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# 2015 Salmon Overfishing Determinations: FAQs

NOAA Fisheries has made a determination that four Pacific salmon stocks are “subject to overfishing.” Notice of this determination was sent to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in July and subsequently published in the Federal Register on September 2, 2015.

## What is an overfishing determination?

When harvest of a particular stock exceeds the allowable rate prescribed in the Fishery Management Plan developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council, the stock is determined to be “subject to overfishing.” This does not mean they are overfished, but rather is a cautionary determination that indicates further attention is warranted and the rate of harvest may need to be reduced.

## What salmon stocks are subject to overfishing?

The Pacific Fishery Management Council manages fisheries on 67 salmon stocks through the Pacific Salmon Fishery Management Plan. Of those, four have been identified as subject to overfishing:

- Upper Columbia River summer Chinook salmon
- Willapa Bay fall Chinook salmon
- Grays Harbor fall Chinook salmon
- Hoh coho



*Spawning coho.  
Photo: John McMillan, NOAA*

## What’s the difference between overfishing and overfished?

The two terms are distinct. An overfishing determination has no connection to and does not indicate that a stock is overfished. None of the four stocks are close to being considered overfished, which would be an indication of more serious conservation concern. The Council amended the Pacific Salmon Fishery Management Plan in December 2011 to include new definitions for “overfishing” and “overfished.”

**OVERFISHING** is based on the annual rate of harvest (called “exploitation rate”). When harvest in a particular year exceeds the allowable exploitation rate specified in the Fishery Management Plan for a given stock, that stock is determined to be subject to overfishing. The determination is a caution that indicates the need for reducing the rate of harvest and reviewing the status of the stock.

**OVERFISHED** is based on the number of adult salmon of a given stock that return to fresh water to spawn. When too few salmon of a given stock return to spawn over a three-year period, the stock is considered overfished (whether or not fishing was the cause of insufficient returns). An overfished determination indicates that the stock is depressed and is a stronger indicator of conservation concern.

### **How was the overfishing determination made? How long does it last?**

Each year the Council reviews the status of salmon stocks relative to the overfishing and overfished criteria. This review is published each March in the annual Preseason Report I: Stock Abundance Analysis, which is available on the

Council's website ([www.pcouncil.org](http://www.pcouncil.org)). The report published in March 2015 indicated that the harvest of the four stocks had exceeded the allowable exploitation rates specified in the current Fishery Management Plan and thus they were determined to be subject to overfishing. The determinations were based on the most recent data available, which for the Chinook stocks was from 2012 and for the coho stock was from 2013.

The overfishing determination ends when the annual exploitation rate no longer exceeds specified limits in the Fishery Management Plan. The Council's next review will be published in the March 2016 Preseason Report I, and will indicate whether the determination should continue.

### **Does the overfishing determination mean these salmon are going to be listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)?**

No, none of the affected stocks in the recent notice of overfishing are listed or under consideration for listing under the ESA. The overfishing determination is provided for under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and has no ESA-related ramifications.

### **How did the overfishing occur?**

In short, the harvest or exploitation rate for the Chinook salmon stocks exceeded what was anticipated in the management plan by 1 percent and the harvest rate for the coho stock exceeded anticipated impacts by 5 percent. Ocean harvest off Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, and northern Oregon, and in-river fisheries in Washington contribute to impacts on the affected salmon stocks. Fisheries managers work together under the Pacific Salmon Treaty and other agreements to keep fisheries impacts within limits in the Fishery Management Plan, but sometimes they are exceeded. The overfishing determination signals that further scrutiny is warranted and harvests may need to be reduced if the situation continues.

### **Are Pacific salmon fisheries sustainable?**

Federally managed fisheries in the U. S., including Pacific salmon fisheries, are managed sustainably through a dynamic and public process that uses the best science available. Overfishing and overfished determinations are part of this science-based management process, ensuring continued monitoring and signaling caution when necessary. This approach has earned the U.S. the reputation of being a global leader in sustainable fisheries management.

### **If these stocks are subject to overfishing, why are we still harvesting them?**

The fisheries data that prompted the overfishing determinations were from fisheries in 2012 and 2013, the most recent years for which the appropriate data are available. However, more recent escapement data through 2014 indicate that these stocks are meeting, and in some cases greatly exceeding, escapement goals. This indicates that the stocks are healthy and not at risk of being overfished.

### **What happens next?**

If the stocks remain subject to overfishing, NOAA Fisheries will work with the Council to examine the contribution of different fisheries to overfishing and alert the managers of fisheries with significant impacts on the involved stocks, as recommended in the Fishery Management Plan.



*Chinook salmon. Photo: NOAA*