



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 300

[RTID 0648-XF818; Docket No. 260428-0118]

Pacific Halibut Fisheries of the West Coast; 2026 Catch Sharing Plan; Inseason

Action

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; inseason adjustment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces an inseason action for the Pacific halibut recreational fishery in the International Pacific Halibut Commission's (IPHC) regulatory Area 2A. This action adds fishing dates (June 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23) in the Columbia River subarea. These additional fishing dates are intended to provide additional opportunity for anglers to achieve the overall recreational fishery allocations in the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) 2026 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan and to promote full utilization of the 2026 Area 2A Pacific halibut catch limits.

DATES: *Effective date:* Effective June 8, 2026.

Comments due date: Comments due on or before [INSERT DATE 15 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE **FEDERAL REGISTER**].

ADDRESSES: Submit your comments, 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. Go to <https://www.regulations.gov> and enter 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, 501 W Ocean Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90802.

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

Docket: This rule is accessible via the Internet at the Office of the Federal Register website at <https://www.federalregister.gov>. Background information and documents are available at the NOAA Fisheries website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/2026-pacific-halibut-recreational-fishery> and at the 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, phone: 562-980-3231 or email: melissa.mandrup@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

On April 30, 2026, NMFS implemented the 2026 recreational (sport) fishery bag limits, fishing dates, and subarea allocations for subareas off the U.S. West Coast in IPHC regulatory Area 2A via a final rule (91 FR 23369). Inseason modifications to the Area 2A recreational fisheries, including bag limits, state and subarea allocations, and fishing days per calendar week (*i.e.*, fishing dates) are authorized under 50 CFR

300.63(c)(6), if it is determined such action is necessary to meet the Area 2A allocation objectives and if the action will not result in exceeding the allocation.

The final rule implementing the 2026 recreational fishery management measures for Area 2A (91 FR 23369, April 30, 2026) opened the Columbia River subarea for recreational Pacific halibut fishing on April 30, 2026 (Thursday) and on 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). The final rule also stated that, if NMFS determines that sufficient allocation is available to add fishing dates for the Columbia River subarea in June 2026, based on an assessment by NMFS based on catch effort in May and projections for June, NMFS may take inseason action to open the fishery the following additional days in June: June 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23 (Monday, Tuesday).

In accordance with 50 CFR 300.63(c), inseason actions are announced in the **Federal Register** and also on the NMFS hotline at (206) 526-6667 or (800) 662-9825. Weekly catch reports are available on the respective state Fish and Wildlife agency websites.

After consulting with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and other appropriate entities, NMFS has determined that this action is necessary to meet the management objective of achieving, but not exceeding, the Area 2A subarea allocations. This action was not previously implemented in the final rule setting the open dates and management measures for 2026 (91 FR 23369, April 30, 2026) and is intended to provide additional opportunity for anglers to achieve the annual recreational fishery allocation. NMFS will continue to monitor the recreational catch estimates for all subareas obtained via state sampling procedures, until NMFS has determined that there is not sufficient allocation for another

full day of fishing and the subarea is closed by NMFS, or until there are no more open fishing dates, whichever is earlier.

Inseason Action

The Pacific halibut fishery regulations for Area 2A at 50 CFR 300.63(c)(6) provide NMFS with the authority to modify annual management measures inseason, including fishing periods, following consultation with the Council, the IPHC, and the affected states, where such inseason action is necessary to allow allocation objectives to be met and will not result in exceeding the allocation for Area 2A (50 CFR 300.63(c)(6)(i)(A), (i)(B) and (ii)(A)).

The Columbia River subarea recreational fishery opened on April 30, 2026. NMFS has determined, through an assessment of recreational catch and effort in May and projections for June, that there is sufficient allocation to open additional fishing dates in June. Catch and effort estimates through May 17, 2026, indicate that 4,579 pounds (2.1 metric tons) of the 19,299 pound (8.8 metric tons) allocation for the Columbia River subarea recreational fishery, or approximately 24 percent of the allocation, have been landed. Additionally, catch projections through June estimate that 15,774 pounds (7.2 metric tons) of the total allocation would be landed by June 30, or approximately 82 percent, without the opening of additional fishing dates. The projected remaining allocation of 18 percent is sufficient to warrant opening additional fishing days in June. Accordingly, this inseason action implements the following additional fishing dates for the Columbia River subarea all-depth recreational fishery:

- June 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, and 23.

If the subarea allocation is projected to be reached prior to June 30, the subarea will be closed by NMFS 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 additional inseason action to reopen the fishery in August through September, up to 7 days per week.

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to the Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982. This action is taken under the regulatory authority at 50 CFR 300.63(c)(6) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(3)(B), there is good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this routine inseason action, as notice and comment would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest. WDFW and ODFW provided updated landings data to NMFS through May 17, 2026, and a catch projection through June. This information indicates that without additional open days approximately 18 percent of the Columbia River subarea's annual recreational fishery allocation would remain at the end of June. Therefore, to promote the full utilization of the subarea's allocation, and thus to create additional opportunity within the fishery achieve the overall Area 2A allocation, additional fishing opportunity is necessary.

The final rule implementing the 2026 recreational fishing measures (91 FR 23369, April 30, 2026) specified that if NMFS determines sufficient allocation is available, additional fishing dates may be warranted in June to increase angler opportunity to achieve the 2026 subarea and Area 2A recreational fishery allocations. Further, the final rule specified the additional dates to be opened in June: June 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, and 23 (Monday, Tuesday), and provided that the determination of whether sufficient allocation remained to open these dates would be based on an assessment, by NMFS, of catch and effort in May and projections for June.

The proposed rule to implement the 2026 recreational fishing measures for Area 2A (91 FR 14511) published on March 25, 2026, and requested public comment through April 9, 2026. The proposed rule identified the original dates that the Columbia River

subarea would be open in April, May and June 2026, and specifically identified the additional dates recreational fishing in the subarea may be open in June 2026, if sufficient subarea allocation was determined to remain in May. Both the original open dates for the subarea and the potential additional open dates for the subarea in June, which are identified in the proposed rule, are the same open dates implemented in the final rule and through this inseason action. Thus, the public had notice of these proposed additional dates and an opportunity to comment on them during the comment period on the proposed rule.

Based on recreational catch and effort through May 17, 2026, and projections through June, NMFS has determined that sufficient subarea allocation remains to open additional recreational fishing days in the Columbia River subarea in June. Opening additional dates for recreational fishing in the subarea is deemed necessary to allow the opportunity for the Area 2A allocation objectives to be met in accordance with 50 CFR 300.63(c)(6)(i)(A). Further, this action should be implemented as soon as possible to allow fishery participants time to prepare to take advantage of the additional fishing dates. Implementing this action through proposed and final rulemaking would reduce the benefits the action is intended to provide to fishery participants in the subarea, as time is limited before the first additional fishing date on June 8, 2026. It is necessary that this rulemaking be implemented in a timely manner so that planning for additional fishing dates can take place, and to allow for business and personal decision making by the regulated public impacted by this action, including recreational charter fishing operations, associated port businesses, and private anglers who do not live near the coastal access points for the fishery, among others. Without implementation of additional fishing dates in the Columbia River subarea, the overall Area 2A recreational fishery allocation is unlikely to be harvested this year, thus limiting the economic benefits of the fishery, in general, and obstructing the goals of the 2026 Area 2A Catch Sharing Plan.

To ensure the regulated public is fully aware of this action, notice of this regulatory action will be provided to anglers through a telephone hotline, news release, and by the relevant state Fish and Wildlife agencies. NMFS will receive public comment for 15 days after publication of this action, in accordance with 50 CFR 300.63(c)(6)(iv). No aspect of this action is controversial, and changes of this nature were anticipated in the process described in regulations at 50 CFR 300.63(c), and in the proposed and final rules implementing the 2026 management measures for the Area 2A recreational fishery.

For these reasons, there is also good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to waive the 30-day delay in effective date and make this action effective immediately upon filing for public inspection, as a delay in the effectiveness of this action would constrain fishing opportunity, be inconsistent with the goals of the 2026 Catch Sharing Plan, and potentially limit the economic opportunity intended by this rule to fishery participants and fishing communities. 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 establish any new or unique regulations, nor otherwise make changes that would require fishery participants to purchase new gear or make other time-consuming adjustments. By contrast, this rule implements routine inseason action. Waiving the 30-day delay in effectiveness will benefit the public because it will provide additional opportunity for recreational Pacific halibut anglers in 2026 and thus increase the likelihood of full utilization of the 2026 allocations in Area 2A. Additionally, NMFS regulations allow the Regional Administrator to modify sport fishing periods, bag limits, size limits, days per calendar week, and subarea allocations in Area 2A, when the action supports allocation objectives being met and such action will not result in exceeding the catch limit for the subarea or for Area 2A. The regulated public is aware of this authority and therefore expects such inseason action throughout the fishing year.

In conclusion, NMFS finds good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity for public comment and the 30-day delay in effective date for this rule. NMFS recently received information on the progress of landings in the recreational fisheries in the Columbia River subarea, which indicate that additional season dates should be implemented in order to promote the optimal harvest of the subarea's annual allocation. Thus, it is in the public interest that this action not be delayed.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 773-773k.

Dated: June 2, 2026.

Kelly Denit,

Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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