



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 300

[RTID 0648-XF353; Docket No. 260319-0084]

Pacific Halibut Fisheries of the West Coast; 2026 Catch Sharing Plan and Recreational Fishery Management Measures

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes to approve changes to the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for the International Pacific Halibut Commission's (IPHC) regulatory Area 2A off Washington, Oregon, and California. In addition, NMFS proposes to implement management measures for the 2026 recreational fisheries in Area 2A that are not implemented through IPHC regulations. These measures include the recreational fishery seasons and subarea allocations for Area 2A. These actions are intended to conserve Pacific halibut and provide angler opportunity where available.

DATES: Comments on the proposed rule must be received on or before [INSERT DATE 15 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE **FEDERAL REGISTER**].

ADDRESSES: A plain language summary of this proposed rule is available at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NMFS-2025-1131>. You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2025-1131, by either of the following methods:

- *Electronic Submission:* Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Visit <https://www.regulations.gov> and type NOAA-NMFS-

2025-1131 in the Search box. Click on the “Comment” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- *Mail:* Submit written comments to Jennifer Quan, Regional Administrator, c/o Melissa Mandrup, West Coast Region, NMFS, 8901 La Jolla Shores Dr., La Jolla, CA 92037.

Instructions: Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NMFS. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on <https://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (*e.g.*, name, address), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

Docket: This proposed rule is accessible at the Office of the Federal Register website at <https://www.federalregister.gov>. Background information and documents are available at the NMFS West Coast Region Pacific Halibut Recreational Fishery website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/2025-pacific-halibut-recreational-fishery> and at the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s website at <https://www.pcouncil.org>. Other comments received may be accessed through <https://www.regulations.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Melissa Mandrup, West Coast Region, NMFS, 562-980-3231, melissa.mandrup@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982 (Halibut Act), 16 U.S.C. 773-773k, gives the Secretary of Commerce responsibility for implementing the provisions of the Halibut Convention between Canada and the United States for the Preservation of the

Halibut Fishery of the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea (Halibut Convention, signed at Ottawa, Ontario, on March 2, 1953), as amended by a Protocol Amending the Halibut Convention, (signed at Washington, DC, on March 29, 1979), including the responsibility to adopt regulations to carry out the Act (16 U.S.C. 773c). Additionally, the Halibut Act provides that the regional fishery management council with authority for the geographic area concerned may develop regulations governing Pacific halibut fishing in U.S. waters that are in addition to, and not in conflict with, approved IPHC regulations (*id.* 773c(c)). Such regulations may be implemented only with the approval of the Secretary of Commerce.

As provided in the Halibut Act at 16 U.S.C. 773b, the Secretary of State, with the concurrence of the Secretary of Commerce, may accept or reject, on behalf of the United States, regulations recommended by the IPHC in accordance with the Halibut Convention. Following acceptance by the Secretary of State, the annual management measures promulgated by the IPHC are published in the **Federal Register** to provide notice of their immediate regulatory effectiveness and to inform persons subject to the regulations of their restrictions and requirements (50 CFR 300.62). The IPHC held its annual meeting January 19-22, 2026, where it recommended the Area 2A catch limit, also known as the Fishery Constant Exploitation Yield (FCEY), for 2026 of 1.54 million pounds (lb) or 699 metric tons (mt). This FCEY is derived from the total constant exploitation yield (TCEY) for Pacific halibut, which includes commercial discards and bycatch estimates calculated using a formula developed by the IPHC. The 2026 TCEY of 1.65 million lb (748 mt) and FCEY of 1.54 million lb (699 mt) for Area 2A, as well as other applicable Area 2A allocations that are established by the IPHC in accordance with the Area 2A CSP, will be published as part of a separate rulemaking. These allocations,

in net weight,¹ will be based on IPHC's recommended Area 2A FCEY of 1.54 million lb (699 mt) for 2026 and will be subject to acceptance by the Secretary of State with concurrence by the Secretary of Commerce.

Since 1988, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) has developed a CSP that allocates the IPHC regulatory Area 2A Pacific halibut FCEY between treaty Tribal and non-Tribal harvesters and among non-Tribal commercial and recreational fisheries. NMFS has implemented certain provisions of the CSP, and implemented annual rules containing annual management measures consistent with the CSP, at 50 CFR 300.63 *et seq.* In 1995, the Council recommended and NMFS approved a long-term Area 2A CSP (60 FR 14651, March 20, 1995). NMFS has been approving adjustments to the Area 2A CSP based on Council recommendations each year to address the changing needs of these fisheries. While the full CSP is not published in the **Federal Register**, it is made available on the Council website.

This rule proposes to approve the changes to the Area 2A CSP for the 2026 fishing year that the Council recommended at a special session meeting in December 2025. The recommended changes to the 2026 CSP were developed through the Council's public process over multiple meetings. This rule also proposes to implement recreational Pacific halibut fishery management measures for 2026, including certain season opening and closing dates for the Area 2A subareas, which are consistent with 2026 CSP as modified by the Council's recommendations at its special session meeting in December 2025. For 2026, certain season opening and closing dates for Area 2A subareas will be implemented through the annual IPHC regulations.

Proposed Changes to the 2026 Area 2A Catch Sharing Plan

¹ "Net weight" of a Pacific halibut means the weight of a Pacific halibut that is without gills and entrails, head-off, washed, and without ice and slime. If a Pacific halibut is weighed with the head on or with ice and slime, the required conversion factors for calculating net weight are a 2 percent deduction for ice and slime and a 10 percent deduction for the head (IPHC Fisheries Regulations, 2025).

Each year at the Council's September meeting, members of the public have an opportunity to propose changes to the CSP for consideration by the Council. At the September 2025 Council meeting, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) proposed changes to the CSP for the fisheries that occur off of their respective coasts.

At its November 2025 meeting and December 2025 special session meeting, the Council considered the recommendations from the State agencies, including results of State-sponsored workshops, regarding proposed changes to the CSP, along with public input provided at multiple Council meetings, and made its recommendations for annual modifications to the CSP. NMFS proposes to approve the following Council-recommended changes to the 2026 CSP:

1. Section 6.9.3(d) - modify the season structure in the Washington South Coast subarea to allow for fishing 4 days per week in May (Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday).

2. Section 6.10(a) - modify the depth areas in the Columbia River subarea by removing the nearshore fishery and allocating the 500 lb (0.2 mt) to the all-depth fishery.

3. Section 6.11(d)(i) - modify the season structure in the Oregon Central Coast subarea by opening the nearshore season May 1, 7 days per week, only in waters shoreward of the 40-fathom (73-meter) regulatory line, unless the Area 2A FCEY is less than 1.2 million lb (544.3 mt), in which case the opening may be postponed until June 1.

4. Section 6.11(d)(ii) - modify the all-depth and nearshore fishery allocations in the Oregon Central Coast subarea by allocating 75 percent of the subarea allocation to the spring all-depth fishery, regardless of the Area 2A FCEY, and (1) if the Area 2A FCEY is 700,000 lb (317.5 mt) or greater, allocating 10,000 lb (4.5 mt) to the nearshore fishery with the remaining subarea allocation to the summer all-depth fishery, or (2) if the Area

2A FCEY is less than 700,000 lb (317.5 mt), allocating the remaining 25 percent of the subarea allocation to the nearshore fishery.

5. Sections 6.12.1(d) and 6.12.2(d) - modify the season structures in the California Coast subareas to have the flexibility to open in April.

Additional discussion of these changes is included in the materials submitted to the Council at its September, November, and December meetings, available at <https://www.pcouncil.org/council-meetings/previous-meetings/>. A version of the CSP including these changes can be found at

https://www.pcouncil.org/managed_fishery/pacific-halibut/.

Proposed 2026 Recreational Fishery Management Measures

As described above, NMFS proposes to implement recreational fishery management measures, including certain season dates for the 2026 fishery, consistent with the Council's recommendations. The CSP includes a framework for setting days open for fishing by subarea. Under this framework, each State submits its final recommended season dates annually to NMFS during the comment period on this proposed rule. In addition, the final dates are based on the 2026 FCEY Area 2A allocation, which is issued as described above. Accordingly, this proposed rule contains the preliminary season dates for the Area 2A subareas, based on the CSP framework and recommendations from the States that have been received to date.

After the opportunity for public comment, NMFS will publish a final rule approving the CSP and promulgating the annual management measures for the Area 2A recreational fishery, as required by implementing regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c)(1). If there is any discrepancy between the CSP and Federal regulations, Federal regulations take precedence.

For Area 2A, NMFS proposes 2026 recreational fishing subarea allocations and fishing dates as described below. Fishery and subarea allocations are provided in net

weight. All recreational fishing in Area 2A is managed on a “port of landing” basis, whereby any Pacific halibut landed into a port counts toward the allocation, in net weight, for the subarea in which that port is located, and the regulations governing the subarea of landing apply regardless of the specific area of catch.

The provisions contained in this rule may be modified through inseason action consistent with 50 CFR 300.63(c). For example, subarea allocations may be transferred between subareas within a State inseason in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63—paragraphs (c)(6)(i)(C), (c)(6)(i)(D), and (c)(6)(i)(E)—and from one State to another inseason in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c)(6)(i)(G). Inseason actions taken by NMFS will be published in the **Federal Register**. In addition to publication in the **Federal Register**, NMFS will make the public aware of inseason management actions by telephone hotline, (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825, and fishery bulletins administered through email by NMFS West Coast Region. Recreational anglers are encouraged to monitor the telephone hotline and subscribe to receive fishery bulletin emails for current information for the subarea in which they are landing fish.

Washington Puget Sound and the U.S. Convention waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca

Subarea allocation

The subarea allocation for landings into ports in Puget Sound and the U.S. Convention Waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca will be provided in the final rule based on the allocation formula in the CSP.

Season structure

If the 2026 Area 2A FCEY is 1.3 million lb (589.7 mt) or greater, consistent with the 2026 IPHC regulations, NMFS is proposing to open the subarea from April 2 through June 30, 7 days per week. If the subarea allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing after June 30, NMFS may take inseason action to reopen the fishery in August

through September, up to 7 days per week. The area will be closed when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing. If the subarea season is closed prior to September 30 and there is insufficient allocation for an additional fishing day, NMFS may take inseason action to transfer any remaining subarea allocation to another Washington coastal subarea.

If the 2026 Area 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million lb (589.7 mt), then NMFS proposes to open the subarea every Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday from April 2 through June 30. If the subarea allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing after June 30, NMFS may take inseason action to reopen the subarea in August through September, up to 7 days per week. The area will be closed when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing. If the subarea season is closed prior to September 30 and there is insufficient allocation for an additional fishing day, NMFS may take inseason action to transfer any remaining subarea allocation to another Washington subarea.

Any inseason action, including closures and reallocation, will be announced in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c) and on the NMFS hotline at (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825.

Landing restrictions

The daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Washington North Coast Subarea

Subarea allocation

The allocation for landings into ports in the Washington North Coast subarea will be provided in the final rule based on the allocation formula in the CSP.

Season structure

If the Area 2A 2026 FCEY is 1.3 million lb (589.7 mt) or greater, NMFS is proposing to open the subarea:

- April 30 (Thursday),
- May 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, (Thursday, Friday, Saturday),
- May 22, 23, 24, (Friday, Saturday, Sunday - Memorial Day weekend),
- May 28, 29, 30 (Thursday, Friday, Saturday),
- June 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28 (Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday).

If the subarea allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing after June 30, NMFS may take inseason action to reopen the fishery in August through September, up to 7 days per week. The subarea will be closed when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing. If the fishery is closed prior to September 30 and there is insufficient allocation remaining to reopen for another fishing day, NMFS may take inseason action to transfer any remaining allocation to another Washington subarea.

If the 2026 Area 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million lb (589.7 mt), then NMFS is proposing to open the subarea:

- April 30 (Thursday),
- May 2, 7, 9, 14, 16 (Thursday, Saturday),
- May 22, 24 (Friday, Sunday - Memorial Day weekend),
- May 28, 30 (Thursday, Saturday),
- June 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28 (Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday).

If the subarea allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing after June 30, NMFS may take inseason action to reopen the fishery in August through September, up to 7 days per week. The subarea will be closed when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing. If the fishery is closed prior to September 30 and there is insufficient allocation remaining to reopen for another fishing day, NMFS

may take inseason action to transfer any remaining allocation to another Washington subarea.

Any inseason action, including closures and reallocation, will be announced in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c) and on the NMFS hotline at (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825.

Landing restrictions

The daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Washington South Coast Subarea

Subarea allocation

The allocation for landings into ports in the Washington South Coast subarea will be provided in the final rule based on the allocation formula in the CSP. The South Coast subarea has a primary and a nearshore fishery.

Season structure

NMFS is proposing to open the primary fishery:

- April 30 (Thursday),
- May 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, 31
(Thursday, Friday, Sunday, Tuesday),
- June 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18, 21, 23, 25, 28, 30 (Thursday, Sunday, Tuesday).

The fishery will close when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing. However, if the subarea allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing after June 30, NMFS may take inseason action to reopen the fishery in August through September, up to 7 days per week. The subarea will be closed when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing.

When the primary fishery does not have sufficient allocation to open for at least another full day of fishing, any remaining primary fishery allocation will be used to open

a nearshore fishery. The nearshore fishery will open the first Saturday after the closure of the primary fishery and will be open 7 days per week until there is not sufficient nearshore fishery allocation remaining for another full day of fishing, at which point the subarea will be closed.

If the primary fishery is closed prior to September 30 and there is not sufficient allocation remaining for at least a full day of fishing in the nearshore fishery, NMFS may take inseason action to transfer any remaining subarea allocation to another Washington subarea.

Any inseason action, including closures and reallocation, will be announced in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c) and on the NMFS hotline at (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825.

Landing restrictions

The daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Columbia River Subarea

Subarea allocation

The allocation for landings into ports in the Columbia River subarea will be provided in the final rule based on the allocation formula in the CSP. The Columbia River subarea has an all-depth fishery and a nearshore fishery.

Season structure

If the 2026 Area 2A FCEY is 1.3 million lb (589.7 mt) or greater, NMFS proposes to open the all-depth fishery as follows:

- April 30 (Thursday),
- May 1, 3, 7, 8, 10, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29, 31 (Thursday, Friday, Sunday),
- June 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 28 (Thursday, Friday, Sunday).

If at least 55 percent of the Columbia River subarea allocation remains as of May 25, 2026, then NMFS may take inseason action to allow the all-depth fishery to open the following additional days:

- June 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23 (Monday, Tuesday).

If the 2026 Area 2A FCEY is less than 1.3 million lb (589.7 mt), NMFS proposes to open the all-depth fishery as follows:

- April 30 (Thursday),
- May 1, 3, 7, 8, 10, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29, 31 (Thursday, Friday, Sunday),
- June 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 28 (Thursday, Friday, Sunday).

If the subarea allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing after June 30, NMFS may take inseason action to reopen the fishery in August through September, up to 7 days per week. The area will be closed when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing. Any remaining subarea allocation may be transferred inseason to other Washington or Oregon subareas by NMFS in proportion to the allocation formula in the CSP, in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c). Any inseason action, including closures and reallocation, will be announced in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c) and on the NMFS hotline at (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825.

Landing restrictions

The daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Oregon Central Coast Subarea

Subarea allocation

The allocation for landings into ports in the Oregon Central Coast subarea will be provided in the final rule based on the allocation formula in the CSP. The Oregon Central Coast subarea has a nearshore, a spring all-depth, and a summer all-depth fishery.

Season structure

For the nearshore fishery allocation, if the Area 2A FCEY is 700,000 lb (317.5 mt) or greater, NMFS proposes to allocate 10,000 lb (4.5 mt) to this fishery; if less than 700,000 lb (317.5 mt), NMFS proposes to allocate 25 percent of the Oregon Central Coast allocation to this fishery. For the nearshore fishery season structure, NMFS proposes to open the fishery from May 1 through October 31, 7 days per week. However, if the FCEY is less than 1.2 million lb (544.3 mt), then the nearshore fishery may be postponed and open on June 1. The fishery will be closed when there is not sufficient fishery allocation for another full day of fishing.

For the spring all-depth fishery allocation, regardless of the Area 2A FCEY, NMFS proposes 75 percent of the Central Coast subarea allocation be allocated to this fishery. For the spring all-depth fishery season structure, NMFS proposes to open the spring all-depth fishery from May 1 through July 31, up to 7 days per week. The fishery will be closed when there is not sufficient fishery allocation for another full day of fishing.

For the summer all-depth fishery, if the Area 2A FCEY is 700,000 lb (317.5 mt) or greater, NMFS proposes 25 percent of the Central Coast subarea allocation, less the 10,000 lb (4.5 mt) allocated to the nearshore fishery, be allocated to the summer all-depth fishery. However, if the Area 2A FCEY is less than 700,000 lb (317.5 mt), the summer all-depth fishery will not receive an allocation (*i.e.*, does not open) and the spring all-depth fishery will continue through October 31. The all-depth fishery will be closed when there is not sufficient fishery allocation for another full day of fishing. Should the summer all-depth fishery receive an allocation, NMFS is proposing to open the summer all-depth fishery from August 1 through October 31, 7 days a week; however, the weeks the fishery is open depends on the remaining amount of allocation from the nearshore and spring all-depth fisheries by July 31, the close of the spring all-depth fishery. If there is

50,000 lb (22.7 mt) or more allocation remaining, NMFS proposes to open the summer all-depth fishery from August 1 through October 31, 7 days per week, every week. If there is less than 50,000 lb (22.7 mt) allocation remaining, NMFS proposes to open the summer all-depth fishery from August 1 through October 31, 7 days per week, every other week. If the entire Oregon Central Coast subarea allocation is 30,000 lb (13.6 mt) or more following Labor Day Weekend, the summer all-depth season will be open 7 days per week every week. The subarea will close when the remaining combined spring all-depth fishery and summer all-depth fishery allocations in the Oregon Central Coast subarea is not sufficient for another full day of fishing. If the Oregon Central Coast subarea is not projected to utilize its allocation by the season ending date, NMFS may take inseason action to transfer any projected unused allocation to another Oregon subarea.

Any inseason action, including closures and reallocation, will be announced in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c) and on the NMFS hotline at (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825.

Landing restrictions

The daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Southern Oregon Coast Subarea

Subarea allocation

The allocation for landings into ports in the Southern Oregon Coast subarea will be provided in the final rule based on the allocation formula in the CSP.

Season structure

NMFS is proposing to open the subarea from May 1 through October 31, 7 days per week, or until there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing, at which point the area will be closed. If the Southern Oregon Coast subarea is not

projected to utilize its allocation by the season ending date, NMFS may take inseason action to transfer any projected unused allocation to another Oregon subarea.

Any inseason action, including closures and reallocation, will be announced in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c) and on the NMFS hotline at (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825.

Landing restrictions

The daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Northern California Coast subarea

Subarea allocation

The allocation for landings into ports in the Northern California Coast subarea will be provided in the final rule based on the allocation formula in the CSP.

Season structure

Consistent with the 2026 IPHC regulations, NMFS is proposing to open the subarea from April 1 through November 15, 7 days per week, or until there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing, at which point the area will be closed. If the Northern California subarea is not projected to utilize its respective allocation prior to or by the season ending date, NMFS may take inseason action to transfer any projected unused allocation to the South of Point Arena subarea.

Any inseason action, including closures and reallocation, will be announced in accordance with Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c) and on the NMFS hotline at (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825.

Landing restrictions

The daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

South of Point Arena subarea

Subarea allocation

The allocation for landings into ports in the South of Point Arena subarea will be provided in the final rule based on the allocation formula in the CSP.

Season structure

Consistent with the 2026 IPHC regulations, NMFS is proposing to open the subarea from April 1 through December 31, 7 days per week, or until there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing, at which point the area will be closed. NMFS will announce any closure in accordance with Federal procedures at 50 CFR 300.63(c)(3) and on the NMFS hotline (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825.

Landing restrictions

The daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Allocation Transfers between the Area 2A States

Transfers of unused allocation between States may also occur through inseason action in accordance to Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c)(6)(i)(G), if any State is projected to not utilize its recreational allocation by the end of the fishing seasons in its respective subareas.

Classification

Under section 773 of the Halibut Act, the Council may develop, and the Secretary of Commerce may implement, regulations governing Pacific halibut fishing by U.S. fishermen in Area 2A that are in addition to, and not in conflict with, approved IPHC regulations (16 U.S.C. 773c(c)). The proposed rule is consistent with the Council and NMFS's authority under the Halibut Act. NMFS concludes a 15-day comment period is sufficient because the proposed season structures and management measures proposed in this action, including opening dates, were developed through the Council's public process and recommended by the Council in December 2025. Additionally, the 2026 Area 2A FCEY was developed through the IPHC's public process, with the Area 2A recreational fishery allocations based on the formulas set in the long-term CSP. Fishery participants

and other stakeholders therefore had notice of the substance of the proposed season structures and management measures for several months, with multiple opportunities for public comment provided in the Council and IPHC forums. The regulated public is expecting the season structures, including opening dates, proposed in this action to be implemented and has made business plans, accordingly. For the remaining subareas in Washington and Oregon, for which the 2026 IPHC regulations do not implement season structure, opening dates are set to be April 30 and May 1, respectively. If this proposed action is not finalized by those dates, such delay would likely result in lost opportunity within the Area 2A recreational fishery and the inability for the fishery to catch its full subarea allocations. A 15-day comment period is appropriate here because it balances the benefit of additional public comment against the needs of fishery participants and the socioeconomic benefits provided by achieving the late April and early May opening dates for certain subareas.

This action is exempt from review under E.O. 12866. This rule is exempt from the requirements of E.O. 14192 because it is a routine fishing action.

The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration that this proposed rule, if adopted, would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities, for the following reasons:

For Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) purposes only, NMFS has determined that charter vessels targeting Pacific halibut are all small businesses. Charter fishing operations are classified under NAICS code 487210, with a corresponding Small Business Association size standard of \$14 million in annual receipts (13 CFR 121.201).

This proposed rule would open the 2026 Area 2A Pacific halibut recreational fishery and establish season dates and subarea allocations. The proposed season dates and subarea allocations are similar to those implemented for the 2025 fishing year. Moreover,

overall participation in the Pacific halibut recreational fisheries in Area 2A is not expected to change in 2026 as compared to the 2025 fishing year.

This action would affect anglers, charter vessels (which are small entities), and small businesses relying on recreational fishing across Area 2A. There are no large entities involved in the Pacific halibut fisheries off the west coast, and no commercial fishing entities are directly affected by this rule. None of these changes will have a disproportionately negative effect on small entities versus large entities. Private vessels used for recreational fishing are not businesses and are therefore not included in the RFA analysis.

In 2025, NMFS issued 117 permits to the recreational charter vessel fleet for Area 2A. NMFS anticipates a similar number of permits to be issued in 2026. These permit holders would be affected by these regulations as the permitted vessels operate in Area 2A. The major driver of profitability for charter vessels participating in the Pacific halibut recreational fishery, results from the catch limit decisions (*i.e.*, FCEYs) which were made by the IPHC at its annual meeting January 19-22, 2026, a decision independent from this proposed action. This proposed action would implement management measures to optimize recreational fishing opportunity under the IPHC allocations, but has limited independent economic effect. Therefore, the proposed rule is unlikely to significantly increase or reduce the profitability of the recreational fishery or the small charter fishing businesses that target Pacific halibut off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. Thus, although this proposed action would impact a substantial number of small businesses, it is not expected to have a significant economic impact. Finally, none of these changes would have a disproportionately negative effect on small entities versus large entities because no large entities participate in the Pacific halibut recreational fishery in Area 2A.

For the reasons described above, the proposed action, if adopted, will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. As a result, an initial regulatory flexibility analysis is not required and none has been prepared. As part of the public comment on this proposed action, NMFS requests public comment on its proposal to certify the action as not having a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities.

This proposed rule contains no information collection requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

Dated: March 20, 2026.

Samuel D. Rauch, III,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2026-05801 Filed: 3/24/2026 8:45 am; Publication Date: 3/25/2026]