



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

Summary of Washington Pacific Halibut Fisheries Management in 2007

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Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
48 Devonshire Road
Montesano, WA 98563

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
SUMMARY OF PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN 2007**

The purpose of this report is to summarize the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) management and enforcement activities in 2007 Pacific halibut fisheries. It includes a synopsis of Washington’s recreational catch and a description of the results of the incidental halibut catch in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis. A summary of WDFW’s enforcement efforts relative to patrolling the North Coast (Neah Bay and La Push) recreational halibut fisheries is contained in Appendix A.

Washington’s Recreational Halibut Fisheries in 2007

Washington’s halibut fisheries are managed under the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A. The catch sharing plan 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 seasons for 2007 is described in Table 1.

Table 1.

Subarea	Quota (lbs)	Catch (lbs)	Avg Wt (lbs)	Season Dates
Puget Sound	65,562	45,415	22.7	East: April 9-June 16 West: May 24-Aug 3
North Coast	116,199	114,489	20.8	May 15, 17, 19, 31; June 19, 21, 23, 28; July 7, 22; Aug 4, 18, 19; Sept 1
South Coast	50,907	51,166	25.6	May 1-3; 6-8
Columbia River	20,378	8,950 ^{1/}	16.2	May 1-26 Aug 3-5; 10-12; 24-26; Sept 15

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

Halibut are measured at the dock and the lengths of the samples are then converted to weights. On the coast, lengths are taken throughout the season on a weekly basis and applied to the number of halibut caught to project the total catch in pounds. The catches are then monitored and the fisheries are closed when they are projected to attain their respective subarea quota.

Coastal Recreational Fisheries

One of the coastal recreational fishery management challenges that WDFW has faced for the past few years is with regard to the North Coast (Neah Bay and La Push) subarea and its short halibut season. There has been a significant increase in fishing effort in this area over the past few years, resulting in earlier quota attainment. As an example, in 2006, the North Coast halibut season was only seven days long.

For the past few years, as the amount of effort in this fishery has increased, the number of days that the season has been open has decreased. In addition, the amount of subarea quota remaining at the end of the season has increased as it takes more quota to reopen the fishery for another fishing day. WDFW wanted to explore designating a nearshore area that could reopen if sufficient quota is not available to reopen the entire offshore area (similar to what is typically done in the South Coast); however, we did not have halibut catch data to estimate the amount of quota needed for a fishery only in the nearshore area. Therefore, WDFW proposed collecting this data by constraining a portion of the June fishery to the nearshore area.

The intent of the nearshore-only fishery was to slow the catch rate down by closing some of the more favored offshore areas, while still allowing access to halibut grounds off La Push (i.e., at the “rockpile”) through a modified 30-fm line and halibut areas out of Neah Bay at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. While these areas do offer some halibut fishing opportunity, we believed that the catch rate would be much lower than when the offshore fishery is open.

As noted in Table 1., in 2007, the halibut fishery lasted twice as long, staying open for 14 days. However, this seemed to be more of a result of lower than anticipated effort in late June and July, rather than a lower catch rate in the nearshore area.

Other changes implemented in 2007 for Washington sport fisheries include specifying a set aside of 5% of the South Coast quota to be used to provide a northern nearshore fishery on Fridays and Saturdays after the offshore fishery had closed. For the past two years (2005 and 2006), the South Coast fishery had exceeded its quota during the offshore season thereby precluding the northern nearshore area from reopening. In the past, the northern nearshore area had either remained open or reopened following the offshore closure; this allowed anglers to keep halibut incidentally caught while targeting bottomfish or salmon in the nearshore area. The northern nearshore area does not contain any known halibut “hot spots,” so the catch rate in this area is low, which allows WDFW to monitor catches against fairly small amounts of remaining quota.

With this provision in place in 2007, WDFW set aside 5% of the South Coast quota, which was 2,545 lbs. However, higher than anticipated catches and a higher average weight resulted in the entire quota being taken in the primary offshore fishery, which precluded us from opening the northern nearshore fishery. To address this, WDFW recommended, and the Pacific Council approved, a higher set aside of 10% for the South Coast subarea beginning in 2008. This higher set aside is expected to provide assurance for a nearshore incidental fishing opportunity while still allowing the South Coast fishery to achieve its subquota.

Puget Sound Halibut Catch Estimate

WDFW manages the Puget Sound halibut fishery based on “fishing equivalent days” (FEDs). We apply the highest catch per FED for the previous five years (which, for the 2007 calculation, occurred in 2003) to determine the total amount of FEDs that will be available in the following season. In projecting the season length, a weekday is equivalent to one FED, while weekends and holidays are 2.5 FEDs. Using this method, the amount of FEDs available for the 2006 fishery was 83.5.

WDFW produced a post-season catch estimate using data from creel surveys of anglers returning to port to estimate the catch per angler-trip and overall effort. WDFW samplers measured halibut intercepted at the docks to determine the average weight.

This method produced a catch estimate of 1,998 halibut; multiplied by the average weight (22.73 lbs) results in a total estimated catch of 45,415 lbs. The division of this catch between the two regions for 2007, and a comparison to 2005 and 2006, is described in Table 2.

Table 2. Puget Sound catch estimates, by region, for 2005-07.

Area	2007		2006		2005	
	# Halibut	lbs	# Halibut	lbs	# Halibut	lbs
Eastern Region	1,215	27,626	2,480	57,635	1,990	45,969
Western Region	783	17,798	247	5,740	710	16,401

Anecdotal information from anglers indicated that the earlier season opening was not as successful as it was in 2006, and creel data for the month of April supports this. A detailed description of the Puget Sound catch by area and month is contained in Appendix B.

Following the annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission and the adoption of the Area 2A total allowable catch (TAC), WDFW will have a public meeting to develop proposed season dates for Puget Sound for 2008, which will be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service for approval.

Canadian Halibut Landed Into Neah Bay

As part of WDFW’s port sampling efforts for recreational halibut fisheries, we also sample the halibut caught in Canadian waters and landed into Neah Bay. Using the average weight from the U.S. fish landed into the North Coast subarea in 2007 (20.75 lbs) and applying it to the Canadian catch landed into Neah Bay, produces a catch estimate of 207,023 lbs., which is about 100,000 lbs. less than the 2006 catch.

Table 3. is a comparison of the Canadian halibut catch landed into Neah Bay in 2000-2007. The total catch in pounds is calculated using the average weight for the U.S. fish landed into the North Coast subarea for each respective year. A weekly catch summary of Canadian halibut brought into Neah Bay by charter and private vessels (in numbers of fish) is described in Appendix C.

Table 3. Canadian halibut landings into Neah Bay, Washington, in 2000-2007.

Year	# Boats	# Anglers	# Halibut	Avg Wt (lbs)	Total lbs
2007	1,579	6,820	9,977	20.75	207,023
2006	1,863	8,223	13,045	23.15	301,992
2005	1,446	5,515	8,816	24.60	216,874
2004	1,468	5,941	9,693	21.63	209,660
2003	1,555	6,089	10,805	20.03	216,424
2002	1,328	5,361	9,027	19.47	175,756
2001	1,594	6,202	9,716	19.24	186,936
2000	2,007	6,857	10,088	20.80	209,830

Incidental Halibut Catch in the 2006 Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis, WA

The 2A Halibut Catch Sharing Plan 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 amount of halibut allowed in the directed sablefish fishery is capped at 70,000 lbs, and the remaining allocation is transferred back to the Washington recreational fishery and divided among the subareas according to the methodology described in the Plan. For the 2007 season, the Council adopted the same landing ratio that was in place in for the previous two years, that is, 100 lbs. of halibut for every 1,000 lbs. of sablefish (both dressed weight, halibut with head-on). The sablefish fishery extends from April 1 through October 31 with associated halibut landings allowed beginning in May. Fishers were also allowed up to two additional halibut per fishing trip to provide some flexibility in complying with the regulation.

Twenty-four individual vessels made a total of 84 landings containing halibut in the directed tier-limit sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis. Of the 84 landings, 26 contained the full amount of halibut provided for in regulation, while the other 58 landings averaged 75% per landing of the potential amount of halibut allowed. This is very similar to the pattern that occurred in this fishery in 2006, indicating that the current regulation does a reasonable job of accommodating incidental halibut bycatch in the fishery.

The total catch of dressed, head-off halibut in the directed sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis at the conclusion of the fishery on October 31 was **45,780 lbs.** which is 65.4% of the established quota. This final total is 63% below the halibut total on fish tickets in the tier-limit fishery in 2006. However, the associated sablefish catch is proportionally down 62.3% from the 2006 total. Given this relationship, it appears that a reduction in the sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis is directly responsible for the reduction in halibut landed rather than any change in fishery methods or in the relative abundance of halibut and sablefish.

Summary

WDFW plans to continue to monitor and sample our recreational and commercial fisheries, including the amount of halibut caught in Canadian waters and landed into Neah Bay; take a precautionary approach when setting our Puget Sound season; maintain our enforcement efforts during the halibut recreational fisheries; and monitor the efforts to document halibut bycatch in the West Coast trawl fisheries and recommend appropriate action through the Pacific Fishery Management Council.

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Statewide Marine Division has concentrated enforcement activities around the recreational halibut season along the north coast for the past several years, including 2007. WDFW Marine Enforcement designed emphasis or saturation patrols for 2007 to address violations with recreational fishing rules. These patrols not only addressed halibut regulations, but also offered a level of protection for other species that are encountered while halibut fishing and provided an opportunity to monitor U.S - Canada border fishing activities. Other enforcement activities that occurred in concert with halibut protection included: ensuring compliance with the Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area closure; enforcing canary and yelloweye rockfish no-retention rules; monitoring Canadian-caught halibut landings; and ensuring general compliance with groundfish fishing regulations.

Summary of Directed Halibut Patrols

In 2007, WDFW Officers made 1,057 enforcement contacts relative to recreational groundfish and halibut fisheries, including 136.5 hours of fisheries enforcement in the LaPush and Neah Bay areas and 114 hours of patrol by vessel.

Aside from routine patrol, WDFW Marine Division Officers embarked on multi-day emphasis patrols (May 15, 17, and 19, and June 19 and 21) along the North Coast. The primary goal was to ensure compliance with halibut regulations, enforce yelloweye and canary rockfish closures, and to monitor bycatch of these species. Four WDFW patrol vessels, two U.S. Coast Guard vessels, and the U.S. Coast Guard helicopter participated, and two dockside patrols covered the primary terminal ports of Neah Bay and La Push.

During the May emphasis patrol, there were 110 violations witnessed, most (91) of which were failure to record catch. There were 18 citations issued, including 2 violations for exceeding the halibut daily bag limit, and 1 violation for fishing when the season was closed.

On May 31, four officers conducted another emphasis patrol at Neah Bay and Sekiu, targeting groundfish and halibut harvesters. Several Canadian-caught halibut were checked at the docks in Neah Bay. Two boats were contacted fishing seaward of the 20-fm depth restriction illegally in possession of rockfish and lingcod; an angler on one of the boats reeled in a large yelloweye rockfish while it was being contacted, reinforcing the need for the depth restrictions for overfished rockfish protection.

In June, July and August, officers conducted multi-day patrols and issued citations for non-halibut fishery-related violations, including possession of canary or yelloweye rockfish, possession of undersized lingcod, and salmon violations (e.g., over limit, undersized chinook, wild coho possession). In late summer and fall, patrols primarily focused on the salmon fishery, however, officers kept an eye out for potential halibut and groundfish violations. A critical shortage of enforcement staff on the north Olympic Peninsula has precluded a greater presence in the halibut fishing areas.

Appendix B.

Table 1. Puget Sound halibut catch estimates, by area and month.

Area	Month	Number of Halibut	Pounds of Halibut
5	May	140	3,192
	June	280	6,368
	July	357	8,105
	Aug	6	132
	<i>Total</i>	783	17,798
6	April	240	5,458
	May	393	5,928
	June	412	9,357
	<i>Total</i>	1,045	23,742
7	April	59	1,336
	May	46	1,037
	June	18	417
	<i>Total</i>	123	2,790
8	April	45	1,027
	May	3	67
	<i>Total</i>	48	1,094

Table 2. Puget Sound halibut catches (numbers of fish), by month, for 2005-07.

Month	2005	2006	2007
April	1,247	1,331	344
May	436	433	582
June	848	797	710
July	169	153	357
Aug	50	13	6
<i>Total</i>	2,750	2,727	1,998

Appendix C.

Table 1. Canadian halibut landed into Neah Bay, by week and fishing mode.

Week	Charter			Private			Total		
	Boats	Anglers	Halibut	Boats	Anglers	Halibut	Boats	Anglers	Halibut
4/30-5/6	23	230	400	7	24	15	30	254	415
5/7-5/13	28	270	224	28	88	70	56	358	294
5/14-5/20	12	85	99	77	231	161	89	316	260
5/21-5/27	38	366	611	84	271	285	122	637	896
5/28-6/30	43	449	808	28	75	67	71	524	875
6/4-6/10	33	342	613	42	125	90	75	467	703
6/11-6/17	46	408	691	18	46	33	64	454	724
6/18-6/24	31	312	583	38	123	130	69	435	713
6/25-7/1	15	161	275	20	49	87	35	210	362
4/2-7/8	8	62	116	107	324	269	115	386	385
7/9-7/15	11	98	172	104	315	561	115	413	733
7/16-7/22	11	94	146	130	421	595	141	515	741
7/23-7/29	5	36	68	56	153	214	61	189	282
7/30-8/5	8	54	108	60	175	243	68	229	351
8/6-8/12	7	70	126	144	413	648	151	483	774
8/13-8/19	7	49	96	105	288	437	112	337	533
8/20-8/26	3	21	41	109	332	498	112	353	539
8/27-9/2	5	37	73	54	147	228	59	184	301
9/3-9/9	0	0	0	11	29	41	11	29	41
9/10-9/16	0	0	0	23	47	55	23	47	55
9/17-9/23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9/24-9/30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	334	3,144	5,250	1,245	3,676	4,727	1,579	6,820	9,977