



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 230224-0053; RTID 0648-XD678]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for the Pacific cod sideboard limit by non-exempt American Fisheries Act (AFA) catcher vessels in the Western Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the annual 2024 Pacific cod sideboard limit established for non-exempt AFA catcher vessels in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 20, 2024, through 2400 hours, A.l.t., December 31, 2024.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Adam Zaleski, 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 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. Regulations governing sideboard protections for GOA groundfish fisheries appear at subpart B of 50 CFR part 680.

The annual 2024 Pacific cod sideboard limit established for non-exempt AFA catcher vessels in the Western Regulatory Area is 640 metric tons (mt), as established by the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (88 FR 13238, March 2, 2023).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iv), the Regional Administrator has determined that the annual 2024 Pacific cod sideboard limit established for non-exempt AFA catcher vessels in the Western Regulatory Area will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 0 mt and is setting aside the remaining 640 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this sideboard directed fishing allowance has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for the annual 2024 Pacific cod sideboard limit for non-exempt AFA catcher vessels in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

While this closure is effective the maximum retainable amounts at § 679.20(e) and (f) apply at any time during a trip.

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This action is required by 50 CFR part 679, which was issued pursuant to section 304(b), and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), there is good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action, as notice and comment would be 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 delay the directed fishing closure of the annual 2024 Pacific cod sideboard limit for the non-exempt AFA catcher vessels in the Western Regulatory Area of the GOA. NMFS was

unable to publish a notification providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of January 16, 2024.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA 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.

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

Dated: January 18, 2024.

Everett Wayne Baxter,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.