

# SPORT FISHING

## *Emergency Order*

ALASKA DEPARTMENT  
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

**Emergency Order No.** 2-RF-6-04-24

**Issued at:** Anchorage, Monday, March 11, 2024

**Effective Date:** 12:01 a.m. Monday, April 1, 2024

**Expiration Date:** 11:59 p.m. Tuesday  
December 31, 2024, unless superseded by  
subsequent emergency order.

### **EXPLANATION:**

This emergency order reduces rockfish bag and possession limits in the salt waters of Prince William Sound from four per day, eight in possession to three per day, six in possession, of which only one per day, one in possession can be nonpelagic. In addition, from April 1 through June 30, 2024, yelloweye rockfish may not be retained.

### **REGULATION:**

The provisions of 5 AAC 55.022(a)(9)(A) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order the following provisions are effective 12:01 a.m. Monday, April 1 through 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, December 31, 2024:

### **5 AAC 55.022. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area.**

(9) rockfish:

(A) may be taken from January 1 – December 31, except yelloweye rockfish which may only be taken from July 1 – December 31; bag limit of three fish; possession limit of six fish, of which only one per day and in possession may be a nonpelagic rockfish; no size limit;

Doug Vincent-Lang,  
Commissioner

By delegation to:

*Brittany Blain-Roth*  
Brittany Blain-Roth  
Area Management Biologist

### **JUSTIFICATION:**

In Prince William Sound, rockfish harvest has continued to trend upwards and sustainable levels of harvest are unknown. Prior to 2005, rockfish harvest in Prince William Sound was less than 25,000 fish, which included higher bag limits. From 2006–2013 harvest levels nearly doubled and the most recent 5-year (2018–2022) average of rockfish harvest has exceeded 85,000 fish annually. Much of this increase in harvest has been pelagic rockfish, which recently comprised approximately 65% of the rockfish harvest in the Prince William Sound Area (PWSA). While the overall health of the rockfish stock appears good,

these increased harvest levels may not be sustainable. Following restrictions implemented in 2023, annual harvest was estimated to have exceeded 79,000 rockfish.

Black rockfish continue to be the predominant pelagic rockfish harvested in the PWSA. The average length and weights of the annual black rockfish harvest was about 10% smaller in recent years compared to the historical average. A similar decline in average age (15% reduction) has also been detected in black rockfish harvest data with more than half of the harvest composed of immature black rockfish in 2022. Increasing harvest trends and changes in biological data indicate a possible truncation in the population structure that is unsustainable. Harvest of immature black rockfish is concerning to management, as these fish have not had the opportunity to replace themselves in the population through spawning.

In addition, while yelloweye rockfish stocks currently look healthy, stock assessment data indicates that the harvest rates of yelloweye rockfish are not sustainable into the future. To reduce yelloweye rockfish harvests by approximately 28%, it is necessary to prohibit retention from April - June. This seasonal closure also allows these fish the ability to have a successful reproductive event as most female yelloweye rockfish are gravid, with developing larvae during this time.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

The distribution list for this emergency order is on file at the Region 2 Office of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, 333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage, AK 99518, (907) 267-2218.