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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 0907301205-0289-02]

RIN 0648- XB001

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Atlantic Herring Fishery; Sub-ACL (Annual Catch Limit) Harvested for Management Area 2

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is closing the directed herring fishery in management area 2, because 95 percent of the catch limit for that area has been caught. Effective 0001 hr, February 20, 2012, federally permitted vessels may not fish for, catch, possess, transfer, or land more than 2,000 lb (907.2 kg) of Atlantic herring (herring) in or from Management Area 2 per calendar day until January 1, 2013, when the 2013 allocation for Area 2 becomes available.

DATES: Effective 0001 hr local time, February 20, 2012, through December 31, 2012.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Lindsey Feldman, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 675-2079.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Regulations governing the herring fishery are found at

50 CFR part 648. The regulations require annual specification of the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limit (ACL), optimum yield, domestic harvest and processing, U.S. at-sea processing, border transfer, and sub-ACLs for each management area. The 2012 Domestic Annual Harvest is 91,200 metric tons (mt); the 2012 sub-ACL allocated to Area 2 is 22,146 mt, and 0 mt of the sub-ACL is set aside for research (75 FR 48874, August 12, 2010).

Section 648.201 requires the Administrator, Northeast Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), to monitor the herring fishery in each of the four management areas designated in the Fishery Management Plan for the herring fishery and, based on dealer reports, state data, and other available information, to determine when the harvest of herring is projected to reach 95 percent of the management area sub-ACL. When such a determination is made, NMFS must publish notification in the Federal Register and prohibit herring vessel permit holders from fishing for, catching, possessing, transferring, or landing more than 2,000 lb (907.2 kg) of herring per calendar day in or from the specified management area for the remainder of the closure period. Transiting of Area 2 with more than 2,000 lb (907.2 kg) of herring on board is allowed under the conditions described below.

The Regional Administrator has determined, based upon dealer reports and other available information that 95 percent of the total herring sub-ACL allocated to Area 2 for 2012 is projected to be harvested. Therefore, effective 0001 hr local time, February 20, 2012, federally permitted vessels may not fish for, catch, possess, transfer, or land more than 2,000 lb (907.2 kg) of herring in or from Area 2 per calendar day through December 31, 2012. Vessels may transit through Area 2 with more than 2,000 lb (907.2 kg) of herring on board, provided such herring

was not caught in Area 2 and provided all fishing gear aboard is stowed and not available for immediate use as required by § 648.23(b). Effective 0001 hr, February 20, 2012, federally permitted dealers are also advised that they may not purchase herring from federally permitted herring vessels that harvest more than 2,000 lb (907.2 kg) of herring from Area 2 through 2400 hr local time, December 31, 2012.

Classification

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

NMFS finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment because it would be contrary to the public interest and impracticable. This action closes the herring fishery for Management Area 2 until January 1, 2013, under current regulations. The regulations at § 648.201(a) require such action to ensure that herring vessels do not exceed the 2012 sub-ACL allocated to Area 2. The herring fishery opened for the 2012 fishing year on January 1, 2012. Data indicating the herring fleet will have landed at least 95 percent of the 2012 sub-ACL allocated to Area 2 have only recently become available. If implementation of this closure is delayed to solicit prior public comment, the sub-ACL for Area

2 for this fishing year can be exceeded, thereby undermining the conservation objectives of the FMP. NMFS further finds, pursuant to 5 U.S.C 553(d)(3), good cause to waive the 30-day delayed effectiveness period for the reasons stated above.

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

Dated: February 17, 2012

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

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