

Fishing seasons for halibut reflect higher catch quota

Local News

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OLYMPIA - This year's recreational halibut seasons will be similar to 2010 in Puget Sound, but may allow for more days of fishing off the coast under new catch quotas adopted by the International Pacific Halibut Commission. This year's quota for Washington, Oregon and California is 910,000 pounds, up 12 percent from 2010. In Washington, sport anglers will be allowed to catch 216,489 pounds of the big flatfish compared to 192,699 pounds last year. Those increases will improve fishing opportunities in coastal waters of Washington and other West Coast states, said Heather Reed, coastal policy coordinator for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). In Puget Sound, where the sport catch has exceeded area harvest guidelines for the past two years, this year's higher sub-quota also helped to avert further cutbacks in fishing opportunities, she said. "This year's quota, together with shorter seasons adopted last year, will bring the catch more in line with the allowable harvest," Reed said. "We took a big step toward stabilizing the fishery last year, and the higher quota will help to accommodate the growing popularity of halibut fishing in Puget Sound." This year's catch quota for Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca is 58,155 pounds, up from 50,542 pounds in 2010. Like last year, most areas of the Sound will be open for halibut fishing three days a week - Thursday, Friday and Saturday - except as noted below.

Marine areas 6 through 10, extending from Low Point to the Southworth Ferry Dock, will be open May 5 through May 29. Marine Area 5 (Sekiu) will be open May 26 through June 18. Halibut fishing will remain closed in marine areas 11 (Tacoma) and 13 (southern Puget Sound) to protect three species of rockfish listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal) will remain closed due to low dissolved-oxygen conditions. In coastal areas, the structure of the coastal halibut season will be similar to last year, said Reed, noting that fishing seasons in marine areas 1-4 will remain open so long as there are halibut remaining to be caught under the area quotas. "This year's coastal quotas are up by more than 17,000 pounds," Reed said. "Depending on catch rates during the course of the season, that could translate to extra time on the water in some areas." All areas open to fishing have a one-fish daily catch limit, with no minimum size, a possession limit of one fish while on the vessel, and a possession limit of two fish in any form once the angler is on the shore. The 2011 recreational halibut seasons approved for Washington's marine areas are: **Columbia River (Ilwaco):** Marine Area 1 will open May 5, three days a week, Thursday through Saturday until 70 percent of the quota is reached, or until July 17. The fishery will then reopen on Aug. 5 and continue three days a week (Friday through Sunday) until the remaining quota is reached, or Sept. 30, whichever occurs first. The 2011 catch quota is 15,418 pounds. **South Coast (Westport/Ocean Shores):** Marine Area 2 will open on May 1, two days a week, Sundays and Tuesdays. During the fourth week in May the fishery will be open Sunday only (May 22). Beginning the following week the fishery will resume the Sunday, Tuesday structure until the quota is reached. The northern nearshore area will be open seven days per week, until the quota is reached. The 2011 catch quota is 43,500 pounds. **North Coast (La Push/Neah Bay):** Marine areas 3 and 4 will open on May 12, two days per week, Thursdays and Saturdays, through May 21. If sufficient quota remains, the fishery will reopen the week of June 2. If sufficient quota remains after that opener, the fishery will reopen starting June 16. The 2011 catch quota is

108,792 pounds. **Strait of Juan de Fuca/Puget Sound:** Marine areas 6 through 10 (Strait, Port Angeles, Admiralty Inlet and Everett) will be open May 5 through May 29. Marine Area 5 (Sekiu) will be open May 26 through June 18. These fisheries will be open three days a week, Thursday, Friday and Saturday closed Sunday through Wednesday except for Memorial Day weekend when they will be open Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The 2011 combined catch quota for these areas is 58,155 pounds. For additional information, call the Fishing Hotline at (360) 902-2500 or check the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/creel/halibut/>.