

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN
FOR THE
RED KING CRAB COMMERCIAL FISHERY
IN BRISTOL BAY REGISTRATION AREA T, 1999

by

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INTRODUCTION

This fishery management plan is intended to provide a brief overview of the red king crab fishery which occurs in the Bristol Bay, Area T, king crab management area. Information on general area description, brief historic fishery review, and summary of current management practices and policies should provide fishers and members of industry a better understanding of how the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) manages the red king crab fishery in this area.

Description of Registration Area and Statistical Areas

The Area T, Bristol Bay, king crab management area is bounded on the north by the latitude of Cape Newenham (58° 39' N. lat.), on the south by the latitude of Cape Sarichef (54° 36' N. lat.), on the west by 168° W. long., and includes all waters of Bristol Bay (Figure 1).

Shellfish Management Area T has no district, subdistrict or section subdivisions. For catch reporting purposes, the area is divided into statistical areas, each encompassing one degree of longitude by one half degree of latitude. All commercial removals of red king crabs (including deadloss) are reported to the ADF&G in reference to these statistical areas (Figure 2).

Historical Fishery Perspective

The red king crab fishery in the Bristol Bay portion of the Eastern Bering Sea began with Japanese harvests in 1930. United States fishers entered the area with trawl gear in 1947. Effort and catches declined throughout the 1950s. A full-scale domestic pot fishery developed in the mid 1960s. Harvest in the domestic pot fishery peaked in 1980 when 130 million pounds of red king crabs were harvested. In that same year the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) established Bristol Bay as a separate registration area.

Immediately following the record harvest in 1980 the stock declined sharply and the Bristol Bay area was closed to king crab fishing for the 1983 season due to low stock abundance. The area reopened in 1984, and the harvest reached 20 million pounds by 1990. By 1994 the stock once again fell to levels which necessitated a fishery closure. The area remained closed for the 1994 and 1995 seasons. In the Spring of 1996, the BOF adopted a revised harvest strategy aimed at improving the probability for stock rebuilding. Details of this revised harvest strategy, which included a reduction in the exploitation rate of mature male crabs, are set out below in the *Harvest Strategy and Guideline Harvest Level* section.

In the fall of 1996, the Bristol Bay king crab management area reopened to commercial fishing for red king crabs; a total of 8.4 million pounds were harvested. This was approximately 70% over the preseason Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) of 5.0 million pounds. As a result of this excessive harvest, the BOF called a special meeting prior to the 1997 fishery and adopted interim management measures intended to provide the department additional tools for management of this fishery at low GHLs. These measures included, but were not limited to, variable pot limits based on the GHL level and number of participating vessels, vessel pre-registration requirements, and the ability to allow

baited gear to remain on the fishing grounds to facilitate extremely short fishery closure announcements.

The 1997 fishery, with a GHL of 7.0 million pounds, was prosecuted with reduced pot limits and fishers were allowed to leave baited gear on the fishing grounds after the season closure. Despite these additional measures, harvest in the 1997 fishery was 8.7 million pounds. In 1998 the fishery GHL was 15.8 million pounds; the actual harvest was 14.3 million pounds. At their spring 1999 meeting, the BOF made permanent those interim management measures adopted prior to the 1997 season.

REGULATIONS

Bristol Bay is an *exclusive* king crab registration area. Vessels which register and participate in this area are not permitted to participate in any other *exclusive* or *superexclusive* king crab registration areas during the king crab registration year, which runs from June 28 to June 27 of the following year. The Bristol Bay registration area is open to the harvest of both red and blue king crabs, however few blue king crabs are ever harvested due to low stock abundance.

Specific regulations governing commercial king crab fishing in the Bristol Bay king crab management area, begin with 5 AAC 34.800 DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRATION AREA T, on page 148 of the 1999-2000 Commercial Shellfish Fishing Regulation booklet. Some of the regulations are summarized below. This section does not include all regulations pertaining to the Bristol Bay red king crab management area. Fishers are urged to obtain the latest commercial shellfish regulation booklet for an office of the ADF&G. For additional information on regulations pertaining to Bristol Bay king crab fishing, contact the ADF&G office in Dutch Harbor or Kodiak.

Fishing Seasons, Pot Limits and Legal Gear

The Bristol Bay red and blue king crab fishery opens annually at 4:00 p.m. on October 15, according to provisions of 5 AAC 34.810 (b) FISHING SEASONS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. The area is closed by emergency order when the GHL is achieved or when stock conditions, such as poor fishery performance or excessive by catch of small or female crabs, indicate a closure is necessary to protect the long term health of the stock.

In 1992, in an effort to improve manageability of this fast-paced fishery, the BOF adopted regulations which allowed all participating vessels to fish a maximum of 250 pots. In 1993, in order to comply with federal law regarding application of pot limits in a nondiscriminatory manner, differential pot limits, based on vessel length, were implemented. Differential pot limits provided vessels less than or equal to 125 feet in overall length a maximum of 200 pots and vessels in excess of 125 feet a maximum of 250 pots.

Pot limits implemented by the BOF in 1997, for the Bristol Bay king crab management area, range from 60-200 pots for vessels equal to or less than 125' length overall and 75-250 pots for vessels greater than 125' length overall, depending on the GHL and the number of vessels registered for the fishery. These pot limit regulations are outlined in 5 AAC 34.825(h)(1-8) LAWFUL GEAR FOR

REGISTRATION AREA T. To ensure compliance with pot limit regulations, the main or trailer buoy on each pot must display one fishery-specific identification tag for the current year according to 5 AAC 34.051 (b) and (c) KING CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS and 5 AAC 34.826 (a) KING CRAB POT MARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. All pots must be tagged at the time of tank inspection and remain tagged throughout the fishery. It is the responsibility of each vessel operator to ensure that all gear is tagged and that tags are affixed to the gear in a way which minimizes tag loss.

Buoy tags are available for \$2.00 each from ADF&G offices in Dutch Harbor and Kodiak. Buoy tags for the Bristol Bay king crab fishery are normally available beginning on the first business day following the pre-season registration deadline.

Buoy tags lost during the season may be replaced according to provisions of 5 AAC 34.826 (b) KING CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. This regulation states that replacement of lost tags is permitted if the vessel operator and three crew members submit statements, in person, at the ADF&G office in Dutch Harbor, describing how tags were lost and listing the number of each lost tag. Buoy tags for the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery are normally available from the ADF&G offices in Dutch Harbor and Kodiak by late September.

Legal gear for the commercial red king crab fishery in the Bristol Bay registration area is limited to king crab pots which are no more than 10 feet long by 10 feet wide by 42 inches high with rigid tunnel eye openings that individually are no less than five inches in any one dimension with perimeters which are individually greater than 36 inches, or pots that are no more than 10 feet long by 10 feet wide by 42 inches high which taper inward from their base to a top consisting of one horizontal opening of any size. A complete description of legal gear for the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery is set out in 5 AAC 34.050 LAWFUL GEAR FOR KING CRAB. All gear must be marked and tagged according to 5 AAC 34.051 (a) KING CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS. In addition to these gear requirements, all pots fished for king crabs in the Bristol Bay registration area must have at least on-third of one vertical surface of the pot composed of not less than nine-inch stretched mesh webbing as required by 5 AAC 34.825(b) LAWFUL GEAR FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. All pots must also be equipped with a biodegradable escape mechanism as described in 5 AAC 39.145 ESCAPE MECHANISM FOR SHELLFISH AND BOTTOM FISH POTS.

Registration, Tank Inspections and Operation of Other Gear

In addition to vessel registration requirements with the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission listed under 5 AAC 39.120 REGISTRATION OF COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSELS, a vessel used to take king crabs in the Bristol Bay king crab registration area must first obtain a shellfish registration certificate from the ADF&G according to provisions of 5 AAC 34.020 KING CRAB AREA REGISTRATION.

Pre-season registration is required for all vessels wishing to participate in the Area T red and blue king crab fishery. The annual registration deadline is 5:00 p.m. September 24 as outlined in 5 AAC 34.806(b) AREA T REGISTRATION.

In order for the shellfish vessel registration to be valid, a vessel must first have all holds and/or live tanks inspected by a department representative as specified in 5 AAC 34.030 INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS. Hold inspections are required to insure that vessels are not in possession of crabs prior to the start of a fishery. Vessels intending to participate in the Area T red and blue king crab fishery are required to register and have their holds inspected in Dutch Harbor, Akutan, Saint Paul or King Cove beginning 30 hours prior to the start of the season according to provisions of 5 AAC 34.840 REGISTRATION AREA T INSPECTION POINTS AND REQUIREMENTS.

In addition to the normal 30 hour tank inspection window, pre-tank and gear inspections are available to facilitate gear loading and expedite the registration validation process. ADF&G staff in all tank inspection ports, except Saint Paul, inspect holding tanks and gear on vessels up to seven days prior to the normal tank inspection period. If all gear on a vessel at the time of the pre-tank inspection is in compliance with registration area gear requirements, and all tanks are confirmed to contain no crabs, a pre-inspection certificate is issued to the operator of the vessel. Leaving port or placing gear on the vessel, which is not in compliance with area registration gear requirements, invalidates the pre-inspection certificate and the vessel is required to undergo a regular tank inspection during the 30 hour tank inspection window. Any time during the normal tank inspection window, operators or interim-use card holders, from vessels which have received a pre-tank and gear inspection may proceed, with their pre-tank certificate, vessel registration and interim use card for Area T king crab, to pre-designated "Quick Registration" signing locations to have their registrations validated. Quick Registration signing locations are announced during pre-tank inspections. Once a vessel's registration has been validated, the vessel is free to leave port and proceed to the fishing grounds. Pre-tank inspection and Quick Registration validation process, used prior to the Area T red king crab fishery, greatly expedites tank inspections and normally enables the majority of the fleet to complete the registration validation process within one hour of the start of regular tank inspections.

In addition to registration requirements outlined above, a supplemental registration form detailing fishing activities and level of federal observer coverage must be filled out by operators of all vessels which operated trawl gear in the 30 days prior to the opening of the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery. As provided in 5 AAC 34.828. OPERATION OF OTHER GEAR IN REGISTRATION AREA T, only those persons or vessels whose operation of trawl gear in Area T has been observed by a federal observer during the entire 30 days immediately before the scheduled opening date may participate in the commercial red king crab fishery. This section also prohibits a person or vessel that operates commercial, subsistence, personal use or sport pots in Registration Area T, during the 30 days immediately before the scheduled opening date of the commercial red king crab season in that registration area, from participating in the commercial red king crab fishery in that registration area.

United States Coast Guard (USCG) personnel now accompany ADF&G personnel during some tank inspections. USCG representatives review vessel stability requirements and certified letters of stability to ensure the number of pots carried by a vessel does not exceed the vessel's stability requirements. Questions regarding USCG stability checks should be addressed to; Lieutenant Commander Steve P. McCleary, Marine Safety Detachment, USCG, Dutch Harbor, (907) 581-3468.

Landing and Pot Storage Requirements

As outlined in 5 AAC 34.841 LANDING REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T, vessels having fished for red or blue king crabs in Registration Area T must be at their chosen processing location within 30 hours following the season closure if delivery is made to processors in Dutch Harbor, Akutan or King Cove. Vessels delivering to ports east of King Cove must get an extension of time to transit directly to the point of processing by contacting an ADF&G representative in Dutch Harbor within the 30 hours following the closure.

During a closed season, king crab pots must be removed from the water. However, according to 5 AAC 34.827 KING CRAB POT STORAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T, king crab pots may be stored with doors secured fully open and bait containers removed in waters north of 57° N. lat., south of 58° N. lat., east of 166° W. long. and west of 164° W. long. In addition, pots with doors secured fully open and bait containers removed may be stored in registration Area T for up to 10 days following the closure of the king crab fishery in that registration area. Additional provisions of this section allow baited pots to be stored on the fishing grounds in Registration Area T for up to 10 days following a closure if the registration area is closed with less than 24 hours advanced notice.

Legal Size Limits

The legal minimum size of red and blue king crabs which can be harvested in the Bristol Bay registration area is six and one-half inches as outlined in 5 AAC 34.820 SIZE LIMITS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. Only male crabs can be legally harvested.

HARVEST STRATEGY

The harvest strategy developed for Bristol Bay red king crabs, in accordance with provisions set out in 5 AAC 34.080 HARVEST STRATEGY, is outlined under 5 AAC 34.816 BRISTOL BAY RED KING CRAB HARVEST STRATEGY. This harvest strategy establishes a minimum abundance threshold of 8.4 million mature female crabs and an effective spawning biomass (ESB) of at least 14.5 million pounds of mature female crabs before a fishery is allowed. This harvest strategy also establishes an exploitation rate of 15% on mature male crabs if the ESB is above 55 million pounds. If the ESB falls below 55 million pounds the exploitation rate on mature male crabs is reduced to 10%. Effective spawning biomass is defined as the estimated biomass of mature female red king crabs that the population of mature male red king crabs can successfully mate in a given year.

The red king crab GHL for the Bristol Bay registration area is calculated based on population estimates derived from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) trawl survey of the Bering Sea. Survey results are presented annually in an Alaska Fisheries Science Center report. In addition to the normal area swept and catch survey analysis (CSA) methods for analyzing survey data, a length-based computer model (LBA) has also been developed for analysis of Bristol Bay king crabs (J. Zheng, M.C. Murphy, and G.H. Kruse 1995). This model makes use of survey, port sampling and observer collected data. Determination of the red king crab GHL is normally

complete and made available to the public by ADF&G news release prior to September 10. New releases are faxed or emailed to all major processor and industry groups active in the Bering Sea crab fisheries.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEER CATCH REPORTING

The Bristol Bay red king crab fishery has thus far been managed inseason. However, if the GHL were unusually low and/or the number of vessels relatively high, a fishery closure could be determined based on the total number of participants and historic fishery performance. In these situations the closure would be announced to the fishing fleet shortly after the fishery begins, once total effort could accurately be determined. A closure announcement would be announced to the fleet over single side band radio (SSB) and faxed or emailed to all major processors and industry groups.

Inseason management is preferred and is accomplished by means of voluntary daily catch reports from participating vessel operators. These reports, sent by means of marine satellite telex (each 12 hours) or over single side band radio (each 24 hours), are processed daily by ADF&G staff in Dutch Harbor. Vessel operators report number of pots hauled and number of legal crabs harvested for a predetermined 12 or 24 hour reporting period. Inseason management allows the fishery manager to base management decisions on actual, real-time fishery performance and weather conditions. The operator of any validly registered vessel may participate in the voluntary inseason catch reporting program and all vessel operators are asked to participate at the time of tag purchase, registration and/or tank inspection. Inseason information is used to monitor the daily harvest and to calculate a daily catch rate used to project the date and time of the fishery closure. Once determined, the closure is announced to the fishing fleet over single side band radio (frequency 4125) and faxed or emailed to all major processors and industry groups. In 1998, approximately 40% of the vessels participating in the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery volunteered to take part in the daily inseason catch reporting program.

GUIDELINE HARVEST LEVEL AND OUTLOOK FOR THE 1999 FISHERY

LBA analysis indicates the abundance index for legal male red king crabs (>119 mm) increased from 15.9 million animals in 1998 to 18.1 in 1999. Numbers of large (>90mm) female crabs fell from 23.6 million animals in 1998 to 21.9 million in 1999. ESB of Bristol Bay red king crabs for 1999 is estimated at 44.4 million pounds, down from the 1998 ESB estimate of 56.3 million pounds. Based on an ESB below 55 million pounds, the exploitation rate on mature male crabs is set at 10%, yielding a GHL of 10.66 million pounds for the 1999 season. Of this total, 10,127,000 pounds are available to the open access fishery and the remaining 533,000 pounds are set aside for the Community Development Quota fishery. This years total GHL represents a 35% reduction from the 16.4 million pound GHL established for the 1998 season.

The 1999 Bristol Bay season begins at 4:00 p.m. on October 15. The fishery will be managed inseason based on twice daily reports from fishers. Given catch rates observed during the last three seasons, the fishery is expected to last between three and five days. Catch updates and the

closure announcement will be provided to fishers via single side band radio on frequency 4125. Fishers should stay tuned to that frequency at all times as fishery updates could occur at any time and the time interval between the announcement and the fishery closure could be relatively short.

DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

Contacts for ADF&G in Dutch Harbor are Rance Morrison, Area Management Biologist; Forrest Bowers, Assistant Area Management Biologist; Robert Gish, Crab CDQ and Groundfish Management Biologist; and Elizabeth Wilson, lead dockside inspector and sampler. The ADF&G phone number in Dutch Harbor is (907) 581-1239, and the fax number is (907) 581-1572.

Department contacts in Kodiak are Wayne Donaldson, Regional Shellfish Biologist; Dave Jackson, Kodiak Island/Alaska Peninsula Area Shellfish Management Biologist; and Mike Ruccio, Assistant Area Shellfish Biologist. The ADF&G phone number in Kodiak is (907) 486-1840, and the fax number is (907) 486-1824.

LITERATURE CITED

Zheng, J., M.C. Murphy, and G.H. Kruse. 1995. A length-based population model and stock-recruitment relationships for red king crab, *Paralithodes camtschaticus*, in Bristol Bay, Alaska. Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 52: 1229-1246.

Table 1. Bristol Bay, Area T of the Bering Sea, commercial red king crab harvest, 1966-1998.

Year	Number of		Harvest ^a (pounds)	Pots Pulled	Average		CPUE ^b	% Old Shell	Deadloss (pounds)		
	Vessels	Landings Crab ^a			Weight (pounds)	Length (mm)					
1966	9	15	140,554	997,321	2,720	7.1	52				
1967	20	61	397,307	3,102,443	10,621	7.8	37				
1968	59	261	1,278,592	8,686,546	47,496	6.8	27				
1969	65	377	1,749,022	10,403,283	98,426	5.9	18				
1970	51	309	1,682,591	8,559,178	96,658	5.1	17				
1971	52	394	2,404,681	12,955,776	118,522	5.4	20				
1972	64	611	3,994,356	21,744,924	205,045	5.4	19				
1973	67	441	4,825,963	26,913,636	194,095	5.6	25		N/A		
1974	104	605	7,710,317	42,266,274	212,915	5.5	36		N/A		
1975	102	592	8,745,294	51,326,259	205,096	5.7	43		1,639,483		
1976	141	984	10,603,367	63,919,728	321,010	6.0	148	33	27.4	875,327	
1977	130	1,020	11,733,101	69,967,868	451,273	5.9	148	26	13.0	730,279	
1978	162	926	14,745,709	87,618,320	406,165	5.9	147	36	6.9	1,273,037	
1979	236	889	16,808,605	107,828,057	315,226	6.4	152	53	10.4	3,555,891	
1980	236	1,251	20,845,350	129,948,463	567,292	6.2	151	37	11.0	1,858,668	
1981	177	1,026	5,307,947	33,591,368	542,250	6.3	151	10	47.4	711,289	
1982	90	255	541,006	3,001,210	141,656	5.5	145	4	24.6	95,834	
1983			NO COMMERCIAL FISHERY								
1984	89	137	794,040	4,182,406	112,556	5.2	142	7	26.5	35,601	
1985	128	130	796,181	4,174,953	85,003	5.2	142	9	25.8	6,436	
1986	159	230	2,099,576	11,393,934	178,370	5.4	142	12	25.5	284,127	
1987	236	311	2,122,402	12,289,067	220,871	5.8	145	10	19.0	120,388	
1988	200	201	1,236,131	7,387,795	153,004	6.0	147	8	15.1	23,537	
1989	211	287	1,684,706	10,264,791	208,684	6.1	148	8	17.7	81,334	
1990	240	331	3,120,326	20,362,342	262,131	6.5	152	12	14.7	116,527	
1991	302	324	2,630,446	17,177,894	227,555	6.5	152	12	12.1	119,670	
1992	281	289	1,196,958	8,043,018	205,940	6.7	153	6	22.3	9,000	
1993	292	361	2,261,287	14,628,639	253,794	6.5	152	9	15.2	133,442	

-Continued-

Table 1. (Page 2 of 2)

Year	Number of		Harvest ^a (pounds)	Pots Pulled	Average		CPUE ^b	% Old Shell	Deadloss (pounds)	
	Vessels	Landings Crab ^a			Weight (pounds)	Length (mm)				
1994			NO COMMERCIAL FISHERY							
1995			NO COMMERCIAL FISHERY							
1996 ^c	196	198	1,249,005	8,405,614	76,433	6.7	153	16	24.3	24,166
1997 ^d	256	265	1,315,969	8,756,490	90,510	6.7	152	15	11.0	13,771
1998 ^e	274	284	2,140,607	14,233,063	141,707	6.7	152	15	19.1 ^f	53,716

^aDeadloss included.

^bDefined as catch of legal crab per pot.

^cNot including 117,500 pounds landed in Test Fishery.

^dNot including 154,897 pounds landed in Test Fishery.

^eNot including 188,750 pounds landed in Test Fishery.

^fIncludes all skip molt crabs.

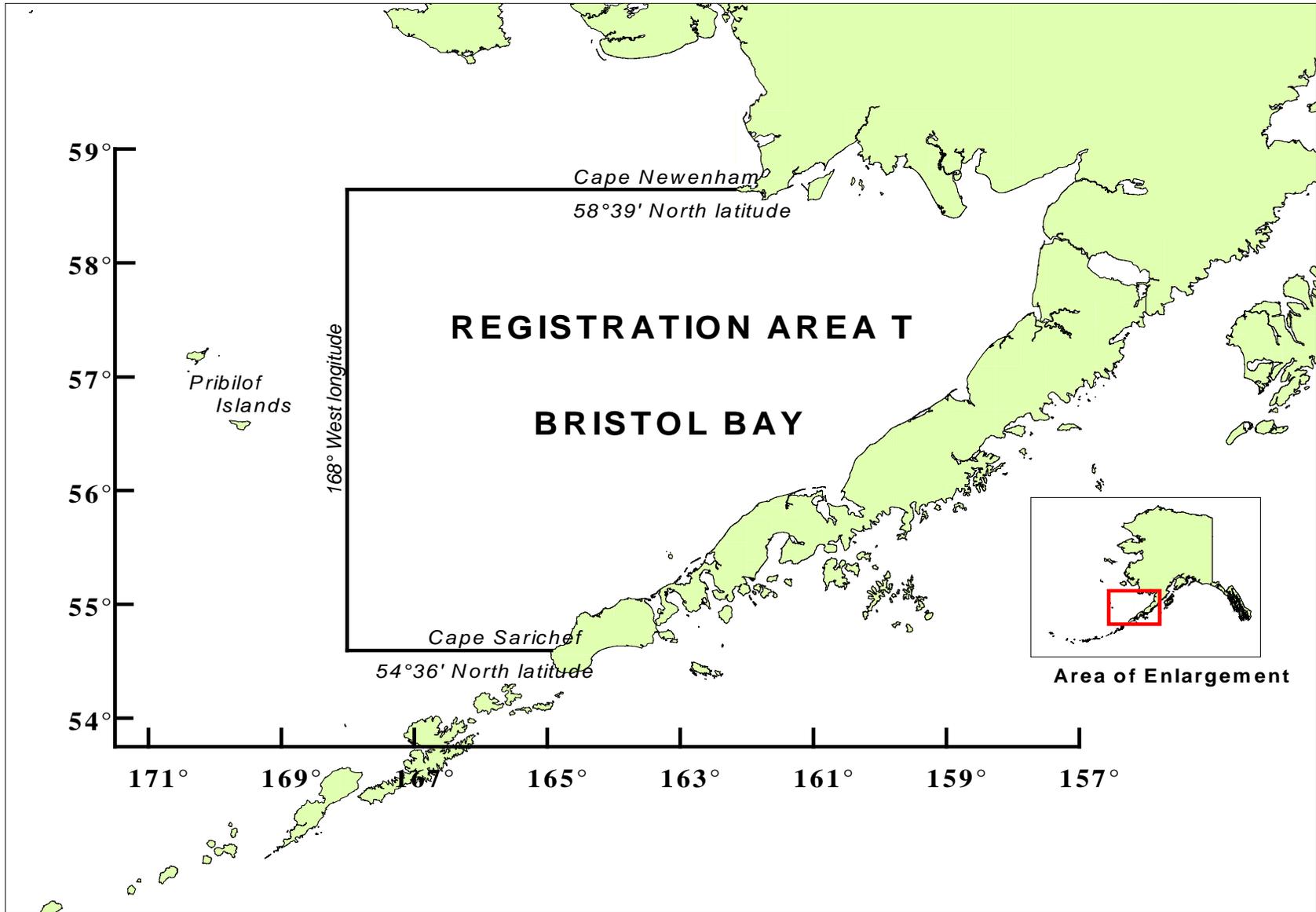


Figure 1. Map of the Bristol Bay king crab Registration Area T.

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