

North Pacific Fishery Management Council Bering Sea Habitat Conservation Alternatives-
Updated February 15, 2007:

The alternatives and options to be analyzed in this analysis follow:

Note that the major components are considered as alternatives, and the minor components are provided as options. These Options can be chosen in any combination with any of the alternatives.

Alternative 1: Status quo. No additional measures would be taken to conserve benthic habitat.

Alternative 2: Open area approach. This alternative would prohibit non-pelagic trawling outside of a designated 'open area'. Non-pelagic trawling would be prohibited in the northernmost shelf area and the deepwater basin area of the Bering Sea. There is only one open area analyzed, which is based on the EFH EIS area, modified using non-pelagic trawl effort distribution data through 2005.

Note that the open area approach will contain the boundaries for the Etolin Strait Area as negotiated by representatives of these coastal communities and the flatfish industry.

Alternative 3: Gear modifications. This alternative would require gear modifications for all non-pelagic trawl gear used in flatfish target fisheries. Specifically, this alternative would require discs on non-pelagic trawl sweeps to reduce seafloor contact and/or increase clearance between the sweep and substrate. A performance standard of at least 2.5 inches elevation of the sweep from the bottom would be required

The below options could be selected in combination with any Alternative more than one option can be chosen.

Option 1. Close the area around Saint Matthew to non-pelagic trawling. This area would be configured such that the area near St. Matthew Island is closed to conserve blue king crab habitat

Option 2. Close an area to non-pelagic trawling around around Nunivak Island with the southern border extending along the nearshore portion of Etolin Strait . This area would be configured such that the area around Nunivak Island and Etolin Strait is closed to conserve nearshore habitats, and minimize potential interactions with community use and subsistence fisheries taking place in the nearshore areas.

Option 3. Close an area to non-pelagic trawling around around Nunivak Island with the southern border extending along the nearshore portion of Etolin Strait and Kuskokwim Bay. This area would be configured such that the area in southern Etolin Strait and Kuskokwim Bay is closed to conserve nearshore habitat and minimize potential interactions with community use and subsistence fisheries taking place in the nearshore areas. The boundaries of this closure area are the result of negotiations by representatives of the flatfish industry and coastal communities.

Option 4: Northern Bering Sea Experimental Fishing Area is the northern boundary line of the open area under Alternative 2, stretching from the Russian border around the southern end of St. Matthew Island to and around the southern portion of Nunivak Island and across Kuskokwim Bay to Cape Newenham. The area would be closed to fishing with non-pelagic trawl gear. The Council requests the NOAA/NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center design an adaptive management experiment in the closed northern area described under this option to study the effects of non-pelagic trawling in previously untrawled areas. The study should include open and closed areas and appropriate monitoring to study fishing impacts on benthic communities and ecological process, particularly as this relates to juvenile snow crab. The adaptive management experiment design will include review by the SSC. NMFS will provide the draft adaptive

management experiment design to the Council for review within 18 months following the Federal Register publication of the final rule for this action.

Option 5: Close the area to non-pelagic trawling around St. Lawrence Island. This area would be configured such that the area around St. Lawrence Island is closed to non-pelagic gear to conserve blue king crab habitat and minimize potential interactions with community use and subsistence fisheries taking place in nearshore areas.

Draft timeline for analysis: This schedule contemplates initial review/final action in March- April 2007/June2007.

Discussion paper on alternative concepts and problem statement finalized December 2005

Discussion paper on refinement of the alternatives and options – June 2006

Discussion paper on Open Area Approach– October, 2006

Update on Gear Modification Research (Craig Rose) December 2006

Council determines alternatives for analysis December 2006

Draft EA for preliminary draft review in February 2007

Modifications to alternatives in February 2007

Initial Review for Council in March-April 2007

All sections of document due March 7th

Internal review of draft document – March 6-7th

Initial review draft sent to Council – March 8th

Initial review by Council – March 28-April3

Revisions to draft document – April/ May

Final review and Council action – June 2007

Public review draft sent to Council – tba

Send Secretary of Commerce draft to AKR –tba

Development of FMP amendment and proposed rule and regional review Nov-Dec 2007

Initiate Secretarial review – Jan 2008

Proposed rule published – Feb 2008

Secretarial approval – April 2008

Final rule published April-June 2008

Applicable laws with significant issues for analysis:

- NEPA
- EFH Final Rule (guidance)
- EO 12866
- ESA

Major legal, monitoring, or enforcement issues that might arise from any alternatives considered:

Updates are provided to the NPFMC Enforcement Committee on a regular basis. Currently working with NMFS enforcement on the gear modification alternative and possible implementation program. May need to consider a VMS requirement to go with alternatives and options that include closed areas.