



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

ISSUE 1

Commercial Coastal Pelagic Species Fisheries Rule Amendments

BACKGROUND

Fisheries for Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS), including Pacific sardine, Pacific mackerel, jack mackerel, northern anchovy, market squid, and krill, are managed under federal regulations ([Code of Federal Regulations Part 660, Subpart I](#)) The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) typically adopts the federal rules by reference. The Commission is being asked to adopt updated federal harvest specifications and management measures for the Pacific sardine fishery for the upcoming July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027, fishing year. These measures continue the closure of the primary directed sardine fishery and provide very low harvest allowances in other sectors across the West Coast due to the depressed stock status.

The Pacific sardine stock is assessed annually by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) uses the best scientific information available (BSIA), as required by the [Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act](#) (MSA), and recommended by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in setting harvest levels. Additionally, the Council utilizes the harvest specifications framework and harvest control rule specified in the CPS Fishery Management Plan (FMP), along with advice from technical and industry advisors and public input when determining federal harvest limits and management measures. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) participates in this process via a voting seat on the Council and representatives on its Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Management Team and the SSC.

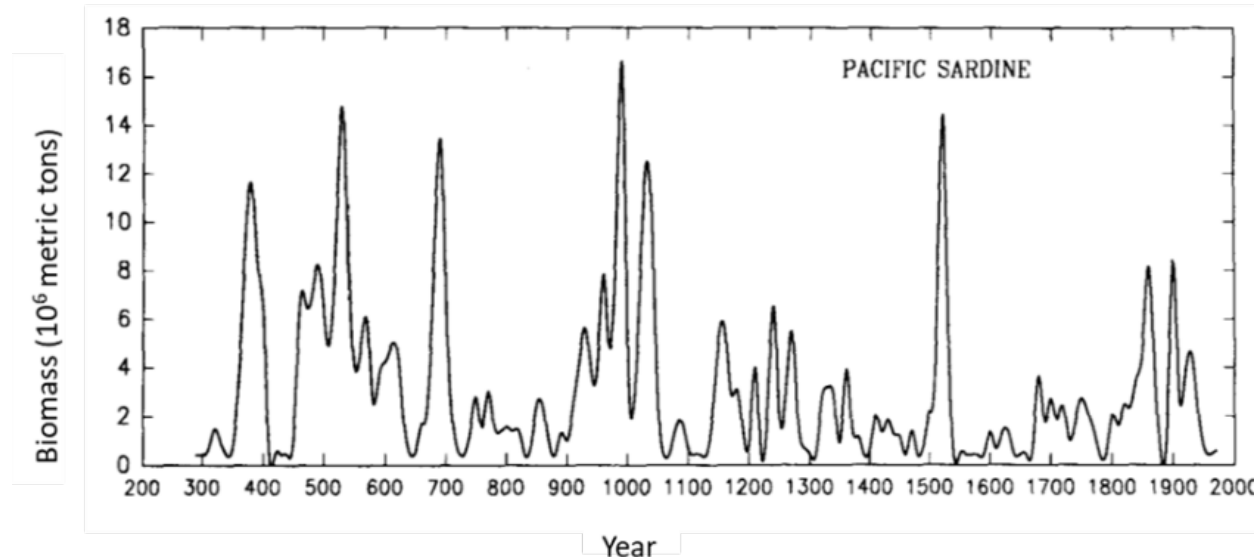
The Council adopted sardine harvest specifications and management measures for the 2026-2027 season at its April 2026 meeting (Attachment 4). The FMP and harvest specifications framework recognize the forage value of sardines, and account for uncertainty in assessment of the stock and management/monitoring of the fishery. The specifications adopted for 2026-2027 use a buffer for scientific uncertainty, resulting in conservative catch limits while also accounting for socio-economic needs of the fishing industry and the public. The Council transmitted its recommendations to NMFS, and the regulations will be published in the Federal Register.

Pacific Sardine Biology and Ecosystem Role

Pacific sardine (*Sardinops sagax*) are prey for many other fish, marine mammals, and seabirds, and are an important component of the forage base in the California Current Ecosystem (CCE). At times of high abundance, Pacific sardines compose a substantial portion of biomass in the CCE. Sardine population size is thought to be primarily driven by environmental conditions and varies naturally. Periods of low recruitment can lead to low population abundance over extended periods. In 1992, Baumgartner and coauthors published an analysis of fish scale deposits in deep ocean sediments off southern California which found layers of sardine and anchovy scales, with scale deposition rates indicating a series of major population spikes and declines over a 1700-year period

(C.E. 270 to 1970). This illustrates the cyclical boom and bust nature of sardines and anchovies (Figure 1).

Figure 1. 1700-year hindcast series of Pacific sardine biomass off California and Baja California (Baumgartner et al. 1992, Reconstruction of the history of Pacific sardine and northern anchovy populations over the past two millennia from sediments on the Santa Barbara Basin, California)



Fluctuating oceanographic conditions can have significant effects on the abundance and distribution of CPS stocks. The El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) are important climate drivers, and alterations in their patterns of temperature, upwelling, and other oceanographic features impact CPS stocks directly and indirectly. Based on past data, sardines appear to become abundant during warm PDO periods, and anchovy during cool PDO periods. However, the mechanisms involved are uncertain, and whether the past correlations will persist into the future, with changing ocean conditions, is uncertain. Extensive information regarding the recent state of the CCE is available in the latest CCE Status Report (see <https://www.pcouncil.org/briefing-book/march-2026-briefing-book/#e.-ecosystem-management-toc-2f0245ca-5b70-4b9c-8869-ebfe04883a4f>) along with a presentation at the Council meeting in March 2026 (<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2026/03/e-1-a-supplemental-cciea-presentation-1-2025-2026-california-current-ecosystem-status-report.pdf>) which provides supplemental information to help understand current conditions in the CCE.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A significant public process was conducted by the Council in the development of the federal harvest specifications and management measures regulations for commercial fisheries for Pacific sardine in 2026-2027. Two written and two verbal comments were provided to the Council at their April meeting by individuals and groups representing commercial fisheries and conservation organizations. The written comments to Council are available on the PFMC website under public comments for the April 2026 meeting (<https://pfmc.agendacomment.com/Meeting/Details/5133?agendaID=20268>). In addition, the Council received input from its Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS), which

represents the commercial and recreational fishing industry, tribes, processors, and conservation interests.

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 hearing that occurs at the Commission meeting.

ANALYSIS

This section provides information on Pacific sardine fisheries, the federal management process, and the federal harvest specifications and management measures for July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027 season which staff recommend adopting by reference.

Pacific Sardine Fisheries History

The Council produces an annual CPS Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) document (see PFMC website <https://www.pcouncil.org/stock-assessments-and-fishery-evaluation-safe-documents/>) which contains a detailed history of sardine fishing on the west coast.

The directed sardine fishery on the west coast, including Oregon, was closed beginning July 1, 2015, when the biomass estimate dropped below the 150,000 mt threshold specified in the FMP, described in more detail below. While directed sardine harvest has been closed, small sardine landings have been allowed for live bait, minor directed fisheries and in CPS fisheries targeting other species such as anchovy and mackerel, as well as in non-CPS sectors, to enable continued operation of those fisheries while protecting the sardine resource. Coastwide sardine landings in these fisheries since the closure have totaled approximately 1-2% of the historical peak, and landings in Oregon are a very small fraction of this coastwide total. Sardine landings on the U.S. west coast for the last five fishing years are provided in Table 1, landings in Oregon have remained a small fraction of the totals. The table also includes the Annual Catch Limit (ACL), which are a requirement of the MSA, and the Annual Catch Target (ACT) which trigger management measures designed to slow down catches so that the ACL is not exceeded.

Table 1. Pacific sardine landings (mt) and harvest specifications for previous sardine fishing seasons (July 1-June 30).

Fishing Season	2021 2022	2022- 2023	2023- 2024	2024- 2025	2025- 2026*
Total Landings	1,782	1,592	1,739	939	789
Annual Catch Target	3,000	3,800	3,600	5,500	2,100
Annual Catch Limit	3,329	4,274	3,953	6,005	2,200

**The 2025-2026 season is still open, data through May 15, 2026*

Pacific Sardine Federal Harvest Quota Determination

The CPS FMP contains an annual harvest specification framework and harvest control rules for Pacific sardine and other CPS fisheries. Biological reference points and formulas used in the framework and control rules are used to describe stock status and calculate catch limits which are then adopted by the Council and implemented by NMFS.

2026-2027 Pacific Sardine Fishery Regulations

No new full or update assessment has been conducted in 2026, instead the Council rolled over the values resulting from the 2025 update assessment, based on recommendation from the SSC. The Council adopted the Pacific sardine overfishing limit (OFL) of 4,645 mt as the best scientific information available, based on the stock assessment, and newly available scientific information (see PFMC Agenda Item F.4.a Supplemental SSC Report 1 at: <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2026/04/f-4-a-supplemental-ssc-report-1-scientific-and-statistical-committee-report-on-pacific-sardine-specifications-and-management-measures-for-2026-2027-final-action.pdf>).

Based on this OFL, harvest control rules in the CPS FMP, and the uncertainty and risk tolerance buffer, the Council adopted the following harvest specifications and accountability/management measures for 2026-2027, **which staff recommend the Commission adopt, by reference to federal rules:**

- **Overfishing Level (OFL)** = **4,645 mt**
- **Allowable Biological Catch (ABC)** = **3,613 mt**
- **Annual Catch Limit (ACL)** = **2,200 mt**
- **Harvest Guideline (HG)** = **zero****
- **Annual Catch Target (ACT)** = **2,100 mt*****

** “Zero HG” means no commercial Pacific sardine catch except as part of the live bait, tribal, or minor directed fisheries, incidental catch in other fisheries, or under an exempted fishing permit (i.e., no catch allowed in the primary nontribal directed sardine fishery)

*** “Annual Catch Target”, triggers further restrictions on fisheries (see below) when coastwide sardine catch reaches this level, providing an additional conservative buffer

- **A 20-percent incidental catch per landing allowance by weight applies to fisheries directed at other CPS.**
- **If the ACT of 2,100 mt is attained, then a 1-mt per trip limit of sardine would apply to all CPS fisheries.**
- **An incidental per-landing allowance of 2 mt of sardine applies to fisheries for non-CPS species.**

All sources of sardine catch will be accounted for against the ACT and ACL.

Expected Impact of Proposed Regulations

Current coastwide fishing mortality is not considered to be the primary constraining factor in rebuilding Pacific sardine. The federal regulations will maintain the primary directed fishery closure and continue to limit other harvest to very low levels to ensure that fishing mortality is not interfering with the stock’s potential to rebuild when environmental conditions become favorable.

In Oregon, the federal management measures will maintain protections for the Pacific sardine stock and are not expected to significantly constrain existing fishing activities beyond continuing the directed sardine closure. Commercial fishing for other CPS in waters off Oregon in recent years has primarily targeted market squid and vessels fishing for coastal pelagic species have maintained incidental Pacific sardine catch well below the specified percent per landing limit.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt federal regulations, by reference, as shown in Attachment 3 for Pacific sardine fisheries.
2. Adopt more restrictive regulations for Pacific sardine fisheries for Oregon.

DRAFT MOTION:

I move that we adopt the federal regulations, by reference, as shown in Attachment 3 for Pacific sardine fisheries for 2026-27.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026