

# Charter: Recreational fishermen are allowed to catch one halibut each

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management issues. The company offers guided trips for salmon, halibut, tuna, sturgeon and bottomfish, as well as burials at sea.

Investigators seized passenger manifests and other documents during the visit. Department of Fish and Wildlife Capt. Dan Chadwick said in a phone interview. Chadwick declined to name the suspects, saying the case is still under investigation, and no one has been arrested or charged yet.

A staff member hung up when a Chinook Observer reporter called the Pacific Salmon office.

## Regulated fishery

The International Pacific Halibut Commission manages Pacific halibut stocks in the U.S. and Canada. The commissioners, who are appointed by the U.S. president and Canadian prime minister, gather once a year to review the health of fish populations, make catch recommendations and discuss regulatory proposals. State and provincial governments then use their recommendations to set local limits. In Washington state, the Department of Fish and Wildlife manages the recreational halibut fishery.

Halibut is a quota-based fishery, meaning that the season ends when the total catch reaches a predetermined limit. The quotas are based on fish



Natalie St. John/EO Media Group

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Lt. Greg Bush and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Sgt. Tony Leonetti reviewed records at Pacific Salmon Charters in the Port of Ilwaco on Thursday. The business is under investigation for alleged violations of the strict rules that govern the halibut fishery, according to a search warrant.**

population estimates and other data, and are intended to prevent overfishing. For 2017, the commission recommended setting the Washington state sportfishing limit for halibut at 237,762 pounds, according to the website. The regular recreational season opened in early May, and lasted for eight days this year. After assessing fish stocks, managers allowed one extra day of fishing on June 17.

Under Washington state law, recreational fishermen are allowed to catch one halibut each. "If you're not happy with the size of the fish, you can release it right away and try for a bigger one," Chadwick said. "But the minute you retain a fish, it's yours."

## Honest customers

The quota system can only keep fish populations stable if fishermen are honest about what they catch, Chadwick said, so Fish and Wildlife took note when a Pacific Salmon customer alleged in May that the crew on his fishing trip had blatantly violated the rules.

According to a Fish and Wildlife report filed with the warrant in South District Court, a group of four men from Idaho took a trip on the Westwind in mid-May. In a written statement, one of the men said he and his friends started to put away their gear after catching their fish, and were surprised when the captain and deckhand urged them to "keep fishing"

and "get bigger fish." Another man said crew members told him they would store all of the fish in a "live well" until the end, and then decide which ones to keep. At the end of the trip, he said, one of the crew lined the fish up on the deck and sorted them by size.

"None of them appeared to be alive," he wrote. "Then I saw the crew start throwing some of the fish over the side, several of which had their throats cut." A third man said the deckhand told him to remember his tag number, and urged him to "Keep fishing for a bigger one," even though he already had a fish in the live well.

"I don't recall anybody being told to stop fishing throughout the rest of the day, no matter how many they caught," he wrote. He said he didn't realize they were high-grading until he watched the crew transfer tags from small fish to large fish. He alleged that seven halibut "floated away, belly up," after the crew tossed them over the side.

After the trip, the men discussed what they had seen, and decided to contact the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

## Undercover angler

When fisheries managers decided to open the season for one more day on June 17, Fish and Wildlife police saw an opportunity and took it. They booked a halibut fishing trip for a plainclothes officer on the

Pacific Dream.

During a briefing at the start of the trip, the officer and other passengers listened as a skipper allegedly explained that if they caught "little chickens," they would store them, rather than "gaffing," or killing them, so that the customers could "size up" at the end of the day.

In all, they caught 18 fish that day — four more than the legal limit, according to the officer's report. The officer said he watched as a crew member held pairs of fish by the tails to compare their sizes, and then threw four small ones overboard. At least one was already dead, he said.

## Fishin' mission

Two other Fish and Wildlife officers met the boat in port. At first, crew members allegedly denied exceeding limits or throwing small fish back. The officers claimed they repeatedly gave the suspects opportunities to come clean, but no one did, until they revealed that an undercover officer had posed as an angler as part of an ongoing investigation.

At that point, two employees allegedly acknowledged they had been high-grading, and one claimed he had been below-decks for most of the trip and hadn't seen anything.

The investigating officer concluded that high-grading appeared to be "standard practice for Pacific Salmon Charters."

## Other customers

During the search last week, officers seized customer manifests, receipts, fishing license books and other documents. Investigators are using that information to find and contact other customers, Chadwick said.

Pacific Salmon staff could potentially be charged with two misdemeanors, second-degree unlawful recreational fishing, and wasting food fish or shellfish. They could also be cited for violating state rules for fishing seasons and limits. In the report, the investigator said, if they are charged with lying to, or misleading officers, it might put their U.S. Coast Guard licenses at risk.

Chadwick said high-grading and other forms of poaching have harmful consequences for people, as well as fish. When a charter company uses illegal or unethical practices to help their customers catch more and bigger fish, it puts honest competitors at a disadvantage. Left unchecked, one company's unethical practices can create an atmosphere where other companies also feel that they have to break the rules to stay in the game, Chadwick said.

"We're furthering our investigation ... to understand the extent of this practice over the last year," Chadwick said. "Two boats from the same company doing the same thing — it's an indication to us that we need to dig further."

# Seaside: 'This could have a major impact'

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Commissioners also proposed plans which would include "residential over commercial" units that could open up some downtown commercial buildings to condominiums and apartments.

"That could have a major impact on workforce housing," Mayor Jay Barber said. "I'm open to looking at how we can help landlords bring buildings up to code."

## Removing hurdles

In a list intended to remove hurdles to providing additional rental opportunities in residential zones, commissioners presented proposals to encourage long-term rental housing development, including plans to modify parking requirements and rules for accessory dwelling units.

"Right now we're required to provide two spots per dwelling unit," Carpenter said. "But two spots is prohibitive if you want to have workforce housing with smaller units. If developers

are able to reduce the number of parking spots, they can build more."

Recent state legislation provides new rules for multi-family accessory units in single-family zones, Planning Director Kevin Cupples said, which could add to the city's rental stock.

Staff has not had time to do an extensive review of the bill, Cupples said, although it may be necessary for the city to begin working on amendments relating to accessory dwelling units.

A reduction in system development charges — the costs charged to builders for city services like roads and sewers — was also considered as a way to invite developers to provide more affordable or workforce units. The fees could be reduced in exchange for more rental units.

## Vacation rentals

City Councilors and commissioners eliminated further short-term rental regulation — including a cap on the number of short-term rentals

— as a response to the long-term rental shortage.

"I see these as two separate issues: vacation rentals and workforce housing," Planning Commissioner Chris Hoth said. "I don't think we're going to accomplish anything if we put them together."

Cupples said the city has 398 vacation rentals, about 8.5 percent of the city's 4,665 housing units. The number is up from 368 units in 2016, and 348 in 2010.

Barber said he had not

received complaints about the number of vacation rentals. "I haven't personally gotten pushback from citizens about the number," he said.

"Who's going to enforce more restrictions?" Councilor Dana Phillips said. "We don't have the staff."

"If there are problems with VRDs, we should deal with those problems," Hoth said of vacation rentals. "If there are troubles with workforce housing, we should deal with those. I don't think those things are complementary."



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**Nathan Pacheco drops a wheelbarrow full of mulch onto a new section of playground at Tapiola Park on Tuesday. Pacheco was volunteering along with about 20 others.**

# Volunteers: 20 people turned out for the event

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"It was overwhelmingly passed with full support from the council and the mayor," he said. "So, the community wanted to do something to give back to the city and to show their thanks for the support."

Jonah Dart-McLean, the city's park maintenance supervisor, said he was very pleased with the effort and the roughly 20 people who turned out for

the event. Dart-McLean said the project to expand the playground had been on the city's radar for some time.

"This worked out really well," Dart-McLean said. "This project at Tapiola was something we had been considering for a while. We wanted to bring the playground together to make it more cohesive and safe for kids. It worked out well that they had the enthusiasm to get everyone together. This was a win-win."



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