

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock in Statistical Area 620 of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the B season allowance of the pollock total allowable catch (TAC) for Statistical Area 620 of the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), April 3, 2003, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., August 25, 2003.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Furuness, 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.

The B season allowance of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 620 of the GOA is 7,778 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2003 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (68 FR 9924, March 3, 2003). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B) the Administrator,

Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator) hereby increases the B season pollock TAC by 1,484 mt, the amount of the A season pollock allowance in Statistical Area 620 that was not previously taken in the A season. The revised B season allowance of pollock TAC in Statistical Area 620 is therefore 9,262 mt (7,778 mt plus 1,484 mt).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the revised B season allowance of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 620 has been reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 9,062 mt, and is setting aside the remaining 200 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock in Statistical Area 620 of the GOA.

Maximum retainable amounts may be found in the regulations at § 679.20(e) and (f).

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained

from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is contrary to the public interest. This requirement is contrary to the public interest as it would delay the closure of the fishery, lead to exceeding the B season allowance of the pollock TAC in Statistical Area 620, and therefore reduce the public's ability to use and enjoy the fishery resource.

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.

This action is required by section 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: April 2, 2003.

Richard W. Surdi,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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