October, one 10-hour day in late October, one 8-hour day in early November and one 12-hour day in early November. There are no 2025 fall commercial salmon season scheduled for Area 2C. Thus, the suite of rules encompassed in amended WAC 220-354-290 are a complete rules package including a revised fishing season to meet conservation and harvest objectives based upon 2025 forecasts of salmon abundance.

3. Difference between the text of the proposed rule and the rule as adopted

No changes were made between the rule proposed in the CR-102 and the rule to be adopted in the CR-103P.

4. Public Comments, response to comments, and consideration of comments

During the Willapa Bay/Grays Harbor Fishery Discussion meeting on March 12, 2025, there was one comment requesting to run one live box chamber on boats instead of two after October 1st.

Recovery boxes are required to provide additional recovery provisions for fish that are required to be released, wild (unmarked) Chinook. Most non-treaty gillnet openings have taken place in October and early November. A review of 10 years of on-board observer data from the fishery showed the majority of wild (unmarked) Chinook encounters, fish required to be placed in a recovery (live) box, occurred during weeks 43 and 44, which correspond to the last two weeks of October. Based on this information, reducing the requirement to only one recovery box chamber per boat after October 1 would not be advisable at this time.

Part of the concern in the comment was instability of smaller boats in inclement weather when both recovery box chambers were full. Further evaluation of boat size, timing of weather systems and wild Chinook encounters will occur to determine future considerations for this proposal. WDFW will also evaluate the effectiveness of this proposal that will be implemented in Willapa Bay this year.

Comment: There was a concern about the planning model results for Chehalis River Basin fall Chinook escapements after all fisheries are prosecuted.

According to the Grays Harbor Salmon Policy for Fall Chinook, “Fisheries will be managed with the intent of achieving escapement goals for natural-spawning fall Chinook. The WDFW commercial fishery will be managed to incidental harvest only of fall Chinook during fisheries directed at coho and chum salmon”.

The escapement goal was established in 2014 based on a joint stock-recruitment analysis by WDFW and the Quinault Indian Nation. This analysis, which estimates the number of spawning adults needed to sustain a healthy fall Chinook population, requires data from multiple generations. While total mass marking of hatchery fall Chinook in the Grays Harbor basin has only been in place for a few generations, the analysis accounts for the productivity of all spawning fish, regardless of origin.

The analysis determined that 13,326 natural spawning fall Chinook are needed to maintain the fall Chinook population in the Grays Harbor basin, including 9,753 required for the Chehalis subpopulation. The final fishery plan, with the adopted rules, projects a natural spawning escapement of 13,338.

Non-treaty commercial fisheries were developed to primarily target chum salmon, with the available harvest of 130,913 chum returning to Grays Harbor. These fisheries were also modeled to harvest some of the 77,820 coho salmon returning to the Chehalis River Basin. To minimize incidental catch of fall Chinook, non-treaty commercial fisheries were scheduled later in the season.

Recreational fisheries in the Chehalis River Basin were modeled to target returning coho and chum salmon and reduce impacts to adult Chinook.

There were no written comments received during the CR-102 (WSR 25-10-091) open public comment period from May 6, 2025, through June 13, 2025, and no oral comments were received during the June 12, 2025, public hearing.

Conclusion

WDFW carefully reviewed input from all sectors during the North of Falcon meetings and the rule-making process, which included analysis and modeling of significant comments associated with commercial fisheries planning process. The adopted rules are a result of integrating public and North of Falcon comments and meeting the primary conservation objectives. WDFW's 2025 Grays Harbor commercial salmon fishing regulations comply with its statutory mandate and are consistent with WDFW's management objectives for these fisheries.