

Bering Sea Habitat Conservation Open Area Approach
Council Motion October 10/08/06 3:20pm

The Council tasks staff to evaluate a modified open area approach under Option 1 of both Alternatives 2 & 4 and evaluate two additional options as follows:

Alternatives 2 & 4 Revised Option 1: Include the areas north of Bogoslof, south of Nunivak Island and the 10 minute strip in the Red King Crab Savings Area in the open area, and redefine the Northward boundary¹ of the proposed Bering Sea Open Area to include Blue King Crab Savings Area near St. Matthew Island (see attached map).

Alternatives 2 & 4, new Option 2: In order to fish (with bottom trawl gear) in the Closed Area north of the Open Area boundary an Exempted Fishery Permit is required.

Alternative 4, new Option 3: For the region north of the historically fished area, research openings will be established to assess the impact of bottom trawling on benthic habitat and organisms-particularly *C. opilio* crab. The area opened shall be established across bottom contours so as to include representative habitat types.

Alternative 3: Include a new Option 1 that would establish habitat research areas in the Bering Sea to assess the impact of bottom trawling on benthic habitat and organisms particularly *C. opilio*. The research areas shall be established across bottom contours so as to include representative habitats and should focus on assessing habitat impacts of trawling by adopting a statistical design of open and closed areas. The habitat research areas would be located in the northern portion of the BS, that has not had much fishing in the between St. Matthew and St. Lawrence Islands and would be similar to that in Alternative 4.

Further:

- 1) The Council tasks staff to present better depiction of the maps to include the bathymetry of the slope.
- 2) The Council, in response to the SSC and public comment, tasks staff with drafting a white paper to discuss current scientific information on three canyons within the EBS including, Pribilof canyon, Middle canyon and Zhemchug Canyon
- 3) The Council tasks staff to bring forth a summary of current research on Skate nurseries and the degree of overlap of fisheries in the EBS.
- 4) Lastly, staff should bring forward as part of the discussion information a draft schedule for the next HAPC process.
- 5) Request Council staff provide more than 1 option for the northern boundary of the open area under Alternatives 2 & 4 based on varying threshold levels, staff would determine approach based on ranges for relatively low to relatively high trawl effort

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The redesignation of the northward boundary, defined in the staff discussion paper (AGENDA D-4 (b) October 2006, Figure 5), is near St Matthew Island and extends southwest to project juvenile, non-ovigerous female and male blue king crab habitat, and northeast to protect ovigerous females habitat. This area has: (1) been represented in the NMFS and ADF&G surveys to contain juvenile and mature BKC; (2) locations of PSC catch in the rock sole trawl fleet; and (3) observations from the directed crab fishery. Industry comments indicate that increased flatfish trawl effort has been progressing northward on average 20 miles/year, some of this effort is occurring near St. Matthew Island. This crab stock is severely depleted, designated overfished such that the last pot survey found only 5 legal male BKC in the area.

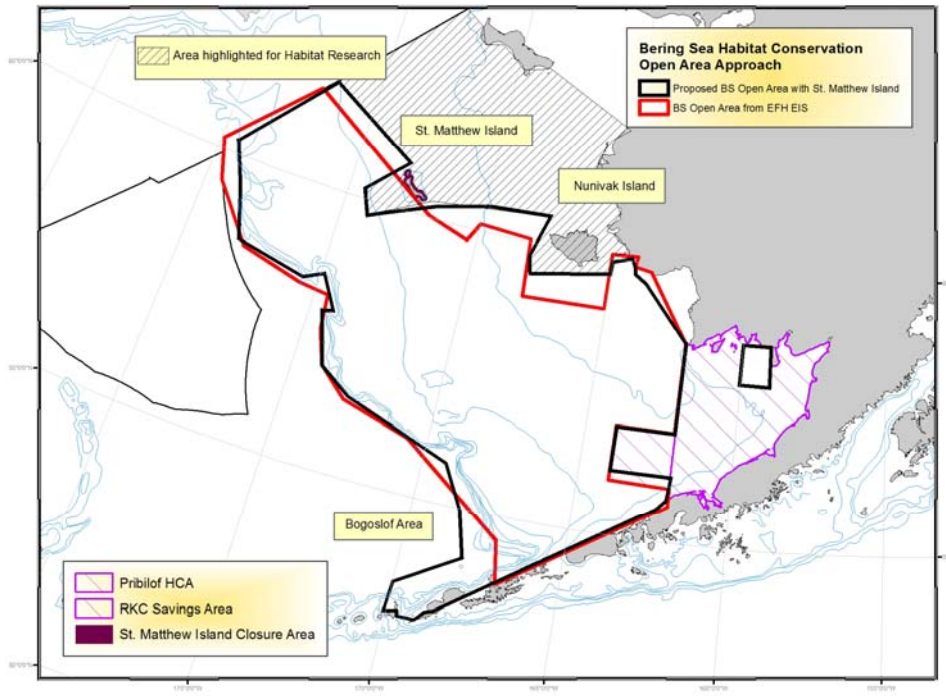


Figure 1. Alternatives 2 & 4 Current Option 1: Open area approach October 2006 contrasted with that of the EFH EIS (NOAA, 2005) further modifications will be presented in December 2006.