

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

ISSUE 1

2026 Commercial and Recreational Pacific Halibut Fishery Regulations

BACKGROUND

Pacific halibut research, monitoring, and management is coordinated by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), an international organization established by a convention between Canada and the United States in 1923. The IPHC conducts annual Pacific halibut surveys and stock assessments as well as other halibut-related research, and sets annual fishery catch limits for each of 10 areas across the stock’s range in U.S. and Canadian waters (Figure 1). Oregon is located within IPHC Regulatory Area 2A, which also encompasses Washington and California.

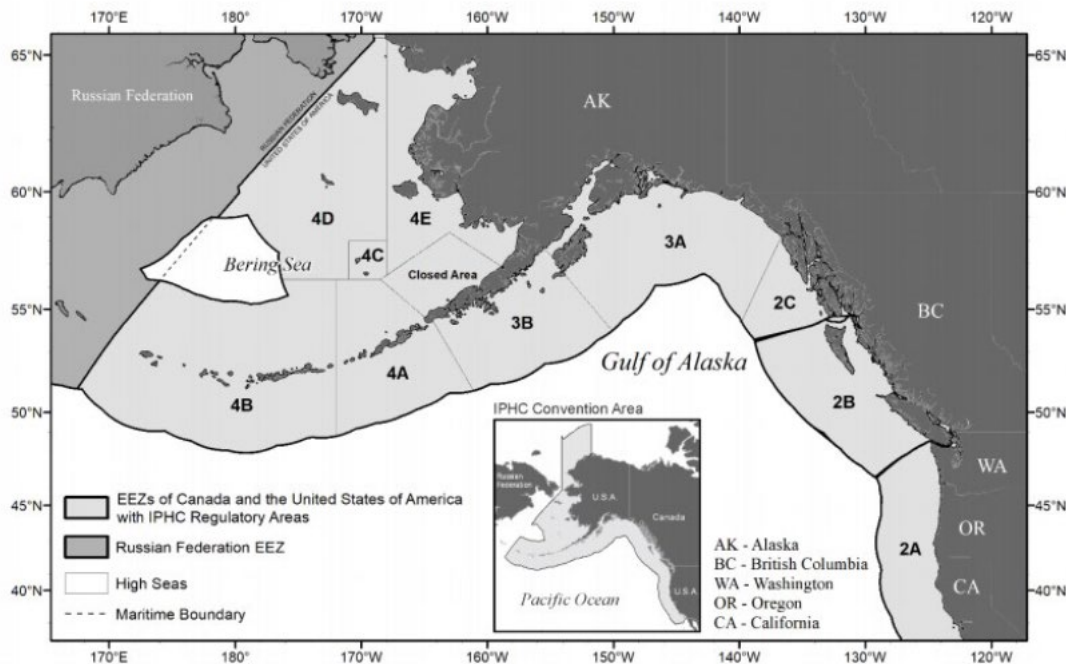


Figure 1. Map of the IPHC Convention Area (inset) and IPHC Regulatory Areas

Within Area 2A, fishery allocations, catch limits, and management measures are determined annually by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), documented in the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP), and adopted into federal rules.

The Commission typically adopts federal Pacific halibut fishery regulations by reference once published by NMFS. In addition, the Commission adopts open dates for the spring halibut fishery in Oregon’s central coast subarea. This agenda item presents the 2026 sport and commercial Pacific halibut fishery regulations for the Commission’s consideration.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The IPHC considers public input as well as advice from two industry advisory groups – the Processor Advisory Board (PAB) and Conference Board (CB) – to balance trade-offs between stock productivity and economic impacts to harvesters and communities as they determine catch limits each year.

Additionally, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the PFMC use a multi-step process to gather public input on potential changes to sport Pacific halibut fisheries in Oregon.

- ODFW annually holds public meetings to discuss the sport fishery and develop proposals for the upcoming year. For the 2026 fishery, a hybrid meeting (in-person and online) occurred in July 2025 in Newport in which 9 people participated.
- The PFMC reviews proposals in September and adopts a range of options for public review and comment. Based on these options ODFW develops final recommendations based on stakeholder input that was solicited during meetings in October 2025 in Brookings, North Bend, and Newport. The Newport meeting was also available as a webinar to provide for remote participation. A total of 64 people took part in at least one of the meetings either in person or remotely.
- The PFMC typically adopts final changes at its November meeting. Similar to the IPHC, the PFMC considers public input as well as advice from an industry advisory group, the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP). In 2025, due to the federal government shutdown, the Magnuson-Stevens Act requirement that a Federal Register Notice (FRN) regarding a PFMC meeting be published 14 days in advance of the meeting was not met for the November 2025 PFMC meeting. The November meeting was still held, but the PFMC was unable to take final action on any issue, including the 2026 Commercial and Recreational Catch Sharing Plan and Annual Regulations. The PFMC held a special meeting in December 2025 to adopt the final 2026 Commercial and Recreational Catch Sharing Plan and Annual Regulations for Pacific halibut.
- Following the IPHC’s determination of quotas in late January, 2026, ODFW seeks input on the number and timing of open days in the Central Oregon Coast subarea’s spring all-depth season. A hybrid meeting was held on February 2, 2026, in Newport, with 16 public in attendance. ODFW then develops recommendations following the public meeting and conveys them directly to NMFS.
- NMFS publishes proposed halibut fishery regulations in the Federal Register (Attachments 7 and 8), considers public comment received (if any), then publishes final rule (Attachment 6). Final rules specific to IPHC Regulatory Area 2A have been delayed for 2026, though will be available prior to the start date of the fisheries.
- 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 comment prior to (in writing) or (orally) during the April Commission meeting.

ANALYSIS

2026 Catch Sharing Plan (CSP)

The IPHC considered updated information on Pacific halibut stock status and trends at its annual meeting in January 2026, and adopted a fishery catch limit of 1,540,000 pounds of Pacific halibut for Area 2A in 2026. This amount is 10,000 pounds higher than in 2025, though similar to the past seven years. The increase from 1.53 million pounds to 1.54 million pounds in 2026 accounts for estimated average annual halibut discards from the prior three years, which is not available during the year of fishing but must be accounted for once the information is made available the following year. As determined by the sharing arrangements in the PFMC's CSP, 2026 catch limits for individual fisheries in Area 2A are:

- Tribal fisheries (WA): 539,000 lbs. (35.0% of Area 2A)
- Commercial fisheries (WA/OR/CA): 377,307 lbs. (24.5%)
- WA sport fishery: 286,356 lbs. (18.6%)
- OR sport fishery: 297,297 lbs. (19.3%)
- CA sport fishery: 40,040 lbs. (2.6%)

The Oregon sport fishery is further broken into three different subareas with seasonal and/or depth-dependent allocations (Attachment 5):

- Columbia River Subarea (Leadbetter Pt. WA to Cape Falcon OR): 19,299 lbs. (2.3% of OR sport + 8,837 lbs. WA sport + remaining Southern OR Subarea quota of 3,624 lbs.)
 - o All-depth: 19,299 lbs.
- Central Coast Subarea (Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt.): 278,835 lbs. (93.79% of OR sport)
 - o Spring all-depth: 209,126 lbs.
 - o Summer all-depth: 59,709 lbs.
 - o Nearshore: 10,000 lbs.
- Southern Oregon Subarea (Humbug Mt. to OR/CA border): 8,000 lbs. (3.91% of OR sport, capped at 8,000 lbs., 3,624 lbs. re-allocated to the Columbia River Subarea)
 - o No seasonal or depth restriction

There are three changes to the CSP that will improve opportunity for Oregon sport Pacific halibut fisheries beginning in 2026. The changes are all intended to provide flexibility to harvest more of the quota, which has not been fully utilized in recent years. These changes were proposed during the 2025 summer and fall public meetings and had broad public support. The three changes to the CSP include:

- Columbia River nearshore fishery – The Columbia River Subarea is managed jointly by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and ODFW. For 2026, the nearshore fishery will be removed, and the 500 pounds that had previously been allocated to this fishery will be shifted to the Columbia River Subarea all-depth season.
- Central Oregon Coast subarea sub-quotas – Allocate 75 percent of the subarea sub-quota to the spring all-depth fishery, regardless of the Regulatory Area 2A Fishery Constant Exploitable Yield (FCEY). If the Area 2A FCEY is 700,000 pounds or greater, allocate 10,000 pounds to the nearshore fishery with the remaining subarea sub-quota allocated to the summer all-depth fishery. If the Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is less than 700,000 pounds, allocate the remaining 25 percent of the sub-quota to the nearshore fishery.

- Central Oregon Coast nearshore fishery – The nearshore season opens May 1, seven days per week, only in waters shoreward of the 40-fathom (73 meter) regulatory line, unless the Regulatory Area 2A FCEY is less than 1.2M pounds, then it may be postponed and open on June 1.

Sport Fishery – 2026 Season Dates

ODFW recommends open “fixed” and “backup” dates for each year’s Central Oregon Coast subarea spring all-depth fishery to NMFS after considering public input.

Background information and a summary of public input are contained in a memo transmitting ODFW’s recommendation to NMFS (Attachment 9). The recommended dates are:

- Spring fishery fixed open dates: May 1 through July 31, seven days per week.

ODFW is also recommending beginning the season with a 2-fish daily bag limit for the Central Oregon Coast and Southern Oregon Subareas.

The CSP has provisions to adjust open days and bag limits in season depending on how the season is progressing. As in past years, ODFW will coordinate with NMFS to make in season adjustments as needed to ensure Oregon anglers have the opportunity to harvest the allocation without exceeding the Oregon sport allocation.

Commercial Fisheries

As in 2020 through 2025, the directed commercial fishery will occur in 3-day (58-hour) open fishing periods. The first opening will start at 0800 on the fourth Tuesday in June and end at 1800 on the subsequent Thursday. Additional openings (up to 58 hours each) may be announced by NMFS if enough quota remains and could occur every other week after the previous opening. Vessel-size based limits will be determined and announced by NMFS prior to the first opening and are expected to be similar to 2025 levels, given the similar quota.

Landing limit options for halibut retention in the commercial salmon troll fishery were developed by the PFMC in March and will be finalized at its April meeting. These limits are based on a ratio of Pacific halibut to salmon with an overall Pacific halibut trip limit.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt the proposed staff recommendations that adopt federal rules by reference as reflected in Attachment 3.
2. Adopt the proposed staff recommendations with changes.
3. Reject the proposed rule changes.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: ISSUE 1

Option 1. Adopt staff recommendations to adopt federal rules by reference as reflected in Attachment 3.

DRAFT MOTION:

Issue 1: I move to amend OAR Chapter 635 Divisions 004 and 039 rules for the 2026 recreational and commercial Pacific halibut fisheries as shown in Attachment 3.

EFFECTIVE DATE: *Upon filing (estimated April 2026)*