

Fishery Management Report No. 04-16

**Fishery Management Plan for the Commercial Tanner
Crab Fishery in the South Peninsula District of
Registration Area J, 2005**

by

Nicholas H. Sagalkin

December 2004

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Divisions of Sport Fish and Commercial Fisheries



FISHERY MANAGEMENT REPORT NO. 04-16

**FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE COMMERCIAL TANNER
CRAB FISHERY IN THE SOUTH PENINSULA DISTRICT OF
REGISTRATION AREA J, 2005**

by

Nicholas H. Sagalkin
Division of Commercial Fisheries, Kodiak

Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Sport Fish, Research and Technical Services
333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage, Alaska, 99518-1599

December 2004

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*Nicholas H. Sagalkin,
Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries,
211 Mission Road, Kodiak, AK 99615, USA*

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ABSTRACT

The South Peninsula District will open for a commercial Tanner crab *Chionoecetes bairdi* fishery on January 15, 2005 with a guideline harvest level of 300,000 pounds. This report provides a brief historic overview of the fishery and summarizes the harvest strategy for South Peninsula Tanner crabs. Information on tank inspections, inseason reporting, pot storage, landing requirements, gear operation hours, and contact personnel within the Alaska Department of Fish and Game is also provided. Harvesters are encouraged to use this document as a supplement to the 2003-2005 Commercial Shellfish Fishing Regulations to understand changes affecting this fishery.

Key words: South Peninsula District, Tanner crab fishery, *Chionoecetes bairdi*, harvest strategy, regulations

INTRODUCTION

The South Peninsula District of Area J for Tanner crabs includes all Pacific Ocean waters south of the Alaska Peninsula, west of the line from Kupreanof Point to the easternmost point of Castle Rock then extending 135° southeast from the easternmost point of Castle Rock, and east of the longitude of Scotch Cap Light. A full description of the districts can be found at 5 AAC 35.505 DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRATION AREA J DISTRICTS on page 184 of the shellfish regulations and are illustrated in Figure 1. The South Peninsula District is a nonexclusive registration area for Tanner crabs *Chionoecetes bairdi*.

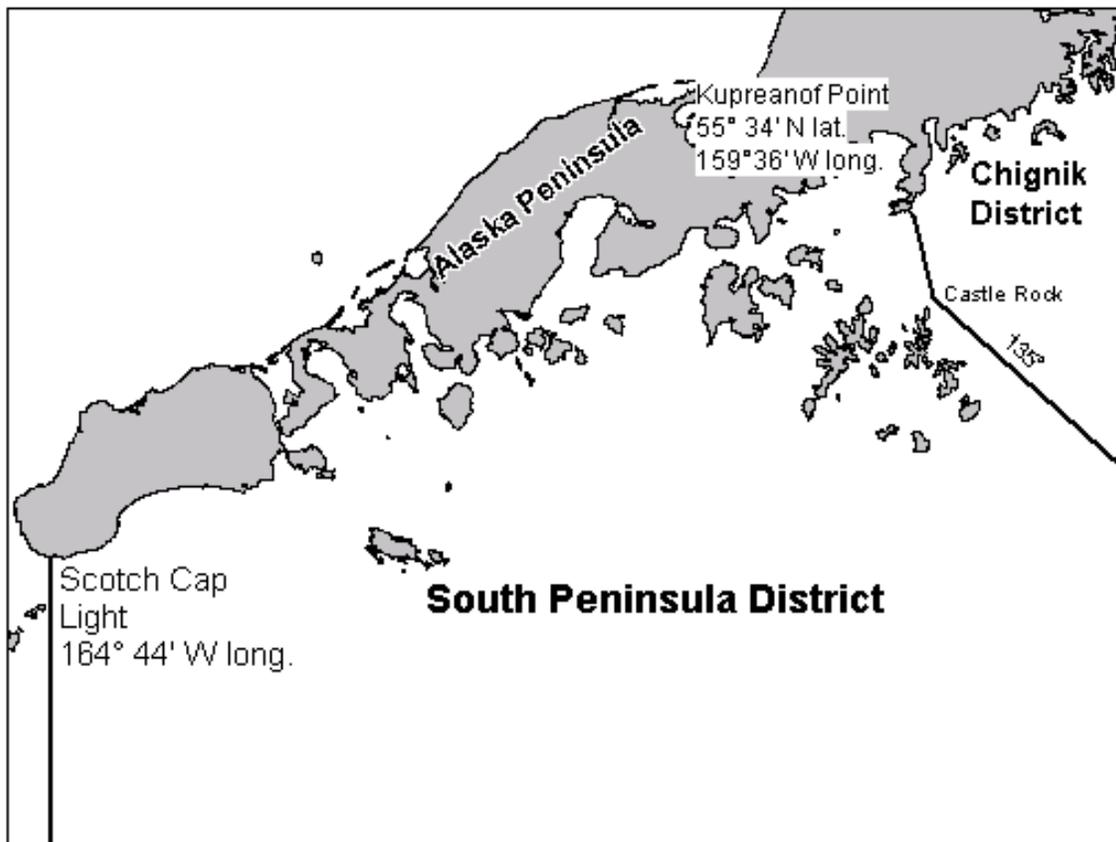


Figure 1.—South Peninsula Tanner crab fishing District, 2005.

OVERVIEW

The first commercial harvest of Tanner crabs from the South Peninsula District occurred in 1967 when 3,100 pounds were landed. The fishery grew quickly and, by 1973, the harvest exceeded five million pounds (Table 1). Guideline harvest levels (GHLs) were established in 1974 and, in 1975, seasons were imposed to protect crabs during the mating and molting period. In 1976, the minimum size limit of 5.5 inch carapace width (CW) was established. During the six fishing seasons from 1974 through 1978/79, harvests ranged from five to almost nine million pounds. Harvest peaked in 1978/79 when nine million pounds of crabs were caught. From 1979 to 1984, harvest and catch per unit effort (CPUE) declined, and in the 1983/84 season the fleet landed almost two million pounds. Recruitment improved between 1985 and 1988 and harvest ranged from about two million to four million pounds. Harvest decreased to slightly more than one million pounds in 1988/89 and indications from the trawl survey data predicted a decline in recruitment for future years. The fishery was closed from 1990 until 2000 due to low abundance of legal-sized crabs and lack of recruitment.

In 1999, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) presented the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) with a comprehensive harvest strategy for Tanner crabs in the South Peninsula District. The BOF also established a minimum threshold of crab abundance that must be met to allow for a commercial Tanner crab fishery (Urban et al. 1999). The harvest strategy also established a stair-step pot limit of 30, 40, or 75 pots per vessel depending on GHL size. A vessel size limit of 58 feet overall length is also in effect for the South Peninsula District. The harvest strategy, as adopted by the BOF, can be found under 5 AAC 35.507 KODIAK, CHIGNIK, AND SOUTH PENINSULA DISTRICTS, *C. bairdi* TANNER CRAB HARVEST STRATEGIES in the 2003-2005 Commercial Shellfish Fishing Regulations, which will be referred to as 'shellfish regulations' for the remainder of this report.

RECENT FISHERIES

Prior to 2001, the Tanner crab commercial fishery in the South Peninsula District had not opened for over 10-years due to low stock abundance. Since the 2001 fishery, the South Peninsula District has remained closed due to low stock abundance.

2001 Fishery

The South Peninsula District met the required criteria for a commercial Tanner crab opening in 2001. A 375,000 pound guideline harvest level (GHL) was established for the district. The fishery closed on January 18, 2001 at 7:59 PM. The harvest for the 2001 fishery was 258,631 pounds from 67 landings. Estimated exvessel value for the fishery was \$209,194.

REGULATIONS

OVERVIEW

Regulations pertaining to Tanner crab fishing in the State of Alaska can be found in chapter 35 of the Alaska Administrative Code (AAC). Chapter 35 begins on page 165 of the 2003-05 shellfish regulation booklet. Specific regulations that pertain to the Tanner crab fisheries in Registration Area J (Westward Region) begin on page 183. The harvest strategy regulation, 5 AAC 35.507 KODIAK, CHIGNIK, AND SOUTH PENINSULA DISTRICTS, *C. bairdi* TANNER CRAB HARVEST STRATEGIES, can be found on pages 186-187 of the 2003-2005 shellfish regulations. Some of the regulations regarding Tanner crab fishing are summarized below, particularly those that have changed as a result of BOF

action in 1999 and 2002. For additional information on regulations, contact the ADF&G office in Kodiak and refer to the shellfish regulations (available at ADF&G offices or at our website: <http://www.state.ak.us/adfg/>). The following is an overview of regulations pertaining to Tanner crab fishing in the South Peninsula District:

- When the district GHL is less than 600,000 pounds, **the pot limit is 30 pots per vessel**. Pot limit regulatory language is under 5 AAC 35.525 LAWFUL GEAR FOR REGISTRATION AREA J (c)(3)(A&B).
- **Fishing gear may be operated for 10 hours each day from 8:00 AM to 5:59 PM**. Baited gear may be left in the water, for 14 hours from 6:00 PM to 7:59 AM each night. The regulation for the daily fishing and soak periods can be found under 5 AAC 35.510 FISHING SEASONS FOR REGISTRATION AREA J (c).
- **A person or vessel that operates pot gear (e.g., cod pots) 14 days prior to the South Peninsula District Tanner crab fishery may not participate in the commercial Tanner crab fishery**. The regulation for operation of other pot gear can be found under 5 AAC 35.053 OPERATION OF OTHER POT GEAR.
- **Only vessels 58' or less may participate in the commercial Tanner crab fishery in the South Peninsula District**. 5 AAC 35.590 VESSEL LENGTH RESTRICTIONS (B)

2005 GUIDELINE HARVEST LEVEL

The GHL for the South Peninsula District is 300,000 pounds.

In 2004, ADF&G conducted a trawl survey to estimate the Tanner crab biomass in the district. The estimated number of legal crabs from the 2004 trawl survey in this district is just under 1.0 million animals. This estimated abundance of crab in the South Peninsula District is more than triple of last year's estimate (Figure 2).

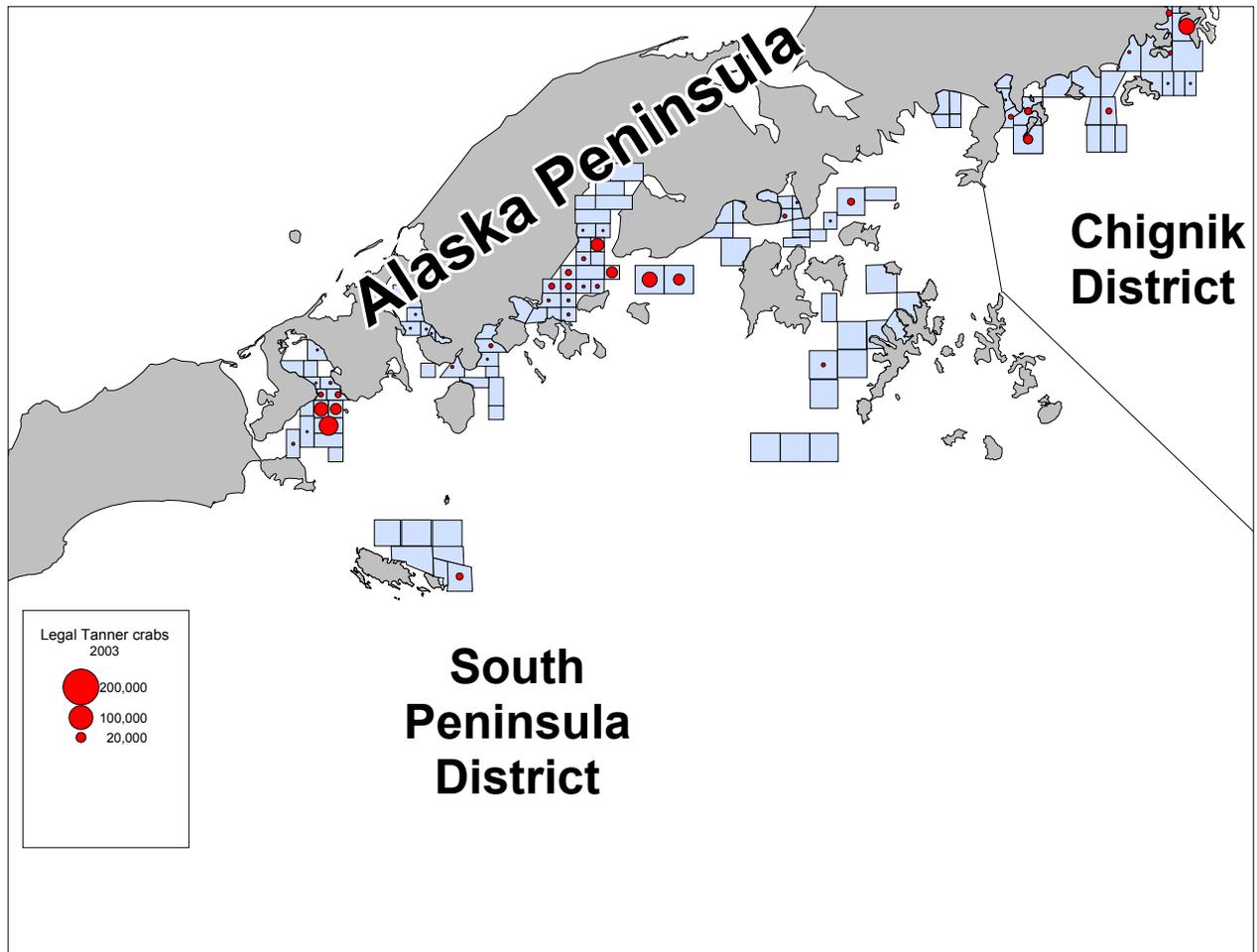


Figure 2.—Number of mature male Tanner crabs per kilometer towed in the 2003 South Peninsula trawl survey.

ADF&G will manage the South Peninsula District in two sections (Figure 3). A section or parts of a section may close prior to the entire district if harvest in that area approaches the trawl survey biomass estimates. The fishery will close when ADF&G determines that the GHF is achieved or when conditions indicating a threat to the long term health of the stock, such as low catch per pot or excessive bycatch of female or sublegal male Tanner crabs, are observed. The regulatory season closure date is March 31.

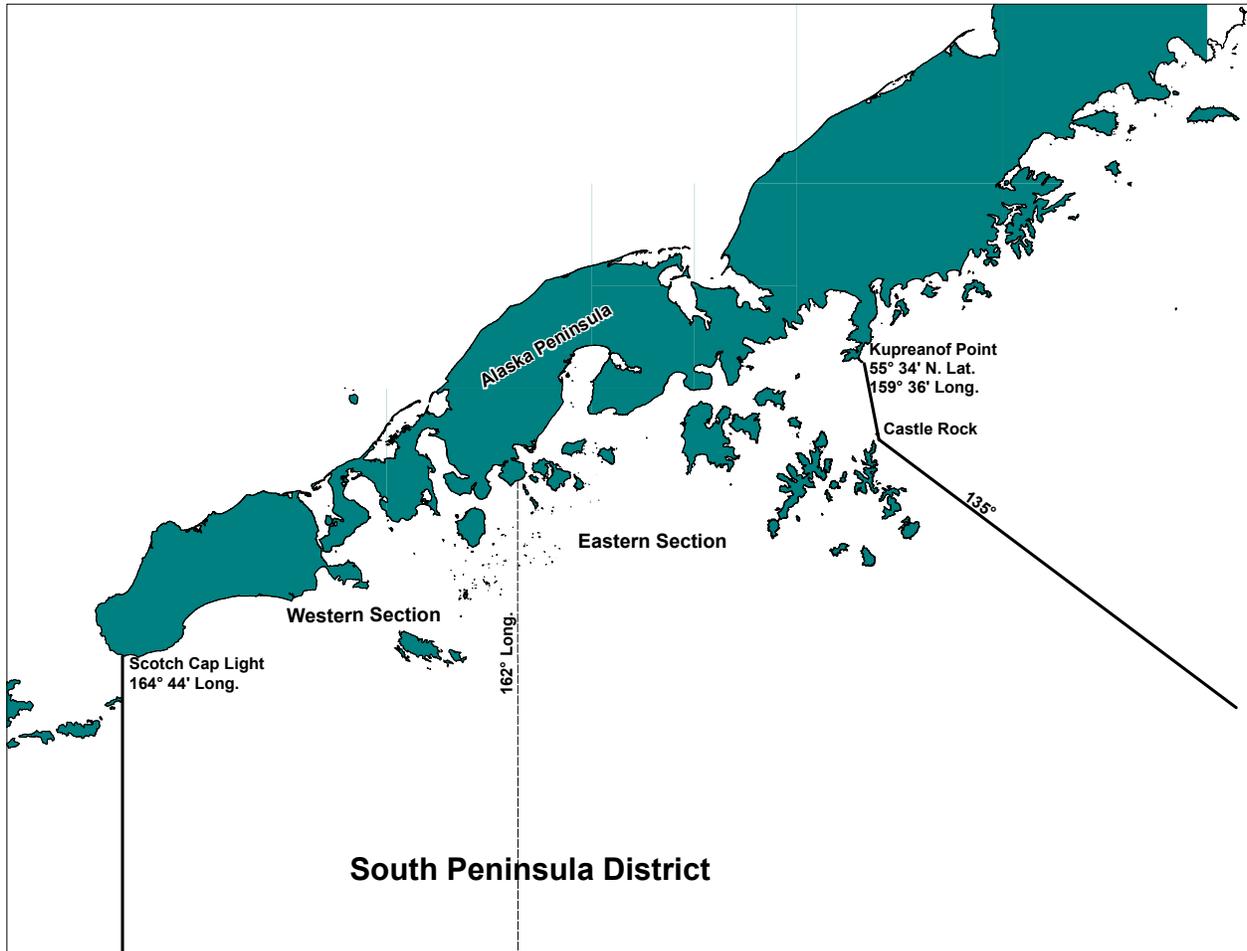


Figure 3.—South Peninsula Tanner crab fishing District, identifying the Eastern and Western Sections, 2005.

POT LIMITS AND BUOY TAGS

When the district GHL is less than 600,000 pounds, no more than 30 aggregate pots (including stored pots) may be operated from a validly registered Tanner crab vessel. When the district GHL is more than 600,000 pounds but less than 1,000,000 pounds, no more than 40 pots may be operated. When the district GHL is greater than 1,000,000 pounds no more than 75 pots may be used. **The pot limit for the 2005 South Peninsula District fishery will be 30 pots per vessel.**

Tags will be available for purchase beginning in mid-December at a cost of \$1.50 per tag. A valid 2005 Tanner crab CFEC permit card is required to purchase tags. Tags will be sold at ADF&G in Kodiak; department representatives will sell tags in Sand Point and King Cove beginning approximately January 10th. Participants can purchase tags via U.S. Mail until December 31. No tags will be mailed after this date; call the ADF&G office in Kodiak for details (907) 486-1840. Appendix B contains additional contact information.

Replacement tags may be obtained by contacting the ADF&G in Kodiak. The vessel owner, operator, or agent must complete an affidavit form describing how the tags were lost and supply the unique number(s) of each lost tag. Replacement tags cost \$1.50 per tag.

Pots with lost tags must be secured open with the bait removed until replacement tags are obtained. Vessel operators must contact Alaska State Troopers Bureau of Wildlife Enforcement to inform them of the situation (Appendix B has contact information).

GEAR

Gear for the commercial Tanner crab fishery is limited to pots no more than 10 feet long by 10 feet wide by 42 inches high with rigid tunnel eye openings that are less than five inches in height. Tunnel eye opening perimeters must be individually more than 36 inches. Ring nets **are not** legal gear in the South Peninsula District for the commercial harvest of Tanner crabs. The specific language regarding legal pot dimensions can be found under 5 AAC 35.050 **LAWFUL GEAR FOR TANNER CRAB** on page 169 of the shellfish regulations.

Escape mesh or ring requirements are required for Tanner pots. Each pot used to take Tanner crabs must have at least one third of one vertical surface of the pot composed of not less than 7-1/4 inch stretched mesh webbing or have no less than four circular escape rings which have an inside diameter of at least five inches. If using rings, they must be installed on the vertical plane of the pot to allow for escapement of undersized crabs. The rings are not required to be placed within a certain distance from the bottom as they are in some Bering Sea fisheries. However, ADF&G recommends placing rings within one mesh of the bottom of the pot to optimize escapement of undersized crabs. The specific language on escape device requirements can be found under 5 AAC 35.525 **LAWFUL GEAR FOR REGISTRATION AREA J** on page 192 of the shellfish regulations.

All pots must be equipped with a biodegradable escape mechanism as described in 5 AAC 39.145 **ESCAPE MECHANISM FOR SHELLFISH AND BOTTOMFISH POTS** on page 54 of the shellfish regulations. An opening 18 inches or greater in length that is placed within six inches of the bottom of the pot must be laced, sewn, or secured together by a single length of untreated, 100 percent cotton twine no larger than 30 thread.

Buoys attached to pots must comply with 5 AAC 35.051 **TANNER CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS** listed on page 169 and 5 AAC 35.526 **TANNER CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS AREA J** on page 193-194 of the shellfish regulations. The buoy that contains the ADF&G number may not be marked with additional numbers; however, symbols and letters are acceptable on this buoy. Trailer or other buoys used to mark ownership or string sequence may be marked with any desired numbers, symbols, or letters.

The use of converted pots as ‘storage boxes’ to store crabs in the water for vessels registered as dry tanked vessels is not permitted unless crab storage devices are attached to the vessel at all times.

OPERATION OF OTHER POT GEAR, POT STORAGE, AND LANDING REQUIREMENTS

There is a 14-day stand down period for the operation of pot gear prior to the commercial Tanner crab fishery opening in the South Peninsula District. No person or vessel that will participate in the commercial Tanner crab fishery may operate commercial, subsistence, sport, or personal use pots for any species within the district during that 14-day period.

Legal pots with buoy tags attached *may be* placed into shallow water storage during the 14-day stand down period. However, vessels may not retrieve gear already in legal storage to put tags on

gear during the 14-day stand down period. In addition, vessels **will not** be allowed to retrieve gear from storage during the 24-hour period after tank inspection but before the fishery opening, due to enforcement concerns. At the time of registration, all gear onboard and in the water must have buoy tags affixed.

After the closure of the Tanner crab season, vessels wishing to participate in the Pacific cod fishery must either place pots into shallow-water storage or on land and register with ADF&G for the cod fishery. Additional stipulations on the operation of other pot gear within the South Peninsula District can be found under 5 AAC 35.053 OPERATION OF OTHER POT GEAR on page 195 of shellfish regulations.

Up to 30 pots may be stored prior to the season in waters of 25 fathoms or less with all bait and bait containers removed and with the doors secured fully open (or not secured closed for cone or pyramid pots; 5 AAC 35.527(3) % AAC 34.510 (a)). No vessel may have more than the specified pot limit onboard or in wet storage in the registration district while the vessel is validly registered. The regulatory language concerning pot storage can be found at 5 AAC 35.527 TANNER CRAB POT STORAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR AREA J on page 194-195 of the shellfish regulations.

Delivery requirements, post-closure pot storage requirements, and re-registration requirements vary depending on the type of area closure and the amount of notice given. The following is a summary of closure scenarios, subsequent pot storage options, delivery requirements, and re-registration requirements contained in 5 AAC 35.030, 5 AAC 35.031, 5 AAC 35.052, 5 AAC 35.527, and 5 AAC 35.556:

- **The department will manage the South Peninsula District by dividing the district into eastern (east of 162° W. Long) and western (waters west of 162°W long.) ‘sections’ (Figure 3).**
- **Descriptions and justification for the division of the district is contained in the ADF&G’s proposal to the BOF (proposal 451).** The current South Peninsula harvest strategy, adopted in 1999, does not divide the district into sections. Recent trawl surveys have indicated different rebuilding rates in separate areas of the district. Separating the district into sections will allow the department the flexibility to manage the sections in relation to their crab populations.
- **These ‘sections’ may close independently.**

SUMMARY OF CLOSURE SCENARIOS

Closure of an entire section with 6 or more hours notice of the closure given.

- Vessel operators are required to deliver all catch from the section within 24 hours of the closure.
- Unbaited gear with doors secured open may be stored in waters deeper than 25 fathoms for 72 hours following the closure.
- After 72 hours, all gear must be removed or stored in waters shallower than 25 fathoms.
- Gear may remain in shallow water storage for up to 7 days after the closure of the entire South Peninsula District (5 AAC 35.527 (3)). While in transit from the closed area, vessel

operators may place baited gear, in the waters of the open section provided the 24 hour delivery deadline is met.

Closure of an entire section with less than 6 hours advance notice of the closure given.

- Vessel operators are required to proceed directly to port at the time of the closure and deliver within 24 hours.
- Vessel operators may not place gear in storage, retrieve pots from storage, or place gear in an open section until they have completed their delivery of crabs from the closed section.
- Vessel operators are required to return to the fishing grounds within 72 hours after their delivery to ‘rail dump’ all crab from baited gear left on the grounds.

Partial closure of a fishing section with 6 or more hours notice of the closure given.

An example of a partial closure of a fishing section would be when inner bays within the Eastern Section close prior to the outside waters.

- Vessel operators are required to deliver all crabs from the section within 24 hours of the closure.
- Vessel operators may store pots in waters deeper than 25 fathoms for 72 hours in the closed waters of the section.
- Vessel operators may place, or simultaneously have, baited gear in the open waters of the same section before delivery provided the 24 hour delivery deadline is met. Any changes to the delivery requirement would be provided in a news release at the time of the closure announcement.

Partial closure of a fishing section with less than 6 hours notice of the closure given.

This scenario is highly unlikely. Should this type of closure occur the landing, pot storage, and re-registration requirements will be provided in a news release.

Closure of the entire South Peninsula District with 6 or more hours notice of the closure given.

- Vessel operators are required to deliver all crabs within 24 hours of the closure.
- Vessel operators may store pots with bait and bait containers removed and doors secured open in waters deeper than 25 fathoms for up to 7 days following the closure.
- Gear may be stored with bait and bait containers removed and doors secured open in waters shallower than 25 fathoms for 7 days after the closure.

Closure of the entire South Peninsula District with less than 6 hours notice of the closure given.

- Vessel operators are required to deliver within 24 hours.
- After the closure, vessel operators may not place gear in or remove gear from storage until they have completed their delivery of crabs.
- Baited gear may be stored in waters deeper than 25 fathoms for 72 hours following the closure.

- Vessel operators are required to immediately return to the fishing grounds after their delivery to ‘rail dump’ any baited gear left on the grounds. Pots may then be stored in waters shallower than 25 fathoms for up to 7 days.

Vessel operators wishing to deliver to ports outside the district are required to contact the ADF&G office in Kodiak or ADF&G personnel in Sand Point or King Cove if available before leaving the district. Vessels delivering outside the district must provide the estimated number of crabs onboard the vessel at the time of the closure, location of port and processing facility, and estimated time of arrival. Additional requirements exist for catcher-processors and vessels mechanically disabled. Cases of delay due to circumstances of weather will be addressed on an individual basis (5 AAC 35.031 TANNER CRAB LANDING REQUIREMENTS page 167-168 of the shellfish regulations).

REGISTRATION, CFEC VESSEL SIZE RESTRICTIONS, TENDERS, AND TANK INSPECTIONS

Vessel operators participating in the South Peninsula 2005 Tanner crab fishery must have a 2005 permit card for Area M Tanner crab and a current 2005 commercial vessel license. Permits and vessel licenses can be obtained from the CFEC in Juneau.

Tender vessels must register with ADF&G before beginning tendering operations. Tender vessels may not have a pot-hauling block onboard nor may they be used to harvest Tanner crab.

Tank inspections are required for vessels with a circulating sea water system to confirm that no crabs are onboard the vessel prior to the opening. Circulating sea water systems include on-deck containers with water circulated by pumps, hoses, or other means. Gear will also be inspected at the time of tank inspection to ensure it is in compliance with all gear regulations. Tanks will be inspected beginning at NOON on January 14. Arrangements will be made to accommodate vessel inspections in King Cove and Sand Point. Upon successful completion of the tank inspection and gear inspection process, a valid 2005 shellfish registration will be issued to the vessel. A copy of this registration must remain onboard the vessel while fishing. This registration becomes invalid 24 hours after the closure of the fishery. Vessels must invalidate their registration before participating in other fisheries if the Tanner fishery remains open.

SIZE LIMIT

The legal minimum size of Tanner crabs that can be harvested in the South Peninsula District is 5.5” (140 millimeters) carapace width (CW). Only legal-size male crabs can be retained; all other crabs incidentally captured must be immediately returned to the water unharmed. This includes king crab, as they cannot be legally taken in a commercial Tanner crab fishery for subsistence purposes.

VOLUNTEER CATCH REPORTING

ADF&G will manage the South Peninsula District commercial Tanner crab fishery from inseason catch reports provided by fishers. Inseason management allows for real-time fishery decisions and the ability to consider changes in effort, fleet behavior, and weather. ADF&G will make every effort to allow sufficient time for fishers to configure gear for storage or to place gear onboard before a closure; however, the potential exists for a short advance notice closure.

Any validly registered vessel may participate in the reporting process and each registering vessel will be issued a 2005 reporting code and worksheet. Reports will be taken over marine VHF

channels 6 (King Cove) and 73 (Sand Point), single sideband (SSB) 4125 kHz, telephone, satellite dispatch system and e-mail. The ADF&G office uses Matrix¹ dispatch services; the office number is 7410, the R/V Resolution number is 7411. Operators will be asked during the registration process which method they will use to submit daily reports. Vessel operators will be issued a reporting worksheet during tag sales and/or tank inspection to participate in inseason reporting.

Contents of the daily report will contain confidential codes for the section in which the vessel operator is fishing, statistical area, number of pot lifts, and number of crabs retained for each 10-hour fishing period. Reports will initially be taken at 6:30 PM daily and may be transmitted via SSB, marine telex, e-mail, satellite dispatch, and satellite or cell phone. If inside sections close, the department may change the reporting schedule to 9:00 AM.

ADF&G will update the fleet on SSB 4125 kHz with the fishery status each morning at 8:30 AM. Any closure announcement or change in the reporting schedule will be made on this frequency. Current fishery status will also be available on the ADF&G recorded information phone at 486-4559. Messages on the recorded information phone will be updated daily after the 8:30 AM updates. Updates, changes to the reporting schedule and closure announcements will be distributed via e-mail, FAX, and passed along to all participating processing facilities.

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The 2005 South Peninsula Tanner crab fishery will open at noon on January 15, 2005. ADF&G will manage the eastern and western sections independently. In addition, bays and offshore areas may be managed separately; one portion of a section may close while harvest is allowed in other locations within the same section. Partial closures may occur after very little fishing time (possibly within the first full day of fishing).

Details of the tank inspection process, updates on inseason reporting, and other fishery related information will be forthcoming in ADF&G news releases.

¹Use of trade names does not constitute an endorsement from ADF&G.

REFERENCE CITED

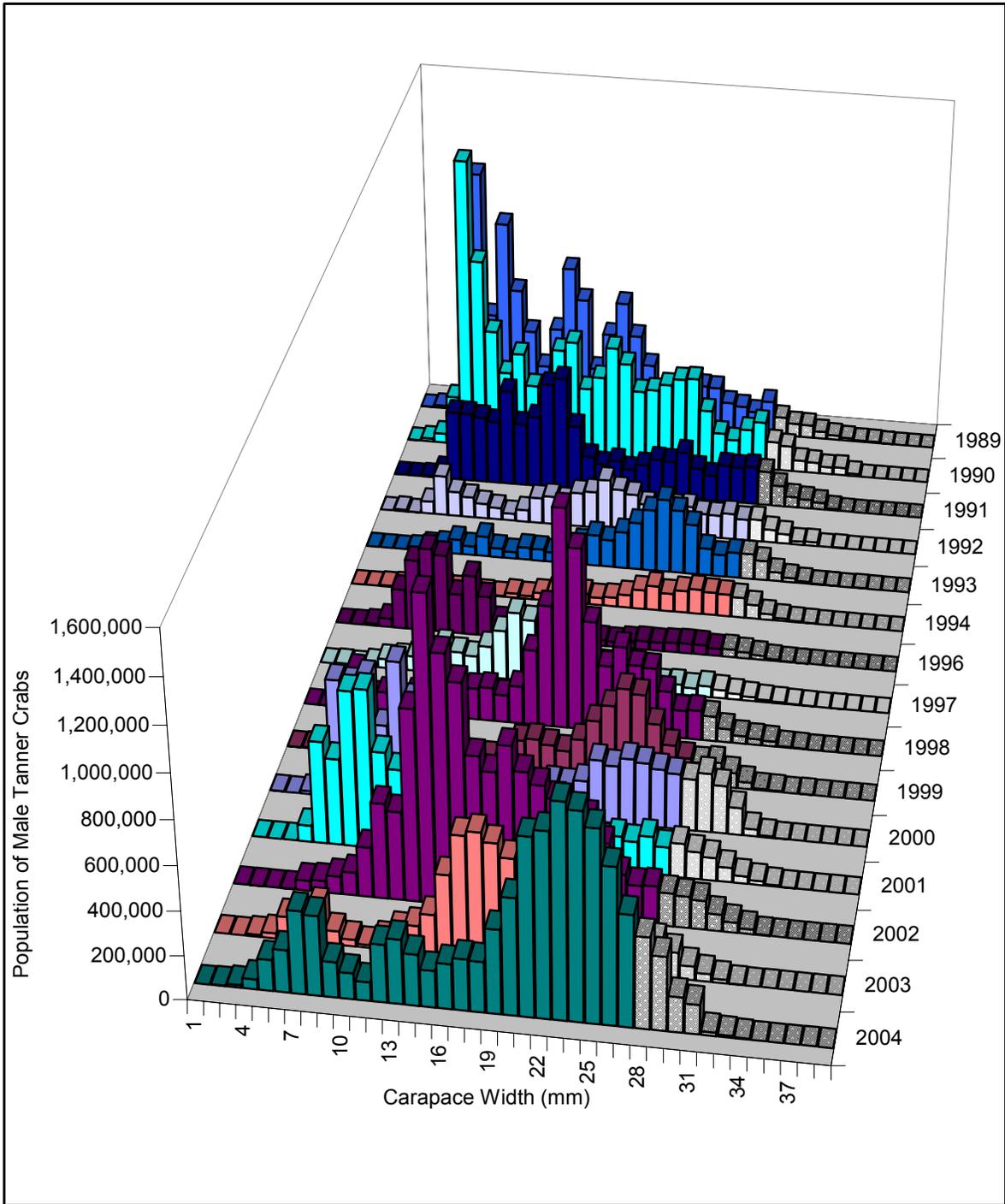
Urban, D., D. Pengilly, D. Jackson, and I. Vining. 1999. A Tanner crab harvest strategy for Kodiak, Chignik, and the South Peninsula Districts. A Report to the Board of Fisheries. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Westward Region, Regional Information Report 4K99-21, Kodiak.

Table 1.— Commercial catch and effort for the Tanner crab *Chionoecetes bairdi* fishery for the South Peninsula Management District, 1968-2004.

Year	Number				Pots Lifted	CPUE	Average Weight	Price Per Pound (\$)
	Vessels	Landings	crabs	Pounds				
1967	NA	NA	NA	3,100	NA	NA	NA	NA
1968	NA	155	36,835	110,610	NA	NA	3	NA
1969	NA	173	221,946	606,178	NA	NA	2.7	NA
1969/70	NA	NA	NA	2,093,600	NA	NA	NA	NA
1970/71	17	242	813,610	2,140,585	NA	NA	2.6	0.1
1971/72	NA	NA	NA	3618900	NA	NA	NA	NA
1972/73	36	390	2,213,006	5,615,563	53,573	41	2.5	NA
1973/74	44	386	3,504,668	8,300,578	58,444	60	2.4	NA
1974/75	44	131	2,053,530	5,195,800	38,153	54	2.5	0.14
1975/76	36	288	2,724,509	6,926,161	52,381	52	2.5	0.20
1976/77	28	289	2,524,565	6,773,838	63,143	40	2.7	0.32
1977/78	36	374	2,847,948	7,446,270	70,587	40	2.6	0.40
1978/79	48	332	3,267,122	8,684,408	82,374	40	2.7	0.51
1979/80	61	363	2,581,544	6,961,251	96,989	27	2.7	0.54
1980/81	43	268	1,274,539	3,294,106	59,560	21	2.6	0.58
1981/82	72	365	1,815,060	4,589,042	81,008	22	2.5	1.05
1982/83	82	230	1,144,096	2,863,798	70,524	16	2.5	1.20
1983/84	61	207	775,472	1,789,883	50,726	15	2.3	1.04
1984/85	52	184	1,097,182	2,549,686	47,465	23	2.3	1.42
1985/86	74	187	1,589,759	3,781,950	65,078	24	2.4	1.72
1986/87	54	106	950,300	2,400,784	37,511	25	2.5	2.03
1987/88	73	148	1,359,371	3,328,809	52,516	26	2.4	2.20
1988/89	65	87	433,112	1,055,082	27,958	15	2.4	2.70
1989/90 to 1999/2000				NO COMMERCIAL FISHERY				
2001	55	67	107,653	258,631	4,426	24	2.4	1.24
2002				NO COMMERCIAL FISHERY				
2003				NO COMMERCIAL FISHERY				
2004				NO COMMERCIAL FISHERY				
TOTAL	NA	NA	33,077,046	90,385,513	1,012,416	NA	NA	NA

NA = not available

**APPENDIX A. ESTIMATED POPULATION OF MALE TANNER
CRABS BY CARAPACE WIDTH IN THE SOUTH PENINSULA
DISTRICT, 1987-2004**



Appendix A1.—Estimated population of male Tanner crabs by carapace width in the South Peninsula District, 1987-2004.

(Note- The lightly colored portion of each year represents the estimated population that is legal sized.)

**APPENIX B. LISTING OF CONTACT PERSONS, BY AGENCY AND
LOCATION**

Appendix B1.—Listing of contact persons, by agency and location.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

[web site: http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region4/](http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region4/)

Kodiak office

Mail address:	211 Mission Road Kodiak, Alaska 99615	physical address: 211 Mission Road 2 nd floor, Kodiak	Phone: (907) 486-1840 FAX : (907) 486-1824
Wayne Donaldson	Westward Region Shellfish/ Groundfish Biologist		wayne_donaldson@fishgame.state.ak.us
Nick Sagalkin	Kodiak, Chignik, Alaska Peninsula Area Shellfish/ Groundfish Biologist		nick_sagalkin@fishgame.state.ak.us
Lynn Mattes	Kodiak, Chignik, Alaska Peninsula Asst. Area Shellfish/ Groundfish Biologist		lynn_mattes@fishgame.state.ak.us
Kally Spalinger	Kodiak, Chignik, Alaska Peninsula Shellfish Biologist		kally_spalinger@fishgame.state.ak.us

Dutch Harbor office

Mail address:	P. O. Box 920587 Dutch Harbor, Alaska 99692	physical address: F.T.S. building, 2 nd floor Airport Beach Road, Dutch Harbor	Phone: (907) 581-1239 FAX: (907) 581-1572
Forrest Bowers	Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Area Biologist		forrest_bowers@fishgame.state.ak.us

Division of Fish and Wildlife Protection

[web site: http://www.dps.state.ak.us/fwp/](http://www.dps.state.ak.us/fwp/)

Kodiak office

Mail address:	2921 A Mill Bay Road Kodiak, Alaska 99615	physical address: 2921 A Mill Bay Road	Phone: (907) 486-4761 FAX: (907) 486-5480
Sargent Lonnie Gonzales	Post Sargent		lonnie_gonzales@dps.state.ak.us
Sven Skille	Trooper		sven_skille@dps.state.ak.us

Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission

[web site: http://www.cfec.state.ak.us/](http://www.cfec.state.ak.us/)

Juneau office

Mail address:	8800 Glacier Highway Juneau, Alaska 99615	physical address: 8800 Glacier Highway Juneau, Alaska	Phone: (907) 789-6160 FAX : (907) 789-6160
Susan Haymes	<i>CFEC staff</i>		susan_haymes@cfec.state.ak.us
