

900,000 lb (408.2 mt), which it is in 2003. [NOTE: New for 2003, regulations for the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery require participants in the primary sablefish fishery in which halibut may be retained to follow depth-based management restrictions (*i.e.*, closed areas) as described in a proposed rule published in the **Federal Register** on January 7, 2003 (68 FR 936). The final rule for the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery, including depth-based management measures, will publish in the **Federal Register**. The CSP also divides the sport fisheries into seven geographic areas each with separate allocations, seasons, and bag limits.

For 2003, PFMF recommended changes to the CSP to modify the Pacific halibut fisheries in Area 2A in 2003 and beyond pursuant to recommendations from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). These changes to the CSP will implement closed areas for the Washington North Coast sport fishery subarea and the nontreaty commercial halibut fishery to protect yelloweye rockfish, allocate subarea halibut quota between the May and June sport seasons in Washington's North Coast subarea, cap the incidental halibut retention allocation for the primary sablefish fishery at 70,000 lb (31.8 kg) when halibut is available to that fishery, move the season ending date for Oregon sport fisheries in the North Central and South Central areas from September 30 to October 31, provide more flexibility for inseason sport fishery management, and revise the names of Oregon sport seasons.

A complete description of the PFMF recommended changes to the CSP, notice of a draft Environmental Assessment and Regulatory Impact Review (EA/RIR), and proposed sport fishery management measures were published in the **Federal Register** on February 6, 2003 (68 FR 6103) with a request for public comments by February 18, 2003. No public comments were received. Therefore, NMFS has finalized the EA/RIR, made a finding of no significant impact, and approved the changes to the CSP as proposed. Copies of the complete CSP for Area 2A as modified and the final EA/RIR are available from the NMFS Northwest Regional Office (see **ADDRESSES**).

The ODFW held public workshops (after the IPHC set the Area 2A quota) in early February 2003, to develop recommendations on the opening dates of the sport fisheries. WDFW did not hold public meetings after the IPHC annual meeting in 2003 because the catch limit and season structure are the

same as in 2002. The WDFW and ODFW sent letters to NMFS providing the following recommendations on the opening dates and season structure for managing the sport fisheries consistent with the CSP.

WDFW recommended a May 8 to July 18 season for eastern Puget Sound and a May 22 to August 1 season for western Puget Sound, 5 days per week (closed Tuesday and Wednesday). The recommended number of fishing days is based on an analysis of past harvest patterns in this fishery and meets the requirements of the CSP for the overall Puget Sound sport fishery subarea. For the Washington North Coast subarea, WDFW has recommended a season opening May 1 and continuing until the May sub-quota is taken, 5 days per week (closed Sunday and Monday), and a second season opening June 18 and continuing until the remaining quota is projected to be taken, 5 days per week (closed Sunday and Monday). WDFW also recommended changing the North Coast subarea's closed area to a "C-shaped" area, known as the Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area, in accordance with (f)(1)(ii) of the CSP (see **ADDRESSES**). This change in the size and shape of the closed area is intended to protect yelloweye rockfish, an overfished groundfish species that coexists with Pacific halibut. The "C-shaped" area has been determined to be an area with high interception of yelloweye rockfish in recreational fisheries. This area will be closed to recreational groundfish and halibut fishing. For the Washington South Coast subarea, WDFW has recommended a season opening May 1 and continuing until the quota is taken, 5 days per week (closed Friday and Saturday) in the offshore area and 7 days per week in the nearshore area. WDFW recommendations for the Puget Sound, North Coast and South Coast Washington subareas meet the requirements of the CSP.

Both WDFW and ODFW have recommended opening the Columbia River subarea on May 1 and continuing the season until the quota has been reached, 7 days per week. This recommended season meets the requirements of the CSP.

ODFW recommended starting the nearshore fishery in the Oregon Central Coast and South Coast subareas, on May 1 and continuing the season until the sub-quota for that fishery is taken, 7 days per week. For the all-depth fisheries in those subareas, ODFW recommended a 6 day spring season of May 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, and 17, based on an analysis of past harvest rates. ODFW further recommended a 4-day summer

all-depth season of August 1, 2, 8, and 9. If the spring season does not take the entire spring sub-quota for these subareas, ODFW recommended these additional potential opening dates: June 19, 20, 21, 26, 27, and 28. If the summer season does not take the entire summer sub-quota for these subareas, ODFW recommended these additional potential opening dates: August 22 and 23, September 5, 6, 19, and 20, October 17 and 18. These recommendations meet the requirements of the CSP for these subareas.

For the southernmost subarea, south of Humbug Mountain, Oregon, ODFW recommended opening this subarea on May 1 and continuing the season until September 30, 7 days per week. This recommended season meets the requirements of the CSP.

NMFS is implementing sport fishing management measures in Area 2A based on recommendations from the states in accordance with the CSP.

Technical Correction to Halibut Regulations

With this rule, NMFS will revise the Federal halibut regulations at 50 CFR 300.63, which authorize vessels with IPHC licenses that are operating in the primary sablefish longline fishery north of Pt. Chehalis to land halibut taken incidentally in that fishery. The technical correction will alter the regulations to more clearly state that no halibut taken in this fishery may be landed south of Pt. Chehalis. This is a minor clarification and has no substantive effect on the environment or the regulated community because it only clarifies where halibut taken incidentally in the primary sablefish longline fishery may be landed.

Annual Halibut Management Measures

The annual management measures that follow for the 2003 Pacific halibut fishery are identical to those recommended by the IPHC and approved by the Secretary of State.

2003 Pacific Halibut Fishery Regulations

Regulations respecting the Convention Between Canada and the United States of America for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the Northern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea.

1. Short Title

These regulations may be cited as the Pacific Halibut Fishery Regulations.

2. Application

(1) These Regulations apply to persons and vessels fishing for halibut