

economic zone is managed by NMFS according to the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Fishing by U.S. vessels is governed by regulations implementing the FMP at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

In accordance with § 679.20(c)(3)(iii), the Pacific ocean perch TAC in the Central Aleutian District was established by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish for the BSAI (62 FR 7168, February 18, 1997) as 3,170 metric tons (mt). The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), established a directed fishing allowance of 2,170 mt and set aside the remaining 1,000 mt as bycatch in support of other anticipated groundfish fisheries. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator found that the directed fishing allowance would soon be reached and NMFS closed the directed fishery for Pacific ocean perch in the Central Aleutian District of the BSAI on March 24, 1997 (62 FR 14652, March 27, 1997). Subsequently the Regional Administrator reduced the directed fishing allowance from 1,000 mt to 500 mt. Consequently 956 mt remain in the directed fishing allowance. Therefore NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is opening directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the Central Aleutian District of the BSAI effective 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 15, 1997.

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance will soon be reached. Current information shows the catching capacity of vessels catching Pacific ocean perch is in excess of 400 mt per day. NMFS is closing directed fishing for Pacific ocean perch in the Central Aleutian District of the BSAI at 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 16, 1997.

All other closures remain in full force and effect.

Classification

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: April 15, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

*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. 961126334-7025-02; I.D. 041197C]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska, Pacific Cod in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Apportionment of reserve.

SUMMARY: NMFS is apportioning the initial reserve of Pacific cod in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to allow incidental catch of Pacific cod to be retained in other directed fisheries and to account for previous harvest of the total allowable catch (TAC) in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

DATES: Effective: 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), April 18, 1997, until 2400, A.l.t., December 31, 1997. Comments must be received by May 5, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be sent to Ronald J. Berg, Chief, Fisheries Management Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668, Attn: Lori Gravel.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas Pearson, 907-486-6919.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone is managed by NMFS according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish 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. Fishing by U.S. vessels is governed by regulations implementing the FMP at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The initial TAC of Pacific cod in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA was established by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish of the GOA (62 FR 8179, February 24, 1997) as 34,952 metric tons (mt). Directed fishing for Pacific cod for processing by the inshore component in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA was closed on March 11, 1997, under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), in order to prevent exceeding the allocation for processing by the inshore component in this area (62 FR 11770, March 13, 1997).

The reserve of Pacific cod in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA was created as a management buffer to prevent exceeding the TAC and to provide greater assurance that Pacific cod could be retained as bycatch throughout the fishing year by the Final 1997 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish of the GOA (62 FR 8179, February 24, 1997).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator), has determined that the initial TAC for Pacific cod in the Central Regulatory Area needs to be supplemented from the Pacific cod reserve for that area in order to allow incidental catch of Pacific cod to be retained in other fisheries and to account for prior harvest. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(b)(3)(i)(A), NMFS is apportioning 8,738 mt of Pacific cod from the reserve to the TAC in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(6)(iii), the apportionment of the Pacific cod reserve in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA is allocated to vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore and offshore components as 7,864 mt and 874 mt respectively. This action increases the total allocation of the 1997 Pacific cod TAC in the Central Regulatory Area for vessels catching Pacific cod for processing by the inshore and offshore components to 39,321 mt and 4,369 mt, respectively.

In accordance with § 679.20(b)(3)(iii)(A), NMFS finds that there is good cause for not providing the public with a prior opportunity to comment. As of April 2, 1997, NMFS estimates the initial TAC of 34,952 mt for the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA has been reached. This action is necessary to allow retention of amounts of Pacific cod that are caught incidentally while conducting directed fishing for other species in the Central Regulatory Area.

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

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR 679.20 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: April 15, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

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

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