



South Coast Assessment Bulletin

Creel Survey – Program Overview

Recreational Fishery South Coast Tidal Waters

15 July 2026

Introduction

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) estimates recreational angling catch and effort in southern British Columbia marine waters using a creel survey. Creel survey estimates are generated monthly and reported to DFO fishery managers, the Sports Fishing Advisory Board (SFAB), and recreational anglers via bulletins that are available on the Federal Science Library catalogue:

<http://science-libraries.canada.ca/eng/home/>

The search term “South Coast assessment bulletin, creel survey” is helpful to find these bulletins.

This first bulletin of 2026 provides a brief background of the DFO South Coast Creel Survey, an overview of methods, a description of how results are presented, and a summary of work underway to improve our estimates of recreational catch in the future.

Creel Survey Background

Early in the development of recreational fisheries in B.C., catch estimates were generated based on the observations of Fishery Officers. With the rapid expansion of recreational fisheries in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a more consistent and accurate method to estimate recreational catch was required. Comprehensive marine creel surveys in B.C. began in 1980. The first B.C. marine creel survey was developed to estimate the catch of Chinook and Coho Salmon in Strait of Georgia recreational fisheries. Over time, the geographic scope of the South Coast Creel Survey (SCCS) has expanded to include Barkley Sound and Alberni Inlet (1984), the entire West Coast of Vancouver Island (1991), and Johnstone Strait (1998). The objectives of the creel survey have also expanded to include estimates for all recreationally caught fin fish: five species of Pacific salmon, Halibut, Lingcod, and many other groundfish species. The SCCS collects biological samples of key target species (i.e., Chinook, Coho, Sockeye, Chum, Halibut, Lingcod) to estimate size, age, and stock composition of recreational catch to support stock assessment processes and scientific research. SCCS data are used to inform fisheries management measures that aim to meet numerous conservation, allocation, and socio-economic objectives.



Methods

The SCCS estimates how many fish are caught and how many people are fishing by combining angler interviews and aerial surveys of boats on the water (Figure 1). When anglers return to the dock, creel survey staff ask about their trip, including what they caught, when they fished, and where they fished. On randomly selected days, chartered aircraft fly over the survey areas and count the number of boats actively fishing. The timing of fishing trips obtained during angler interviews allows for the expansion of the aerial boat counts to estimate total fishing effort on the day of the aerial survey. For each month, the total daily effort is averaged across each aerial survey day and is then expanded to estimate of total monthly fishing effort. Finally, the total monthly effort estimate is multiplied by the average catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) for each species to estimate the total catch by species for the month.

The SCCS uses a stratified random sampling design for angler interviews and aerial counts to reduce bias in the recreational catch and effort estimates. The estimates are stratified by location (a total of 143 ‘creel sub-areas’ across the SCCS study area), time (month and day type (weekday or weekend)), and other (e.g. species, disposition (kept or released)).

Please consult Ma et al. (2026), Korman et al. (2005), English et al. (2002), and Sturhahn and Nagtegaal (2001) for more detailed methodologies.

Creel surveys are active during the peak seasons of recreational angling. The time and area coverage of the SCCS varies by year in response to program refinement and fiscal constraints. In 2026, surveys in the Strait of Juan de Fuca (Sheringham to Cadboro points; portions of Pacific Fishery Management Areas [PFMAs] 19 and 20) and the Strait of Georgia are planned for June to September (PFMA 13 to 18, 28, and 29). West Coast of Vancouver Island surveys are planned for June through August (PFMA 21, 24 to 27, 121, 124 to 127, and western portion of 20) or June through September (PFMA 23 and 123). North Island surveys are planned for June through August (PFMA 11, 12, and 111).

Results

Monthly estimates of total effort and catch by species are reported by PFMA. Preliminary estimates, along with information regarding creel survey activity, are emailed to interested stakeholders via monthly bulletins June through September and are available from the Fisheries and Oceans Science Library ([link previous](#)). They are distributed two weeks after the end of the month to allow time for data entry and analysis. For example, the July bulletin is circulated around 15 August. Final estimates are released in February.

Program Improvements

Starting in 2010, DFO has worked with the Sports Fishing Institute (SFI), local lodges, guides, and Avid Anglers to incorporate paper and electronic logbook data collected by experienced fishers in selected South Coast areas. Logbook participants provide valuable information on their fishing activity and catch including biological data and samples of



both kept and released catch. The Avid Angler program in the Strait of Georgia now has over 200 registered anglers. We thank all logbook participants for volunteering their time and effort to improve catch monitoring information and support stock assessment.

The Internet Recreational Effort and Catch (iREC) Reporting Program was initiated in 2012 to provide comprehensive recreational effort and catch monitoring for all areas and months including those not covered by the SCCS. Adult B.C. tidal water sport fishing licence holders report their fishing effort and catch, as well as that for any accompanying juvenile anglers, for an assigned reporting period. The reported effort and catch data are expanded to estimate total effort and catch by all fishers with a license which is valid during the reporting month. Where sufficient data exist, the total catch estimates are calibrated to reduce reporting biases by comparing iREC and corresponding SCCS estimates. We report the calibrated catch estimates of Chinook, Coho, and Halibut from iREC in the final bulletin each year for the peak fishing season April-September when and where the SCCS program was not run. These estimates are footnoted as 'In-Fill'.

Contacts

For additional information on South Coast Creel Survey Programs, please contact:

Johnstone Strait and North Island Surveys (PFMAs 11, 12, 26, 27, 111, 126 & 127)

Matthew Clarke – Program Head, Johnstone Strait Salmon Stock Assessment

Matthew.Clarke@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

250-527-0157

Strait of Georgia Survey (PFMAs 13 – 20, 28 & 29)

Kevin Pellett – Program Head, Strait of Georgia Salmon Stock Assessment

Kevin.Pellett@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

250-619-3781

West Coast Vancouver Island Survey (PFMAs 20 – 25 & 121 – 125)

Pieter Van Will – Program Head, WCVI Salmon Stock Assessment

Pieter.VanWill@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

250-230-0048

All South Coast Area

Erin Rechisky – Area Chief, South Coast Salmon Stock Assessment

Erin.Rechisky@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

778-269-2196

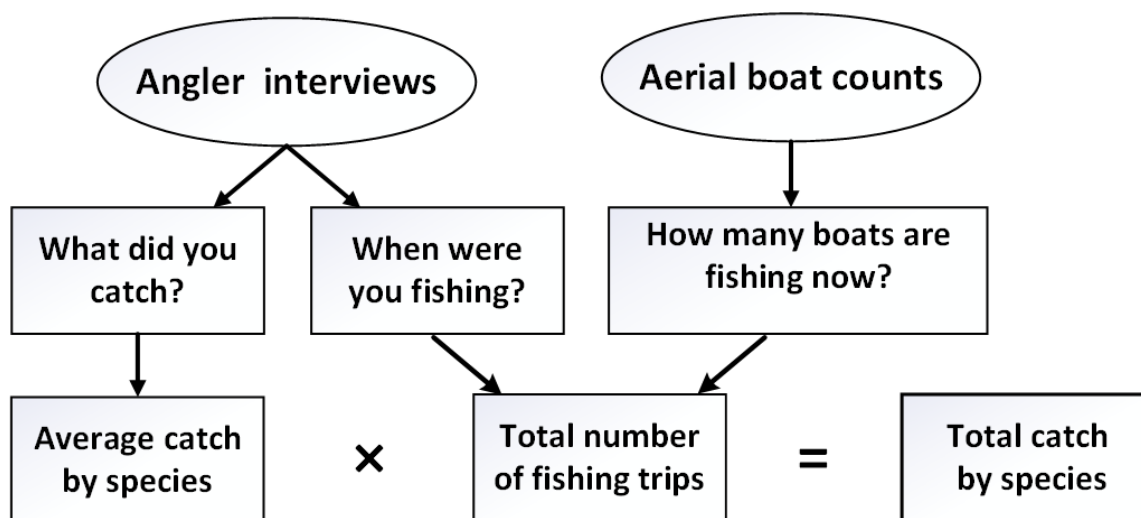


Figure 1. Overview of the South Coast Creel Survey estimate procedure. Data from angler interviews and aerial surveys of recreational boats fishing are used to estimate the average catch per boat trip and the number of boat trips. These estimates are combined and expanded to generate monthly estimates of recreational fin fish catch.

References

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