AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

ISSUE

2026 Groundfish Fisheries Regulations

BACKGROUND

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) will be asked to adopt regulations for the 2026 recreational and commercial groundfish fisheries. The Commission will also be asked to review the 2024 commercial nearshore logbook report.

2026 Groundfish Fisheries Regulations

Nearshore groundfish species (approximately a dozen species of rockfish, cabezon, greenlings, and lingcod) are important components of Oregon's nearshore ecosystem and support fisheries that are economically and culturally significant to coastal communities, businesses, and visitors. Permanent rules have been established by the Commission to achieve conservation and fishery objectives, and the Commission annually considers amendments taking into account new information and stakeholder input.

Groundfish fisheries are subject to joint state and federal management and are required to meet several accountability measures, including quotas and harvest guidelines, vessel monitoring, logbooks, and creel sampling to document fishing activity, such as but not limited to effort, catch, and release or discard of fish at sea. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) collaborates with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC), and others on research, monitoring, and regulation development in a science-based public process. The department's management is guided by the Food Fish Management Policy (ORS 506.109), the Wildlife Policy (ORS 496.012), the Native Fish Conservation Policy (Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) 635-007-0502 through -0509), the Climate and Ocean Change Policy (OAR 635-900-0001 through -0020), and public input. The primary state management goals are to maintain and restore groundfish stocks to provide substantial ecological, economic, and cultural benefits for present and future generations, and to provide equitable fishery opportunities within the conservation sideboards. Federal regulations must be consistent with the Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA), which has overarching conservation and utilization goals, in alignment with state management goals. The MSA explicitly includes protection of the marine ecosystem, recognition of evolutionary and ecosystem processes, and a requirement to take uncertainty and changing environmental conditions into account.

The Commission typically adopts federal groundfish rules by reference and may adopt additional measures to achieve objectives for Oregon's commercial nearshore and recreational fisheries, such as season duration or allocation to user groups within the state. Brief descriptions of the fisheries and management approach are provided below. Additional detail can be found in the Oregon Nearshore Strategy and the federal Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The department held two open public meetings to discuss and seek input on 2026 commercial nearshore groundfish management measures: a meeting in Port Orford on September 9 and a meeting in Tillamook on September 11, both with virtual and in-person options. Around 30 commercial fishers and members of the public attended these two meetings. Staff also held a meeting in June 2025 with the Commercial Nearshore Advisory Panel (CNAP) to discuss the 2025 fishery landings attainment and activity as the season progressed and obtained input on potential rule changes and management strategies for black rockfish for the 2026 season.

Input on recreational groundfish seasons and regulations for 2026 was obtained at a series of in-person public meetings (one was also available online) in early October (66 total participants). Staff also communicated regularly with the Marine Sportfishing Advisory Committee (SAC) to discuss the 2025 fishery landings attainment and activity as the season progressed, options for in season changes as needed, and to discuss potential rule changes for the 2026 season.

Additional input on both fisheries was received in person at the office as well as via email and phone.

In anticipation of the Commission consideration of the proposed rules, the department published notice of the proposed rulemaking (Attachment 2). Additionally, the public has an opportunity to provide comments prior to (in writing) or during (orally) the hearing that occurs at the Commission meeting.

ANALYSIS

In Oregon's commercial nearshore sector, harvesters use small vessels and hook and line gear to target nearshore groundfish, including black rockfish and other species, generally in state waters. Catch controls include annual sector catch limits, trip limits, time/area closures, gear restrictions, and minimum size limits. A restricted participation system and annual sector catch limits keep fishing-related mortality of nearshore groundfish species to sustainable levels. Bi-monthly vessel landing limits moderate the pace of the fishery so that it remains open year-round. All landed catch is fully accounted for, with requirements that buyers report all catch by species or management group to the department. Department staff sample commercial landings, and at-sea discards have been estimated by NOAA Fisheries' West Coast Groundfish Observer Program through 2024. Detailed statistics on this fishery are published annually in The Oregon Commercial Nearshore Fishery Update, available online at https://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/publications/.

In the recreational groundfish sector, anglers fish for rockfish, lingcod, cabezon, and other groundfish species (often referred to as "bottomfish") with rod and reel. Roughly half of the overall effort for bottomfish occurs from private or guide boats and half from charter boats, few anglers fish for groundfish from shore. Catch controls include annual sector catch limits, daily bag limits, time/area closures, gear restrictions, and minimum size limits. In recent years, anglers have taken approximately 100,000 trips each year for groundfish, with black rockfish making up at least 50 percent of the total catch. Effort is highest in the summer months (July and August), but year-

round opportunities are important to many anglers, businesses, and coastal communities. The Marine Resources Program collects data on recreational effort and catch in the ocean with a coastwide sampling program. An annual Sport Groundfish Newsletter is available online at https://myodfw.com/sport-bottomfish-seasons.

Options, analysis, and recommendations presented below are grouped into four sub-topics: (1) federal regulations, (2) state harvest guidelines for the commercial and recreational sectors, (3) commercial management measures, and (4) recreational management measures.

(1) FEDERAL REGULATIONS

Federal harvest specifications and management measures for west coast groundfish stocks are determined by the PFMC in a biennial cycle that relies on robust stock assessments, scientific advice, consideration of uncertainty and risk including changing environmental conditions, fishery impact and economic analysis, and public input. Federal harvest specifications for 2025 and 2026 were published in the Federal Register in late 2024 and **were adopted by reference by the Commission in December 2024.**

In 2023, the PFMC conducted new stock assessments for black and canary rockfishes, among others. The PFMC stock assessment process is a rigorous public process, reviewed by independent experts, then approved by the PFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee as the Best Scientific Information Available, per the MSA. The black rockfish assessment off Oregon indicated that while the stock is healthy, the estimated sustainable biomass is lower than the recent harvest levels. To maintain the stock in the healthy zone, the allowable harvest was reduced by approximately 33 percent from 2024 to 2025, followed by small annual increases (1-2%) starting in 2026. The canary rockfish assessment, which was done coastwide (WA, OR, and CA), also estimated the sustainable biomass to be lower than 2024 harvest levels and that the stock was in the precautionary zone. Therefore, allowable harvest was reduced by approximately 55 percent from 2024 to 2025, with a small additional decrease for 2026 to help rebuild the stock to a healthy sustainable level.

(2) STATE HARVEST GUIDELINES

State harvest guidelines (HGs) are annual amounts (in weight) of each species or management group allocated to the commercial and recreational fishery sectors in Oregon. HGs are the overall harvest objectives, and management measures such as trip limits or bag limits are designed to enable each sector to attain, but not exceed, its HGs. When cumulative sector catch is projected to reach an HG before the end of the year, staff will determine whether in-season rule changes are needed to avoid exceeding an annual catch limit while factoring in potential impacts to the other sector.

The Commission establishes HGs by distributing federal catch limits for Oregon stocks to each sector. The proportions allocated to each sector, which were first applied in the early 2000s based on the then-recent and historic landings by each sector, have not changed since that time, except to align with changes in stock groupings (i.e., there has not been any policy change in the share allocated to each sector).

Table 1 shows the recreational and commercial HGs that would result from applying the status quo allocation proportions for each species/management group to the 2026 federal allocations for Oregon fisheries. Recent years (2021-2025) are included for reference. **Staff recommend adopting the proposed 2026 sector HGs in Table 1**.

Table 1. State HGs for commercial and recreational groundfish management groups, in metric tons.

Management Group Sector (status quo proportion)	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 Proposed
Black Rockfish						
Commercial HG (24.0%)	122.9	122.9	122.9	122.9	82.4	**84.1**
Recreational HG (76.0%)	389.1	389.1	389.1	389.1	261.1	**266.3**
Blue and Deacon Rockfish						
Commercial HG (18.6%)	16.8	16.3	15.7	15.2	14.8	**14.4**
Recreational HG (81.4%)	73.7	71.2	68.8	66.7	64.9	**63.2**
Nearshore Rockfish						
Commercial HG (51.3%)	11.3	11.1	16.6	16.1	15.4	**15.0**
Recreational HG (48.7%)	10.8	10.5	15.8	15.2	14.7	**14.3**
Cabezon						
Commercial HG (64.3%)	35.0	33.5	32.4	31.6	31.0	**30.5**
Recreational HG (35.7%)	19.4	18.6	18.0	17.6	17.2	**16.9**
Greenling						
Commercial HG (75.1%)	108.1	103.8	100.7	98.4	96.6	**95.3**
Recreational HG (24.9%)	35.8	34.4	33.4	32.6	32.0	**31.6**

(3) COMMERCIAL NEARSHORE GROUNDFISH FISHERY MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The primary objective for the commercial nearshore fishery is to provide opportunity to attain, but not exceed, the full commercial HG. A secondary objective is to provide a 12-month season with more opportunity in the summer to meet stronger market demand at that time of year. Historically, input from many south coast commercial nearshore harvesters and buyers has favored a 12-month season due to a relatively strong year-round market, whereas input from north coast participants indicated a much more seasonal pattern of market demand, varying from very strong in the summer to much lower in the winter.

2025 Commercial Nearshore Season Recap

Commercial nearshore fishing effort rebounded from historic lows in 2020 and 2021 to near average in 2022 but decreased in 2023 and again in 2024. Effort in early 2025 was higher than average but has tracked lower since mid-year, falling slightly below 2024 levels and the historic low. Landings of black rockfish, cabezon, and other nearshore rockfish have tracked lower than average throughout the year. Landings of greenling have tracked close to the average. Blue and deacon rockfish landings (combined) are at a record high for the fourth year in a row, with landings projected to exceed the commercial HG for the first time since establishing a species-specific HG in 2019. By mid-year, projections indicated fishing mortality for all management groups except black rockfish and blue and deacon rockfish would be below HGs at the end of the year, so the department increased bi-monthly vessel limits for other nearshore rockfish, cabezon, and greenling in Periods 4-6 (July-December). Current projections indicate impacts will remain below HGs through the end of 2025, except for blue and deacon rockfish (Table 2). The recreational fishery is

anticipated to harvest less than its HG for blue and deacon rockfish, therefore even if the commercial HG is exceeded, there is no risk of exceeding any federal allocation.

Table 2. 2025 Commercial nearshore fishery HGs, impacts, and projected HG attainment, in metric tons. Impacts include landed catch and discard mortality.

	Commercial HG (2025)	Impacts through 09/28/2025 (mt)	Projected impacts through 12/31/2025 (mt) (% HG)
Black Rockfish	82.4	64.9	78.7 (96%)
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	14.8	12.8	17.3 (117%)
Other Nearshore Rockfish	15.4	6.1	8.0 (52%)
Cabezon	31.0	10.1	13.2 (43%)
Greenling	96.6	15.4	17.8 (18%)

2026 Commercial Nearshore Management Measures

Vessel Limits

In 2024, most public input focused on bi-monthly vessel limits for black rockfish and potential management strategies to address the reductions in the black rockfish HG from 122.9 mt (2020-2024) to 82.4 mt in 2025 and 84.1 mt in 2026. Staff analyzed several black rockfish vessel limit scenarios, including: (1) 33 percent, 40 percent, and 45 percent reductions from 2023 levels applied across all bi-monthly periods; (2) steeper reductions in Periods 1, 2, 5, and 6 compared to Periods 3 and 4 due to stronger market demand in the summer; and (3) steeper reductions for nearshore endorsed permit holders compared to Black and Blue permit holders, as Black and Blue non-endorsed permit holders have fewer opportunities to land other species and would be most impacted by HG reductions. In almost all the scenarios examined, the 2025 black rockfish HG was exceeded by the end of the year, except for those with the most severe reductions (Table 3).

Results were presented to CNAP and all members, including Black and Blue permit holders, thought reductions should be applied fairly and equitably across the fleet. Panel members agreed that a good market exists for black rockfish in the winter months, so steeper reductions in limits during this time were not favored. Members also appreciated the opportunity to fish nearshore species during this time, as the crab fishery is often delayed. Several members favored a smaller reduction (33 percent) of limits and the risk of early closure or in-season adjustments rather than have a steeper reduction (45 percent) at the outset. Members cited that poor weather early and late in the season could limit their ability to fish and leave fish on the table. Additional feedback provided at the public meetings was mixed with some supporting the same approach as CNAP while others supported lower limits at the outset to increase the chances of a year-round season so that existing markets are not lost. The department closely monitors catch and adopts in-season changes as needed to avoid exceeding the HG. Black rockfish catch in 2025 is projected to be close to the HG by the end of the year (Table 2). If effort and catch in 2026 is similar to recent years, except for 2025, the HG would be exceeded before the end of the year, which will most likely necessitate in-season changes. Input from public meetings in 2025 was less focused on black rockfish limits but generally supported status quo for 2026. Based on CNAP recommendations, public input, and projected attainment of the HG, **staff recommend keeping 2026 black rockfish**

vessel limits the same as 2025 at 1,200 pounds for Periods 1, 2, 5 and 6, and at 1,600 pounds for Periods 3 and 4.

Other nearshore rockfish limits are set at a constant level throughout the year as the vast majority are landed on the South Coast and enter the live fish market, which has less seasonality in demand than the fresh fish market. The other nearshore rockfish group HG increased substantially in 2023 due to a new stock assessment for copper rockfish, one species in the group. The group HG declined to 16.1 mt in 2024 and to 15.4 mt in 2025 due to some additional buffering at the federal level. In 2026 impacts are not expected to approach the HG. Retention of quillback rockfish was prohibited starting in 2022 based on a stock assessment that indicated a healthy, but quite small, stock off Oregon. The assessment estimated such low sustainable yield that mortality from releasing incidentally caught fish may exceed it despite prohibiting landings. Based on public input, in-season changes in recent years (2023-2025), and projected attainment of the HG, **staff recommend continuing the prohibition on landing quillback rockfish and increasing other nearshore rockfish vessel limits from 450 pounds to 650 pounds for all periods in 2026.**

Like Other Nearshore Rockfish, recommended HGs for cabezon and greenling decreased slightly from 2025 to 2026, but attainment has been low. Based on patterns of effort, in-season changes in recent years (2023-2025), HG attainment in 2025, anticipated HGs for 2026, and public input, **staff recommend increasing vessel limits for cabezon from 1,500 pounds to 2,000 pounds and greenling from 1,200 pounds to 2,000 pounds in 2026. Staff recommend no changes to vessel limits for blue and deacon rockfish**.

Table 3. 2026 Projected commercial nearshore fishery impacts and HG attainment with staff recommended vessel limits, based on 2024 effort and catch, in metric tons.

	Commercial HG (2026)	Projected impacts (% HG)
Black Rockfish	84.1	81.1 (96%)
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	14.4	15.9 (110%)
Other Nearshore Rockfish	15.0	9.3 (62%)
Cabezon	30.5	18.2 (60%)
Greenling	95.3	15.3 (16%)

Black Rockfish Management Areas (BRMAs)

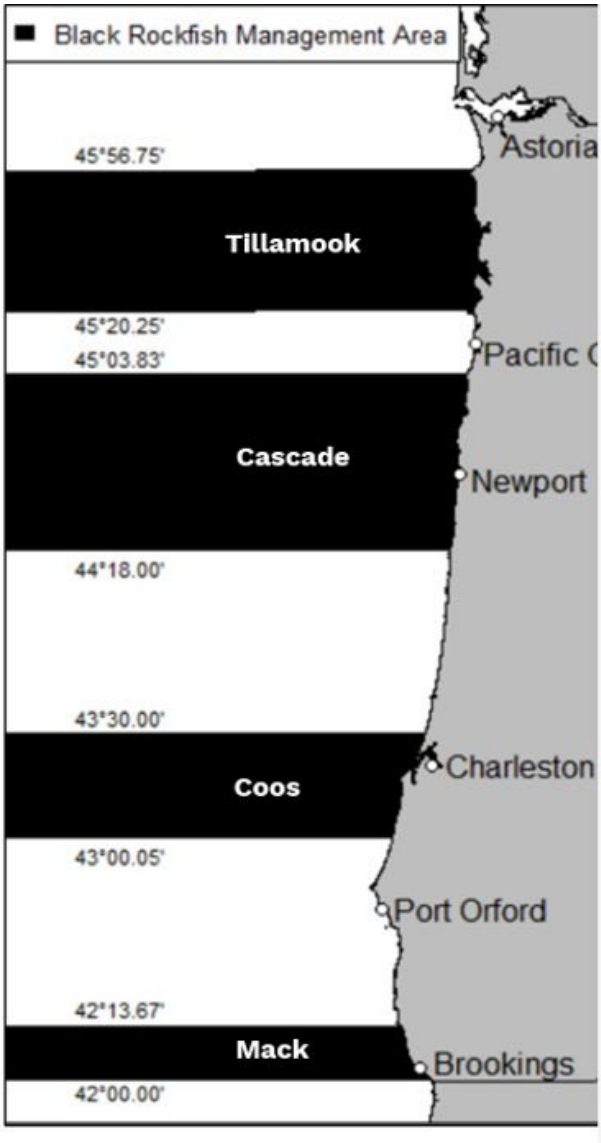
In four areas off the Oregon coast, there have been limits on the amount of black rockfish that can be landed from each individual fishing trip (most recently 300 pounds in March-October and 500 pounds in November-February), in addition to the cumulative bi-monthly limits (Figure 1). These BRMAs and associated limits were adopted in 1995 to address concerns about the rapidly developing commercial nearshore fishery in areas important to the recreational sector. At that time, there was no other state limitation on commercial nearshore groundfish fishing; however, in 2003-2004 the current management structure was established, with a suite of effort and catch controls including a limited number of permits, sector-specific harvest guidelines, and bi-monthly vessel

harvest limits. Due to these changes and comprehensive state and federal regulation, BRMAs are no longer the primary tool used to limit commercial black rockfish harvest and may not be needed to prevent inter-sector conflict with the recreational fishery.

In response to a request from commercial nearshore stakeholders and in consideration of the information just described, the Commission raised the BRMA trip limits for November through February (Periods 6 and 1) beginning in 2020. However, on the north-central coast market demand for black rockfish is significantly higher in the summer and low or non-existent in the winter timeframe, so the increased daily limits provided little practical benefit to the commercial fishery participants.

Based on staff recommendation and public input, the Commission suspended the per-trip limits in BRMAs for 2022 for one year and asked staff to evaluate impacts of the change for consideration of extending the suspension or making it permanent. The bi-monthly vessel limits for black rockfish still applied during the suspension. Staff conducted an evaluation in fall of 2022 with the data available, which included a partial year of landings data and no logbook data due to data processing and entry lag. The evaluation showed little change in distribution of landings among ports or inside versus outside of BRMAs, and that some vessels benefited from the change by landing more black rockfish per trip. While the results were as expected and indicated that BRMAs trip limits may no longer be necessary to achieve management objectives, these conclusions were based on limited data. The Commission suspended the per-trip limits in BRMAs for an additional three years, 2023-2025, and asked staff to reevaluate the impacts in the fall of 2025, which allowed a full three years of landings data and logbook data to be included in the evaluation.

Figure 1. Map of Black Rockfish Management Areas.



In fall of 2025, staff conducted an evaluation that compared landings data and logbook data from 2022-2024 to data from the previous five years (2017-2021) as a baseline. Data from 2025 were not included due to the data processing and entry lag. Again, the evaluation showed little change in distribution of landings among ports or inside versus outside of BRMAs. Overall, landings from inside BRMAs decreased by over 4.5 percent between 2022-2024 compared to landings from 2017-2021 and by over 3.5 percent when the two periods were compared using logbook data. Landings decreased by 4.5 percent and 5.8 percent in the Tillamook and Mack BRMAs, respectively, and increased by 3.7 percent and 2.1 percent in the Cascade and Coos BRMAs, respectively. Similar patterns were observed in the logbook data. Given the current management structure and comprehensive state and federal regulation, it appears that BRMAs are no longer needed to limit commercial black rockfish harvest and prevent inter-sector conflict. It is important to note that removing the daily limits from BRMAs does not allow the commercial fishery as a whole, or individual vessels, to land any more fish than they otherwise would, but allows fishers

to land the same amount of fish in fewer fishing days. The additional regulatory layer of BRMA limits continues to create inefficiencies for commercial harvesters who must take more trips than otherwise necessary to attain their bi-monthly vessel limits. **Staff recommend permanently suspending the per-trip limits in BRMAs.** As an ancillary benefit, allowing participants to harvest their bi-monthly vessel limits more efficiently may result in a modest reduction in fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions from the fishery.

(4) RECREATIONAL GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The primary objectives for the recreational fishery are to keep total mortality within the recreational HGs and maintain a year-round season while limiting regulation complexity. Opportunity (number of open days and a bag limit high enough to entice anglers to go fishing) is the primary benefit to coastal communities, as compared to the primary benefit to the commercial sector being the total amount of fish harvested. Public input has regularly emphasized the importance of a full 12-month season that anglers and fishing related businesses can count on to not close early.

2025 Recreational Groundfish Season Recap

To begin the 2025 season, the daily bag limit for the 'General Marine Fish' group was four fish with a sub-bag limit of one canary rockfish through June 30, 2025. Beginning July 1, 2025, the bag limit increased to five fish with a sub-bag limit of one fish for canary rockfish and, with a sub-bag limit of one cabezon (with cabezon closed by regulation until July 1). Retention of quillback and yelloweye rockfishes remained prohibited in 2025. Fishing was allowed at all depths during all months in 2025, which was the third year since 2003 without a seasonal depth restriction. Fishing with long-leader gear was allowed offshore (seaward) of the 40-fathom regulatory line all year, with a separate ten-fish bag limit of ten midwater rockfish species and with a sub-bag limit of one canary rockfish; long-leader gear is designed to avoid yelloweye rockfish bycatch (yelloweye rockfish status and measures are further discussed below).

Recreational groundfish effort was again high overall in 2025 with 96,186 angler trips through November 2 compared to the five-year average of just over 104,000 angler-trips per year for a full year. In general, effort and catches were lower than projected through June. Effort and catches increased in July and remained high into September, with July estimated at 16% higher than modeling projected. An extended period of consistently favorable ocean conditions began in mid-July and lasted until early September, allowing for anglers to access the fishing grounds daily. Other marine fishing opportunities (coho salmon, albacore tuna, Pacific halibut) also contributed to the high effort as anglers were able to target multiple species on the same fishing trip.

Based on the high effort and landings of black rockfish in July and early August, the general marine bag limit was reduced from five fish back to four fish on August 18. Even with the bag limit reduction, data through August continued to show higher than projected impacts with end of the year projections exceeding the black rockfish recreational HG by approximately 10%. As mentioned above, the commercial nearshore fishery is projected to utilize its entire HG, therefore there was no possibility of borrowing from the commercial HG. However, with black rockfish being part of a complex with blue and deacon rockfish at the federal level and the recreational fishery projected to come in at less than 50% of its HG of blue and deacon rockfish, the fishery was allowed to remain open with a further reduced bag limit of three fish beginning September 18,

utilizing some of the de facto buffer that blue and deacon rockfish provide. While ODFW aims to keep catches of each species to their contribution within the complex ACL, the complex was set up to provide a bit of a buffer for the occasional year of high attainment of black rockfish. While a three-fish bag limit is not popular, it seemed a better option to allow some fishing opportunity, including access to the separate lingcod bag limit, rather than closing the bottomfish fishery in the early autumn. The combined commercial and recreational catch of all three species is projected to be below the federal ACL for the black/ blue/ deacon rockfish complex.

Even with the one-fish sub-bag limit of canary rockfish, impacts are projected to exceed the federally-identified Oregon recreational share of the canary rockfish ACL. Discussions with fisheries managers from other states and sectors indicated that most sectors would not achieve their share, therefore an overage of roughly 1.5 mt from the Oregon recreational fishery would not risk exceeding the ACL or impact any other sectors. Therefore, no in-season changes were implemented for canary rockfish.

The nearshore rockfish species complex is projected to exceed the recreational HG by 0.4 mt as of September 28. With the commercial fishery projected to not fully utilize its HG, in-season action was not deemed to be necessary, as the Oregon share of the nearshore rockfish complex would not be exceeded.

End of year projected catches for blue and deacon rockfish, cabezon, and kelp greenling are projected to be within the recreational HGs.

Table 4 shows recreational impacts in 2025 for all quota-managed species/groups through September 28 and projections through the end of the year. These numbers include estimates for shore and estuary catch and account for all groundfish mortality (including post-release mortality) from recreational fishing in Oregon[1].

Table 4. 2025 Recreational nearshore fishery HGs, impacts, and projected HG attainment, in metric tons.

	2025 Recreational Harvest Guideline	2025 Impacts through 11/2/2025	Projected impacts through 12/31/2025 (% of HG)
Black Rockfish	261.1	280.4	286.3 (110%)
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	64.9	32.5	33.0 (51%)
Other Nearshore Rockfish	14.7	14.7	15.0 (102%)
Cabezon	17.2	10.2	10.7 (62%)
Greenling	32.0	21.0	21.1 (66%)
Canary Rockfish (federal HG)	26.0	26.6	27.1 (104%)
Yelloweye Rockfish (federal HG)	6.9	3.2	3.2 (47%)

[1] Some values in Table 4 differ slightly from the values shown on the Sport Groundfish Estimates webpage, https://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/finfish/groundfish_sport/estimates.asp, which shows only the ocean-boat catch targets and estimates.

2026 Recreational Management Measures

For the last two decades, ODFW has consistently received input that year-round harvest opportunity should be a management priority. However, during the recent public process to inform 2026 season development, ODFW has received input that a shorter season with a higher bag limit

would be preferable to some anglers and charter businesses. Additional input supported a year-round season with a daily general marine bag limit of at least four fish and if a four fish bag limit was not possible year-round, then a shorter season was preferred (Figure 2). While staff are not recommending a shorter season for 2026, staff did want to highlight this change in preference among some anglers and businesses to the Commission, as it may get more traction in the future depending on allocations and bag limits necessary to stay within harvest limits.

Figure 2. Feedback from fishery participants in an online survey on year-round season vs. higher bag limits.

The daily bag limit is the primary tool used to achieve a 12-month season by moderating overall recreational catch and, to some extent, effort. For 2026, a four-fish bag limit, open 12 months, is projected to achieve 96% of the 2026 recreational HG.

Staff evaluated a sub-bag limit for black rockfish, such as a five-fish general marine bag limit with no more than four (or three) black rockfish. However, when this approach was last utilized, several issues arose, including: (1) misidentification of black rockfish with blue and deacon rockfish, (2) anglers catching and releasing many black rockfish to fill out their bag with other species or high-grading, and (3) additional pressure on the other nearshore rockfish species, for which annual impacts are already very close to the annual HGs.

Staff also assessed what season length would be needed to accommodate a five-fish bag limit, while also staying within the recreational HG. Projected impacts for a 12-month season with a five-fish bag limit are 290.5 mt, which is over the 266.3 mt HG by 24.2 mt or 9%. Winter months generally have low effort and landings due to weather; therefore, it would require closing several winter months (Oct-Feb or Nov-Mar) to get 24.2 mt of "savings". However, the months of April, May, and September are projected to have 24-29 mt of catch per month, so only one of those months would need to be closed to attain the required savings. Therefore, the season would need to be shortened by five winter months, or one month in the spring or fall in order to reduce impacts enough to allow for a five-fish bag limit for the remainder of the year.

During their September meeting, the Council adopted an Emergency Rule (ER) to increase canary rockfish allocations to all fisheries along the West Coast. For Oregon recreational anglers, this ER (once published in the Federal Register) will increase the quota from 26.1 mt to 28.6 mt in 2026. Though the quota increase is minimal, it does provide additional room to increase the sub-bag limit

of canary rockfish to a two-fish sub-bag limit. As noted above, other states and sectors are not expected to achieve their share, therefore a small overage from the Oregon recreational fishery would not risk exceeding the coastwide ACL, impact any other sectors, or create a conservation risk. Additionally, a two-fish sub-bag of canary rockfish may (1) decrease regulatory discards, (2) reduce angler violations, and (3) make the Oregon fishery more comparable to the surrounding states.

Based on recent fishery performance, the high and variable effort, modeling bag limit and season length scenarios, and public feedback, **staff recommend a four-fish marine bag limit for 2026 and a two-fish sub-bag limit of canary rockfish**. **Staff also recommend keeping the long-leader bag limit at ten fish and increasing the canary rockfish sub-bag limit to two fish**. This is expected to provide a stable fishery throughout the year, with a limited risk that the bag limit would need to be reduced in-season.

For the last few years, the lingcod bag limit in state regulations has been set at two fish, while the limit in federal regulations is three fish. The lower lingcod limit in state regulations was a conservative measure to reduce bycatch mortality of yelloweye rockfish. With the yelloweye rockfish population rebuilding, the amount of allowable discard mortality has been increasing. In the last assessment, the lingcod stock north of 40° 10' N lat. was determined to be healthy. The annual federal allowable catch from all fisheries is approximately 3,000 mt, while mortality from all fisheries combined has been approximately 30% of that allowable amount in recent years. Therefore, with yelloweye rockfish rebuilding and annual harvest of lingcod being well below limits, **staff recommend a three-fish bag limit for lingcod in 2026.**

While yelloweye rockfish is expected to be declared rebuilt in late 2025 or early 2026, retention is still prohibited in federal regulations and mortality should be limited. The sustainable mortality limit for quillback rockfish is not high enough to allow for retention. Therefore, **staff recommend that yelloweye and quillback rockfishes continue to be prohibited in 2026.**

Finally, as occurred in 2023, 2024, and 2025, **staff recommend maintaining a year-round all-depth bottomfish fishery.** The department has slowly eased depth restrictions related to yelloweye rockfish in recent years as the stock status has improved and the federal allocation for Oregon's recreational fishery has increased. A seasonal depth restriction had been used for approximately 20 years to protect yelloweye rockfish while the stock has been rebuilding from an overfished status. Because yelloweye rockfish are less common inshore of 40 fathoms and post-release survival is higher in shallower water, restricting the bottomfish fishery to inshore of 40 fathoms, especially during high-effort periods, reduced fishing-related mortality. Having the fishery open at all-depth year-round for bottomfish fishing allows the fleet to spread out over a larger area for additional months, potentially reducing the concentration of effort on the nearshore reefs. Additionally, it provides opportunity for all-depth Pacific halibut anglers to keep bottomfish and Pacific halibut on the same trip all season, simplifying regulations and increasing overall opportunity.

Staff recommend no change to any other recreational groundfish regulations for 2026. Close monitoring of effort and catch will continue, and in-season adjustments will be made if determined necessary. Projected impacts in 2026 under all recommended measures are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Projected recreational groundfish impacts in 2026, in metric tons under the staff recommended season structure and bag limits. Effort and catches vary weekly, monthly, and annually, depending on weather, ocean conditions, and other fishing opportunities. Harvest will be monitored closely in-season and adjustments to the bag limit will be made if needed to keep harvest within HGs.

	Recommended 2026 Recreational HG	Projected 2026 Impacts assuming no in-season changes (% of HG)
Black Rockfish	266.3	254.1 (95%)
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	63.2	19.0 (30%)
Other Nearshore Rockfish	14.3	13.6 (95%)
Cabezon	16.9	15.2 (90%)
Canary Rockfish	28.6 (federal)*	33.3 (116%)
Greenling	31.6	21.0 (66%)
Yelloweye Rockfish	7.0 (federal)	6.5 (93%)

*Once published in the Federal Register

OPTIONS

1. Adopt staff recommendations, as reflected in draft OARs in Attachment 3:
   a. **Adopt revised harvest guidelines for 2026:**

Management Group	Commercial HG (mt)	Recreational HG (mt)
Black Rockfish	84.1	266.3
Blue and Deacon Rockfish	14.4	63.2
Other Nearshore Rockfish	15.0	14.3
Cabezon	30.5	16.9
Greenling	95.3	31.6

   b. **Adopt revised commercial management measures for 2026:**
      i. Bi-monthly vessel limits for black rockfish: 1,200 pounds in Periods 1, 2, 5 and 6 and 1,600 pounds in Periods 3 and 4.
      ii. Bi-monthly vessel limits for other nearshore rockfish: 650 pounds for all periods.
      iii. Bi-monthly vessel limits for cabezon: 2,000 pounds for all periods.
      iv. Bi-monthly vessel limits for greenling: 2,000 pounds for all periods.
      v. Permanently suspending per-trip limits in Black Rockfish Management Areas.
   c. **Adopt revised recreational management measures for 2026**:
      i. General marine fish bag limit of four fish with a two-fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish.
      ii. Lingcod bag limit of three fish
      iii. Long-leader fish bag limit of ten fish with a two-fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish
      iv. All other rules – no change.
2. Modify staff proposal for one or more items.
3. Status quo.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Option 1. Adopt the staff recommended groundfish regulations as set forth in Attachment 3.

Option 2. Modify the staff recommended groundfish regulations as set forth in Attachment 3.

Option 3. Reject the staff recommended groundfish regulations as set forth in Attachment 3.

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to amend OAR Chapter 635 Divisions 004 and 039 as proposed by staff in Attachment 3.

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2026.