

Comment invited on options for 2009 Oregon ocean salmon seasons

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. — The Pacific Fishery Management Council will host a public hearing in Coos Bay on March 30 to review options for the upcoming ocean salmon season off the Oregon coast.

In meetings last week, the PFMC announced the strongest hatchery coho abundance forecast since 2001, raising prospects of a banner year for sport fishermen along the coast.

A total of 1.3 million adult coho are forecast for the Oregon coast and Columbia River this year, up from 290,000 forecasted in 2008.

The council, which includes fishery managers from Oregon, Washington and California, adopted three ocean salmon-fishing options that will be submitted for public review and comment before ocean salmon-fishing seasons are finalized at a meeting in San Francisco scheduled for April 4-9.

The public meeting in Coos Bay on March 30 will be held at the 7 p.m. at the Red Lion Hotel.

PFMC, which establishes fishing seasons in ocean water three to 200 miles off the Oregon, Washington and California coasts, last year adopted relatively meager recreational ocean fishing quotas of 10,180 marked coho salmon in the Columbia River Area and 9,000 marked coho south of Cape Falcon to the Oregon/California border. This year's recreational marked coho options for ocean waters off Oregon are significantly larger and include the following catch quotas:

Columbia River Ocean Area (Leadbetter Pt., WA to Cape Falcon, OR)

Cape Falcon to the OR/CA Border

Option 1

94,500

117,000

Option 2

94,500

100,000

Option 3

84,000

70,000

All three proposals represent a substantial improvement in fishing opportunities available to Oregon anglers, according to Ron Boyce, Technical Resources Program manager for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

“We are looking at the potential of a phenomenal sport coho fishery this year,” said Boyce. “The upper end of the proposed harvest quota is the highest we’ve had since the coho marked selective fishery program began in 1999. I’m excited about that. This could be a real boon to coastal communities.”

In 2008, poor fall chinook salmon returns on the Sacramento River led to the largest fishery closure on record. While this year’s returns of fall chinook to the Sacramento are somewhat better than last year’s, sport and commercial fishing opportunities for chinook salmon south of Cape Falcon will continue to be very limited.

North of Cape Falcon options

Recreational- From the US/Canada border to Cape Falcon, the proposed sport fishing options have coho quotas ranging from 168,000 to 189,000 that start in late June or July and run into September. The 2009 coho quota options are 8-9 times larger than the 2008 quota. Chinook fishing will also be allowed, but in the Columbia River and Westport areas, one option only allows marked hatchery chinook to be kept.

Commercial- Ocean commercial fishery options north of Cape Falcon include traditional chinook seasons in the May-June time frame. In the July to September time frame, options give a wide range of season open days, and include gear restrictions to target pink salmon along the North Washington Coast. Chinook quotas for all areas and times range from 10,000 to 22,500, which are similar to the 2008 quota of 20,000. The coho quotas range from 32,000 to 36,000, which are 8-9 times higher than the 2008 quota.

South of Cape Falcon options

Recreational- South of Cape Falcon, Oregon recreational options for coho range from 70,000 to 117,000, which is up from 9,000 last year. Options for this area include mark-selective coho fishing seasons starting in June or July and running through August with additional coho opportunity in September. One of the options even includes a three-fish daily bag limit to take advantage of the expected large abundance of hatchery coho.

Options for Oregon ocean chinook fishing in the Brookings area range from closed to open for 10 days in late August and early September. For the Tillamook, Newport and Coos Bay areas, seasons are proposed for September with a bag limit of up to one chinook per day.

Commercial- Oregon commercial season options in the Brookings area range from closed to a season with a 1,000 chinook quota in September. Season options from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt. range from closed to open for chinook and coho in September, with quotas on coho catch and weekly landing limits for both coho and chinook.

PFMC will host public hearings to review the options on March 30 at 7 p.m. at the Red Lion Hotel in Coos Bay and at 7 p.m. at the Chateau Westport in Westport, Wash.; and on March 31 at 7 p.m. at the Red Lion Hotel in Eureka, Calif. The proposals will also be reviewed by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission at its March 20 meeting in Salem.

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