

Recreational bag limits reduced for some rockfish species

January 12, 2022



The California Department of Fish and Wildlife recently announced multiple changes to recreational rockfish sub-bag limits which took effect Jan. 6. The emergency regulations were adopted by the California Fish and Game Commission in mid-December to align with federal regulations for the species. Changes to the sub-bag limits within the 10-fish daily Rockfish, Cabezon, Greenling complex bag and possession limit include:

A decrease to the statewide sub-bag limit for vermilion rockfish (*Sebastes miniatus*) from five fish to four fish

A new statewide sub-bag limit for quillback rockfish (*S. maliger*) of one fish

A new statewide sub-bag limit for copper rockfish (*S. caurinus*) of one fish

The RCG complex has a daily 10-fish bag and possession aggregate limit, meaning that each angler's catch can be composed of any combination of rockfish, cabezon or greenling, as long as total catch remains at or

below 10 fish. Sub-bag limits within the RCG bag limit are implemented when harvest guidelines cannot accommodate the 10-fish bag limit being composed of a single species.

“New stock assessments conducted in 2021 for quillback and copper rockfish suggest severe population declines for these two species. Also, unsustainably high catches of vermilion rockfish have occurred each year since 2015,” said CDFW Environmental Program Manager Marci Yaremko. “For these reasons, new federal regulations were needed to implement reduced sport bag limits for these three species in 2022.”

Despite these changes, there are still numerous opportunities to catch other groundfish species with healthy populations in 2022 when seasons are open.

Anglers are reminded that when rockfish or any other species subject to barotrauma are released, use of a descending device is encouraged to return the fish to the bottom.

In an effort to better assist anglers with identifying rockfish species while fishing, CDFW is preparing new informational flyers to distinguish copper and quillback rockfish from similar-looking species, such as gopher and canary rockfish. The flyers will be available soon on CDFW’s Fish and Shellfish Identification page and the Marine Region Groundfish page.

Anglers should check CDFW’s website for the current regulations before fishing for groundfish, which include rockfish, lingcod and other species as defined in the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, section 1.91, as changes can occur in-season. Though the boat-based groundfish fishery is closed statewide as of Jan. 1, the fishery is open year-round for shore-based angling and spearfishing. The boat-based recreational groundfish fishery season dates and depth limits are expected to be the same as in 2021 and are as follows:

In the Northern Management Area (the Oregon/California state line to near Cape Mendocino) and the Mendocino Management Area (near Cape Mendocino to Point Arena) from May 1 through Oct. 31, take is prohibited seaward of the 30 fathom (180 feet) Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) boundary line. From Nov. 1 through Dec. 31, groundfish may be taken at any depth in these two areas.

In the San Francisco Management Area (Point Arena to Pigeon Point) and the Central Management Area (Pigeon Point to Point Conception) from April 1 through Dec. 31, take is prohibited seaward of the 50 fathom (300 feet) RCA boundary line.

In the Southern Management Area (Point Conception to the U.S./Mexico border) from March 1 through Dec. 31 take is prohibited seaward of the 100 fathom (600 feet) RCA boundary line.

In all Groundfish Management Areas, the RCA boundary line for the established depth constraint is the series of connected waypoints defined in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 50, Part 660, Subpart C.

For more information on the new 2022 recreational rockfish sub-bag limits and to stay informed of in-season changes, please call the Recreational Groundfish Hotline at (831) 649-2801 or visit CDFW’s summary of recreational groundfish fishing regulations for 2022. For background information on groundfish science and management, please visit CDFW’s Marine Region Groundfish page.

