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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 150818742-6210-02]

RIN 0648-XE528

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Inseason Adjustment to the 2016 Gulf of Alaska Pollock Seasonal Apportionments

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; inseason adjustment

SUMMARY: NMFS is adjusting the 2016 seasonal apportionments of the total allowable catch (TAC) for pollock in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) by re-apportioning unharvested pollock TAC in Statistical Areas 610, 620, and 630 of the GOA. This action is necessary to provide opportunity for harvest of the 2016 pollock TAC, consistent with the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 23, 2016, until 2400 hours A.l.t., December 31, 2016.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations

governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The annual pollock TACs in Statistical Areas 610, 620, and 630 of the GOA are apportioned among four seasons, in accordance with § 679.23(d)(2). Regulations at § 679.20(a)(5)(iv)(B) allow the underharvest of a seasonal apportionment to be added to subsequent seasonal apportionments, provided that any revised seasonal apportionment does not exceed 20 percent of the seasonal apportionment for a given statistical area. Therefore, NMFS is increasing the B season apportionment of pollock in Statistical Areas 610, 620, and 630 of the GOA to reflect the underharvest of pollock in those areas during the A season. In addition, any underharvest remaining beyond 20 percent of the originally specified seasonal apportionment in a particular area may be further apportioned to other statistical areas. Therefore, NMFS also is increasing the B season apportionment of pollock to Statistical Areas 610 and 630 based on the underharvest of pollock in Statistical Areas 620 of the GOA. These adjustments are described below.

The B seasonal apportionment of the 2016 pollock TAC in Statistical Area 610 of the GOA is 3,826 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2016 and 2017 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (81 FR 14740, March 18, 2016). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(5)(iv)(B), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), hereby increases the B season apportionment for Statistical Area 610 by 765 mt to account for the underharvest of the TAC in Statistical Areas 610 and 620 in the A season. This increase is in proportion to the estimated pollock biomass and is not greater than 20 percent of the B seasonal apportionment of the TAC in Statistical Area 610. Therefore, the revised B seasonal apportionment of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 610 is 4,591 mt (3,826 mt plus 765 mt).

The B seasonal apportionment of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 620 of the GOA is 50,747 mt as established by the final 2016 and 2017 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (81 FR 14740, March 18, 2016). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(5)(iv)(B), the Regional Administrator hereby increases the B seasonal apportionment for Statistical Area 620 by 10,149 mt to account for the underharvest of the TAC in Statistical Areas 620 in the A season. This increase is not greater than 20 percent of the B seasonal apportionment of the TAC in Statistical Area 620. Therefore, the revised B seasonal apportionment of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 620 is 60,896 mt (50,747 mt plus 10,149 mt).

The B seasonal apportionment of pollock TAC in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA is 5,083 mt as established by the final 2016 and 2017 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (81 FR 14740, March 18, 2016). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(5)(iv)(B), the Regional Administrator hereby increases the B seasonal apportionment for Statistical Area 630 by 1,016 mt to account for the underharvest of the TAC in Statistical Areas 620 and 630 in the A season. This increase is in proportion to the estimated pollock biomass and is not greater than 20 percent of the B seasonal apportionment of the TAC in Statistical Area 630. Therefore, the revised B seasonal apportionment of pollock TAC in Statistical Area 630 is 6,099 mt (5,083 mt plus 1,016 mt).

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent

NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would provide opportunity to harvest increased pollock seasonal apportionments. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of March 18, 2016.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: March 23, 2016

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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