

NMFS PROVIDES ADVANCE NOTICE OF STELLER SEA LION PROTECTION MEASURES FOR THE POLLOCK FISHERIES OFF ALASKA

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is preparing an emergency rule to implement Steller sea lion protection measures for the pollock fisheries off Alaska, according to Steven Pennoyer, Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS. This emergency rule was recommended by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council). NMFS intends to have the emergency rule effective by January 20, 1999, for a period of 180 days. The purpose of this bulletin is to provide advance notice of the elements currently contemplated for the emergency rule so that the affected public has opportunity to prepare for these regulatory changes. This bulletin is for informational purposes only. Do not rely on it to guide you in compliance with the upcoming regulatory changes.

Aleutian Islands Closure. Under the emergency rule, the Aleutian Islands Subarea will be closed to directed fishing for pollock.

Bering Sea Fishing Seasons. This emergency rule will establish new fishing seasons for the four sectors of the Bering Sea pollock fishery that are defined in the American Fisheries Act. The pollock total allowable catch (TAC) allocated to each industry sector will be apportioned to the fishing seasons according to a formula developed by the Council. Overages and underages may be "rolled over" to subsequent fishing seasons during the same year except that no seasonal apportionment may exceed 30 percent of the annual TAC. These new fishing seasons and corresponding seasonal TAC apportionment percentages are summarized below:

Fishing Season	Season Dates and Seasonal TAC Apportionment Percentages					
	Inshore and Catcher/processor		Mothership		CDQ	
A1 Season	1/20 - 2/15	(27.5%)	2/1 - 4/15	(40%)	1/20 - 4/15	(45%)
A2 Season	2/20 - 4/15	(12.5%)				
B Season	8/1 - 9/15	(30.0%)	8/1 - 9/15	(30%)	4/15 - 12/31	(55%)
C Season	9/15 - 11/1	(30.0%)	9/15 - 11/1	(30%)		

This emergency rule also repeals existing fair start provisions that required vessels fishing for pollock in the Bering Sea Subarea to cease fishing for groundfish during the week leading up to each pollock season or face a mandatory stand down period during the first week of the pollock season. The Council has determined that these fair start requirements are no longer necessary, given the protections for other fisheries that are contained within the AFA.

CH/CVOA) Conservation Zone. The emergency rule will establish a Critical Habitat/Catcher Vessel Operational Area (CH/CVOA) conservation zone for the purpose of regulating total removals of pollock. This CH/CVOA conservation zone will include the portion of Bering Sea critical habitat known as the Bogoslof foraging area, and the portion of the CVOA that extends eastward from the Bogoslof foraging area.

The CH/CVOA conservation zone will consist of the area of the Bering Sea Subarea between 170°00'W and 163°00'W, south of straight lines connecting the following points in the order listed:

- 55°00'N 170°00'W;
- 55°00'N 168°00'W;
- 55°30'N 168°00'W;
- 55°30'N 166°00'W;
- 56°00'N 166°00'W;
- 56°00'N 163°00'W.

Pollock harvests within the CH/CVOA conservation zone during the A1 and A2 seasons will be restricted to a percentage of each sector's seasonal TAC apportionment according to the percentages displayed below:

Fishing Season	Percentage of Catch Within CH/CVOA Conservation Zone			
	Inshore	Catcher/ processor	Mothership	CDQ
A1 Season	70%	40%	50%	100%
A2 Season	70%	40%		
B Season	Not included in the emergency rule			
C Season				

NMFS will monitor catch by each industry sector and close the CH/CVOA conservation zone to directed fishing for pollock by a sector when NMFS determines that the specified CH/CVOA limit has been reached. The Council intended that inshore catcher vessels less than or equal to 99 ft length overall (LOA) would be exempt from CH/CVOA closures from September 1 through March 31 unless the 70 percent cap for the inshore sector has been reached. To accomplish this objective, NMFS will announce the closure of the CH/CVOA conservation zone to catcher/vessels over 99 ft LOA before the inshore sector 70 percent limit is reached and in a manner intended to leave remaining quota within CH/CVOA sufficient to support fishing by vessels less than or equal to 99 ft LOA for the duration of the current inshore sector opening.

The Council will be asked to submit further sea lion protection measures to spatially disperse fishing effort during the Bering Sea B and C seasons.

Gulf of Alaska Fishing Seasons and TAC Apportionments. The emergency rule will establish new fishing seasons and pollock TAC apportionments in the Western and Central (W/C) Regulatory Areas of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). These new fishing seasons are summarized below. The TAC for pollock in the combined W/C Regulatory Areas will continue to be apportioned among Statistical Areas 610, 620, and 630 in proportion to the distribution of the pollock biomass as determined by the most recent NMFS surveys. The pollock fishing season in the Eastern Regulatory Area will be unchanged.

Fishing season and TAC apportionment	From:	To:
A Season: 30%	January 20	April 1
B Season: 20%	June 1	July 1
C Season: 25%	September 1	The date of closure of a statistical area (610, 620, 630) to directed fishing, or October 1, whichever comes first.
D Season: 25%	Five days after the date of closure of a statistical area (610, 620, 630) to directed fishing in the C season.	November 1.

Limits on Pollock Catch Within Shelikof Strait. To prevent localized depletions of pollock within Shelikof Strait, an important winter foraging area for Steller sea lions, the emergency rule limits removals from within a designated Shelikof Strait conservation zone during the A season.

For the purpose of the emergency rule, a Shelikof Strait conservation zone will be defined as the area bound by straight lines and shoreline connecting the following coordinates in the following order:

- A. 58°51'N 153°15'W;
- B. 58°51'N 152°00'W;
- C. The intersection of 152°00'W with Afognak Island. Counterclockwise around the shoreline of Afognak, Kodiak, and Raspberry Islands to . .
- D. 57°00'N 154°00'W;
- E. 56°30'N 154°00'W;
- F. 56°30'N 155°00'W;
- G. 56°00'N 155°00'W;

- H. 56°00'N 157°00'W;
- I. The intersection of 157°00'W with the Alaska Peninsula.

This area overlaps portions of statistical areas 620 and 630. The Shelikof Strait conservation zone catch limit is not a separate TAC for this area, but is a limit on allowable removals from this area. If sufficient TAC is harvested from outside Shelikof Strait in statistical areas 620 and 630, then either or both statistical areas will be closed to directed fishing before the Shelikof Strait catch limit is reached.

The A season catch limit for the Shelikof Strait conservation zone will be determined by calculating the ratio of the most recent estimate of pollock biomass in Shelikof Strait divided by the most recent estimate of total pollock biomass in the GOA. This ratio will then be multiplied by the overall pollock TAC for the GOA and multiplied by the A season apportionment of 30 percent. For 1999, NMFS has specified a Shelikof Strait catch limit of 15,857 mt. When NMFS determines that A season pollock removals from within the Shelikof Strait conservation zone have reached this specified limit, directed fishing for pollock will be prohibited in the Shelikof Strait conservation zone.

W/C GOA Trip limits. The Council recommended that NMFS establish a 300,000 lb (136 mt) trip limit for catcher vessels harvesting pollock in the directed pollock fisheries of the Western or Central Regulatory Areas of the Gulf of Alaska (W/C GOA). Under the emergency rule, a catcher vessel fishing for groundfish in the W/C GOA will be prohibited from retaining on board at any moment, more than 136 mt of pollock harvested in the W/C GOA. In addition, to prevent vessel operators from using tenders to avoid the trip limit restriction, vessels operating as tenders also will be prohibited from retaining on board at any moment, more than 136 mt of unprocessed pollock that was harvested in the W/C GOA.

Revised 1999 interim specifications. To allow the Bering Sea and GOA pollock fisheries to commence on January 20, 1999, this emergency rule will revise the 1999 interim specifications for pollock by using the final TAC recommendations made by the Council in December 1998 and revising them to comport with the emergency rule measures outlined above.

Pollock Trawl Exclusion Zones. The emergency rule will prohibit directed fishing for pollock within 10 or 20 nautical miles (nm) of rookeries and significant haulouts in the Bering Sea Subarea and GOA. The Council's emergency rule recommendations contained all of the pollock exclusion zones recommended by NMFS in the Biological Opinion with one exception in the Bering Sea Subarea and eight exceptions in the GOA. In the Bering Sea Subarea, the Council recommended no closure for a proposed 20 nm exclusion zone around the Cape Sarichef haulout. NMFS has decided to phase in the exclusion zone around this haulout with a 10 nm exclusion zone in 1999 and anticipates extending the exclusion zone to 20 nm for 2000 and beyond. In the GOA, the Council recommended no closures around Cape Barnabas, Gull Point, Rugged Island, Point Elrington, Cape Ikolik, Needles, Mitrofanina, and Sea Lion Rocks. For 1999, NMFS has decided not to implement exclusion zones at these locations, and anticipates phasing-in 10 nm

exclusion zones for 2000 and beyond. The emergency rule will revise Tables 4 and 6 to 50 CFR 679 which will display existing no-trawl zones and new pollock trawl exclusion zones. The revisions to Tables 4 and 6 are displayed below:

Table 4 to 50 CFR 679

Steller sea lion protection areas¹ in the Bering Sea Subarea² are identified in the following table. Where two sets of coordinates are given, the baseline extends in a clock-wise direction from the first set of geographic coordinates along the shoreline at mean lower-low water to the second set of coordinates. Where only one set of coordinates is listed, that location is the base point.

Management Area/Island/Site	Boundaries to				(Effective through July 19, 1999) Directed fishing for pollock prohibited within. . .(nm)		Trawling prohibited within. . .(nm)	
	Latitude	Longitude	Latitude	Longitude	Nov. 1 through April 31	May 1 through Oct. 31	Jan. 1 through April 15	Year-round
Bering Sea								
Walrus	57 11.00N	169 56.00W			20	20		10
Uliaga	53 04.00N	169 47.00W	53 05.00N	169 46.00W		20		
Chuginadak	52 46.50N	169 42.00W	52 46.50N	169 44.50W		20		
Kagamil	53 02.50N	169 41.00W				20		
Samalga	52 46.00N	169 15.00W				20		
Adugak	52 55.00N	169 10.50W			20	20		10
Umnak/Cape Aslik	53 25.00N	168 24.50W			20	20		
Ogchul	53 00.00N	168 24.00W			20	20		10
Bogoslof/Fire Island	53 56.00N	168 02.00W			20	20		10
Emerald	53 17.50N	167 51.50W				20		
Unalaska/Cape Izigan	53 13.50N	167 39.00W			20	20		
Unalaska/Bishop Pt	53 58.50N	166 57.50W			20	20		
Akutan/Reef-lava	54 07.50N	166 06.50W	54 10.50N	166 04.50W	20	20		
Old Man Rocks	53 52.00N	166 05.00W			20	20		
Akutan/Cape Morgan	54 03.50N	166 00.00W	54 05.50N	166 05.00W	20	20	20	10
Rootok	54 02.50N	165 34.50W				20		
Akun/Billings Head	54 18.00N	165 32.50W	54 18.00N	165 31.50W	20	20	20	10
Tanginak	54 12.00N	165 20.00W			20			
Tigalda/Rocks NE	54 09.00N	164 57.00W	54 10.00N	164.59.00W	20	20		
Unimak/Cape Sarichef	54 34.50N	164 56.50W			10	10		
Aiktak	54 11.00N	164 51.00W			20			
Ugamak	54 14.00N	164 48.00W	54 13.00N	164 48.00W	20	20	20	10
Round	54 12.00N	164 46.50W				20		
Sea Lion Rock (Amak)	55 28.00N	163 12.00W			20	20	20	10
Amak+rocks	55 24.00N	163 07.00W	55 26.00N	163 10.00W	20	20		

¹Three nm NO TRANSIT ZONES are described at 50 CFR 227.12(a)(2).

²Closure zones around many of these sites also extend into statistical area 610 of the Gulf of Alaska Management Area

Table 6 to 50 CFR 679 (Effective through June 20, 1999).

Steller sea lion protection areas¹ in the Gulf of Alaska² are identified in the following table. Where two sets of coordinates are given, the baseline extends in a clock-wise direction from the first set of geographic coordinates along the shoreline at mean lower-low water to the second set of coordinates. Where only one set of coordinates is listed, that location is the base point.

Management Area/Island/Site	Boundaries to				(Effective through July 19, 1999) Directed fishing for pollock prohibited within. . .(nm)		Trawling prohibited within. . .(nm)	
	Latitude	Longitude	Latitude	Longitude	Nov. 1 through April 31	May 1 through Oct. 31	Jan. 1 through April 15	Year-round
Gulf of Alaska								
Bird	54 40.50N	163 18.00W			10	10		
South Rocks	54 18.00N	162 41.50W			10	10		
Clubbing Rocks	54 42.00N	162 26.50W	54 43.00N	162 26.50W	10	10		10
Pinnacle Rock	54 46.00N	161 46.00W			10	10		10
Sushilnoi Rocks	54 50.00N	161 44.50W				10		
Olga Rocks	55 00.50N	161 29.50W	54 59.00N	161 31.00W	10	10		
Jude	55 16.00N	161 06.00W			10	10		
The Whaleback	55 16.50N	160 06.00W			10	10		
Chernabura	54 47.50N	159 31.00W	54 45.50N	159 33.50W	10	10		10
Castle Rock	55 17.00N	159 30.00W				10		
Atkins	55 03.50N	159 19.00W			10	10		10
Spitz	55 47.00N	158 54.00W				10		
Kak	56 17.00N	157 51.00W				10		
Lighthouse Rocks	55 47.50N	157 24.00W			10	10		
Sutwik	56 31.00N	157 20.00W	56 32.00N	157 21.00W		10		
Chowiet	56 00.50N	156 41.50W	56 00.50N	156 42.00W	10	10		10
Nagai Rocks	55 50.00N	155 46.00W			10	10		
Chirikof	55 46.50N	155 39.50W	55 46.50N	155 43.00W	10	10		10
Puale Bay	57 41.00N	155 23.00W			10	10		
Takli	58 03.00N	154 27.50W	58 02.00N	154 31.00W		10		
Cape Gull	58 13.50N	154 09.50W	58 12.50N	154 10.50W		10		

¹Three nm NO TRANSIT ZONES are described at 50 CFR 227.12(a)(2).

²Additional closures along the Aleutian Island chain that extend into statistical area 610 of the Gulf of Alaska are displayed in Table 4 of this part.

Table 6 to 50 CFR 679 (cont).

Management Area/Island/Site	Boundaries to				(Effective through July 19, 1999) Directed fishing for pollock prohibited within. . .(nm)		Trawling prohibited within. . .(nm)	
	Latitude	Longitude	Latitude	Longitude	Nov. 1 through April 31	May 1 through Oct. 31	Jan. 1 through April 15	Year-round
Sitkinak/Cape Sitkinak	56 34.50N	153 51.50W			10	10		
Kodiak/Cape Ugat	57 52.00N	153 51.00W			10	10		
Shakun Rock	58 32.50N	153 41.50W			10	10		
Twoheaded Island	56 54.50N	153 33.00W	56 53.50N	153 35.50W	10	10		
Cape Douglas	58 51.50N	153 14.00W				10		
Latax Rocks	58 42.00N	152 28.50W	58 40.50N	152 30.00W	10	10		
Ushagat/SW	58 55.00N	152 22.00W				10		
Ugak	57 23.00N	152 15.50W	57 22.00N	152 19.00W		10		
Sea Otter Island	58 31.50N	152 13.00W			10	10		
Long	57 47.00N	152 13.00W			10			
Kodiak/Cape Chiniak	57 37.50N	152 09.00W			10	10		
Sugarloaf	58 53.00N	152 02.00W			10	10		10
Sea Lion Rocks (Marmot)	58 21.00N	151 48.50W			10	10		
Marmot	58 14.00N	151 47.50W	58 10.00N	151 51.00W	10	10		10
Perl	59 06.00N	151 39.50W			10	10		
Outer (Pye) Island	59 20.50N	150 23.00W	59 21.00N	150 24.50W	10	10		10
Steep Point	59 29.00N	150 15.00W				10		
Chiswell Islands	59 36.00N	149 34.00W			10	10		
Wooded Island (Fish)	59 53.00N	147 20.50W			10	10		
Glacier Island	60 51.00N	147 09.00W			10	10		
Seal Rocks	60 10.00N	146 50.00W			10	10		
Cape Hinchinbrook	60 14.00N	146 38.50W				10		
Hook Point	60 20.00N	146 15.50W				10		
Cape St. Elias	59 48.00N	144 36.00W			10	10		

¹Three nm NO TRANSIT ZONES are described at 50 CFR 227.12(a)(2).