



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**

# **Summary of Washington Pacific Halibut Fisheries Management in 2008**

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**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
SUMMARY OF PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN 2008**

The purpose of this report is to summarize the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) management and enforcement activities in the 2008 Pacific halibut fisheries. It includes a synopsis of Washington’s recreational catch and a description of the results of the incidental halibut catch in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis. A summary of WDFW’s enforcement efforts relative to patrolling the North Coast (Neah Bay and La Push) recreational halibut fisheries is contained in Appendix A.

**Washington’s Recreational Halibut Fisheries in 2008**

Washington’s halibut fisheries are managed under the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A. The catch sharing plan specifies how the Area 2A total allowable catch (TAC) as defined by IPHC is allocated or “shared” among various state commercial and recreational sectors. For Washington, WDFW manages its recreational fisheries by subarea. These subareas are:

1. Puget Sound (inside waters east of the Sekiu River, including Puget Sound)
  - Eastern Region (inner Sound waters east of Low Point)
  - Western Region (Strait waters west of Low Point)
2. North Coast (waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca west of the Sekiu River and Pacific Ocean waters south to the Queets River)
3. South Coast (Pacific Ocean waters south of the Queets River to Leadbetter Point)
4. Columbia River (Pacific Ocean waters south of Leadbetter Point to Cape Falcon, Oregon)

A summary of Washington’s recreational halibut seasons for 2008 is described in Table 1.

Table 1.

Subarea	Quota (lbs)	Catch (lbs)	Avg Wt (lbs)	Season Dates
Puget Sound	59,345	83,304	21.3	East: April 10-June 13 West: May 22-July 21
North Coast	109,991	106,852	24.2	May 13, 15, 17, 20, 29, 31; June 14, 17, 19, 21, 28, 26; August 29
South Coast	44,700	40,397	17.0	May 1, 4, 6, 11, 13, 18, 20, 25, 27; June 1, 3, 8, 17
Columbia River <sup>1/</sup>	18,762	9,693	14.5	May 1-31; August 1, 2, 22, 23, 29

\* Puget Sound catch estimates were not available for the submission of this report; they will be provided as an addendum.

<sup>1/</sup> Columbia River harvest is Washington catch only.

Halibut are measured at the dock and the lengths of the samples are then converted to weights. On the coast, lengths are taken throughout the season on a weekly basis and applied to the number of halibut caught to project the total catch in pounds. The catches are then monitored and the fisheries are closed when they are projected to attain their respective subarea quota.

### ***North Coast Subarea***

Changes in the season structure for the North Coast subarea in 2008 included a revision to allow the opening of the June fishery to occur early enough to keep the halibut and salmon fisheries from overlapping and to increase the flexibility to the date that the June fishery would reopen allowing for more notification time. During the last couple of years, high effort combined with high catch rates at the beginning of the season has reduced the number of days that the fishery is open, exacerbating the derby nature of the fishery. This results in a significant amount of quota being necessary to open the fishery for one day. When there are not enough quota pounds available to keep the fishery open for another day in May, the remaining quota is, by default, shifted into June. The Catch Sharing Plan directs that 28% of the subarea quota be set aside for the June fishery, but when the quota from the May fishery is added to the June set-aside, the amount available for the June fishery has actually been much higher (Table 2). To address this, beginning in 2009, the North Coast subarea will be managed to one quota.

Table 2. North Coast recreational halibut quota divisions and catches in May and June, 2006-08.

	N. Coast Quota	May Quota (72%)	May Catch	May lbs. Remaining	June Quota (28%)	June lbs. Available	Actual June %
2008	109,992	79,194	71,811	7,383	30,798	38,181	35%
2007	116,199	83,663	66,430	17,233	32,536	49,769	43%
2006	119,244	85,856	63,397	22,459	33,388	55,847	47%

Additional proposed changes for 2009 include reducing the season from three days per week (Tue, Thur, and Sat) to two days per week (Thur and Sat), and identifying specific weeks pre-season that the fishery would be closed to provide adequate time to monitor quota attainment and advance notice of closures or re-openings.

### ***South Coast Subarea***

Starting in 2008, to extend the time that the fishery would remain open, the days open for the primary fishery in the South Coast subarea were reduced from five days per week (Sun – Thur) to two days per week (Sun and Tue). As a result, the primary fishery was open 15 days in 2008 compared to 6 days in 2007.

In 2007, the nearshore set aside was 5% of the subarea quota, but high effort and a high average weight resulted in the harvest of the entire subarea quota during the primary season. To provide some assurance that there would be enough quota to provide for a nearshore opportunity, the nearshore set aside was increased to 10% of the subarea quota in 2008. However, the quota available for the nearshore incidental catch fishery after accounting for the catch during the primary season was 4,461 pounds; total catch in the northern nearshore fishery was 158 pounds, leaving 4,303 pounds unharvested at the end of the season. To address this, beginning in 2009, the nearshore set-aside will be capped at 2,000 pounds, which will accommodate incidental catches in the nearshore area while maximizing the halibut quota during the primary season.

Similar to the North Coast subarea, additional changes to the South Coast subarea for 2009 are intended to increase the length of the season and to provide for sufficient notification of closures and re-openings while allowing time for catch accounting. The changes include restructuring the

days that the primary season is open such that the fishery will be open two days per week (Sun and Tue) for the first two weeks of the primary season then will reduce to one day per week (Sun only) for the remainder of the season. WDFW will also identify specific weeks pre-season that the fishery would be closed to provide adequate time to monitor quota attainment and advance notice of closures or re-openings.

### ***Columbia River Subarea***

No changes to the structure of the Columbia River subarea were made for the 2008 season as compared to 2007. This subarea was open seven days per week starting May 1 with a portion of the subarea quota reserved for a late season fishery that was open three days per week (Fri, Sat, Sun) starting August 1. The only change for 2009 is a revision to the primary season to three days per week (Thur, Fri, Sat), which is intended to minimize the amount of time between the primary and late seasons. Beginning August 1, the late season will continue to be open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

### ***Puget Sound Subarea***

WDFW manages the Puget Sound halibut fishery based on “fishing equivalent days” (FEDs). We apply the highest catch per FED for the previous five years (which, for the 2008 calculation, occurred in 2003) to determine the total amount of FEDs that will be available in the following season. In projecting the season length, a weekday is equivalent to one FED, while weekends and holidays are 2.5 FEDs. Using this method, the amount of FEDs available for the 2008 fishery was 76.

For the past two years, the halibut fishery in the eastern region of Puget Sound has opened in early April in response to a request for an earlier opening date. Anecdotal reports from anglers indicate that this earlier time period produces a quality fishing experience, and allows them to successfully catch halibut. However, there are constituents who fish the Port Angeles area (WDFW Marine Area 6) who favor the latter part of the season. To balance these interests, we decided to stay with season dates similar to those in 2007 for 2008.

WDFW is in the process of producing a post-season catch estimate using data from creel surveys of anglers returning to port to estimate the catch per angler-trip and overall effort. This catch estimate will be available in early 2009 and will be added to this report as soon as it is available.

Following the annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission and the adoption of the Area 2A total allowable catch (TAC), WDFW will have a public meeting to develop proposed season dates for Puget Sound for 2009, which will be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service for approval. The fishery will continue to be open five days per week, closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

## Canadian Halibut Landed Into Neah Bay

As part of WDFW's port sampling efforts for recreational halibut fisheries, we also sample the halibut caught in Canadian waters and landed into Neah Bay. The number of Canadian halibut landed into Neah Bay totaled 4,778 for 2008; this is about one half the amount that was landed in 2007 and one-third the amount landed in 2006.

Table 3. is a summary of the Canadian halibut catch landed into Neah Bay in 2000-2008. A weekly catch summary of Canadian halibut brought into Neah Bay by charter and private vessels (in numbers of fish) is described in Appendix B.

Table 3. Canadian halibut landings into Neah Bay, Washington, in 2000-2008.

Year	# Boats	# Anglers	# Halibut
2008	834	3,412	4,778
2007	1,579	6,820	9,977
2006	1,863	8,223	13,045
2005	1,446	5,515	8,816
2004	1,468	5,941	9,693
2003	1,555	6,089	10,805
2002	1,328	5,361	9,027
2001	1,594	6,202	9,716
2000	2,007	6,857	10,088

## Incidental Halibut Catch in the 2008 Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis, WA

The 2A Halibut Catch Sharing Plan provides for incidental landings of halibut in the primary longline sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis, Washington, in years when the Area 2A TAC is greater than 900,000 lbs. The amount of halibut allowed in the directed sablefish fishery is capped at 70,000 lbs; any remaining allocation is transferred back to the Washington recreational fishery and divided among the subareas according to the methodology described in the Plan. For the 2008 season, the Council adopted the same landing ratio that was in place in for the previous two years, that is, 100 lbs. of halibut for every 1,000 lbs. of sablefish (both dressed weight, halibut with head-on). The sablefish fishery extends from April 1 through October 31 with associated halibut landings allowed beginning in May. Fishers were also allowed up to two additional halibut per fishing trip to provide some flexibility in complying with the regulation.

Thirty-six individual vessels made a total of 58 landings containing halibut in the directed tier-limit sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis. The total catch of dressed, head-off halibut in the directed sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis at the conclusion of the fishery on October 31 was **39,729**, which is 56% of the established quota. This final total is 13% below the halibut total on

fish tickets in the tier-limit fishery in 2007. Table 4. summarizes the incidental halibut landings in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis from 2004-2008.

Table 4. Incidental Halibut in the Sablefish Fishery North of Pt. Chehalis

Year	Vessels	Landings	Quota	Catch	% of Quota
2008	36	58	70,000	39,729	56.8%
2007	24	84	70,000	45,780	65.4%
2006	27	130	70,000	64,624	92.3%
2005	27	124	70,000	68,013	97.2%
2004	30	148	70,000	67,837	96.9%

### Summary

WDFW plans to continue to monitor and sample our recreational and commercial fisheries, including the amount of halibut caught in Canadian waters and landed into Neah Bay; take a precautionary approach when setting our Puget Sound season; maintain our enforcement efforts during the halibut recreational fisheries; and monitor the efforts to document halibut bycatch in the West Coast trawl fisheries and recommend appropriate action through the Pacific Fishery Management Council.

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Statewide Marine Division has concentrated enforcement activities around the recreational halibut season along the north coast for the past several years, including 2008. WDFW Marine Enforcement designed emphasis or saturation patrols for 2008 to address violations with recreational fishing rules. These patrols not only addressed halibut regulations, but also offered a level of protection for other species that are encountered while halibut fishing and provided an opportunity to monitor U.S - Canada border fishing activities. Other enforcement activities that occurred in concert with halibut protection included: ensuring compliance with the Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area closure; enforcing canary and yelloweye rockfish no-retention rules; monitoring Canadian-caught halibut landings; and ensuring general compliance with groundfish fishing regulations.

**Summary of Directed Halibut Patrols**

In 2008, WDFW officers expended an estimated 284 hours (as compared to 136.5 hours in 2007) enforcing recreational bottomfish and halibut regulations in the LaPush and Neah Bay areas. 190 hours of patrol were by vessel (compared to 114 boat hours in 2007).

Aside from routine patrol activities, WDFW Marine Division Officers conducted multi-day emphasis patrols (May 13, 15, and 17, and June 17 and 19) along the North Coast. The primary goal was to ensure compliance with halibut regulations, enforce yelloweye and canary rockfish closures, and to monitor bycatch of these species. The weather this year was particularly challenging and officers assisted boats that were taking on water, and in one instance, had to transport anglers from sea to Neah Bay for medical assistance. Despite the heavy weather, the officers were able to make 424 contacts, with 38 violations, 2 vessels in distress rescues, 1 vessel assist, and 1 medical assist.

During the May emphasis patrol, officers did not witness any violations related to fishing in the "C-shaped closed area," fishing during closed season, nor any violations of Canadian fishing regulations.

On May 29 and 31, officers conducted another boat patrol in Marine Areas 4 and 5 during the halibut season. No violations were observed in those areas and, in general, fishing effort appeared to be low for a weekend opener.

In June, July and August, officers conducted multi-day patrols and issued citations for non-halibut fishery-related violations. In late summer and fall, patrols primarily focused on the salmon fishery, however, officers kept an eye out for potential halibut and bottomfish violations. Although the level of activity for 2008 increased on the north coast of Washington, an absence of coverage occurred elsewhere and a critical shortage of enforcement staff on the north Olympic Peninsula precluded a greater enforcement presence in all areas.

**Appendix B.**

Table 1. Canadian halibut landed into Neah Bay, by week and fishing mode.

Week	Charter			Private			Total		
	Boats	Anglers	Halibut	Boats	Anglers	Halibut	Boats	Anglers	Halibut
5/12-5/18	3	21	21	11	24	0	14	48	21
5/19-5/25	6	49	41	3	7	3	9	56	44
5/26-6/1	8	94	37	7	18	10	15	112	47
6/2-6/8	20	191	129	12	35	7	32	226	136
6/9-6/15	16	155	283	0	0	0	16	155	283
6/16-6/22	16	145	274	24	72	108	40	217	382
6/23-6/29	11	86	99	61	183	233	72	269	332
6/30-7/6	7	57	109	43	142	135	50	199	244
7/7-7/13	12	109	187	79	224	389	91	333	576
7/14-7/20	11	104	207	54	154	264	65	258	471
7/21-7/27	9	98	175	47	152	272	56	250	447
7/28-8/3	7	46	74	26	74	76	33	120	150
8/4-8/10	6	45	79	113	363	496	119	408	575
8/11-8/17	6	42	82	70	214	296	76	257	378
8/18-8/24	8	60	121	40	120	190	48	180	311
8/25-8/31	3	16	16	28	80	76	31	96	92
9/1-9/7	0	0	0	46	171	216	46	171	216
9/8-9/14	0	0	0	12	33	47	12	33	47
9/15-9/21	0	0	0	9	24	26	12	33	47
9/22-9/28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9/29-10/5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10/6-10/12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	149	1,318	1,934	685	2,094	2,844	834	3,412	4,778



**Appendix C.**

Table 1. Puget Sound catch estimates, by region, for 2005-08.

Area	2008		2007		2006		2005	
	# Halibut	lbs	# Halibut	lbs	# Halibut	lbs	# Halibut	lbs
Eastern Region	2,371	50,530	1,215	27,626	2,480	57,635	1,990	45,969
Western Region	1,148	32,775	783	17,798	247	5,740	710	16,401

Table 2. 2008 Puget Sound halibut catch estimates, by area and month.

Area	Month	Number of Halibut	Pounds of Halibut
5	May	430	9,159
	June	718	15,310
	July	390	8,305
	Aug	0	0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1,537</i>	<i>32,775</i>
6	April	989	21,079
	May	768	16,382
	June	309	6,579
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2,066</i>	<i>44,040</i>
7	April	48	1,025
	May	22	464
	June	0	0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>1,489</i>
9	April	233	4,958
	May	2	42
	<i>Total</i>	<i>235</i>	<i>5,001</i>

Table 3. Puget Sound halibut catches (numbers of fish), by month, for 2005-08.

Month	2005	2006	2007	2008
April	1,247	1,331	344	1269
May	436	433	582	1222
June	848	797	710	1027
July	169	153	357	390
Aug	50	13	6	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>2,750</i>	<i>2,727</i>	<i>1,998</i>	<i>3907</i>