

fishery are found at 50 CFR part 648. The regulations require annual specification of a commercial quota that is allocated into four quota periods based upon percentages of the annual quota. The quarter 3 (July through September) commercial quota is distributed to the coastal states from Maine through North Carolina. The process to set the annual commercial quota is described in § 648.140.

The initial total commercial quota for black sea bass for the 2001 calendar year was 3,024,742 lb (1,372,000 kg) (66 FR 12902, March 1, 2001). The quarter 3 period quota, which is equal to 12.33 percent of the annual commercial quota, was 372,951 lb (169,168 kg). The quota allocation was adjusted downward to compensate for 2000 quarter 3 landings in excess of the 2000 quarter 3 quota, consistent with the procedures in § 648.140. The final adjusted quarter 3 quota was 276,875 lb (125,588 kg).

The Regional Administrator, Northeast Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator) monitors the commercial black sea bass quota for each quota period on the basis of dealer reports, state data, and other available information to determine when the commercial quota has been harvested. NMFS is required to publish a notification in the **Federal Register** advising and notifying commercial vessels and dealer permit holders that, effective upon a specific date, the black sea bass commercial quota has been harvested and no commercial quota is available for landing black sea bass for the remainder of the quarter 3 period, north of 35°15.3' N. lat. The Regional Administrator has determined, based upon dealer reports and other available information, that the black sea bass commercial quota for the 2001 quarter 3 period has been harvested.

The regulations at § 648.4 (b) provide that Federal black sea bass moratorium permit holders agree as a condition of the permit not to land black sea bass in any state after NMFS has published a notification in the **Federal Register** stating that the commercial quota for the period has been harvested and that no commercial quota for the black sea bass is available. The Regional Administrator has determined that the quarter 3 period for black sea bass no longer has commercial quota available. Therefore, effective 0001 hrs local time, July 17, 2001, further landings of black sea bass in coastal states from Maine through North Carolina, north of 35°15.3' N. lat., by vessels holding commercial Federal fishing permits are prohibited through September 30, 2001. The 2001 quarter 4 period for commercial black sea bass harvest will open on October 1, 2001.

Effective July 17, 2001, federally permitted dealers are also advised that they may not purchase black sea bass from federally permitted black sea bass moratorium permit holders who land in coastal states from Maine through North Carolina, north of 35°15.3' N. lat., for the remainder of the quarter 3 period (through September 30, 2001).

The regulations at § 648.4 (b) also provide that, if the commercial black sea bass quota for a period is harvested and the coast is closed to the possession of black sea bass north of 35°15.3' N. lat., any vessel owners who hold valid commercial permits for both the black sea bass and the NMFS Southeast Region snapper-grouper fisheries may surrender their black sea bass moratorium permit by certified mail addressed to the Regional Administrator (see Table 1 at § 600.502) and fish pursuant to their snapper-grouper permit, as long as fishing is conducted exclusively in waters, and landings are made, south of 35°15.3' N. lat. A moratorium permit for the black sea bass fishery that is voluntarily relinquished or surrendered will be reissued upon the receipt of the vessel owner's written request after a minimum period of 6 months from the date of cancellation.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: July 12, 2001.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 010112013-1013-01; I.D. 071201A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Ocean Perch in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the

Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This is action is necessary to prevent exceeding the 2001 total allowable catch (TAC) of Pacific ocean perch in this area.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), July 12, 2001, through 2400 hrs, A.l.t., December 31, 2001.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mary Furuness, 907-586-2778.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The 2001 TAC of Pacific ocean perch for the Central Regulatory Area was established as 9,610 metric tons (mt) by the Final 2001 Harvest Specifications and Associated Management Measures for the Groundfish Fisheries Off Alaska (66 FR 7276, January 22, 2001).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the 2001 TAC for Pacific ocean perch in the Central Regulatory Area will be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 8,610 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 1,000 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

Maximum retainable bycatch amounts may be found in the regulations at § 679.20(e) and (f).

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds that the need to immediately implement this action to avoid exceeding the 2001 TAC of Pacific ocean perch for the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA constitutes good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(3)(B) and 50 CFR

679.20(b)(3)(iii)(A), as such procedures would be unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Similarly, the need to implement these measures in a timely fashion to avoid exceeding the 2001 TAC of Pacific ocean perch for the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA constitutes good cause to find that the effective date of this action cannot be delayed for 30 days. Accordingly, under 5 U.S.C. 553(d), a delay in the effective date is hereby waived.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: July 12, 2001.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 010112013-1168-06; I.D. 011101B]

RIN 0648-A082

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Steller Sea Lion Protection Measures and 2001 Harvest Specifications and Associated Management Measures for the Groundfish Fisheries Off Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Emergency interim rule; extension and request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS amends and corrects the emergency interim rule that implements the 2001 Steller sea lion protection measures and the 2001 harvest specifications and extends its effectiveness through December 31, 2001. These amendments include adjustments to open and closed areas and seasons for important prey species, exemptions for various gear sectors for socio-economic and safety purposes, the establishment of a pollock research area in the Chiniak Gully, and various amendments to the harvest specifications to implement the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) recommendations. This action is necessary to implement Steller sea lion protection measures for the remainder of 2001 as recommended by

the Council and is intended to manage the groundfish fishery in a manner that is consistent with requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), and to provide adequate protection to Steller sea lions and their critical habitat, as required by the Endangered Species Act and section 209 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2001.

DATES: In the final rule published January 22, 2001 at 66 FR 7276 (corrected March 20, 2001 (66 FR 15656) and July 2, 2001 (66 FR 34852)), and amended March 29, 2001 (66 FR 17083 and 17087) and June 13, 2001 (66 FR 31845), certain amendments were made effective January 18, 2001 through July 17, 2001, and others were made effective June 10, 2001, through July 17, 2001. This rule extends the effective date for those amendments through December 31, 2001, except for: 50 CFR 679.20(a)(5)(i)(B)(2) and (c)(7); § 679.22(a)(11), (a)(12)(i), (a)(12)(ii), (a)(12)(iii)(A), (a)(12)(iv), (a)(12)(v), (a)(13), (b)(3) and (b)(5); § 679.23(d)(4); and Table 21 of 50 CFR part 679, which expire July 17, 2001. The amendments to 50 CFR 679.20, 679.22, 679.23, 679.31, and to Tables 21 through 24 to part 679, in this final rule are effective July 18, 2001 through December 31, 2001. Comments must be received by August 15, 2001.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be sent to Sue Salvesson, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802, Attn: Lori Gravel, or delivered to room 401 of the Federal Building, 709 West 9th Street, Juneau, AK. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet.

Copies of the November 30, 2000, Biological Opinion and Incidental Take Statement on Authorization of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish fisheries based on the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the BSAI and Authorization of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries based on the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (Comprehensive Biological Opinion), including the Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA), may be obtained from the same address. The Comprehensive Biological Opinion is also available on the NMFS Alaska Region home page at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov>.

Copies of the Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review (EA/RIR) for the Extension and Revision

of the Emergency Interim Rule for 2001 Harvest Specifications for the Alaska Groundfish Fisheries and for Steller Sea Lion Protective Fisheries Management Measures may be obtained from the same address. The EA/RIR is also available on the NMFS Alaska Region home page at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Melanie Brown, NMFS, 907-586-7228 or e-mail at melanie.brown@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fisheries in the exclusive economic zone off Alaska under the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area and the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMPs). The Council prepared the FMPs under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, 16 U.S.C. 1801, *et seq.* Regulations governing U.S. fisheries and implementing the FMPs appear at 50 CFR parts 600 and 679. NMFS also has management responsibility for certain threatened and endangered species, including Steller sea lions, under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), 16 U.S.C. 1531, *et seq.*, and the authority to promulgate regulations to enforce provisions of the ESA to protect such species.

Introduction

This preamble consists of two parts. Part I explains the process followed for developing and the basis for the amendments to the Steller sea lion protection measures. Part II contains amendments to several harvest specifications for groundfish harvest for the second half of 2001.

Part I. Steller Sea Lion Protection Measures

Background

On January 22, 2001, NMFS published an emergency interim rule, effective January 18, 2001, that established 2001 harvest specifications for the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries and implemented 2001 Steller sea lion protection measures for these fisheries (66 FR 7276). These protection measures initiated a 1-year phase-in of the RPA developed in the Comprehensive Biological Opinion (See **ADDRESSES**) as directed under section 209 of Public Law 106-554. NMFS determined that the 2001 protection measures provided a sufficient degree of protection to endangered Steller sea lions for 2001 and were consistent with the RPA, the ESA, and with section 209 of Public Law 106-554. Public Law 106-554, which was signed by the President on December 21, 2000,