

HABITAT AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN (HAPC) PROPOSAL

Date: January 9, 2004

Name of Proposer: Marine Conservation Alliance

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Please check applicable box (es): <input type="checkbox"/> GOA Groundfish FMP <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BSAI Groundfish FMP <input type="checkbox"/> Scallop FMP <input type="checkbox"/> BSAI Crab FMP

Title of Proposal. Amatignak/Ulak Islands and Tanaga West coral/rockfish HAPCs

HAPC Site Location. NOAA charts 16460. These proposed HAPC sites in the central Aleutian Islands (AI) are delineated in Figure P3-1 at the 10 mile sea lion rookeries around Amatignak/Ulak Islands, and at the southwest side of Tanaga Bay on the west side of Tanaga Island.

Habitat Type and Species Information. These sites were selected by trawl skippers who possess a wealth of experience and knowledge of the Aleutian Islands. Captains selected these sites because they meet the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's (NPFMC) priority for high-relief hard coral stands likely to be good rockfish habitat. These areas are mostly considered untrawlable grounds with very rocky substrates, numerous snags, and strong tide exchanges. Captains are confident there are stands of high-relief hard corals within these sites. Trawling for rockfish has occurred within these areas during foreign and Joint Venture (JV) fishing but the extent to which that fishing occurred within these areas is not known. The proposed site at Amatignak/Ulak would not have been part of the "open area" under Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Alternative 5b for the AI because no significant trawling has occurred there since 1990. The site at Tanaga West, however, would have been open (Figure P3-2). Despite this latter finding from the 5b analysis, the proposed site on the west side of Tanaga has not been an important area for trawl fisheries because the grounds are largely untrawlable. In all likelihood, the area received an "open" designation in the EFH EIS 5b analysis because the 5 x 5 kilometer blocks lacked sufficient specificity as to the actual areas where fishing occurred. Data suggest these sites have had a high abundance of rockfish in the past according to the historical CPUE study by Fritz, *et al.* (Figure P3-3) where the highest 25% of rockfish CPUEs are plotted for trawl and longline rockfish hauls. For trawlers, however, these catches likely occurred before 1990; little is known about present rockfish abundance at these sites, and none of the sites within NMFS trawl or longline surveys. Rockfish catch data prepared by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for Oceana's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request do not indicate any trawl rockfish catches from 1990-2002 but this result likely occurs from a lack of trawl effort within the area.

Summary Statement of the Proposal. A set of HAPC sites is proposed for the 10 mile sea lion rookeries around Amatignak/Ulak islands and for a portion of a small bay on the west side of Tanaga island. A set of steps is proposed to map the area and develop appropriate restrictions on bottom trawling to protect coral habitat and rockfish within the area while preserving fishing opportunities to the extent possible. Any restrictions on fishing should incorporate an experimental design to increase understanding of how rockfish use habitat and how fishing may affect productivity of FMP species.

Statement of Purpose and Need. The purpose of this proposal is to address the NPFMC's HAPC priority. The purpose of the proposal is to 1) designate the area as HAPC in accordance with the Council's priorities; 2) prioritize mapping via submersible exploration and rockfish abundance evaluations to identify the exact locations of high-relief hard coral stands within the area; and 3) develop appropriate restrictions on bottom trawling to protect high-relief hard coral rockfish areas within the AI HAPC sites while preserving fishing opportunities to the extent practicable, while at the same time designing and

conducting applied research to increase understanding of how rockfish use habitat and how fishing affects the productivity of that habitat.

Objectives of the Proposal. The objective of this proposal is to address the NPFMC's HAPC priority. The proposed HAPC sites around Amatignak/Ulak and west of Tanaga fit the NPFMC's 2003-04 priority based on available data because they are relatively unfished (Figure P3-2) and, based on trawl catches of rockfish before 1990, thought to be good habitat for rockfish and other managed demersal species. Once the sites are mapped to establish locations of any concentrations of hard corals and rockfish within sites and determine the level of existing fishing and non-fishing effects within these sites, they may be zoned for no bottom trawling at high-relief hard coral/rockfish sites and fishing areas. Research should be conducted within these HAPC sites to evaluate the effects of fishing as well as habitat associations of rockfish with fished and un-fished habitat. Once the sites are fully mapped and fishing and non-fishing effects established, they would lend themselves well to zoning for fishing and control areas to evaluate the effects of fishing gears as well as habitat associations of rockfish with fished and un-fished habitat.

Describe How the Proposal Addresses the each of the 4 HAPC Considerations (50CFR 600.815):

The **IMPORTANCE** of the ecological function provided by the habitat.

The extent to which the habitat is **SENSITIVE** to human-induced degradation. Research has shown fishing can modify high-relief coral habitat but the implications of such modifications as they occur from the fishing gears used in Alaska and the low intensity of fishing effort as it occurs off Alaska are not known.

Whether, and to what extent, the activity **STRESSES** the habitat type. The sites in this proposal meet the 2003 HAPC priority because they are largely untrawled and the bottom appears to be high-relief bathymetry with strong tidal flows that have been associated with known concentrations of hard corals and rockfish abundance. Some groundfish longline and pot fishing likely occurs within these sites, but the extent of this is not known at this time.

The **RARITY** of the habitat type. Fishermen believe these sites may have high concentrations of hard corals and an abundance of juvenile and adult rockfish.

Describe any Proposed Solutions to Achieve These Objectives. These sites should be prioritized for submersible mapping so any appropriate restrictions on bottom trawling may be developed to protect high-relief coral habitat within this designated HAPC sites while preserving fishing opportunities. Once these sites are mapped to establish they in fact contain high-relief hard coral abundance areas used by rockfish, and once the level of existing fishing and non-fishing effects on the area are observed and categorized, they should be zoned for no bottom trawling where there are high-relief hard coral habitats for rockfish, while maintaining trawling and other fishing opportunities to the extent possible where these hard coral areas do not occur.

Describe any Proposed Management Measures for the HAPC. 1. Designation of HAPC meeting NPFMC's 2003 priority. 2. Prioritization for submersible mapping and rockfish abundance evaluation within the HAPC site. 3. Eventual development of appropriate bottom trawling restrictions for high-relief hard coral/ rockfish areas within these proposed sites. 4. Development of controlled research to learn more

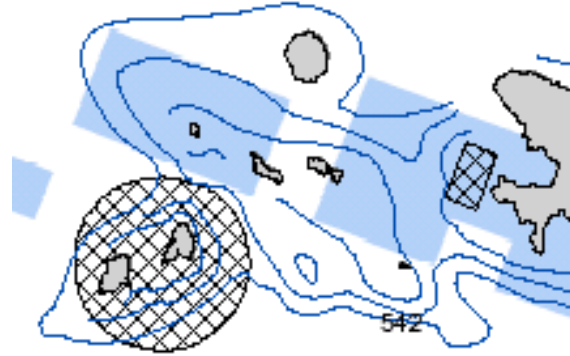
about how rockfish associate with and use habitat, how fishing affects that use and productivity, and how different levels of fishing intensity and gear effects influence productivity of high-relief hard coral habitats.

Identify any Expected Benefits to Habitat or FMP species. Sites within this proposal may be important hard coral abundance areas with rockfish habitat that have not been trawled extensively at least since 1990. If the steps outlined in this proposal are implemented, rockfish and other Fishery Management Plan (FMP) species could benefit with only minimal impacts on groundfish trawlers and communities dependent on trawling.

Identify Fishery, Stakeholders, and/or Communities, which may Benefit from the Proposed HAPC. Proposed sites may be important hard coral abundance areas with rockfish habitat that has not been trawled extensively. If the steps outlined in this proposal (mapping, zoning of appropriate fishing activities within HAPC, research on habitat use and how fishing affects productivity) are implemented, rockfish and other FMP species could benefit with only small direct impacts on groundfish trawl fishermen and communities that depend on trawling. The sites at Amatignak/Ulak Islands are presently closed to trawling for pollock, cod, and Atka mackerel, so the only known trawl activity potentially affected by future management measures is the fishery for Pacific Ocean Perch. Impacts on fixed gear fisheries are not known because data (such as EFH EIS 5b analysis) are not available to evaluate effects, but impacts can be expected to be larger than for trawlers.

Support Data or Information Sources. NOAA chart 16460; knowledge and information volunteered at November and December 2003 meetings by trawl captains who target cod, Atka mackerel, and rockfish in the Aleutian Islands, Portions of NMFS' analysis of AI proposal 5b in 2003 EFH EIS; Fritz, *et al.* CPUE study, 1998 (NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-AFSC-88); rockfish catch data prepared by NMFS for Oceana (2003 FOIA).

Figure P3-2: EFH EIS 5b Aleutian Islands analysis for Amatignak/Ulak and Tanaga



Areas where significant trawl catches have occurred are indicated in blue. Note that under the 5b analysis, Amatignak/Ulak would not have been open while the proposed HAPC site at Tanaga would have been open. This likely resulted from the use of large area blocks for the analysis relative to the geographical scale of fishing in this area.

Highest quartile rockfish CPUE data from Fritz et al. CPUE study (cont.)

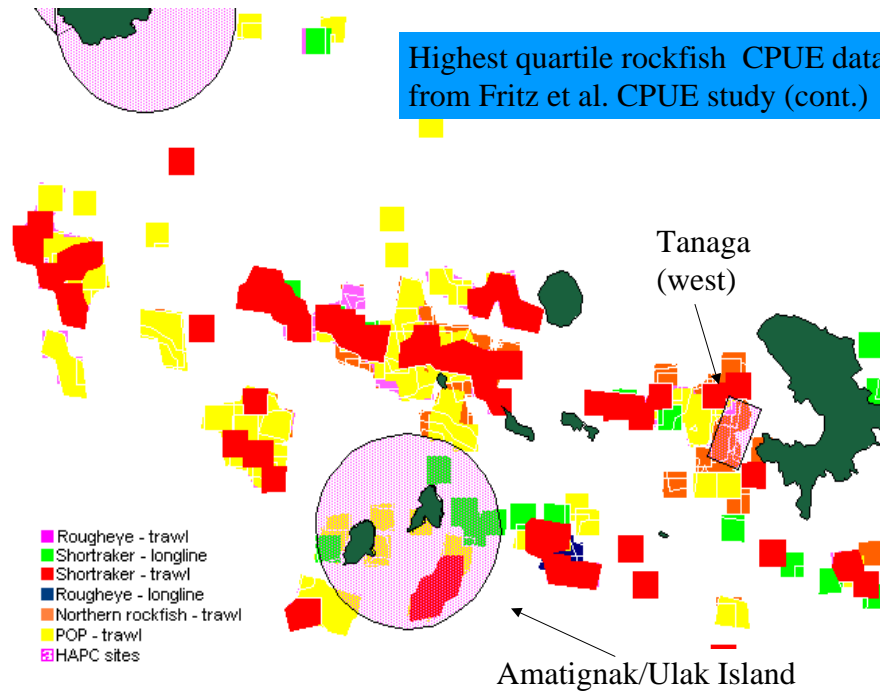


Figure P3-4: Rockfish catches (average annual catch per 10 x 10 block according to 1990-2002 data from Oceana's FOIA request

