



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

Summary of Washington Pacific Halibut Fisheries Management in 2017

December 2017

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
600 Capital Way North
Olympia, WA 98501

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
SUMMARY OF PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN 2017**

This report summarizes the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) management and enforcement activities for Pacific halibut fisheries in 2017. It includes a synopsis of Washington's recreational catch and incidental halibut catch in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis. A summary of WDFW's enforcement efforts relative to patrolling recreational and commercial halibut fisheries during 2017 is attached.

Washington's Recreational Halibut Fisheries in 2017

Washington's halibut fisheries are managed under the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for Area 2A. The CSP specifies how the Area 2A total allowable catch (TAC), as defined by IPHC, is allocated or "shared" among various state commercial and recreational sectors. For Washington, WDFW manages its recreational fisheries by subarea. These subareas are:

1. Puget Sound (inside waters east of the Sekiu River, including Puget Sound)
 - Eastern Region (inner Sound waters east of Low Point)
 - Western Region (Strait waters west of Low Point)
2. North Coast (waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca west of the Sekiu River and Pacific Ocean waters south to the Queets River)
3. South Coast (Pacific Ocean waters south of the Queets River to Leadbetter Point)
4. Columbia River (Pacific Ocean waters south of Leadbetter Point to Cape Falcon, Oregon)

A summary of Washington's recreational halibut season dates for 2017 is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Washington recreational halibut seasons, catch, and average weight by subarea

Subarea	Quota (lbs)	Catch (lbs)	Avg Wt (lbs)	Season Dates
Puget Sound	64,962	60,123	23.77	East and West: May 4, 6, 11, 21, 25, June 1, 4, 10, 17
North Coast	115,599	100,410	17.73	May 4, 6, 11, 21, 25, June 1, 4, 10, 17
South Coast	50,307	61,061	16.20	Primary: May 4, 6, 11, 21 and June 17 Nearshore: N/A
Columbia River ^{1/}	12,799	12,970	17.97	All Depth: May 4-25, Thu-Sun and Sat June 17 Nearshore: May 8-June 11, Mon-Wed
Total ^{2/}	243,667	234,564		

^{1/} Columbia River harvest is Washington catch only.

^{2/} Total Catch includes only Washington landings for the Columbia River subarea

Halibut are measured at the dock and the lengths of the samples are then converted to weight. Length data is collected throughout the season and applied to the number of halibut caught to project the total catch in pounds. Starting in 2017, both the coastal and Puget Sound region were

managed with catch estimates that are produced on a weekly basis and areas are closed when they are projected to attain their respective subarea quota.

Statewide Season Structure – North Coast, South Coast and Puget Sound

The 2017 CSP was revised to establish a statewide season with concurrent season dates for the north coast, south coast and Puget Sound subareas. The Washington recreational halibut fishery has become increasingly popular in with more fishing effort directed at a relatively stable quota. The result has been recreational halibut seasons that last from three to five days in the north coast and south coast subareas. Seasons in the Puget Sound region have gone from several months to as few as 8 days in 2016. In response, WDFW has worked extensively to improve inseason sampling methods, consider stakeholder input, and construct seasons that provide meaningful recreational fishing opportunity and maximize the season length. In recent years, WDFW has worked with stakeholders in these subareas to create overlap in the season dates across these subareas. The overlap is intended to keep catch within the subarea quota and spread out the season by limiting the overall number of fishing days. The implementation of a new sampling approach for the Puget Sound region that allows for inseason quota tracking in 2017 provided the flexibility necessary to establish concurrent season dates in all of these subareas.

North Coast Subarea

The North Coast subarea has traditionally been structured to be open on Thursdays and Saturdays. Under the statewide season structure, the fishery was open Thursday, May 4th, Saturday, May 6th and Thursday, May 11th then switched to a Thursday, Sunday structure on Sunday, May 21 following a management break implemented to evaluate catch relative to the subarea quota. Catch per unit of effort (CPUE) in this subarea was much lower in 2017 than what is typically seen. In addition, fishing effort dropped off as the season extended into late May and June and resulted in a season that was open for 9 days. This subarea was open for one final day on Saturday, June 17th with cumulative catch reaching 100,410 pounds which was 5,683 pounds under the 2017 subarea allocation.

South Coast Subarea

The South Coast subarea has traditionally been structured to open on the first Sunday in May and continue two days per week (Sunday and Tuesday) with a management closure to monitor quota attainment and provide advance notice of another fishing day or a potential closure. Under the statewide season structure this area followed the same season structure as the North Coast subarea with the season following a two day per week structure starting with Thursdays and Saturdays and then switching to a Thursday, Sunday weekend/weekday structure after the first three days. The approach for the North Coast and South Coast subareas reflected a significant compromise between stakeholders from both subareas that wanted to retain their traditional weekend days while still moving toward consistent season days. Saturdays are important to stakeholders from the North Coast subarea while Sundays are important to stakeholders from the South Coast subarea. The South Coast continued to reserve two thousand pounds or 10 percent of the subarea allocation, which was two thousand pounds in 2017, to allow for a nearshore fishery. The 2017 CSP was revised to open the nearshore fishery on the first Saturday following the closure of the primary all depth fishery. However, after five days of all depth fishing, the catch in this area was 61,061 pounds, 10,754 pounds over the subarea allocation which included the 2,000 pounds reserved for the nearshore fishery.

Puget Sound Subarea

As mentioned above, changes were made to the sampling approach for the Puget Sound region that allowed for an inseason quota management approach for this subarea. In addition to enabling WDFW managers to track inseason catch and close the fishery upon projected quota attainment, the new sampling structure provided the flexibility to manage this subarea under the same statewide season approach as the North Coast and South Coast subareas. This subarea opened on Thursday, May 4th under the same season structure and dates as in place for the North Coast and South Coast subareas. Similar to the North Coast subarea, overall fishing success and CPUE was down in this subarea compared to recent seasons. For example, total catch in 2016 under a total of eight fixed season dates was 102,699 pounds, 45,306 pounds over the 2016 subarea allocation. WDFW is pleased to report that the 2017 recreational halibut catch in the Puget Sound subarea remained within its allocation for the first time in several years. The fishery was open for a total of 9 days concluding on Saturday, June 17th when the cumulative catch reached 60,123 pounds leaving 4,839 pounds of quota remaining.

Columbia River Subarea

The Columbia River subarea is structured to open in all depths the first Thursday in May and continues four days per week, Thursday through Sunday until the set aside for the all-depth fishery is achieved. Five hundred pounds of the Columbia River allocation is set aside to allow halibut retention in the nearshore area when bottomfish are on board during days when the all-depth fishery is closed (Monday-Wednesday).

In 2017, the all-depth fishery opened on May 4 and continued four days per week, Thursday through Sunday through May 25th with a final fishing day on Saturday, June 17th. A total of 12,786 pounds of halibut were landed in the Washington portion of the Columbia River subarea during the all depth fishery. Landings in the nearshore fishery totaled 184 pounds through June 11th for total Washington landings in the Columbia River subarea totaling 12,970 pounds.

2017 Washington Recreational Catch Summary

While there is opportunity for further refinement, we view the statewide season approach and new inseason monitoring for the Puget Sound region as meaningful improvements managing recreational halibut fisheries in Washington.

Canadian Halibut Landed into Neah Bay

As part of WDFW's port sampling efforts for recreational halibut fisheries, we also sample halibut caught in Canadian waters and landed into Neah Bay from March through October. The number of Canadian halibut landed into Neah Bay continues to decrease, with the 2017 total at 245 fish. Table 2 summarizes the Canadian halibut catch landed into Neah Bay for 2013-2017.

There could be additional halibut caught in Canada and landed into Washington ports other than Neah Bay that are not currently being accounted for. For example, WDFW's Puget Sound port sampling program does not collect recreational halibut catch data for Canadian halibut that may be landed into other ports adjacent to Canada such as Sekiu, Port Angeles or Bellingham.

Table 2. Canadian halibut landings into Neah Bay, Washington, 2013-2017.

Year	# Boats	# Anglers	# Halibut
2017	169	419	245
2016	230	608	304
2015	254	648	434
2014	295	797	629
2013	390	1,107	690

Incidental Halibut Catch in the 2017 Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis, WA

The 2A Halibut CSP provides for incidental landings of halibut in the primary longline sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis, Washington, in years when the Area 2A TAC is greater than 900,000 lbs. The primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis will be allocated the Washington sport allocation that is in excess of 214,110 lb, provided a minimum of 10,000 pounds is available. The amount of halibut allowed in the directed sablefish fishery is capped at 70,000 lbs; any remaining allocation is transferred back to the Washington recreational fishery and divided among the subareas according to the methodology described in the CSP. The 2017 area 2A TAC was 1,330,000 pounds and the initial Washington sport allocation was 307,762 allowing for 70,000 pounds of halibut available for incidental retention in the longline sablefish fishery. The Pacific Fishery Management Council adopted a 110 pounds of halibut per 1,000 pounds of sablefish limit per landing with up to two additional halibut in excess of the 110 pounds per 1,000 pounds landing ratio allowed per landing (both dressed weight, halibut with head-on) beginning on April 1, 2017. Effective May 11, the landing limit was changed to 140 pounds (64 kg) dressed weight of halibut for every 1,000 pounds (454 kg) dressed weight of sablefish landed and up to 2 additional halibut in excess of the 140 pounds per 1,000-pound ratio per landing. The sablefish fishery extends from April 1 through October 31 with associated halibut landings allowed beginning April 1.

In 2017, fifteen vessels made a total of 67 landings containing halibut in the tier-limit sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis. The total catch of dressed, head-on halibut in the directed sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis at the conclusion of the fishery was 35,866 pounds which is 52 percent of the established quota. Incidental halibut retention in the sablefish fishery was open through October 31. The incidental halibut landings in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis from 2013-2017 are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Incidental Halibut in the Sablefish Fishery North of Pt. Chehalis

Year	Vessels	Landings	Quota	Catch	% of Quota
2017	15	67	70,000	35,866	51.8
2016	16	64	49,686	39,376	79.2
2015	8	37	10,348	9,797	94.7
2014	12	42	14,274	12,224	85.6
2013	14	53	21,173	14,151	66.8

Summary

WDFW will continue to monitor and sample our recreational and commercial fisheries, including the amount of halibut caught in Canadian waters and landed into Neah Bay; continue to improve sampling and catch estimation methods for the Puget Sound region to keep catch within allocations; maintain our enforcement efforts during the halibut recreational fisheries; and monitor the efforts to document halibut bycatch in the West Coast commercial fisheries and recommend appropriate action through the Pacific Fishery Management Council.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Police



2017 Halibut Report



"TO PROTECT OUR NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE PUBLIC WE SERVE"

OVERVIEW

Halibut can be found throughout Puget Sound and offshore waters. This resource is shared among four user groups in Washington State: recreational, directed non-Indian commercial, non-Indian incidental, and Tribal fishermen. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) police developed a patrol plan for 2017 that provides comprehensive protection throughout the entire year.

As halibut seasons and habitats overlap with other fisheries, directed halibut patrols often reveal federal and state violations related to other species. Conversely, halibut violations were also found during patrols intended to maintain compliance in other fisheries. Common halibut violations included mutilation of fish so that size or species could not be determined, failure to account for catch, fishing for and possession of rockfish or halibut in closed areas, closed-season fishing, exceeding limits, failing to submit catch for inspection (hidden fish), and fishing without a license.

Strategic Planning

The Patrol Plan's focus areas include:

1. Elevating enforcement presence at sea and shore-side during halibut-directed fisheries or when halibut can be legally retained incidental to other fisheries;
2. Ensuring compliance with halibut hot spots that are closed to fishing during open halibut seasons (intended for yellow eye and canary rockfish protection);
3. Providing a presence on the halibut grounds during season closures, to include during non-halibut fisheries in locations where halibut could be intercepted;
4. Monitoring commercial off-loads;
5. Inspecting wholesale and retail sellers to ensure lawful origin of halibut in commerce;
6. Ensuring the safety of all persons engaged in commercial and recreational fisheries; and
7. Conducting joint patrols with partner agencies such as Tribal, United States Coast Guard, and local sheriffs' offices in order to expand patrol coverage.



Officers measuring halibut off the Washington coast.

2017 Emphasis Patrols:

16 Participating WDFW Officers

Total Hours: 578

- 370 Hours at Sea on Long-Range Vessels (185 Vessel Hours)

- 208 Hours of Land-Based Patrols

Total Contacts: 2,095

- 109 Commercial Contacts

- 1,995 Recreational Contacts

• Warnings Issued: 201

• Citations Issued: 46



Patrol Highlights

Recreational Season:

Three detachments conducted saturation patrols in Marine Areas 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 prior to and during the recreational and commercial coastal halibut openers. WDFW police committed four patrol boats and deployed officers on United States Coast Guard (USCG) and Clallam County Sheriff's vessels to expand the at-sea presence. In addition to WDFW officers detecting recreational and commercial fishing violations, USCG boarding teams terminated several vessels voyages due to a lack of required safety equipment. Some highlights include:

A number of halibut-directed patrols resulted in high compliance with halibut rules, however, groundfish-related violations by halibut anglers were still observed. For example, one vessel kept a dozen rockfish (five different species) that were illegal to possess in addition to three undersized lingcod. At least one person in the group understood how much trouble they were in upon seeing the patrol vessel approach and started to throw fish overboard. Since rockfish with distended swim bladders fail to sink, they were easily retrieved and the fishermen were cited accordingly.



Officers Davidson, Branscomb, Summit and SGT Rosenberger, with assistance from USCG, emphasized presence in the La Push area. The first open fishing day yielded violations which included one boat fishing halibut in a closed area and in possession of two closed-season Canary Rockfish. With the assistance of the USCG helicopter, WDFW Police were able to contact a vessel fishing for halibut in the Yellow Eye Conservation Area, which is closed to halibut.

In the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Sgt. Rosenberger teamed up with the Clallam County Sheriff to patrol waters between Sekiu and Neah Bay. Three men aboard a boat were contacted and told the Sgt. that they did not have any fish on board and that it was a slow fishing day. As the deputies conducted a vessel safety inspection, Sgt. Rosenberger could hear a fish flopping within a fish well and saw drops of blood on the deck.

Sgt. Rosenberger told the men that he knew there was a fish aboard and requested that they provide it for inspection. The men again denied having a fish, just as the fish started to thrash. The Sgt. asked to see the inside of a fish well the suspect was standing on and discovered a halibut, which was very much alive. The suspect told the Sgt. that he had not recorded the fish on his catch record card, and that is why he had not told the truth. The Sgt. informed the man that he had taken what is a lesser violation and made it into a gross misdemeanor offense by lying. He was cited accordingly. Over-limits for bottomfish and retaining rockfish in closed areas were also addressed through additional angler inspections.

Patrol Highlights



Officer Summit assists anglers at their request

Commercial Fishery:

WDFW Police went undercover and observed an over-limit of four halibut retained on board a vessel for hire. Small halibut, both alive and dead were high-graded in favor of larger fish. When confronted, the captain(s) and crew had a hard time telling the truth for quite some time, but finally admitted to the violations. Ultimately a search warrant was served on the charter boat company office as they had cause to believe that high-grading and exceeding limits was routine. After interviewing numerous witnesses on prior fishing trips, additional violations were added to the original case.

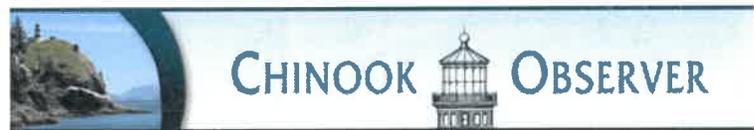
Incidental Fisheries

Commercial salmon troll areas overlap halibut grounds. Trollers may legally retain halibut incidental to the salmon fishery, however limits apply. Commercial trollers are routinely inspected to ensure compliance. No violations were found.

Commercial Focus

Fish Company Inspections:

Wholesale fish dealers and processors are inspected throughout the season to ensure proper catch accounting and enforce possession limits. One commercial vessel was discovered to have delivered two hundred and eighteen pounds of halibut in excess of the limit. The overage was seized and state citations were issued to the captain. Officers also conducted vessel patrols during each of the open-directed commercial halibut fisheries. No violations were found.



Local charter suspected of 'high-grading' prized halibut

Natalie St. John

Published on July 18, 2017 3:51PM

