



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 300

[RTID 0648-XF353; Docket No. 260428-0118]

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: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This final rule approves 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, the rule implements management measures for the 2026 recreational fisheries in Regulatory Area 2A, including the recreational fishery season open dates and subarea allocations for Regulatory Area 2A. These actions are intended to conserve Pacific halibut, while providing additional angler opportunity to achieve the Regulatory Area 2A allocation set by the IPHC.

DATES: This rule is effective April 30, 2026.

ADDRESSES: This rule is accessible via the Office of the Federal Register website at <https://www.federalregister.gov/>. Background information is available at the NMFS West Coast Region website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/region/west-coast> and the Catch Sharing Plan and other related documents at the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) website at <https://www.pcouncil.org>.

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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, ON, 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).

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 only be implemented with the approval of the Secretary of Commerce.

Under the Halibut Act, 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 (16 U.S.C. 773b). 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).

At its annual meeting held January 19–22, 2026, the IPHC adopted new regulations that open the recreational fisheries in the Washington Puget Sound and U.S. Convention waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca subarea on the first Thursday of April (*i.e.*, April 2, 2026) and in the Northern California and South of Point Arena subareas on April 1, 2026. At its annual meeting, the IPHC also adopted a Regulatory Area 2A catch limit, referred to as the fishery constant exploitation yield (FCEY), of 1.54 million

pounds (lb) or 699.0 metric tons (mt) of Pacific halibut. The FCEY is derived from the total constant exploitation yield (TCEY) of 1.65 million lb (748 mt) for Regulatory Area 2A, which includes commercial discards and bycatch estimates calculated using a formula developed by the IPHC. On March 23, 2026, the Secretary of State accepted, with concurrence from the Secretary of Commerce, the opening dates and bag limits for the recreational fisheries in the Washington and California subareas, the Regulatory Area 2A TECY, the Regulatory Area 2A FCEY, and commercial and recreational fishery allocations (in net weight¹) that were adopted by the IPHC. These management measures, catch limits, and allocations were subsequently published in the **Federal Register** on March 25, 2026 (91 FR 14464).

This final rule implements the opening dates and management measures (e.g., season dates and bag limits) for the Washington North Coast, Washington South Coast, Columbia River, Oregon Central Coast, and Southern Oregon subareas, along with the 2026 recreational fishery subarea allocations based on the 2026 Regulatory Area 2A FCEY, which was adopted by the IPHC and published in the **Federal Register** on March 25, 2026 (91 FR 14464). Additionally, the March 25, 2026 final rule (91 FR 14464) contains IPHC regulations and other Regulatory Area 2A annual domestic management measures that are published each year under NMFS's authority to implement the Halibut Convention (50 CFR 300.62).

Since 1988, the Council's CSP has included an allocation framework for apportioning the IPHC Regulatory Area 2A Pacific halibut FCEY between treaty Tribal and non-Tribal harvesters and among non-Tribal commercial and recreational (sport) fisheries. At 50 CFR 300.63 *et seq.*, NMFS has implemented certain provisions of the

¹ "Net weight" of a Pacific halibut means "the weight of 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" (<https://www.iphc.int/uploads/2025/02/IPHC-Fishery-Regulations-2025-5-Feb-2026.pdf>).

CSP. NMFS also issues rules containing annual management measures consistent with the CSP. In 1995, a long-term Regulatory Area 2A CSP took effect (60 FR 14651, March 20, 1995). NMFS has been promulgating adjustments to the Regulatory 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: https://www.pcouncil.org/managed_fishery/pacific-halibut/.

This rule finalizes changes to the 2026 Regulatory Area 2A CSP, which were developed through the Council’s public process over multiple meetings. The changes to the CSP were detailed in the proposed rule and are not repeated here (91 FR 14511, March 25, 2026). This rule also implements recreational Pacific halibut fishery management measures for 2026, including certain season opening and closing dates for the Area 2A subareas that are not implemented through the annual IPHC regulations. These management measures are consistent with the recommendations made by the Council for the 2026 CSP and the season dates recommended by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) during the proposed rule’s public comment period.

2026 Annual Recreational Management Measures

This rule finalizes recreational fishery management measures consistent with the revisions to the 2026 CSP. If there is any discrepancy between the CSP and regulations, the regulations take precedence. These provisions may be modified through inseason action consistent with 50 CFR 300.63(c). All recreational fishing in Regulatory Area 2A is managed on a “port of landing” basis, whereby any 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 2026 recreational fishing subareas, allocations (in net weight), fishing dates, and daily bag limits are described below. 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—specifically, 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. Since provisions of these regulations may be changed by inseason actions, 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. To sign up to receive fishery bulletins about Pacific halibut via email from the West Coast Region use the following link: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USNOAAFISHERIES/subscriber/new>.

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

Subarea allocation

The Pacific halibut recreational fishing allocation for landings into ports in Puget Sound and the U.S. waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca subarea is 80,512 lb (36.5 mt).

Season structure

Consistent with IPHC regulations, the Puget Sound subarea is open 7 days per week 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 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.

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

Consistent with the 2026 IPHC regulations, 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 is 131,149 lb (59.5 mt).

Season structure

The Washington North Coast subarea is open:

- April 30 (Thursday);
- May 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, (Thursday, Friday, Saturday);
- May 22, 23, 24, (Friday, Saturday, Sunday of Memorial Day weekend);
- May 28, 29, 30 (Thursday, Friday, Saturday); and
- 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 up to 7 days per week while sufficient subarea allocation remains in August through September. The specific day or days of the week that the fishery may reopen would be determined through

inseason action. 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 Pacific halibut recreational fishing allocation for landings into ports in the Washington South Coast subarea is 65,857 lb (29.9 mt).

Season structure

The Washington South Coast primary fishery is open:

- 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); and
- 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 up to 7 days per week while sufficient subarea allocation remains in August through September. The specific day or days of the week that the fishery may reopen would be determined

through inseason action. 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 Pacific halibut recreational fishing allocation for landings into ports in the Columbia River subarea is 19,299 lb (8.8 mt).

Season structure

The Columbia River subarea is open:

- April 30 (Thursday);
- May 1, 3, 7, 8, 10, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29, 31 (Thursday, Friday, Sunday); and

- June 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 28 (Thursday, Friday, Sunday).

Additionally, if NMFS determines that sufficient allocation is available to add fishing dates for this subarea in June, NMFS may take inseason action to allow the fishery to open the following additional days in June:

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

The determination of whether allocation is sufficient to open these additional days will be based on catch and effort in May and projections for June. The proposed rule for this action stated that this determination would be based on whether 55 percent of the Columbia River subarea allocation remained as of May 25, 2026. However, that was residual language from the 2025 CSP and included by error. Rather than the specific percentage employed in the 2025 CSP, consistent with the revised 2026 CSP, and as recommended by the Council and expected by the public following the Council process, the new determination of whether additional fishing dates are warranted in June is based on a qualitative assessment by NMFS of whether sufficient allocation remains based on catch effort in May and projections in June.

If the subarea allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing after June 30, NMFS may also take inseason action to reopen the fishery up to 7 days per week in August through September. 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

The Pacific halibut recreational fishing allocation for landings into ports in the Oregon Central Coast subarea is 278,835 lb (126.5 mt). The nearshore fishery allocation is 10,000 lb (4.5 mt), the spring all-depth fishery allocation is 209,126 lb (94.9 mt), and the summer all-depth fishery allocation is 59,709 lb (27.1 mt).

Season structure

The nearshore fishery is open 7 days per week from May 1 through October 31. The area will close when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing. 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.

The spring all-depth fishery is open 7 days per week from May 1 through July 31. The area will be closed when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing. 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.

The summer all-depth fishery is open 7 days per week from August 1 through October 31; 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, the summer all-depth fishery will open 7 days per week, every week, from August 1 through October 31. If there is less than 50,000 lb (22.7 mt) allocation remaining the summer all-depth fishery will open 7 days per week, every *other* week, from August 1 through October 31. If the entire Oregon Central Coast subarea allocation remaining 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 two Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Southern Oregon Subarea

Subarea allocation

The allocation for landings into ports in the Southern Oregon subarea is 8,000 lb (3.6 mt).

Season structure

The fishery is open 7 days per week from May 1 through October 31. The area will close when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing. If the Southern Oregon 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 two Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Northern California Coast subarea

Subarea allocation

The Pacific halibut recreational fishing allocation for landings into ports in the Northern California Coast subarea is 39,540 lb (17.9 mt).

Season structure

Consistent with the 2026 IPHC regulations, the fishery is open 7 days per week from April 1 through November 15. If the Northern California Coast 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. The area will close when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing.

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

Consistent with the 2026 IPHC regulations, the daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

South of Point Arena subarea

The Pacific halibut recreational fishing allocation for landings into ports in the South of Point Arena subarea is 500 lb (0.2 mt).

Season structure

Consistent with the 2026 IPHC regulations, the fishery is open 7 days per week from April 1 through December 31. The area will close when there is not sufficient subarea allocation for another full day of fishing.

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

Consistent with the 2026 IPHC regulations, the daily bag limit is one Pacific halibut of any size per person.

Comments and Responses

NMFS published a proposed rule on March 25, 2026 (91 FR 14511) and requested public comment on the 2026 Regulatory Area 2A CSP and the proposed 2026 annual management measures. NMFS received four distinct public comments on the proposed rule only; one of which was responsive to this action from the ODFW.

Comment 1: ODFW submitted a comment recommending that the 2026 Oregon Central Coast subarea's spring all-depth recreational fishery season dates be those included in the proposed rule: 7 days per week, May 1–July 31. In contrast to the one Pacific halibut of any size per person daily bag limit included in the proposed rule, ODFW recommended that the daily bag limit for the Oregon Central Coast and Southern Oregon subareas be two Pacific halibut of any size per person. ODFW's recommendations for the 2026 season dates and bag limits are based on feedback from a public meeting ODFW conducted following the IPHC annual meeting, as well as on past fishing effort and harvest rates, other fishing opportunities anticipated for 2026, the potential for adverse weather impacts on fishing in 2026, and the risk of exceeding the combined spring and summer all-depth fishery allocations.

Response: NMFS appreciates ODFW's public outreach and its recommendations for the 2026 season dates and bag limits and has revised the Oregon Central Coast and Southern Oregon subarea daily bag limits to be two Pacific halibut of any size per person, which is a change from the proposed rule.

Classification

This final rule is consistent with section 773 of the Halibut Act, which gives relevant regional fishery management councils the authority to develop regulations

governing Pacific halibut fishing in U.S. waters that are in addition to, and not in conflict with, approved IPHC regulations, and that “shall only be implemented with the approval of the Secretary.” (*Id.* 773c(c)).

This action is exempt from review under Executive Order (E.O.) 12866. This final rule is exempt from the requirements of E.O. 14192 because it is a routine fishing action. A Treaty Tribal summary impact statement under section (5)(b)(2)(B) and section (5)(c)(2) of E.O. 13175 was not required for this final rule because this action does not impose substantial direct compliance costs on Treaty Tribal Governments and this action does not preempt Treaty Tribal law. A Treaty Tribal summary impact statement is not required and has not been prepared.

NMFS finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the date of effectiveness of this rule pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(1) and (3) and make the 2026 Regulatory Area 2A recreational fishery management measures (*i.e.*, season dates and bag limits) in this rule effective immediately upon the filing of this rule with the Office of Federal Register. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(1), this rule relieves a restriction on fishing. The fishing seasons for the recreational Pacific halibut fisheries in the first subareas for which open dates are established under this rule are set to begin on April 30, 2026. The next subarea open date established under this rule is May 1, 2026. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), delaying the effective date of the annual management measures contained in this rule would be contrary to the public interest as it would prevent the recreational Pacific halibut fisheries in these subareas to begin on time. Accordingly, waiving the 30-day delay in effectiveness will benefit the public because it will provide additional opportunity for Pacific halibut fishermen in 2026 and thus increase the likelihood of full utilization of the 2026 Pacific halibut allocations in Area 2A.

Moreover, a delayed effective date is not necessary to provide sufficient notice to the fishing community. The purpose of the 30-day delay in effectiveness provision of the

Administrative Procedure Act (APA) is generally to give the regulated community time to adjust to new regulations. This rule does not make changes that would require fishery participants to purchase new gear or make other time-consuming adjustments. By contrast, this rule contains season structures and open dates for the Area 2A recreational Pacific halibut fishery that were recommended by the Council following a public process consisting of multiple meetings, which included the opportunity for public comment. The regulated community has made business plans based on these anticipated annual management measures. The final rule is also virtually unchanged from the proposed rule except for two minor changes. NMFS found a minor error in the proposed rule in the Columbia River subarea section regarding how inseason action may be taken to add additional dates in June, if appropriate. This section of the final rule has therefore been corrected to reflect the language in the 2026 CSP. Additionally, NMFS received a comment from ODFW, which expressed overall support for the proposed management measures; however, included a recommendation to revise the Central Oregon Coast and Southern Oregon subarea daily bag limits to two Pacific halibut of any size per person. NMFS made this revision to the final rule. No other changes were necessary to accommodate public comment.

Finally, waiver of the APA's 30-day delay in effectiveness is appropriate because this rule implements the 2026 Regulatory Area 2A subarea allocations for the recreational Pacific halibut fishery, as published in the proposed rule (91 FR 14511, March 25, 2026), based on the formulas set in the 2026 CSP and using the 2026 Area 2A FCEY for Pacific halibut set by the IPHC and accepted by the Secretary of State, with concurrence from the Secretary of Commerce, on March 12, 2026. Said differently, the compressed timeline necessitated by the processes outlined in the Halibut Act makes it impossible for NMFS to delay the effective date of this final rule and still allow for a timely start to the Area 2A recreational fishing season.

In conclusion, NMFS finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effective date pursuant to 5 USC 553(d)(1) and (3).

The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration during the proposed rule stage that this action would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities for purposes of the Regulatory Flexibility Act. The factual basis for the certification was published in the proposed rule and is not repeated here. No comments were received regarding this certification. As a result, a regulatory flexibility analysis was not required for this action and none was prepared.

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

Dated: April 29, 2026.

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