

Oregon State Delegation 7 a.m.
 Washington State Delegation 7 a.m.
 Enforcement Consultants As
 necessary
 Salmon Advisory Subpanel As
 necessary
 Salmon Technical Team As necessary
 Tribal Policy Group As necessary
 Tribal and Washington Technical
 Group As necessary
 Although nonemergency issues not
 contained in this agenda may come
 before this Council for discussion, those
 issues may not be the subject of formal
 Council action during this meeting.
 Council action will be restricted to those
 issues specifically listed in this notice
 and any issues arising after publication
 of this notice that require emergency
 action under Section 305(c) of the
 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery
 Conservation and Management Act,
 provided the public has been notified of
 the Council's intent to take final action
 to address the emergency.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically
 accessible to people with disabilities.
 Requests for sign language
 interpretation or other auxiliary aids
 should be directed to Ms. Carolyn Porter
 at 503-820-2280 at least five days prior
 to the meeting date.

Dated: March 15, 2005.

Emily Menashes,

*Acting Director, Office of Sustainable
 Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.*
 [FR Doc. E5-1182 Filed 3-17-05; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 031505D]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Application for an Exempted Fishing Permit

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

ACTION: Notice; receipt of exempted
 fishing permit application.

SUMMARY: This notice announces receipt
 of an application for an exempted
 fishing permit (EFP) from John Gauvin
 and John Gruver. If granted, this permit
 would be used to continue the
 development and testing of a salmon
 excluder device in the Bering Sea
 pollock trawl fishery. It is intended to
 promote the objectives of the Fishery
 Management Plan for Groundfish of the

Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands
 Management Area (FMP) by developing
 a method for reducing salmon bycatch
 in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the EFP
 application are available by writing to
 Sue Salvesson, Assistant Regional
 Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries,
 Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668,
 Juneau, AK 99802, Attn: Lori Durall.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
 Melanie Brown, 907-586-7228 or
melanie.brown@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS
 manages the domestic groundfish
 fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian
 Islands Management Area (BSAI) under
 the FMP. The North Pacific Fishery
 Management Council (Council)
 prepared the FMP under the Magnuson-
 Stevens Fishery Conservation and
 Management Act. Regulations governing
 the groundfish fisheries of the BSAI
 appear at 50 CFR parts 600 and 679. The
 FMP and the implementing regulations
 at §§ 679.6 and 600.745(b) authorize
 issuance of EFPs to allow fishing that
 would otherwise be prohibited.
 Procedures for issuing EFPs are
 contained in the implementing
 regulations.

NMFS received an application for an
 EFP from John Gauvin, Principal
 Investigator and John Gruver of the
 United Catcher Boats Association. The
 purpose of the project is to improve the
 performance of the salmon excluder
 device developed under an EFP in 2004
 and 2005, and to validate the
 performance of this device for pollock
 trawls. The goal is to develop a device
 for pollock trawls that reduces salmon
 bycatch without significantly lowering
 catch rates of pollock.

The EFP would allow for two types of
 testing of the salmon excluder device in
 fall 2005 and spring 2006. In the first
 experiment, a catcher vessel would be
 used to test minor adjustments to the
 current excluder device design to
 improve performance. The second
 experiment would be conducted using a
 catcher/processor for the paired-tow
 experiment to validate the performance
 of the excluder device. Depending on
 the results from the work in 2005 and
 2006, the EFP may need to be modified
 to allow for an additional year of testing.

Exemptions from regulations for
 salmon bycatch limits, observer
 requirements, salmon savings area
 closure, the Catcher Vessel Operating
 Area (CVOA), and total allowable catch
 amounts (TACs) for groundfish would
 be necessary to conduct the work. The
 taking of salmon during the experiment
 is crucial for determining the
 effectiveness of the device. Salmon

taken during the experiment would not
 be counted toward the chinook and
 chum salmon bycatch limits under
 §§ 679.21(e)(1)(vii) and (e)(1)(viii).
 Potentially, the amount of salmon
 bycatch by the pollock trawl industry
 during the EFP period could approach
 or exceed the salmon bycatch limits.
 The additional salmon taken during the
 experiment would create an additional
 burden on the pollock trawl industry
 and may lead to closures of the salmon
 savings areas, if the EFP salmon were
 counted toward the salmon bycatch
 limits. Approximately 2,500 chum
 salmon and 1,500 chinook salmon
 would be required to support the
 project.

The applicants also have requested an
 exemption from closures of the Chinook
 Salmon Savings Areas and the Chum
 Salmon Savings Area
 (§§ 679.21(e)(7)(vii) and (e)(7)(viii)). The
 experiment must be conducted in areas
 of salmon concentration to ensure a
 sufficient sample size. The salmon
 savings areas are areas of known
 concentration of salmon and provide an
 ideal location for conducting the
 experiment and ensuring that the
 vessels encounter concentrations of
 salmon.

Groundfish taken under the EFP
 would be exempt from the TACs
 specified in the annual harvest
 specifications (§ 679.20). A total of 2,500
 metric tons (mt) of groundfish
 (primarily pollock) would be taken
 during the EFP work and would not be
 included in the harvest applied against
 the Bering Sea groundfish TACs,
 including the pollock TAC of
 approximately 1.5 million mt. The 2005
 Bering Sea pollock acceptable biological
 catch is 1.960 million mt, well above the
 combined TAC and the additional
 harvest anticipated from the project.
 Because of the nature of groundfish
 bycatch in the pollock fishery, the
 harvest of other groundfish species
 during the project is expected to be very
 minor.

The experiment using the catcher/
 processor would require exemption
 from the CVOA restriction
 (§ 679.22(a)(5)) because of the location
 of the Chinook Salmon Savings Area in
 the CVOA. Catcher/processors are
 prohibited from operating in the CVOA
 during the B season. It would be
 necessary for the catcher/processor to
 conduct tows in this area to ensure
 encountering sufficient pollock and
 salmon.

The EFP would include an exemption
 from the observer requirements at
 § 679.50. The applicants would use "sea
 samplers" who are NMFS-trained
 observers. They would not be deployed

as NMFS observers, however, at the time of the experiment. The "sea samplers" would conduct the data collection and perform other observer duties that would normally be required for vessels directed fishing for pollock.

The activities under the EFP are not expected to have a significant impact on the marine environment, but the potential effects on the marine environment will be further analyzed during review of the application.

In accordance with § 679.6, NMFS has determined that the proposal warrants further consideration and has initiated consultation with the Council by forwarding the application to the Council. The Council will consider the EFP application during its April 4–11, 2005, meeting which will be held at the Hilton Hotel in Anchorage, AK. The applicants have been invited to appear in support of the application, if the applicants desire. Interested persons may comment on the application at the Council meeting during public testimony. A notice announcing the upcoming meeting will be published in the **Federal Register**.

A copy of the application is available for review from NMFS (see **ADDRESSES**).

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

Dated: March 15, 2005.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 031505F]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Application for an Exempted Fishing Permit

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

ACTION: Notice; receipt of amended application for an exempted fishing permit.

SUMMARY: NMFS has received an amended application for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) from William Thornton Smith of the North Pacific Longline Association (NPLA). If granted, this EFP would authorize the applicant to conduct an experiment to evaluate the integrated weight groundline as a potential seabird avoidance measure in the 2005 Pacific cod hook-and-line

fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI). The project is intended to promote the objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP) by reducing fishery interactions with the endangered short-tailed albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*) and other seabird species.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the EFP application may be requested from Sue Salvesson, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Alaska Region, NMFS, Attn: Lori Durall by: mail to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802; fax to 907–586–7557; or email to Lori.Durall@noaa.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kim Rivera, 907–586–7424 or Kim.Rivera@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the domestic groundfish fisheries in the BSAI under the FMP. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared the FMP under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). Regulations governing the groundfish fisheries of the BSAI appear at 50 CFR parts 600 and 679. The FMP and the implementing regulations at §§ 679.6 and 600.745(b) authorize the issuance of EFPs to allow fishing that would otherwise be prohibited. Procedures for issuing EFPs are contained in the implementing regulations.

In June 2004, the Council approved the application for an EFP for this experiment which was submitted by the Washington Sea Grant Program (WSGP). The WSGP was unable to secure vessels for the work, and an EFP was not issued in 2004. In February 2005, NMFS received an amended application for this EFP from the NPLA. The purpose of this EFP is to authorize experimental fishing using integrated weight groundline to evaluate its effectiveness as a potential new seabird avoidance measure. The application calls for testing integrated weight groundlines against unweighted groundlines, with and without paired streamer lines. This proposed experiment builds on work that was completed in Alaska in 2002, and compliments efforts taking place in other fisheries. Information from this experiment could ultimately result in better and more effective seabird avoidance measures. The hook-and-line fishing industry appears especially interested in this experiment, because it may provide a better tool with which to avoid the incidental catch of the endangered short-tailed albatross and other seabird species. In addition, the

integrated weight groundline may improve fishing efficiency with better gear handling characteristics and increased target catch rates resulting from getting baited hooks down more quickly. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service issued a Biological Opinion (September 2003) that includes a conservation recommendation for NMFS to support research efforts to develop new and novel deterrent technologies such as integrated weight groundlines. This experiment would fulfill such a recommendation.

The goal of the experiment is to reduce the incidental catch of the endangered short-tailed albatross and other seabird species in ways that are consistent with Magnuson-Stevens Act National Standard 9 which requires conservation and management measures to minimize bycatch and bycatch mortality and that the effects on birds should be considered when selecting these measures. A preliminary WSGP investigation in 2002 evaluated four weightings of integrated weight groundline (25g/m, 50g/m, 75g/m and 100 g/m). The four weighting treatments were compared to a control of unweighted groundline in the sablefish fishery in the Aleutian Islands and the Pacific cod fishery in the Gulf of Alaska. Preliminary results strongly suggest that 50g/m line was the optimal weighting. It was the most practical gear in terms of operational performance in mechanical baiting (auto-bait) hook-and-line systems, and it sank quickly beyond the range of seabirds.

Based on these initial results, NPLA proposes to continue this work by comparing the catch rates of all species, the abundance and behavior of seabirds, and the sink rate of groundlines under three scenarios: 50g/m integrated weight groundline, and un-weighted groundlines with and without paired streamer lines. Regulations at § 679.24(e)(4)(ii)(c) require the use of paired streamer lines by vessels greater than 55 ft (16.8 m) length overall (LOA). Because vessels used in the experiment would be greater than 55 ft (16.8 m) LOA, an EFP is necessary to conduct the experimental control treatments that call for the experimental gear to be deployed in the absence of paired streamer lines. Work will take place on two freezer-longliner vessels using auto-bait systems in the Pacific cod fishery in the BSAI during 2005 and 2006, if unforeseen circumstances prohibit completion of the work in 2005.

Amendments to the application approved in June 2004, include: (1) starting the experimental fishing a month earlier (July 15, 2005 instead of August 15, 2005), (2) allocating