

2011 Halibut sport fishery review

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Abstract

The sport harvest of Pacific halibut was estimated at 7.5 million pounds in 2011, a 4.1% decrease from 2010 and below the 10.7 Mlb average of 2004-2008. Harvests increased slightly in almost all areas but decreased substantially in Area 2C due to the imposition of a 37-inch maximum size limit for fish caught by guided anglers. Major sport fishery restrictions, such as daily bag and possession limits, remained unchanged from 2010 in all areas but southeast Alaska, as previously noted. The current economic downturn has been cited as the main contributing factor in reduced angler trips and lower harvests. Anecdotal reports suggested some movement of anglers to Area 3A due to the maximum size limit restriction in Area 2C, but data are not available to substantiate the amount of area switching.

Introduction

IPHC depends on state and federal agencies for estimates of Pacific halibut sport fishery harvests. Management and data collection methods vary by area. For the sport fishery in Area 2A, dockside sampling by state agencies supplies information for catch estimation needed for in-season management. Harvest estimates for the Canadian sport fishery are based on a combination of self-reporting by some lodges, as well as overflights conducted by the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), logbooks, and a DFO creel monitoring program. For the Alaska sport fishery, different methodologies are used for estimating harvests in the current year versus the previous year, and also vary between the unguided (private) and guided (charter) fisheries. Charter vessel operators are required to record client catches in a daily logbook to assist in providing timely catch estimates. In addition, a sample of licensed anglers receives a post-season mail survey, administered by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), for estimating all sport fishery harvests, including halibut. Data on the size of halibut caught are collected by an ADF&G dockside creel sampling program in major ports, but excludes many lodges due to the remoteness of their locations.

Preliminary coast-wide sport harvest estimates for 2011 indicate a slight 4.1% decrease in the sport harvest from 2010, to 7.5 million pounds (Table 1). Coastwide harvest remains below the historic high levels seen during 2004-2008, but still remains relatively high. Harvests increased slightly in all areas but Area 2C. Daily bag and possession limit regulations were either unchanged or reduced from 2010 for all areas. Season length was unchanged for the Alaskan areas but shortened for the Canadian sport fishery (Table 2). Season length in the Area 2A fisheries varied by area.

Area 2A – US West Coast

The 2011 Area 2A sport allocation was 403,995 pounds, according to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) formula. This allocation was further subdivided to six subareas, resulting in 216,489 pounds to Washington subareas and 187,506 pounds to Oregon/California subareas. Allocations and preliminary catch estimates for each subarea are

shown in Table 3. The Area 2A harvest was roughly 18,400 pounds (~5%) below the total sport allocation, with the catch in four of six subareas below their respective allocations. Participation in the Columbia River and Central OR nearshore areas diminished later in the year, resulting in the subarea quotas not being attained. In the southern OR subarea, anglers discovered concentrations of halibut north of Brookings and were extremely successful all summer in catching halibut. This unprecedented success contributed to an overage of the subarea allocation, as the CSP did not allow for any inseason closures for this subarea. In addition, anecdotal reports were received in 2011 of unreported sport harvest from northern California waters, which would have added to the harvest from this subarea; this is not reflected in Table 3, as the potential amount of unreported harvest could not be verified. As in past years, effort for halibut in all subareas was heavily dependent upon the availability of other fishing opportunities, especially for salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.) and albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*).

Area 2B – British Columbia

DFO estimates catch from a mix of data sources which differs by area and year. Aircraft overflights, on-water vessel counts, creel sampling, and lodge logbooks provide effort data. Piece counts are estimated from lodge logbooks, and creel sampling by DFO and the Haida Fisheries Program. Halibut weight data, when collected, come from the creel programs or from the self-reported lodge logbooks. The lodge data are largely unvalidated.

The Area 2B sport fishery had an allocation of 0.948 million pounds in 2011, which was 12% of the total catch limit for the area adopted by IPHC. DFO implemented several restrictions to slow the pace of the fishery and lengthen the season within the constraints of the allocation. The restrictions included a reduced daily bag limit of one fish and a possession limit of two fish for the entire season, and a prohibition on halibut retention in DFO Pacific Fishery Management Area 121 (Figure 1) seaward from 12 nm; all of these restrictions were also in place in 2010. The opening of the season was delayed to March 1 and closed on September 5, when the sport quota was projected to have been reached. Fishing was allowed to continue only under conditions of an experimental DFO program which allowed commercial quota to be leased to sport fishers. The amount of participation in that program is currently unknown. The preliminary 2011 Area 2B harvest estimate is 1.22 million pounds, exceeding the fishery allocation by 0.27 million pounds, or 28.7%.

Areas 2C, 3A and 4 - Alaska

Management of the guided fishery in 2011 continued under the Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) program developed by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). Implementation of a catch sharing plan for Areas 2C and 3A was delayed by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), leaving the GHL program as the management program for the sport charter fishery. The program specifies a GHL relative to specified levels of Total constant exploitation yield (TCEY) resulting from the IPHC halibut assessment and harvest policy. In effect, the GHL steps are coarsely linked to changes in abundance. The program is outlined in Table 4.

ADF&G provides harvest estimates for the Alaska sport fishery. Preliminary estimates of the current year's harvest by the guided and unguided sectors were made using sector-specific approaches because of the influence of management restrictions, which differ between sectors, on the projections. Changes in guided fishery bag limit regulations in the past three years led ADF&G

to project the 2011 harvest based on 2011 logbook returns through July 31 and expanded through the end of the year by the proportion caught by July 31 in previous years. Projections for the unguided fishery continue to be made from the Statewide Harvest Survey (SWHS) time series. For both sectors, ADF&G projects the number of fish caught through the aforementioned methods and applies an average weight from current year's dockside sampling. A breakdown of guided (charter) and unguided (private) sector harvests since 2000, along with the estimates for 2011, is shown in Table 5.

For Area 2C, the sport harvest was estimated to have decreased substantially, dropping from 1.97 million pounds in 2010 to 1.31 million pounds in 2011. For the guided fishery, the number of fish caught was relatively unchanged from 2010 (~41,200 fish) but the mean weight declined from 26.4 lb in 2010 to 9.4 lb in 2011, due to the 37-inch maximum size restriction recommended by the IPHC and adopted by the U.S. government. In contrast, the average weight in the unguided fishery was relatively unchanged from 2010 at 16.7 lb, but the number of fish increased 6.5%, resulting in a slightly higher harvest in 2011. The estimated charter fishery harvest of 0.388 million pounds was substantially below the GHL of 0.788 million pounds (Table 4).

The sport fishery harvest in Area 3A increased by about 6% in 2011. Although the overall average weight was unchanged from 2010, the total number of fish caught by both sectors increased 6%. The charter sector was estimated to have caught 185,700 fish in 2011, up 5% from 2010, whereas the private sector fishery increased 8.5% to 134,700 fish. The charter fishery in Area 3A is heavily dependent on tourism but less so than the Area 2C fishery. The bag limit remained unchanged at two fish per day for both sectors. The harvest by the guided sector remains well below the GHL of 3.65 million pounds (Table 4).

Harvest estimates in Areas 3B and 4 were based on the SWHS, which provides an estimate of the number of fish caught. ADF&G has no dockside creel sampling in those areas, so IPHC has traditionally estimated the weight of the catch in those areas by applying the average weight of halibut caught in Kodiak. The estimated 2010 harvests for these areas were also up from 2009, to roughly 40,000 pounds in each area. Halibut sport fishing is much less common in the western Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea due to the relative remoteness of the ports. Since 2005, annual harvests have ranged from 14,000 to 26,000 pounds in Area 3B, and 40,000 to 50,000 pounds in Area 4.

In addition to the one fish bag limit for the guided fishery in Area 2C (see Table 2), NMFS adopted other regulations for the guided fishery which were in addition to IPHC regulations. These were as follows:

- 1) A charter vessel angler may use only one fishing line. No more than six lines are allowed on a charter vessel fishing for halibut;
- 2) Charter operators, guides and crew may not catch and retain halibut during a charter fishing trip;
- 3) Anglers' names and fishing license numbers are to be recorded in the trip log book; and
- 4) Anglers retaining halibut must sign the log at the end of the charter vessel fishing trip.

A summary of the major sport fishery regulations is shown in Table 6.

Table 1. Harvest of Pacific halibut by sport fishers (millions of pounds, net weight) by IPHC regulatory area, 1977-2011. Estimates for 2011 are preliminary.

Year	Area 2A	Area 2B	Area 2C	Area 3A	Area 3B	Area 4	Total
1977	0.013	0.008	0.072	0.196	-	-	0.289
1978	0.010	0.004	0.082	0.282	-	-	0.378
1979	0.015	0.009	0.174	0.365	-	-	0.563
1980	0.019	0.006	0.332	0.488	-	-	0.845
1981	0.019	0.012	0.318	0.751	-	0.012	1.112
1982	0.050	0.033	0.489	0.716	-	0.011	1.299
1983	0.063	0.052	0.553	0.945	-	0.003	1.616
1984	0.118	0.062	0.621	1.026	-	0.013	1.840
1985	0.193	0.262	0.682	1.210	-	0.008	2.355
1986	0.333	0.186	0.730	1.908	-	0.020	3.177
1987	0.446	0.264	0.780	1.989	-	0.030	3.509
1988	0.249	0.252	1.076	3.264	-	0.036	4.877
1989	0.327	0.318	1.559	3.005	-	0.024	5.233
1990	0.197	0.381	1.330	3.638	-	0.040	5.586
1991	0.158	0.292	1.654	4.264	0.014	0.127	6.509
1992	0.250	0.290	1.668	3.899	0.029	0.043	6.179
1993	0.246	0.328	1.811	5.265	0.018	0.057	7.725
1994	0.186	0.328	2.001	4.487	0.021	0.042	7.065
1995	0.236	0.887	1.751	4.511	0.022	0.055	7.462
1996	0.229	0.887	2.129	4.740	0.021	0.077	8.083
1997	0.355	0.887	2.172	5.514	0.028	0.069	9.025
1998	0.383	0.887	2.501	4.702	0.017	0.096	8.586
1999	0.338	0.859	1.843	4.228	0.017	0.094	7.379
2000	0.344	1.021	2.251	5.305	0.015	0.073	9.009
2001	0.446	1.015	1.923	4.675	0.016	0.029	8.104
2002	0.399	1.260	2.090	4.202	0.013	0.048	8.012
2003	0.404	1.218	2.258	5.427	0.009	0.031	9.347
2004	0.487	1.613	2.937	5.606	0.007	0.053	10.703
2005	0.484	1.841	2.798	5.672	0.014	0.050	10.859
2006	0.516	1.752	2.526	5.337	0.014	0.046	10.191
2007	0.504	1.556	3.049	6.283	0.025	0.044	11.461
2008	0.481	1.536	3.264	5.320	0.026	0.040	10.667
2009	0.458	1.098	2.383	4.758	0.030	0.024	8.751
2010	0.373	1.156	1.971	4.285	0.024	0.016	7.825
2011	0.386	1.220	1.313	4.541	0.025	0.018	7.503
2010-2011 change							
Pounds	0.013	0.064	(0.658)	0.256	0.001	0.002	(0.322)
Percent	3.5%	5.5%	(33.4%)	6.0%	4.2%	12.5%	(4.1%)

Table 2. Summary of the 2011 Pacific halibut sport fishery seasons. No size limits were in effect unless otherwise noted.

Regulatory Area & Region	Fishing Dates	Fishing Days per week	No. of Fishing Days	Daily Bag Limit
Area 2A - Washington, Oregon & California				
WA Inside Waters				
East of Low Point	May 5 – 21	3 (Thurs – Sat)	9	1
	May 26 – 29	4 (Thurs – Sun)	4	1
Low Point to Sekiu River	May 26 – 29	4 (Thurs – Sun)	4	1
	Jun 2 – 18	3 (Thurs – Sat)	9	1

WA North Coast (Sekiu Rvr to Queets Rvr)	May 12 – 21	2 (Thurs, Sat)	4	1
	Jun 2, 4, 16, 30	2 (Thurs, Sat)	4	1

WA South Coast (Queets Rvr to Leadbetter Pt.)				
All depths	May 1 – 22	2 (Sun, Tues)	7	1
Northern nearshore	May 2 – May 21	5 (Mn, Wd – Sa)	15	1
	May 23 – Jul 24	7 (Mon – Sun)	33	1

Columbia River (Leadbetter Pt. to Cape Falcon)	May 5 – Jun 4	3 (Thurs – Sat)	15	1
	Aug 5 – Sep 30	3 (Fri – Sun)	57	1

OR Central Coast (Cape Falcon - Humbug Mtn.)				
All Depths	May 13 – Jun 25	3 (Thurs - Sat) ^a	14	1
	Aug 5 – 6	2 (Fri – Sat)	2	1
Less than 40 fathoms	May 1 – Jul 6	7 (Sun – Sat)	37	1
	Aug 13 – Oct 31	7 (Sun – Sat)	80	1

OR/CA (South of Humbug Mtn.)	May 1 – Oct 31	7 (Sun – Sat)	184	1

Area 2B - British Columbia	Mar 1 – Sep 5	7 (Sun – Sat)	188	1

Area 2C - Alaska				
Guided anglers	Feb 1 – Dec 31	7 (Sun – Sat)	334	1 ^b
Unguided anglers	Feb 1 – Dec 31	7 (Sun – Sat)	334	2

Areas 3 and 4 - Alaska	Feb 1 – Dec 31	7 (Sun – Sat)	334	2

^aFishing was prohibited during May 19 – 21.

^bA maximum size limit of 37 inches (fork length) was in effect in 2011.

Table 3. 2011 IPHC Area 2A sport harvest allocations and preliminary catch estimates (pounds, net weight) by subarea.

Subarea	Allocation	Estimate	Pounds Over/(Under)	Percent Taken
WA Inside Waters	58,155	45,856	(12,299)	78.9
WA North Coast	108,792	103,741	(5,051)	95.4
WA South Coast	43,500	45,100	1,600	103.7
Columbia River	15,418	11,279	(4,139)	73.2
OR Central Coast	172,505	169,956	(2,549)	98.5
South OR/California	5,625	9,648	4,023	171.5
Total	403,995	385,580	(18,415)	95.4

Table 4. The Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) fishery targets (millions of pounds, net weight) applicable for the IPHC Areas 2C/3A sport charter fisheries.

Step #	Area 2C		Area 3A	
	Total CEY	GHL	Total CEY	GHL
1	9.027+	1.432	21.581+	3.650
2	7.965 - 9.026	1.217	19.042 - 21.580	3.103
3	6.903 - 7.964	1.074	16.504 - 19.041	2.734
4	5.841 - 6.902	0.931	13.964 - 16.503	2.373
5	4.799 - 5.840	0.788	11.425 - 13.963	2.008

Table 5. Estimated harvest by the private (unguided) and charter (guided) sport halibut fisheries (millions of pounds, net weight) in IPHC Areas 2C and 3A, 2000–2011. Also shown are the Guideline Harvest Levels (GHLs) applicable to the guided fishery. Harvest estimates for 2011 are preliminary.

Year	Area 2C				Area 3A			
	Private	Guided	Total	GHL	Private	Guided	Total	GHL
2000	1.126	1.132	2.258	-	2.165	3.14	5.305	-
2001	0.723	1.202	1.925	-	1.543	3.133	4.676	-
2002	0.814	1.275	2.089	-	1.478	2.733	4.211	-
2003	0.846	1.412	2.258	1.432	2.046	3.382	5.428	3.650
2004	1.187	1.750	2.937	1.432	1.937	3.668	5.605	3.650
2005	0.845	1.952	2.797	1.432	1.984	3.689	5.673	3.650
2006	0.723	1.804	2.527	1.432	1.674	3.664	5.338	3.650
2007	1.131	1.918	3.049	1.432	2.281	4.002	6.283	3.650
2008	1.265	1.999	3.264	0.931	1.942	3.378	5.320	3.650
2009	1.123	1.245	2.368	0.788	2.023	2.734	4.758	3.650
2010	0.885	1.086	1.971	0.788	1.587	2.698	4.285	3.650
2011	0.925	0.388	1.313	0.788	1.704	2.837	4.541	3.650

Table 6. Summary of major U.S. federal and state regulations for the charter (guided) sport halibut fishery in IPHC Areas 2C and 3A.

Area 2C	
Year(s)	Regulations
1995-2005	Two-fish bag limit (no size restrictions), no prohibition on crew retention.
2006	Two-fish bag limit (no size limit), State of AK Emergency Order (EO) prohibiting crew harvest May 26 – Dec 31.
2007	Two-fish bag limit (1 under 32” eff. June 1). No crew retention May 1 – Dec 31 (State EO and Federal Rule).
2008	Two-fish bag limit (one under 32”), except one-fish bag limit June 1-10 (halted by injunction).
2009	One fish (no size limit), no harvest by skipper & crew, line limit (effective June 5).
2010	One fish (no size limit), no harvest by skipper & crew, line limit.
2011	One fish bag limit, under 37” fork length. No harvest by skipper & crew. Line limit.

Area 3A	
Year(s)	Regulations
1995-2006	Two-fish bag limit (no size restrictions), no prohibition on crew retention.
2007	Two-fish bag limit (no size restrictions), state EO prohibiting crew harvest May 1 – Dec 31.
2008	Two-fish bag limit (no size restrictions), state EO prohibiting crew harvest May 24 – Sept 1.
2009	Two-fish bag limit (no size restrictions), state EO prohibiting crew harvest May 23 – Sept 1.
2010-2011	Two-fish bag limit (no size restrictions), no prohibition on crew retention.

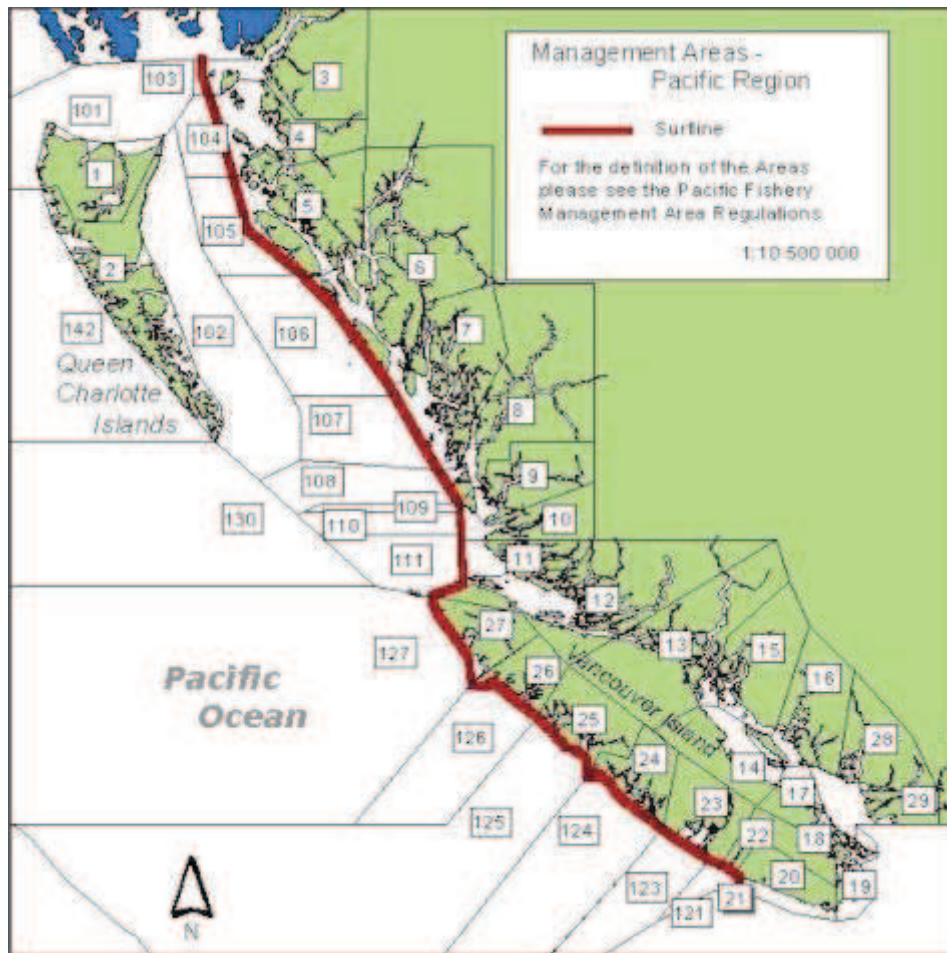


Figure 1. DFO Pacific Fishery Management Areas (PFMA).