

NOAA approves new Oregon recreational rockfish fishery

Oregon fishermen have more opportunities to catch rockfish, or groundfish, following NOAA Fisheries’ approval of a new ocean fishery that uses selective gear to target plentiful species off Oregon while avoiding over-fished species.

NOAA Fisheries this week announced a final rule authorizing a new Oregon recreational fishery for groundfish, such as yellowtail and widow rockfish, at midwater depths greater than 40 fathoms.

Recreational fishing for rockfish off Oregon generates more than \$14 million for the state’s economy annually and has been the largest recreational ocean fishery in the state in recent years. The new fishery is expected to add to these economic benefits.

“People have been waiting a long time for this, so it’s a great opportunity to expand opportunities while still protecting those fish that need it,” said John Holloway of the Recreational Fishing Alliance in Oregon and chair of the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel at the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC).

The PFMC endorsed the new fishery, which will begin in April.

Since 2004, recreational fishermen pursuing rockfish in Oregon had been limited to shallow depths during peak summer months to avoid impacts on overfished deeper water species such as yelloweye rockfish. That left some coastal communities with no recreational fishing for

groundfish, a mainstay of the coastal economy.

The new fishery, which operates around offshore reefs at midwater depths, will also help disperse fishing pressure from nearshore reefs and reducing the likelihood that nearshore fishing will hit its limits and close early, as it did last year.

It will also give charter boats an alternative to salmon fishing in years of low salmon abundance.

Holloway helped suggest the new recreational fishery some 10 years ago, drawing on a commercial fishing method using a “long leader,” a type of hook and line gear, which suspends hooks and lures at least 30 feet off the sea floor. That avoids sensitive groundfish species such as yelloweye

rockfish that dwell on the bottom and are still recovering from overfishing in the 1990s.

Recreational fishermen tested the long-leader method under an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) supported by the PFMC and authorized by NOAA Fisheries that gave them special permission to fish in Rockfish Conservation Areas usually closed to fishing.

They found that long-leader gear catches plentiful species that live higher in the water column, while almost entirely avoiding overfished species, such as yelloweye, that are managed under rebuilding plans to increase their population.

“The fishing community helped demonstrate to us that long leaders caught the fish

they wanted to catch, and now the fishing community is benefiting,” said Gretchen Hanshew, Branch Chief for Groundfish and Coastal Pelagic Species in NOAA Fisheries’ West Coast Region.

“It took some time, but fishing communities and the economy should all benefit.”

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) provided onboard observers to support the EFP fishing, as well as assistance in developing an environmental assessment and drafting new regulations allowing the fishery.

A state report on the experimental fishing aboard charter boats from Newport and Depoe Bay concluded that the long-leader gear has “much lower bycatch rates for yelloweye and canary rockfish in

comparison to current West Coast recreational fishing practices.” NOAA Fisheries helped fund the test fishing.

The numbers back up the findings. During test fishing over a three-year period fishermen caught hundreds of rockfish weighting 5.4 metric tons but only two yelloweye, Holloway said.

“We were fishing in the middle of the area and hardly catching any yelloweye,” he said. He praised the collaboration between fishermen and managers to test and apply an innovative fishing method that benefits both fishing and the environment. “It’s a simple approach that works for everyone.”

Volunteers still being sought for triathlon

Dunes City is hosting the sixth annual Oregon Dunes Triathlon and Duathlon on Saturday, May 12.

With the event just a few weeks away, organizers are encouraging volunteers to sign up to staff the race courses. Most volunteers work only half a day and all volunteers will receive a free event T-shirt.

Volunteers are needed between about 6 a.m. and 1 p.m. on race day. Anyone with a few hours to spare and who would like to be part of this event can call Dunes City Hall at 541-997-3338.

Especially needed are volunteers with kayaks or paddle boards to monitor the swim

course, volunteers to staff the run course and parking areas, and a volunteer with a motorized boat to set up the swim course marker buoys.

Volunteers help ensure that participating athletes stay safe and also play a vital support role for all of the athletes by providing encouragement and hospitality; many athletes have said that they return to the Tri/Du each year because they appreciate the enthusiastic volunteers.

Again this year, Dunes City will award a \$250 donation to the organization that brings the most volunteers on race day.

Be sure to mention your organization’s name if you register to volunteer.

Oregon ocean fishing looking up for 2018

SALEM — Ocean salmon anglers can look forward to more opportunity this year based on recommendations made Tuesday for federal waters (outside three miles) during a Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting in Portland.

Sport salmon fishing in the ocean off the Columbia River will open June 23 and is expected to run through Labor Day, Sept. 3, unless salmon quotas are reached earlier.

The area from Cape Falcon south to Humbug Mt. opened for Chinook on March 15 and will remain open until Oct. 31. The forecast for Coho is down this year for both the Oregon coast and Columbia River, largely due to poor ocean conditions.

Sport fishing for hatchery Coho will be open from Cape Falcon south to Humbug Mt. from June 30 through Sept. 3, or until the quota of 35,000 fish is

met.

A small season for wild and hatchery Coho in this area is also scheduled for Sept. 7-8 and each Friday and Saturday after until Sept. 29, or the quota of 3,500 Coho is met, which may happen quickly.

Unlike the full closure to salmon fishing last year, the area south of Humbug Mt to the OR/CA border will be open to sport fishing for Chinook from May 19 through Aug. 29. The strong forecast for Rogue River fall Chinook is a bright spot for the coast this year.

Commercial troll fishing for Chinook will be open intermittently along the whole Oregon coast from May through the summer. In 2017, all commercial salmon trolling was closed south of Florence.

“While this won’t be a banner year for ocean salmon fishing, overall it’s an improvement from 2017. This is partic-

ularly true for communities on the Southern Oregon coast, which were hit hard by 2017’s salmon closures,” said Chris Kern, ODFW Deputy Fish Division Administrator.

“I want to thank the many advisors, tribal members, agency staff, and members of the general public, who all worked hard to ensure that conservation goals for salmon stocks are met while providing fishing opportunities for communities up and down the west coast,” added Kern.

The PFMC recommendations will be forwarded to NOAA Fisheries for approval and implementation.

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission will be asked to adopt matching rules for State waters (inside 3 miles) at their April 20 meeting in Astoria.

Screening Presented by: Siuslaw News & KCST & KCFM Coast Radio

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