

2019 Salmon Season Setting

NORTH of FALCON



What is North of Falcon?

- Each year (February-April) state, federal, and tribal fishery managers plan recreational and commercial salmon fisheries for the state and tribes.
- Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) establishes ocean salmon seasons from three to 200 miles off the Pacific Coast.
- “North of Falcon” (NOF) process involves a series of public and state/tribal meetings to come to an agreement for the upcoming year’s salmon fisheries.
- The name refers to Cape Falcon in northern Oregon, which marks the southern border of active management for Washington salmon stocks, which include Columbia River, Puget Sound, and Washington coastal stocks.



What Governmental Policies affect the NOF process?

- The Boldt Decision (1974): upheld by the Supreme Court and based upon treaties with the Puget Sound Treaty tribes to allow the state and tribes to manage their own fisheries (co-managers) and share half of the harvestable salmon.
- Endangered Species Act (ESA): NOAA Fisheries ensures the planned fisheries not pose jeopardy to ESA-listed species such as Puget Sound Chinook (1999) or Southern resident orcas (2005).
- Pacific Salmon Treaty (U.S./Canada): helps ensure enough fish destined for the southern U.S. are allowed to pass through Canadian waters to allow fishing opportunity and enough fish to reach the spawning grounds (and vice versa for fish returning to Canada).
- Conservation objectives are agreed to by the co-managers to ensure enough fish get past fisheries and reach rivers to spawn and recover the population.
- Commission policy: The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission sets policy for WDFW. In 2019, the commission updated its NOF policy, directing fishery managers to consider the dietary needs of Southern resident orcas when proposing fisheries.

What are the steps?

- Estimate the forecasted returns of individual hatchery and wild stocks of salmon, then determine if enough fish are returning to allow for harvest.
- Predict harvest for tribal and state recreational and commercial fisheries for Oregon and Washington; include the northern fisheries (Alaska and Canada) too.
- Analyze forecast and harvest scenarios using the Fisheries Regulations Assessment Model (FRAM) to determine whether proposed fishing plans meet management objectives (e.g., ESA impact limits).
- Negotiate with the recreational anglers, commercial fishers, and tribes to allow a fair sharing of catch and ensure conservation objectives are met.
- Combine all Puget Sound and ocean fisheries into the “Agreed-to Fisheries Document” that the recreational (sport) fishing rules pamphlet is based upon.

Southern Resident Killer Whales

There is significant concern regarding the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW) population. While there are several threats affecting their recovery, the decline of Chinook is a major contributing factor.

In recent evaluations of proposed fisheries in Puget Sound, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) noted that there are significantly more Chinook available in Puget Sound than what is needed to sustain the SRKW population now. NMFS also indicated that eliminating Puget Sound fisheries would likely result in a less than one percent increase in Chinook abundance that would benefit SRKWs. Other analyses have shown that ocean salmon and Columbia River fisheries have similar non-significant impacts on SRKW prey abundance.

In 2019, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and NMFS will identify conditions when increased prey is essential for SRKWs, and will help guide fishery actions that will increase available Chinook in critical times and areas to contribute to orca recovery.

Options for public testimony

- The public is welcome to attend several planning meetings throughout the NOF process. These are opportunities for department staff to engage with constituents on their ideas for salmon fishing seasons and explain our conservation challenges.

The most current Public Meeting Schedule can be found at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/northfalcon/>.

- As the public engagement meetings get underway, there will also be an online comment option available to the public at: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/northfalcon/>

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