



Reducing Bycatch in Alaska

The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to minimize bycatch while also allowing for optimum yield in the fisheries. The Council has implemented new measures or refined existing measures to reduce bycatch of prohibited species, such as Chinook and chum salmon, Pacific halibut, and crab in the Federal fisheries. These species are integral to the health of Alaskan marine ecosystems and to State and Federal economies. This paper shares highlights of recently implemented restrictions.

Numerous subsistence users, charter vessels and commercial halibut fishermen rely on Pacific halibut. Halibut bycatch reduction is a priority for the Council and State of Alaska. Halibut size at age has decreased over the last decade and the entire Pacific halibut biomass is in decline along the Pacific coastal corridor.

Bycatch limits

- In June 2012, the Council took action to reduce halibut bycatch limits by 15% in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) trawl fisheries and longline catcher vessel fisheries and 7% in the GOA freezer longline fisheries.
- In 2012, the Council established a halibut bycatch limit in the central GOA Rockfish Program that is 12.5% less than the historical average, and required that 45% of any unused bycatch must be left in the water and not used in other trawl fisheries that year.
- In 2008, the Council established cooperative management in the BSAI non-pollock trawl catcher processor sector and reduced halibut bycatch by about 8% over four years.



Source: IPHC 2011 (net weight).

Gear modifications

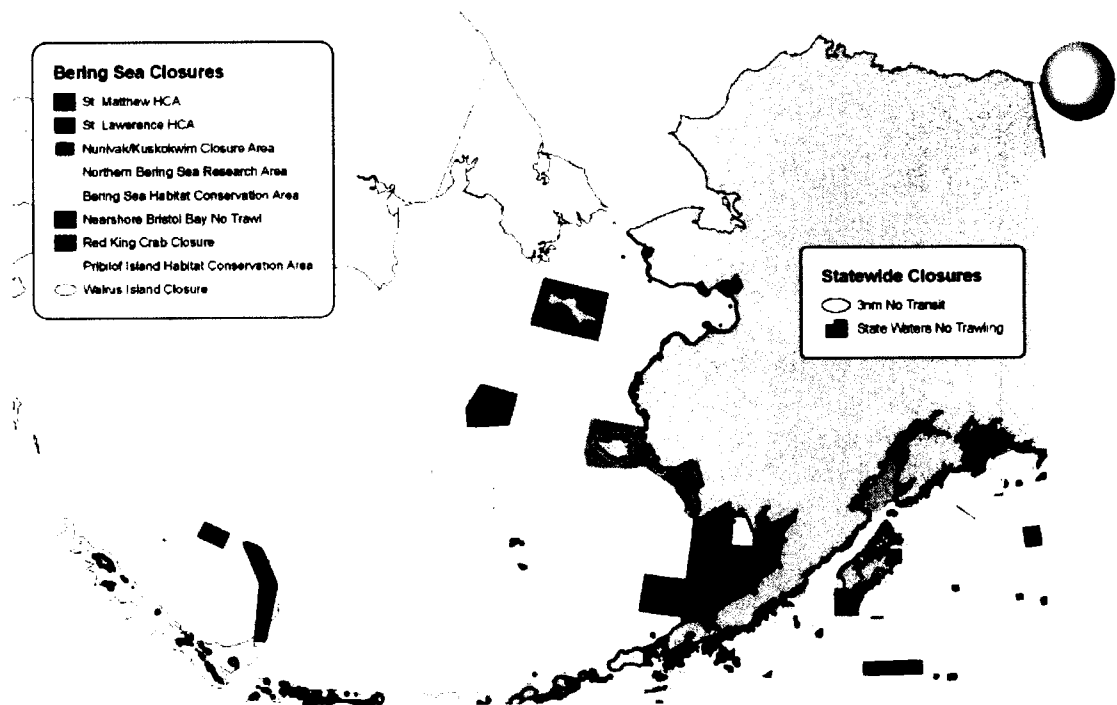
- In 2011, new regulations required all BS flatfish fisheries to elevate their trawl sweeps off the seafloor to reduce habitat damage and crab mortality. In 2013, this requirement was extended to all central GOA flatfish fisheries.
- Pot fishing gear is required to have biodegradable panels to prevent lost pots from 'ghost fishing' and tunnel openings or escape panels to reduce crab bycatch.

Bycatch limits

Bycatch limits are established for some red king, Tanner, and snow crab stocks by the Council in the BS groundfish fisheries and by the State in the statewide scallop fisheries. Bycatch limits are area specific to reduce impacts on local populations and fluctuate based on annual estimates of crab abundance.

Area closures

Several closures were applied in the Bering Sea in the mid-1990s to conserve red and blue king crab stocks, such as the Red King Crab Savings Area, the Nearshore Bristol Bay Closure, and the Pribilof Islands Habitat Conservation Area. In 2010, the Council adopted a bottom trawl closure in Marmot Bay to reduce bycatch of Tanner crabs, enhancing existing trawl closure areas designed to protect red king crabs.



Chinook salmon are an integral part of subsistence, sport, and commercial harvests in Alaska. The Council has implemented numerous management measures to reduce Chinook salmon bycatch over the years.

Bering Sea

In 2011, the Council implemented a new Chinook salmon bycatch avoidance program for the Bering Sea pollock fishery, which includes:

- A hard cap on the number of Chinook salmon that can be taken in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. This maximum limit requires immediate closure to all further pollock fishing for the remaining season.
- Incentive plan agreements to keep bycatch lower than the cap level. These agreements include explicit incentives and penalties for the pollock fleet to avoid Chinook salmon in all conditions.
- An industry program to close areas of the pollock fishing grounds when Chinook salmon bycatch rates are high in those areas.
- Requirements for every pollock vessel to have at least one observer onboard at all times. It requires a full count of all salmon caught, with genetic sampling to determine stock of origin.

Gulf of Alaska

- In 2012, a bycatch cap of 25,000 Chinook salmon was established for the western and central GOA pollock trawl fisheries.
- In 2013, the Council approved a hard cap (7,500 salmon) on Chinook bycatch in all remaining GOA trawl fisheries.
- Full retention of Chinook salmon is also required in all trawl fisheries. Retention of salmon supports research to identify the stock of origin of Chinook salmon bycatch in the GOA.

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