

Pacific Council releases alternatives for 2024 West Coast Ocean Salmon Fisheries

March 11, 2024



The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) has adopted three alternatives for 2024 ocean salmon fisheries off Washington, Oregon, and California, which are available for public review. The Council will make a final decision on salmon seasons at its next meeting on April 6-11, 2024. Detailed information about season starting dates, areas open, and catch limits for the three alternatives are available on the Council's website at www.pccouncil.org.

Forecasts for West Coast Chinook and coho stocks in 2024 are a mixed bag, with some low and high points when compared to last year. Federal requirements to conserve Fraser River (Canada) coho, Washington coast natural coho, lower Columbia River natural coho, Klamath River fall Chinook and Sacramento River fall Chinook will be the main constraints for this year's ocean salmon fisheries.

"Meeting our conservation and management objectives continues to be the highest priority for the Council," said Council Chair, Brad Pettinger. "Balancing those objectives while providing meaningful commercial and

recreational seasons remains a challenge in 2024.”

Washington and Northern Oregon (North of Cape Falcon)

Fisheries north of Cape Falcon (in northern Oregon) are limited mainly by the need to constrain catch of lower Columbia River natural coho. On the bright side, two natural coho stocks previously declared overfished (Queets River and Strait of Juan de Fuca) now meet the criteria for rebuilt status.

Tribal ocean fisheries north of Cape Falcon

Tribal negotiations are underway, but at this time, the Chinook and coho quotas for Tribal ocean fishery alternatives range from 35,000 to 45,000 for Chinook, and from 27,500 to 47,500 coho, compared to a range from 30,000 to 50,000 for Chinook, and from 42,000 to 62,000 coho in 2023. Under the range of alternatives, seasons would open May 1 and continue into September, and closing no later than September 30.

Commercial season alternatives

The non-Tribal ocean commercial fishery North of Cape Falcon include alternatives that reflect traditional seasons between May and September. Chinook quotas for all areas and times range from 36,000 to 42,500, compared to a range from 32,500 to 42,500 in 2023. Coho quotas range from 12,800 to 16,800 marked coho, compared to a range from 27,200 to 32,000 marked coho 2023.

Sport season alternatives

The ocean sport fishery north of Cape Falcon include alternatives with Chinook recreational quotas range from 36,000 to 42,500, compared to a range from 32,500 to 42,500 in 2023. For coho, recreational quotas range from 67,200 to 88,200 marked coho, compared to range from 142,800 to 168,000 marked coho in 2023. Starting dates range from mid- to late-June with the season continuing through most or all of September. Chinook and coho retention are generally allowed throughout the proposed seasons.

Oregon (south of Cape Falcon to the California border)

Fisheries south of Cape Falcon are again limited mainly by the low abundance forecast for both Klamath River and Sacramento River fall Chinook. While the forecasts for these two stocks are higher than last year, this year’s management alternatives show significantly reduced or closed to fishing opportunity compared to average seasons given the very low abundance forecasts for key California Chinook stocks of concern. Coho abundance as a whole is forecasted to be less than last year’s forecast, but the natural coho forecasts are generally higher this year compared to last year.

Commercial season alternatives

The ocean commercial fishery from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain include two alternatives that open in mid- April, with some opportunity in May and June, and open all of September and October (with vessel limits). One alternative also has limited opportunities in July. In the third alternative, a limited coho season is

also being considered in September. In the Oregon Klamath Management Zone, seasons are proposed to occur in the last half of April in two alternative and proposed closed in the third alternative.

Sport season alternatives

Oregon ocean recreational alternatives from Cape Falcon to the Oregon/California border include mark-selective coho fishing seasons that start in mid-June and continue through mid-August. Quotas range from 40,000 to 50,000 marked coho (compared to 90,000 to 110,000 in 2023). In addition, non-mark-selective coho fisheries are proposed in all alternatives for the area between Cape Falcon and Humbug Mountain for the month of September, with quotas ranging from 25,000 to 30,000 coho (compared to 15,000 to 25,000 in 2023). All alternatives provide Chinook retention from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain from March through October, except for some weeks in August in two alternatives. In the area from Humbug Mountain to the Oregon/California border, all alternatives would allow opportunity in May through most or all of August, with coho retention in mid- to late June and continues into the latter part of August.

California

California fisheries offer very limited opportunity in 2024 due to the low forecasts for Klamath River and Sacramento River fall Chinook, and constraints surrounding California Coastal Chinook. Two alternatives for both commercial and sport fisheries offer limited opportunity coastwide, with the third alternative proposed being closed in all areas.

Commercial season alternatives

California ocean commercial alternatives include limited opportunity in all subareas in two of the three alternatives. The third alternative is proposed closed. All proposed seasons include harvest limits, along with weekly vessel-based landing and possession limits, and seasons are limited to June. Additional requirements include landing fish in the subarea caught and a 24-hour quick reporting requirement necessary for monitoring catch as the season progresses.

Sport season alternatives

California ocean recreational alternatives include limited opportunity in all subareas in two of the three alternatives. The third alternative is proposed closed. Under Alternative I, all areas would have minimal opportunity in June, July, August, September and October. Alternative II provides minimal opportunity in just July and August. Harvest guidelines will be in place and inseason action may be taken to enact closures to ensure the fishery remains within preseason projections of harvest.

Management Objectives for Southern Resident Killer Whales

“The 2024 salmon season discussions have once again been dominated by the severely low forecasts for both the Klamath and Sacramento River fall Chinook stocks”, said Executive Director, Merrick Burden, “the Council will need to do its best when setting the 2024 seasons to include considerations for the economic implications to the coastal communities and the low abundances of key salmon stocks.”

The Council worked collaboratively with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to understand the effects of Council-area fisheries on Southern Resident killer whales, which are listed as endangered. Based in part on information provided by the Council's ad-hoc Southern Resident Killer Whale Workgroup, the Council amended the Pacific Salmon Fishery Management Plan to address the needs of the whales while providing salmon harvest opportunities. As part of the amendment, the Council adopted a Chinook abundance threshold for the North of Falcon area, below which additional action (management measures) would be required when considering ocean salmon seasons. The threshold value is 623,000 Chinook. The Chinook abundance is projected to be well above this threshold in 2024.

Management Process

The Council has scheduled one public hearing for each coastal state to hear comments on the alternatives. The Washington and California hearings are scheduled for Monday, March 25 (in-person) and the Oregon hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, March 26 (on-line). The public will also be able to comment on the alternatives during the April Council meeting. Materials and instructions for joining online Council meetings and hearings will be posted to the Council website.

The Council will consult with scientists, hear public comment, revise preliminary decisions, and choose a final alternative at its meeting April 6-11.

The Council will forward its final season recommendations to NMFS for its approval and implementation no later than May 16, 2024.

All Council meetings are open to the public.

Council Role

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 for the purpose of managing fisheries 3-200 miles offshore of the U.S. coastline. The Pacific Council recommends management measures for fisheries off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington.

On the Web

- Pacific Fishery Management Council (www.pcouncil.org)
- Draft Alternatives for 2024 salmon management are on the 'Annual season management process' page on the Council's website.
- Final Alternatives and analyses of the biological and socioeconomic impacts will be posted on the Council web page on or about March 22 (look for 2024 Preseason Report II on this page)
- Fact sheet: Salmon
- Fact sheet: Geography of Salmon

- Fact sheet: Common Terms Used in Salmon Management

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