



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 300

[RTID 0648-XF895]

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 in August and September in the Columbia River and Washington subareas. These actions are intended to provide additional fishing opportunity for anglers in 2026 and are necessary to achieve the overall recreational fishery allocations for Area 2A established in the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) 2026 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan and the 2026 IPHC regulations.

DATES: Effective [INSERT DATE OF FILING WITH THE OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL REGISTER] through September 30, 2026. Comments are requested following this rule's publication, and are 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 Joshua Lindsay, 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: Joshua Lindsay, (213) 392-7410, or Joshua.Lindsay@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

On April 30, 2026, consistent with the 2026 IPHC regulations, 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). The final rule implementing the 2026 recreational fishery management measures for Area 2A (91 FR 23369, April 30, 2026) opened the coastal

Washington and Columbia River subareas on select days of the week from April 30, 2026 through June 30, 2026. The Puget Sound subarea opened 7 days per week from April 1, 2026 through June 30, 2026, pursuant to the 2026 IPHC regulations. The final rule implementing the 2026 recreational fishery management measures for Area 2A (91 FR 23369, April 30, 2026) stated that, if sufficient Washington and Columbia River subarea allocations remain for at least another full day of fishing after June 30, NMFS may take inseason action to reopen the Washington and Columbia River subareas in August, up to 7 days per week, through September. Additionally, Federal regulations provide that inseason modifications to recreational fishing periods, bag limits, size limits, open days per calendar week (fishing dates), and state and subarea allocations may be implemented to allow for annual allocation objectives to be met, so long as such action would not result in exceeding the Area 2A annual recreational allocation (50 CFR 300.63(c)(6)(i)).

In accordance with § 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), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and other appropriate entities, NMFS has determined that the following actions are necessary to meet the management objective of achieving, but not exceeding, the Area 2A 2026 recreational fishery subarea allocations. These actions are intended to provide opportunity for anglers to achieve the overall Area 2A 2026 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 relevant subarea is closed by NMFS, or until there are no more open fishing dates, whichever is earlier.

Inseason Actions

The Pacific halibut fishery regulations for Area 2A at § 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 annual allocation for Area 2A (§ 300.63(c)(6)(i)(A), (i)(B) and (ii)(A)).

Washington Puget Sound and the U.S. Convention Waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca (Puget Sound Subarea)

The Puget Sound subarea recreational fishery opened on April 2, 2026, consistent with IPHC regulations. Through June 30, 2026, anglers in the Puget Sound subarea harvested 46,791 pounds (lb) (21.2 metric tons (mt)) of the 80,512 lb (36.5 mt) allocation, leaving 33,721 lb (15.3 mt) remaining (41.9 percent). Sufficient allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing; therefore, this action opens the Puget Sound subarea 7 days per week from August 8 through September 30, 2026, or until there is not sufficient allocation for another full day of fishing and the area is therefore closed.

Washington North Coast Subarea

The North Coast subarea recreational fishery opened on April 30, 2026. Through June 30, 2026, anglers in the North Coast subarea harvested 58,194 lb (26.4 mt) of the 131,149 lb (59.49 mt) allocation, leaving 72,955 lb (26.4 mt) remaining (55.6 percent). Sufficient allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing; therefore, this action opens the North Coast subarea 7 days per week from August 8 through September 30, 2026, or until there is not sufficient allocation for another full day of fishing and the area is therefore closed.

Washington South Coast Subarea

The South Coast subarea recreational fishery opened on April 30, 2026. Through June 30, 2026, anglers in the South Coast subarea harvested 38,229 lb (17.3 mt) of the

65,857 lb (29.9 mt) allocation, leaving 27,628 lb (12.5 mt) remaining (42.0 percent).

Sufficient allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing; therefore, this action opens the South Coast subarea 7 days per week from August 16 through September 30, 2026, or until there is not sufficient allocation for another full day of fishing and the area is therefore closed.

Columbia River Subarea

The Columbia River subarea recreational fishery opened on April 30, 2026.

Through June 30, 2026, anglers in the Columbia River subarea harvested 11,743 lb (5.3 mt) of the 19,299 lb (8.8 mt) allocation, leaving 7,556 lb (5.3 mt) remaining (39.2 percent). Sufficient allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing; therefore, this action opens the Columbia River subarea 7 days per week from August 16 through September 30, 2026, or until there is not sufficient allocation for another full day of fishing and the area is therefore closed.

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)(B), there is good cause to waive notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action prior to it being effective, as prior notice and comment would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest. There is good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity to for public comment on this inseason action because the public had an opportunity to comment on the final rule implementing the 2026 recreational fishery in Area 2A. The final rule specifically provided that additional fishing periods may be set through inseason action during the 2026 fishing season, in accordance with § 300.63(c)(6), if an additional fishing period is deemed necessary to attain a subarea's 2026 allocation. WDFW and ODFW provided updated

landings data to NMFS on July 6, 2026, showing that through June 30, 2026, an estimated 41.9 percent of the Puget Sound subarea annual allocation, 55.6 percent of the North Coast subarea annual allocation, 42.0 percent of the South Coast subarea annual allocation, and 39.7 percent of the Columbia River subarea annual allocation was remaining. The 2026 Area 2A recreational fishery's final rule (91 FR 23369; April 30, 2026) specifically included a provision that, if after June 30, 2026 sufficient allocation remained for at least another full day of fishing in these subareas, then NMFS may take inseason action to reopen the recreational fishery. NMFS has determined that sufficient allocation remains for at least another full day of fishing in the Columbia River and Washington subareas; therefore, NMFS is taking this inseason action. Because this potential inseason action was part of the rulemaking establishing this year's Area 2A recreational fishery, which included public notice and comment, this action will not be unexpected by the public, which had specific notice and an opportunity to comment on NMFS' intent to implement this inseason action during that rulemaking process.

In addition, this inseason action is necessary to allow for the Area 2A 2026 allocation objectives to be met in accordance with § 300.63(c)(6)(i)(A). Specifically, this inseason action will increase the opportunity for the Area 2A fishery to reach the overall 2026 recreational allocation. The annual recreational fishing season for Pacific halibut in Area 2A is relatively short and occurs primarily during the summer months and in early fall. As the Washington and Columbia River subareas close on September 30, 2026, implementing this action through proposed and final rulemaking would undermine the benefit this action is intended to provide to fishery participants and there is good cause to waive notice and comment rulemaking under 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B). The regulated public needs sufficient time to plan for additional fishing periods. Thus, it is necessary that this rulemaking be implemented in a timely manner, so that proper planning for additional fishing dates can take place, including time to allow for business and personal decision

making by the regulated public and others impacted by this action, which includes recreational charter fishing operations, associated port businesses, and private anglers who do not live near the fishery's coastal access points, among others. Without timely implementation of the additional fishing dates in the Washington and Columbia River subareas, the overall Area 2A recreational fishery allocation for 2026 is unlikely to be harvested this year, which would limit the economic benefits to fishery participants and obstruct the goals of the 2026 Catch Sharing Plan.

To ensure the regulated public is fully aware of this action, notice of the 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 comments for 15 days after publication of this action, in accordance with 50 CFR 300.63(c)(6)(iv)(B). No aspect of this action is controversial, and changes of this nature were anticipated in the process described in regulations at § 300.63(c), and in the proposed and final rules implementing the 2026 management measures for the Area 2A recreational fishery.

NMFS has also determined that the 30-day delay in the date of effectiveness required by 5 U.S.C. 553(d) does not apply to this inseason action because this action relieves a restriction on the fishery and there is good cause to waive the requirement pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(1) and (d)(3), respectively.

The 30-day delay in effective date requirement pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(1) does not apply to this inseason action because this inseason action relieves a restriction by allowing participants to fish on the additional fishing dates. Waiving the 30-day delay in effectiveness thus provides additional opportunity for recreational fishermen to harvest Pacific halibut and increases the likelihood of full utilization of the 2026 allocations in Area 2A.

Additionally, there is good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to establish an effective date less than 30 days after the date of publication of this rule for the reasons

discussed above. A delay in 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 the associated fishing communities. The purpose of the 30-day delay in effectiveness provision of the Administrative Procedure Act 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 for this rule and to find that the 30-day delay in effective date does not apply. NMFS recently received information on the progress of landings in the recreational fisheries in the Washington and Columbia River subareas, which indicate that additional season dates should be implemented to promote the optimal harvest of the subareas' annual allocations. It is therefore in the public's interest that this action not be delayed.

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

Dated: July 22, 2026.

Shannon Bettridge,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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