



Marine Resources

1st Annual Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife Marine Resources Program 2019 Sport Pacific Halibut Review



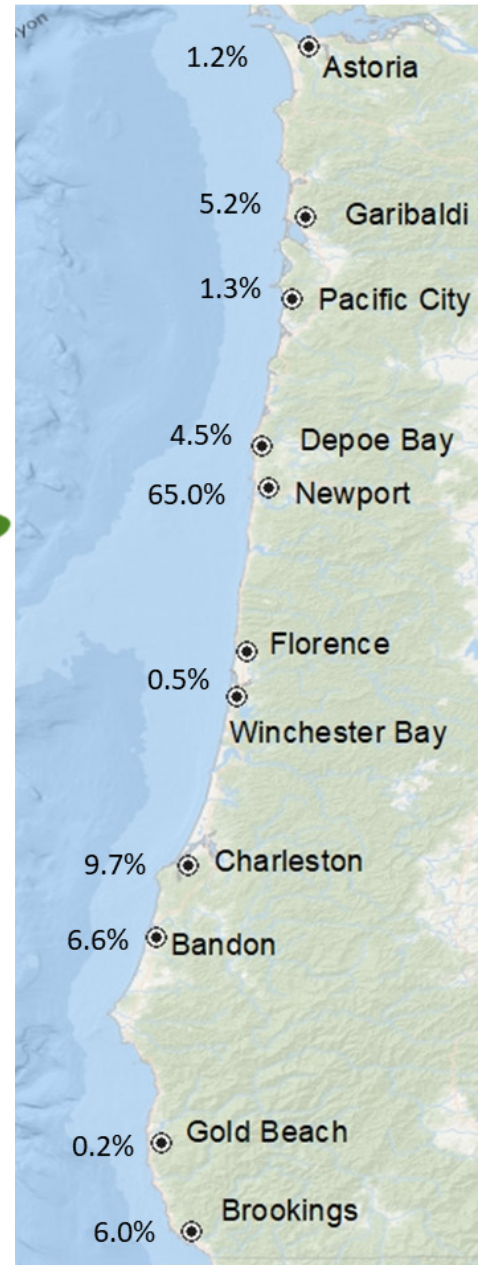
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Since the early 2000s, fishing for Pacific halibut off of the Oregon Coast has been very popular. This newsletter provides a summary of Oregon's 2019 sport halibut fishery.

2019 season highlights

- Highest allocation in over 10 years
- 15,000 directed Pacific halibut angler trips
- Contributed \$2.4 million to the Oregon economy
- Average size was 25 pounds round weight

Percentage of halibut angler trips by port in 2019



Annual US West Coast Total Allocation, 2010-2019

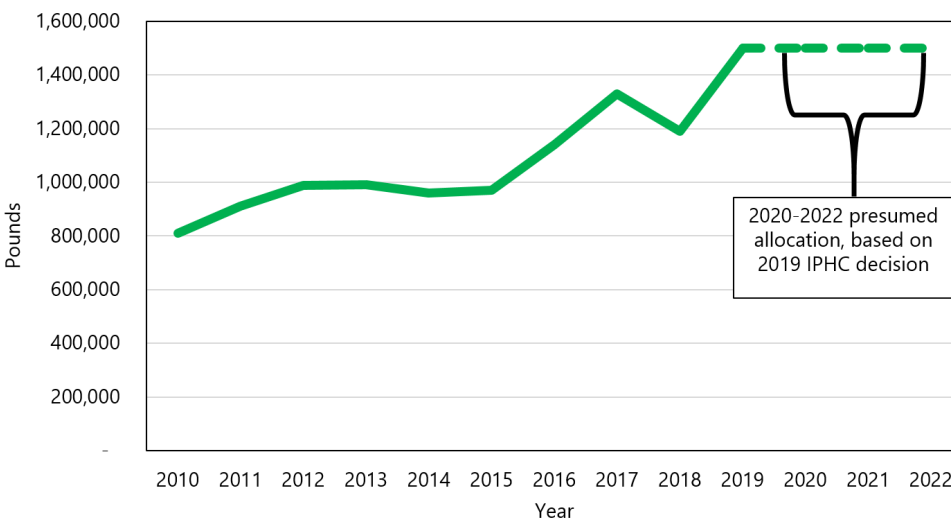


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Have a Question?

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Visit our website:

<https://myodfw.com/pacific-halibut-sport-regulations>

International Pacific Halibut Commission



The [International Pacific Halibut Commission](#) (IPHC) oversees all things Pacific halibut in the Eastern North Pacific Ocean. This includes Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California. They conduct research, do stock assessments, and set fishery harvest levels (allocations), for all areas including Area 2A (WA, OR, & CA). At the IPHC annual meeting

in January of 2019, the Commissioners set the total allocation for Area 2A for 2019 at 1.5 million pounds, the highest level in over 10 years. The Commisisoners also indicated that, barring a conservation concern, the allocation for Area 2A would remain at that level for the next four years (through 2022).

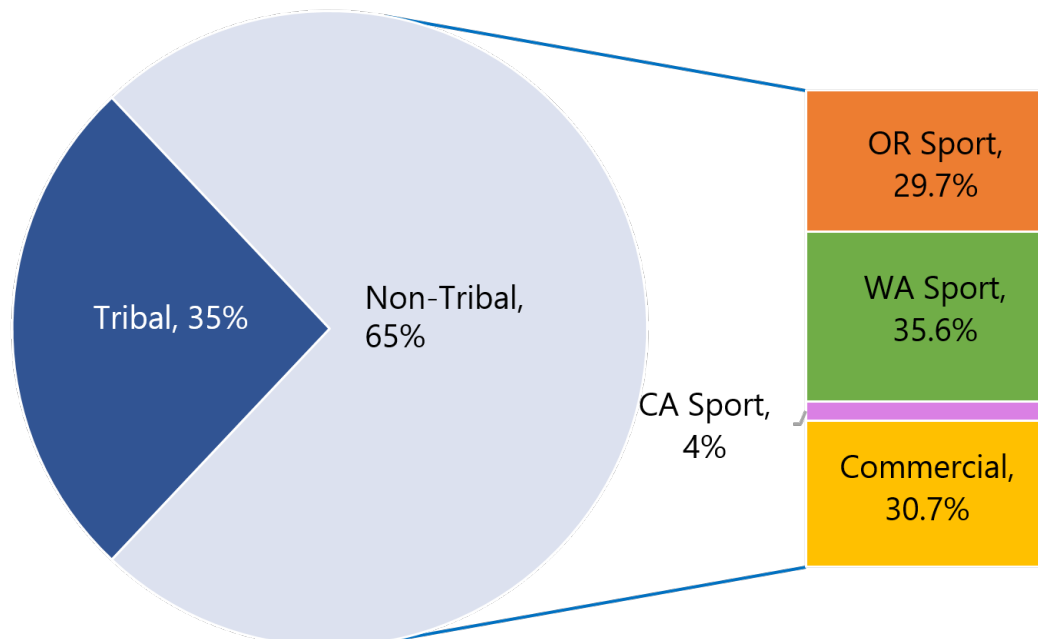
Pacific Fishery Management Council

Within Area 2A, allocations and seasons for the Tribal, commercial, and recreational fisheries are outlined in the [2019 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan](#). The [Pacific Fishery Management Council](#) can make changes to the Catch Sharing Plan annually at their September and November meetings. Anglers can propose changes annually through this Council process. ODFW facilitates this by hosting public meetings in late July or early August to get angler input on how the fishery has proceeded and gather and discuss any proposed changes. ODFW summarizes the public meetings and provides that information to the Council to assist with decision making.



PACIFIC FISHERY
MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2A Allocation as Outlined in the 2019 Catch Sharing Plan



Oregon Subareas and Allocations

Oregon recreational fisheries receive 29.7% of the Area 2A non-tribal allocation, as specified in the Catch Sharing Plan. In 2019 that equated to 289,575 pounds. The Oregon recreational Pacific halibut fishery is divided into three subareas, each with its own allocation, and managed independently.

2019 Oregon Recreational Seasons Summary

Ocean conditions for much of the spring and early summer caused effort for Pacific halibut to be the lowest it has been in the last 5 years, with just over 15,000 angler trips compared to the 5-year average of 18,500 trips coastwide. The reduced effort contributed to the low coastwide allocation attainment.

Columbia River Subarea

Nearshore

In the Columbia River Subarea, 500 pounds of the allocation was set aside for the nearshore fishery. This amount is to allow for any incidentally caught halibut when the all-depth fishery is not open. In 2019, as in the previous 3 years, there were no landings into Oregon ports and there were minimal landings into Washington ports.

The maximum amount landed into this fishery has been around 250 pounds in a year. The quota is low, so as to not strand pounds that could be used elsewhere. If effort and landings increase, the pounds set aside for this fishery can be adjusted through the annual Catch Sharing Plan process.



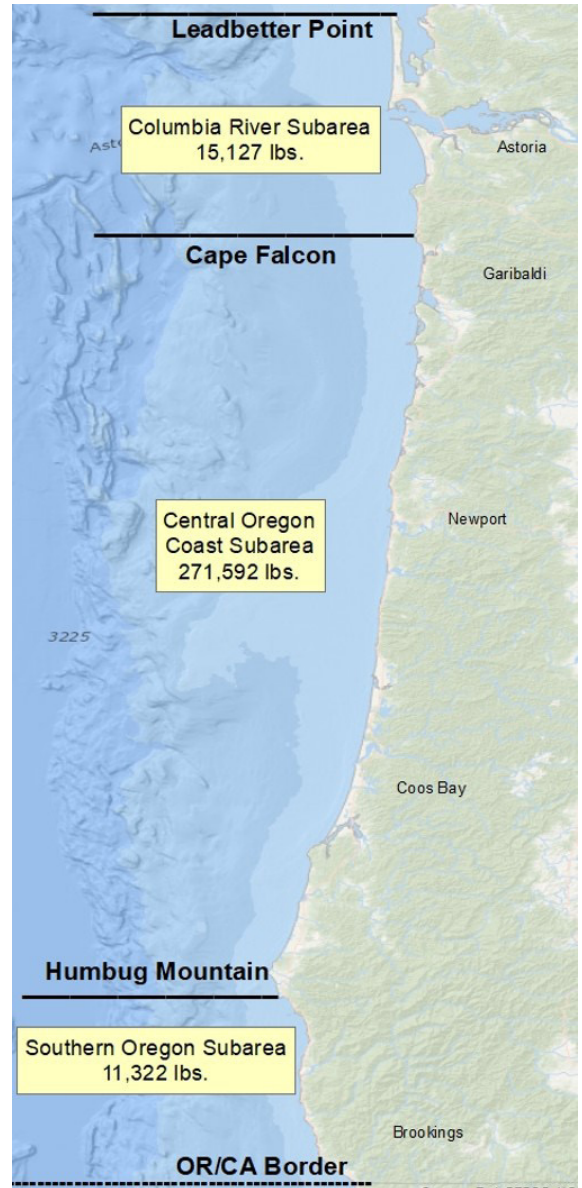
A happy angler with a just landed fish

All-Depth

The Columbia River Subarea all-depth season had an initial allocation of 14,627 pounds. The season was set pre-season with six open dates in May. During those openings, a total of 14,453 pounds were landed, leaving less than 200 pounds of allocation remaining, not enough for any additional open days.

However, in mid-June, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife determined that there was enough of the Washington recreational allocation remaining to re-open all Washington subareas, including the Columbia River, for an additional two days in late June. Catch from those additional days totaled 2,587 pounds. This brought the total catch from the all-depth fishery to 17,039 pounds, 2,412 pounds over the allocation. That overage was taken out of the Washington recreational allocation.

Oregon sport halibut subareas and allocations



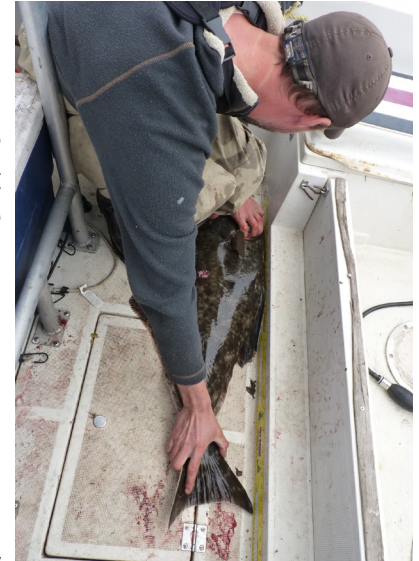
Central Oregon Coast Subarea

Nearshore

In 2019, the Central Coast Subarea nearshore fishery opened on June 1, with an allocation of 32,591 pounds. Total catch was 14,806 pounds, which was 17,785 pounds (55%) under the allocation. Ocean and bar conditions and winds hampered fishing for much of the early part of the season. Additionally, the gravel bar approximately 3 miles offshore of the Yaquina Head lighthouse may have been sanded over by winter storms. That area often accounts for 50-70 percent of the total landings from this fishery but was not a productive location in 2019. Once weather calmed down, opportunities for salmon and albacore tuna drew effort away from halibut. These factors are the reason that so much of the allocation was left unharvested.

Spring All-Depth

The 2019 spring season was managed in two periods, each with fishing allowed Thursday, Friday and Saturday. As has occurred since 1995 in the first period, fixed open dates were set preseason with the intent to not exceed the spring catch limit. Make-up dates, to be open if poundage remained available following the fixed dates, were also set preseason. In 2019, 15 fixed dates were open. During these five 3-day openings, two had low effort and landings due to weather and ocean conditions, two had medium effort and landings, and only one had high effort and landings. After the fixed dates, enough quota remained (65%) for all nine back-up days to be open. This is the most days the spring all-depth season has been open in over 10 years. The total catch from the spring season was 89,062 pounds, or 53% of the spring all-depth catch limit. The remaining 82,041 pounds were then available to be shifted to another Oregon fishery inseason.



Angler measuring his halibut to immediately record on his halibut tag.

Summer All-Depth

The 2019 summer fishery was set preseason to open every other Friday and Saturday from August 2 through October 31. As in the nearshore and spring all-depth seasons, weather and ocean conditions for the early open periods once again limited effort and landings. Under the Catch Sharing Plan's flexible inseason management provisions, the daily bag limit was increased to two fish per day on August 23, and beginning September 8 the fishery was opened 3 days per week. These actions were taken to provide additional opportunities to harvest the allocation. However, even with those changes, total catch in the summer fishery was 50,742 pounds, under the catch limit by 17,156 pounds (25%). Similar to the nearshore fishery, good salmon and albacore tuna fishing drew anglers away from halibut for much of the summer.

Summary Table of 2019 Oregon Sport Halibut Effort and Landings by Subarea and Season.

Subarea	Season	No. Angler Trips	No. Halibut Harvested	Average Weight (net weight)*	Total Pounds (net weight)
Columbia River Subarea (Oregon only)	Nearshore	0	0	N/A	0
	All-Depth	160	137	12.6	1,723
Central Oregon Coast Subarea	Nearshore	2,063	506	29.3	14,806
	Spring All-Depth	8,286	5,026	17.7	89,062
	Summer All-Depth	3,642	2,802	18.1	50,742
Southern Oregon		928	181	21.9	3,972

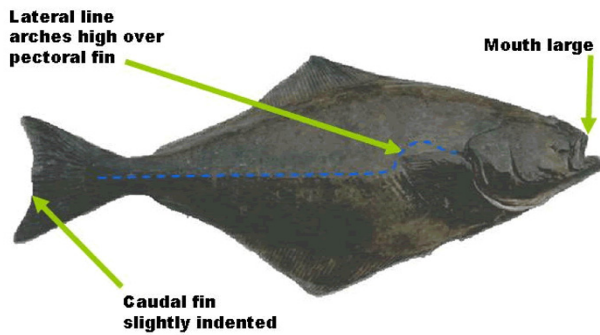
* Net weight is dressed, head-on. It is the "currency" of halibut, how the quota is allocated and tracked.

Southern Oregon Subarea

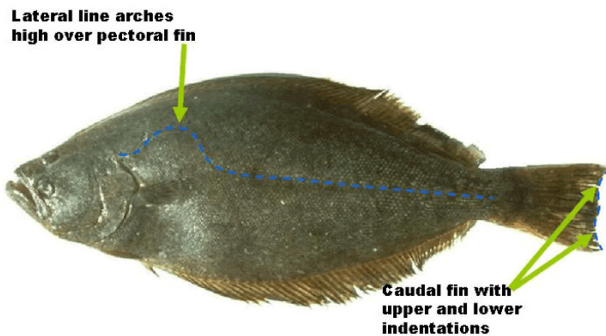
In 2019, the Southern Oregon Subarea had an allocation of 11,322 pounds. As in previous years, effort and catch picked up in late July when other opportunities such as salmon began to decrease and the weather and ocean became more favorable. Unlike many previous years, there was some effort and catch in this subarea after Labor Day weekend. Estimated catch in the Southern Oregon Subarea was 3,972 pounds; 7,350 pounds (65%) under the allocation.

Pacific Halibut vs. California Halibut

Pacific Halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*)



California Halibut (*Paralichthys californicus*)



There are two species of "halibut" off of Oregon, the Pacific halibut and the California halibut. While Pacific halibut occur all along the Oregon coast, California halibut are not common north of Coos Bay.

Pacific halibut tend to be larger, are right eyed, have diamond shaped bodies that are more elongated than most flatfish, have a tail that is double truncated, and a mouth that extends only to the front edge of the eye.

California halibut can be either right or left eyed, but are usually left eyed, and the mouth extends past the eye.

In Oregon, California halibut are part of the flatfish daily bag limit (25 fish in 2019) and do not have an annual limit.

However, Pacific halibut have their own 1-fish daily bag limit, and a 6-fish annual limit, and require anglers to have a combined angling tag in addition to their sport fishing license.

Pacific Halibut Size



106 pound (dressed) 67 inches, Oregon sport caught halibut. Photo courtesy of Matt Blume

Pacific halibut are one of the largest of all flatfish species.

Off of Alaska there have been big "barn doors", 400+ pounders, caught by recreational anglers. The current world record being 459 pounds.

With Oregon being toward the southern end of the range of Pacific halibut, we don't get fish that large. Since 2001, ODFW's sampling program (described below) has measured over 67,000 recreationally caught halibut with the largest measuring 69 inches (approximately 170 pounds round weight) twice, once in June 2006 in Newport, the other in Florence in September 2015. If you happen to land anything over 50 inches, it is definitely noteworthy.



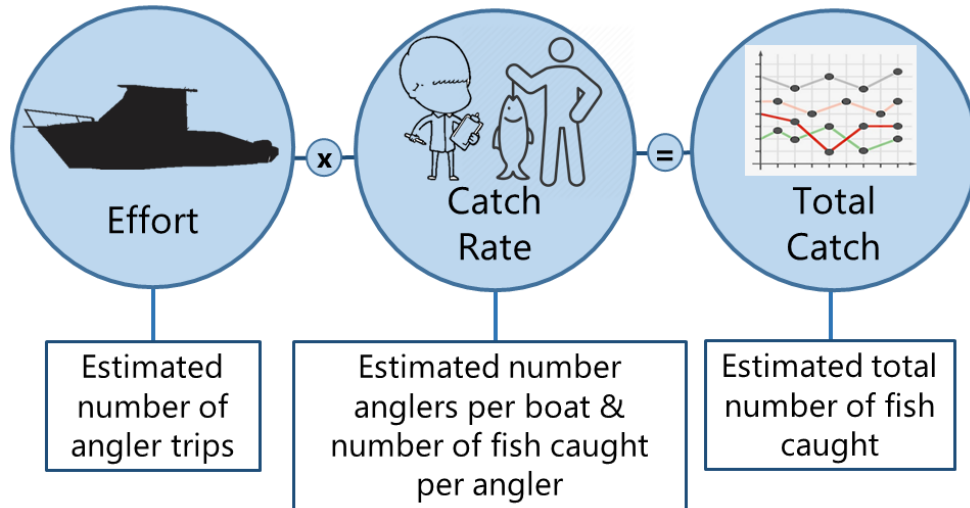
385 pound (dressed), 101 inches, commercially caught halibut from SE Alaska. Photo courtesy of Lynn Mattes

Background Information

The following 2 pages have the same background information as the [2018 Sport Bottomfish Newsletter](#)

Calculating Catch Estimates

To calculate total catches, two pieces of information are needed: (1) effort and (2) catch rate.



To measure effort, ODFW has video cameras in most ports that record boats leaving and returning across the bar. The total number of recreational fishing boats counted (and anglers onboard) equals total effort. ODFW samplers collect catch rate information by interviewing a portion of boats returning to the docks to get information on how many people fished, what species and how many were caught and released, as well as collecting the length/weight of the fish kept. The total catch is estimated by multiplying the number of anglers by the catch rate.

Other calculations and expansions may be needed to estimate catch for unsampled ports and times, but that is generally how total catch estimates are calculated. Additionally, these calculations are done for private and charter vessels.

ODFW in Action: Dockside Sampling

When returning to port, anglers may be met by an ODFW dockside sampler for a post fishing interview. Samplers will ask questions such as: what you were fishing for, what did you catch and release, where you were fishing, at what depth you were fishing, and how long were you fishing. This is important information that helps inform the catch rate part of the total catch estimate. Samplers do not interview every returning boat, instead they try to get a random sample, with a minimum sampling goal of 25% of returning boats.



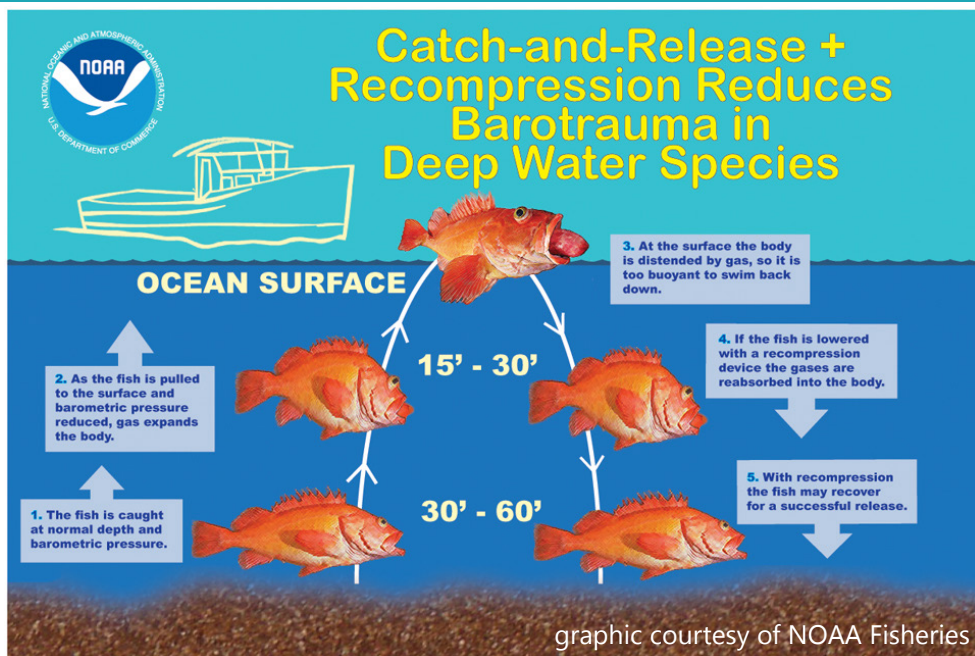
Samplers will also collect biological data on fish kept, such as length and weight.

This information is then used, along with boat counts, to make the total catch estimates that are used to manage the fishery inseason.

Photos courtesy of ODFW Ocean Sampling Program

Rockfish Recompression: Help the Fish, Help the Fishery

Rockfish have a swim bladder, a gas-filled organ that helps regulate buoyancy. The gas in the swim bladder expands when a fish is brought up to the surface, resulting in barotrauma. Signs of barotrauma include: swollen body, stomach and/or esophagus extending out the mouth and/or bulging eyes. Because of the extra buoyancy from the expanded gas, some rockfish may not be able to swim down from the surface on their own.



Recompressing rockfish (or descending back to depth) is good for both the fish and the fishery. It gives the fish a much better chance of surviving, and hopefully reproducing, than leaving them floating on the surface does. Video of a yelloweye rockfish being released back at depth can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4EqJzWtsKrM>



Canary rockfish ready to be released

Research has shown that rockfish released near the depth of capture have a higher survival rate. The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) incorporates this into management. For yelloweye rockfish, releasing fish at depth has helped prevent additional depth restrictions and reduced the chance of a recreational fishery closure due to bycatch of this species

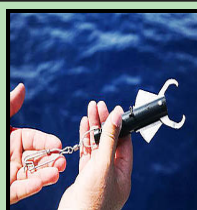
The [Oregon Coalition for Educating ANglers](#) (OCEAN) partnered with ODFW starting in 2010 to do education and outreach about the advantages of recompressing rockfish. Through a number of grants, from ODFW and the National Marine Fisheries Service, and other partnerships, including [Utah's Hogle Zoo](#), over 25,000 descending devices have been purchased and distributed to Oregon anglers free of charge between 2010 and 2018.

Through 2016, the use of descending devices was voluntary and angler-reported use rates averaged around 65-70 percent for yelloweye rockfish. Since descending devices became mandatory in 2017 for all rockfish species released when outside of 30 fathoms, reported use rates have increased to 97-100 percent, which is great for both fish and the fishery.

Types of Descending Devices

There are a variety of devices available commercially, as well as homemade. Find what works for your vessel and set up.

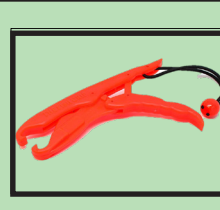
The three most common are:



Seaqualizer



Shelton



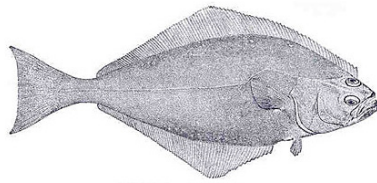
Fish Gripper



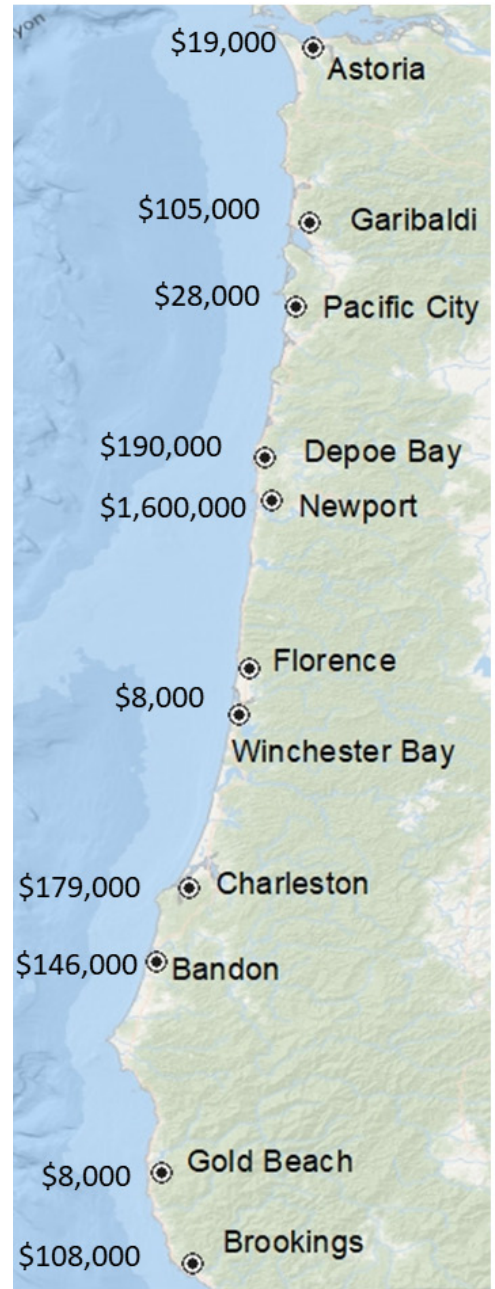
For additional information, see ODFW's Rockfish Recompression webpage: <https://myodfw.com/articles/rockfish-recompression>

Halibut Fishing is Good for the Oregon Economy

The recreational Pacific halibut fishery contributed approximately \$2.4 million to the Oregon economy in 2019 through fishing-related expenditures such as gas, bait, gear, moorage, restaurants, and hotels. This translates to approximately 32 full-time job equivalents. Anglers fishing out of Newport had the most effort and highest economic contribution, about \$1.6 million. Anglers fishing out of Depoe Bay, Charleston, and Bandon contributed between \$0.15 and \$0.19 million each. Even in smaller halibut effort ports with lower absolute economic contribution numbers from a statewide perspective, those contributions can be large relative to other economic activity in the area, and may be an important part of local economies, especially in the spring and early summer.



Economic contribution of halibut anglers by port in 2019

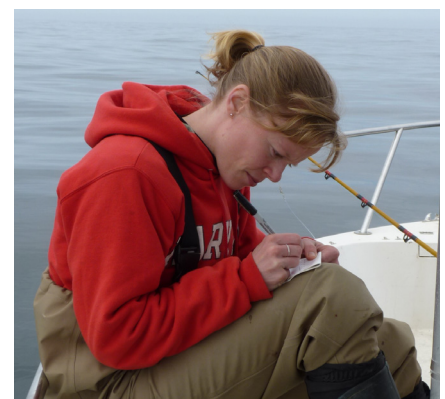


Enforcement

The Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division's Marine Fisheries Team helps ODFW by enforcing fishing regulations. They patrol both on land and at sea to ensure that fishing regulations are followed. Regulations are in place to keep fisheries sustainable, and enforcement of regulations is a key piece to the overall management. Common issues encountered are: fishing without a license, failing to immediately tag halibut, exceeding the bag limit, retaining prohibited species (e.g., yelloweye rockfish) or undersized fish (e.g., lingcod or cabezon), and fishing in closed areas (e.g., Stonewall Bank Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area).



Oregon State Police patrol vessel Guardian



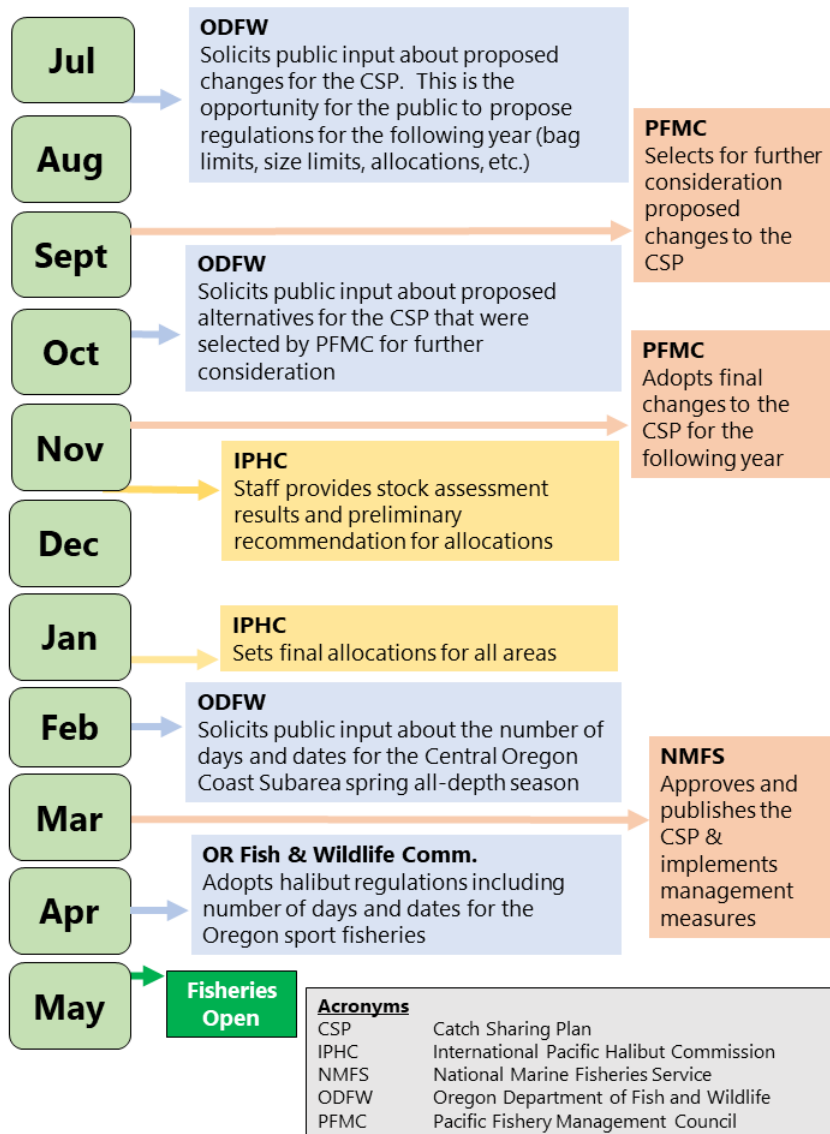
Angler filling out her tag, immediately after landing a halibut

Update on Combining All-Depth Halibut & Longleader Gear Fishery

Non-retention of most species of bottomfish on all-depth halibut days is in place to minimize bycatch of yelloweye rockfish. During the fall of 2019, there were several requests to allow the longleader gear fishery and all-depth halibut on the same trip, which is currently prohibited. The longleader gear fishery uses specialized gear to target healthy mid-water rockfish stocks, while avoiding the rebuilding yelloweye rockfish. Due to the minimal risk of additional yelloweye rockfish impacts, ODFW recommended allowing longleader gear fishing and all-depth halibut on the same trip to the Pacific Fishery Management Council as a proposed change for 2020. However, because it involves both halibut regulations which are on an annual cycle, and bottomfish regulations which are on a two-year cycle, it could not be put in place for 2020. ODFW staff are working through the Council process to be able to consider this for 2021.

How & When to Get Involved

Timeline and agencies for the annual Pacific halibut regulatory process



Due to the multiple agencies involved in management of Pacific halibut, it can be confusing about how, when, and to whom to provide input or make suggested changes. This timeline shows the key times for ODFW, PFMC, and IPHC halibut management. As mentioned above, ODFW begins the annual process by hosting a series of public meetings in late July or early August to start getting input on possible changes for the next year's halibut fisheries. Additionally, the PFMC, IPHC, and Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings are all open to the public and provide time and opportunity for public comments. More information can be found on the website for each agency.

IPHC: <https://iphc.int/>
 PFMC: <https://www.pcouncil.org/>
 OFWC: <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/>

Marine Reserves

OREGON MARINE RESERVES
OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH & WILDLIFE

For Information, see:
<https://oregonmarinereserves.com/>

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