

National Car Rental System, Inc.
 PHH Vehicle Management Services
 Ryder System, Inc. (Both rental and
 leasing operations)
 U-Haul International, Inc. (Subsidiary of
 AMERCO)
 USL Capital Fleet Services
 Wheels Inc.

Issued on: April 4, 2000.

Stephen R. Kratzke,

*Acting Associate Administrator for Safety
 Performance Standards.*

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BILLING CODE 4910-59-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Parts 600 and 648

[I.D. 032400C]

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Applications for Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) to Conduct Experimental Fishing

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

ACTION: Notification of EFP proposals to
 conduct experimental fishing; request
 for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the
 Administrator, Northeast Region, NMFS
 (Regional Administrator), has made a
 preliminary determination to issue EFPs
 to conduct experimental fishing to two
 vessels participating in separate
 fisheries that would permit these vessels
 to conduct operations otherwise
 restricted by regulations governing the
 fisheries of the Northeastern United
 States. The EFPs would exempt vessels
 from regulations regarding: Days-at-sea
 (DAS) while fishing for, retaining, and
 landing Atlantic sea scallops; fishing in
 the scallop closed areas; and limiting
 the vessel's scallop and bycatch harvest.
 Regulations under the Magnuson-
 Stevens Fishery Conservation and
 Management Act require publication of
 this notification to provide interested
 parties the opportunity to comment on
 the proposed EFP to conduct
 experimental fishing. A decision to
 approve or disapprove the EFPs will be
 made following the comment period.

DATES: Comments on this notification
 must be received on or before 5:00 p.m.,
 local time, on April 24, 2000.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be sent to
 Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional

Administrator, NMFS, Northeast
 Regional Office, 1 Blackburn Drive,
 Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark on the
 outside of the envelope "Comments on
 Proposed Scallop EFP Proposals."

Comments also may be sent via
 facsimile (fax) to (978) 281-9135.
 Comments will not be accepted if
 submitted via e-mail or Internet.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

David Gouveia, Fishery Policy Analyst,
 978-281-9280.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The
 Virginia Institute of Marine Science
 (VIMS) proposes a scallop resource
 depletion study in selected locations
 within the Hudson Canyon and Virginia
 Beach Closure Areas chosen in
 consultation with the Northeast
 Fisheries Science Center's scallop
 survey stations. In addition, this study
 proposes to collect information on
 bycatch, habitat effects, and bio-fouling
 of sea scallops. Depending on the
 funding available, this study may also
 attempt to use an autonomous
 underwater vehicle to verify tow tracks
 and habitat modifications.

On a tow-by-tow basis, scientific staff
 and designated crew members will
 enumerate bycatch and estimate
 quantities of non-bycatch debris
 (mollusk shells) and will report on their
 general physical condition. The overall
 objective of the study is to assess the
 increased availability of commercial sea
 scallop biomass resulting from the area
 closures that commenced 2 years ago. A
 similar study in Georges Bank Closed
 Area II was not performed until 4 years
 after the closure. It is thought that more
 knowledge could be gained from a post-
 dredge survey conducted closer to the
 cessation of mobile gear activity.

The survey would be conducted
 during the period June through July
 2000 and would employ the use of two
 15-ft (4.57-m) commercial sea scallop
 dredges at 400 pre-designated stations.
 Sampling densities of approximately
 one station per 7.5 nm² in the Hudson
 Canyon South Closure Area, and one
 station per 5.0 nm² in the Virginia
 Beach Closure Area are proposed.
 Sampling density will be increased to
 one station per 5.0 nm² on or near the
 edges of closed area boundaries. Set tow
 times of 10 minutes at a speed of 4.5
 knots will be used to calibrate area gear
 coverage (width of gear x length of
 dredge path). The dredge gear will
 comply with all mesh size and gear
 configuration provisions of Amendment
 4 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery
 Management Plan (FMP). Therefore, no
 special twine-top configurations or rock
 chains will be used.

No other species besides Atlantic sea
 scallops will be retained or landed,
 except for unusual specimens of interest
 to scientists and only at the discretion
 of the chief scientist in charge of at-sea
 cruise operations. All fishing activities
 conducted by the participating vessel
 must only be research activities. All
 commercial operations would be
 prohibited. The participating vessel
 would be exempt from regulations on
 scallop harvest and bycatch (50 CFR
 648.52 and 648.53) but would be
 allowed to retain and land no more than
 9,100 lb (4,127.76 kg) (650 lb/day
 (294.84 kg/day)) of Atlantic sea scallops.
 It would also be exempt from the
 Atlantic Sea Scallop DAS program when
 fishing under the EFP (50 CFR 648.10).
 Based on this landing limit, participants
 would be required to commit a
 maximum of 14 days to the study.

The vessel's crew will be instructed
 that low value sea scallops may not be
 discarded in favor of retaining high
 value sea scallops (high grading). VIMS'
 chief scientist is charged with
 monitoring all stages of the proposed
 cruise operations in support of the study
 objectives, and will ensure maximum
 integrity of data collection and
 organization of deck operations. The
 second proposal, submitted by
 Coonamessett Farm, proposes to test
 new gear designs to reduce yellowtail
 flounder and skate bycatch rates. The
 experimental dredge will have two
 modifications. The first modification
 adds a 10-inch (25.40-cm) mesh panel
 between the depressor plate and the
 dredge bale that will follow the angle of
 the depressor plate. The second
 modification adds the equivalent of an
 old-style locomotive cow catcher under
 the bale frame that would direct skates
 and flatfish above the bale, along the
 mesh panel, and over the dredge frame.
 The applicant requests one 7-day trip to
 the Georges Bank and South Channel
 sea scallop stock areas. The
 participating vessel would be allowed to
 retain up to 850 lb (385.56 kg) of scallop
 meats per day, not to exceed 5,950 lb
 (2,698.9 kg) of scallop meats for the
 entire trip. An EFP issued to the vessel
 participating in the Coonamessett Farm
 proposal would exempt the vessel from
 the DAS restrictions (50 CFR 648.53)
 and limit the vessel's scallop and
 bycatch harvest (50 CFR 648.52 and
 648.53). Although the dredge gear used
 by Coonamessett Farm is modified, the
 changes to the dredge are within the
 current dredge specifications found in
 the Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP.
 Therefore, no exemption of the dredge
 gear is necessary.

Coonamessett Farm and VIMS would
 each conduct experimental fishing

activities with a single commercial vessel with a Federal limited access Atlantic sea scallop permit. The vessels will be allowed to land and sell sea scallops caught during the conduct of the experiment, up to a maximum, which is determined based on the average scallop catch per DAS for the most recent 12-month period available for the Atlantic sea scallop stock areas.

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

Dated: April 3, 2000.

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 Parts 600 and 648

[I.D. 032300D]

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) to Conduct Experimental Fishing

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

ACTION: Notification of EFP proposal to conduct experimental fishing; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the Administrator, Northeast Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has made a

preliminary determination to issue an EFP to that would allow a single vessel to conduct operations otherwise restricted by regulations governing the fisheries of the Northeastern United States. Mount Desert Oceanarium of Southwest Harbor, Maine, submitted a complete application for an EFP, which warrants further consideration. The experimental fishery would involve fishing for, retention of, and landing of small numbers of regulated multispecies and various unmanaged species for the purpose of public education. Regulations issued under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on the proposed EFP to conduct experimental fishing.

DATES: Comments on this notification must be received at the appropriate address or fax number (See **ADDRESSES**) on or before 5:00 p.m., local time, on April 24, 2000.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to Patricia Kurkul, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, 1 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark on the outside of the envelope "Comments on Proposed EFP Proposal." Comments also may be sent via facsimile (fax) to (978) 281-9135. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tom Warren, Fishery Management Specialist, 978-281-9347.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Mount Desert Oceanarium, of Southwest

Harbor, Maine, submitted an application for an EFP on February 15, 2000, to collect various species of animals for public education. A single chartered vessel will use a modified 50-ft (15.2-m) shrimp trawl to collect marine animals on 3 days during the time period from May 1, 2000, to May 20, 2000. The animals will be brought to shore, maintained in tanks for public display, and most will be returned to the sea in October 2000. Collection will be from the Small Mesh Northern Shrimp Fishery Exemption Area, off Maine. If the target species cannot be located in this area, collection will be farther east or southeast from the Gulf of Maine/ Georges Bank Regulated Mesh Area. The target species will include dabs, blackback and yellowtail flounder, plaice, halibut, monkfish, eel pouts, sculpins, sea ravens, cod, wolffish, spiny dogfish, little skate, barndoor skate, and unidentified species of the Phyla Arthropoda and Echinodermata. The vessel will collect a maximum of six individuals per species, juvenile and adult, with the exception of halibut, which will be limited to a total of one individual, with a minimum total length of 36 inches (91.4 cm).

EFPs are required to exempt the vessel from the possession prohibition, mesh size, minimum fish size, and days-at-sea restrictions of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan.

16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

Dated: March 31, 2000.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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

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