

encryption. Please include "Attn: RIN 1018-AG17" and your name and return address in your e-mail message.

Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above Service address. Copies of the distribution map for the Peninsular bighorn sheep are available by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office or by appointment during normal business hours.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: The Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, at the above address (telephone 760-431-9440; facsimile 760-431-9618).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) are found along the Peninsular Mountain Ranges from the San Jacinto Mountains of southern California south into the Volcan Tres Virgenes Mountains near Santa Rosalia, Baja California, Mexico, a total distance of approximately 800 kilometers (km) (500 miles (mi)). The Peninsular bighorn sheep is similar in appearance to other desert bighorn sheep. The coat is pale brown, and the permanent horns, which become rough and scarred with age, vary in color from yellowish-brown to dark brown. The Peninsular bighorn sheep occurs on steep, open slopes, canyons, and washes in hot and dry desert regions where the land is rough, rocky, and sparsely vegetated. Most of these sheep live between 91 and 1,219 meters (m) (300 and 4,000 feet (ft)) in elevation, where average annual precipitation is less than 10 centimeters (cm) (4 inches (in)) and daily high temperatures average 104° Fahrenheit in the summer. Alluvial fans (sloping masses of gravel, sand, clay, and other sediments that widen out like fans at the base of canyons and washes) are used for breeding, feeding, and movement. Peninsular bighorn sheep use a wide variety of plant species as their food source. Peninsular bighorn sheep typically produce only one lamb per year. Bighorn ewes exhibit a high degree of site fidelity to their home range; this behavior is learned by their offspring. From May through October, Peninsular bighorn sheep are typically more localized in distribution around permanent water sources.

The decline of the Peninsular bighorn sheep is attributed to a combination of factors, including: (1) Relatively low adult survivorship from predation and human-related causes; (2) the effects of disease and parasitism; (3) low lamb recruitment; and (4) habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation. The Peninsular bighorn sheep in the United

States declined from an estimated 1,171 individuals in 1971 to about 570 individuals in 1991 (Bleich *et al.* 1992). Recent estimates now number the population at approximately 335 adults in about eight ewe groups in the wild in the United States. The habitat still remaining for the Peninsular bighorn sheep in the United States is managed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation, California Department of Fish and Game, Bureau of Land Management, private landowners, Trust lands, U.S. Forest Service, and other State and local entities.

Section 4(b)(2) of the Act requires that the Secretary shall designate or revise critical habitat based upon the best scientific data available and after taking into consideration the economic impact of specifying any particular area as critical habitat. Based upon the previously published proposal to designate critical habitat for the Peninsular bighorn sheep and comments received during previous comment period, we have conducted a draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat designation. The draft economic analysis is available at the above Internet and mailing address (see **ADDRESSES** section). To accept the best and most current scientific data regarding the critical habitat proposal and the draft economic analysis of the proposal, we reopen the comment period at this time. Previously submitted oral or written comments on this critical habitat proposal need not be resubmitted. The current comment period on this proposal closes on November 20, 2000. Written comments may be submitted to the Service office in the **ADDRESSES** section.

The distribution map for Peninsular bighorn sheep represents a recent compilation of data from numerous sources that depicts the distributional range of bighorn sheep in the Peninsular Ranges of southern California. The mapped information was compiled through an interagency recovery planning program. The map is being made available to provide the public with additional information on the biology of the Peninsular bighorn sheep.

Author

The primary author of this notice is the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office (see **ADDRESSES** section).

Authority

The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: October 11, 2000.

Anne Badgley,

Regional Director, Region 1.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 660

[Docket No. 001012284-0284-01; I.D. 092100B]

RIN 0648-AO50

Fisheries off West Coast States and in the Western Pacific; Western Pacific Pelagic Fisheries; American Samoa; Control Date

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

ACTION: Advance notice of proposed rulemaking; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that persons who enter the pelagic longline fishery in the exclusive economic zone around American Samoa after July 15, 2000 ("control date") are not guaranteed future participation in the fishery if the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepares and NMFS approves a program limiting entry or effort. This action does not commit the Council or NMFS to limit effort or to prevent any other date from being selected for eligibility to participate in the American Samoa pelagic fishery. The Council or NMFS also may use other criteria to limit fishing effort or participation in a limited entry program if one is developed in the future.

DATES: Comments must be submitted in writing by November 20, 2000.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be mailed to Dr. Charles Karnella, Administrator, NMFS, Pacific Islands Area Office (PIAO), 1601 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 1110, Honolulu, HI 96814-4700; or faxed to 808-973-2941. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Alvin Katekaru, Fishery Management Specialist, PIAO, 808-973-2937.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Since 1996, the pelagic fishery around American Samoa has undergone a change from essentially a troll fishery to a commercial, small-scale longline fishery. Currently, the pelagic longline fishery consists mostly of "alias" (small catamarans), about 30 ft (9.1 m) long

and powered by gasoline outboard engines, that use monofilament longline gear to target albacore tuna. In 1996, 13 alias landed 232,721 lbs (105.56 mt) of albacore. At present about 25 alias are actively engaged in the fishery; however, 63 alias are registered with longline general permits. As for large fishing vessels, in 1997 the fishery consisted of four longliners ranging in length from 65 to 109 ft (19.8 to 33.2 m); today there are 15 large longline vessels in the American Samoa pelagic fishery.

In response to the influx of large longliners into American Samoa's pelagic fishery and the potential for conflict between the large vessels and small alias, the Council established November 13, 1997, as a control date to further restrict the participation of large fishing vessels in the fishery, if the Council decided to limit entry or effort, by establishing area closures to large fishing vessels (63 FR 3532, January 23, 1998). At its meeting in June 2000, the Council voted to: (1) establish 50-nm fishing area closures around the islands

of American Samoa to commercial fishing vessels larger than 50 ft (15.2 m) in length targeting pelagic management unit species, (2) allow vessels registered for use with a Federal general longline permit and a documented landing of pelagic management unit species, prior to the control date of November 13, 1997, to use longline gear within a 50-nm area closure around American Samoa, and (3) establish a new control date of July 15, 2000, for permit eligibility, which supersedes the control date of November 13, 1997, if the Council decides to develop a limited entry program for the American Samoa longline fishery.

The Council believes that there is a risk of speculative entry into the longline fishery while the Council further evaluates the potential benefits and costs of limited entry alternatives. The control date is designed to discourage speculative entry during this period of analysis. The control date does not commit the Council or NMFS to any particular management regime or

criteria for entry into the American Samoa longline fishery. Fishermen are not guaranteed future participation in this fishery, regardless of their level of participation before or after the control date. The Council may choose a different control date or it may choose a management regime that does not involve a control date. Other criteria, such as documentation of commercial landings and sales, may be used to determine eligibility for participation in the fishery. The Council also may choose to take no further action to control entry or access to the fishery, in which case the control date may be rescinded.

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

Dated: October 13, 2000.

Penelope D. Dalton,

*Assistant Administrator for Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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