

contour between 46°16' N. lat. and 38°N. lat. may be implemented at any time during 2003 through an inseason action.

Recreational fisheries off Washington, Oregon, and California north of 40°10' N. lat. will be subject to fewer depth restrictions than the commercial fisheries, primarily because most recreational vessels tend to operate in the nearshore area inside State waters. Off Washington, recreational fishing for groundfish and halibut will be prohibited inside the YRCA, a C-shaped closed area off the northern Washington coast. Coordinates for the YRCA will be defined at 50 CFR 660.304(d). Off Oregon and California north of 40°10' N. lat., recreational fishing for groundfish will be closed outside of 27 fm (49 m) if either the yelloweye or canary rockfish recreational fisheries set asides are projected to be achieved.

As in past years, recreational fisheries off California south of 40°10' N. lat., will be constrained by depth in order to reduce catch of bocaccio and other overfished rockfish species. Recreational fishing for groundfish will be prohibited entirely in waters offshore of the 20 fm (37 m) depth contour. The CCAs will also remain closed to fishing offshore of 20 fm (37 m). Coordinates defining the CCAs have changed modestly to ensure that the CCAs comply with depth-based closures for waters off southern California. CCA coordinates will be defined at 50 CFR 660.304(c).

Many of the closed areas and boundary lines are generally described using a fathom contour line. All of these lines, except the 20 fm (37 m) contour off California south of 40°10' N. lat. and the 3-nautical mile State management line off California, are specifically defined in the regulations at IV.A. (19), using latitude/longitude waypoints. These waypoint coordinates provide straight-line boundaries that approximate the depth-contours to provide clarity to the closed area boundaries for enforcement purposes. To ensure that consistent nomenclature is used coastwide, an area closed to fishing for groundfish will be referred to as a "Groundfish Conservation Area" in general, regardless of whether the boundaries of that area change during the year. The YRCA and the CCA are defined by coordinates that are fixed throughout the year. The larger, gear or sector-specific closed areas described by depth contour boundaries for the 2003 fishing year will be referred to as "Rockfish Conservation Areas," or RCAs. For example, there will be both a trawl RCA and a non-trawl RCA north of 40°10' N. lat. Boundaries for the RCAs

will be referred to as either the "inshore boundary," meaning the RCA boundary or borderline that is closest to shore, or the "offshore boundary," meaning the RCA boundary or borderline that is farthest offshore.

At its September meeting, the Council adopted the State of California's recommendation to create a California Rockfish Conservation Area (CRCA) in waters south of 40°10' N. lat. To ensure consistent coastwide nomenclature, this area will be referred to as an RCA in Federal regulations. NMFS anticipates that the Council and the State of California may continue to refer to the CRCA in management discussions. This RCA south of 40°10' N. lat. will be an area of restricted or no fishing intended to protect overfished rockfish species. This restricted area is proposed as ocean waters of 20–250 fm (37–457 m) depth between 40°10' N. lat. and 38° N. lat. and waters of 20–150 fm (37–274 m) depth between 38° N. lat. and the U.S. border with Mexico. The restrictions for that area that apply to the groundfish fisheries and the exceptions to those restrictions are described earlier in the section on depth based management. Any vessel allowed to fish within the CRCA based on an exception to a fishing restriction would be required to accommodate a State or Federal observer, if requested. In creating this RCA, the Council and the State of California wished to ensure that they had accounted for all fisheries that operate in waters where overfished rockfish species occur, whether State or federally managed. Several of the restrictions within the RCA affect only State-managed species and will be implemented through State regulations. Other restrictions affect federally-managed species other than groundfish, such as salmon, and will be implemented through Federal salmon regulations.

Vessel Monitoring System (VMS)

Routine monitoring of the fishing fleet is used to ensure that vessel operators comply with fisheries regulations. Traditional monitoring techniques include the monitoring of fisheries from air and surface craft, observer programs and analysis of catch records and vessel logbooks. The efficiency of these surveillance techniques can be dramatically enhanced by the addition of a VMS. VMS is a tool that is commonly used to monitor vessel activity in relationship to geographically defined management areas where fishing activity is restricted. VMS transmitters installed aboard each vessel automatically determine the vessel's location and transmit that position to a processing center via a communication

satellite where the information is validated and analyzed before being disseminated for fisheries management, surveillance and enforcement purposes. Transmitters are designed to be tamper resistant and automatic.

Time area closures have long been used to restrict fishing activity in the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery in order to keep harvests within sector allocations and at sustainable levels or to prohibit the catch of certain species. Until September 2002, geographically defined areas tended to be in the nearshore area or defined by simple latitude lines. On September 13, 2002, NMFS published an emergency rule that established a Darkblotched Rockfish Conservation Area for the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery (67 FR 57973), a large irregularly shaped geographical area defined by a series of latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates that extends far offshore with much activity being beyond the range of State enforcement capabilities. Coastwide, depth-based areas defined for 2003 are similarly defined. Traditional enforcement of time areas closures is most effective when the geographical areas are nearshore, small, and defined by simple line. Therefore, management and enforcement of the large irregularly shaped areas proposed for the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery would be greatly enhanced if a VMS program were established. The Council recommended that NMFS move forward in developing a VMS program with the intention of having a system in place by mid-year 2003.

For October-December 2002, Washington and Oregon were able to monitor mid-water fisheries for yellowtail and widow rockfish in the DBCA through a vessel declaration process. The declaration process required vessels intending to fish within the closed area with mid-water gear to declare their intentions to the States. The States were able to fund this process because each vessel was limited to two trips per 2-month period, which also limited the number of declarations the States would have to track. In 2003, the States will not be able to monitor fisheries occurring within the closed areas with a declaration process because they are unable to fund such a process. Federal regulations proposing implementation of a VMS system will address the possible need for a Federal declaration system in conjunction with VMS coverage.

II. Commercial and Recreational Fisheries

Since 1994, the non-tribal commercial groundfish fishery has been divided into