

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN
FOR THE COMMERCIAL TANNER CRAB FISHERY
IN THE KODIAK DISTRICT OF REGISTRATION AREA J, 2001

By

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ABSTRACT

Portions of the Kodiak District will open for a commercial Tanner crab fishery on January 15, 2001 with guideline harvest levels of 225,000 pounds for the Northeast Section and 275,000 pounds for the Eastside Section. This report provides a brief historic overview of the fishery and summarizes the new harvest strategy for Kodiak Tanner crabs that was adopted by the Alaska Board of Fisheries in 1999. Important changes to regulations affecting pot limits, fishing hours, and legal gear requirements are described. Information on tank inspections, inseason reporting, pot storage, landing requirements, 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 2000-2002 Commercial Shellfish Fishing Regulations to understand changes affecting this fishery.

INTRODUCTION

The Kodiak District for Tanner crabs are the waters of Registration Area J south of the latitude of Cape Douglas (58° 51' 06" N lat.), west of the longitude of Cape Fairfield (148° 50' 15" W long.) and east of the longitude of Cape Kumlik (157° 27' W long.). The district is subdivided into eight sections: Northeast, Eastside, Southeast, Southwest, Semidi Island, Westside, North Mainland, and South Mainland. Sections are described in 5 AAC 35.505 DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRATION AREA J DISTRICTS on pages 186-187 of the shellfish regulations and are illustrated in Figure 1.

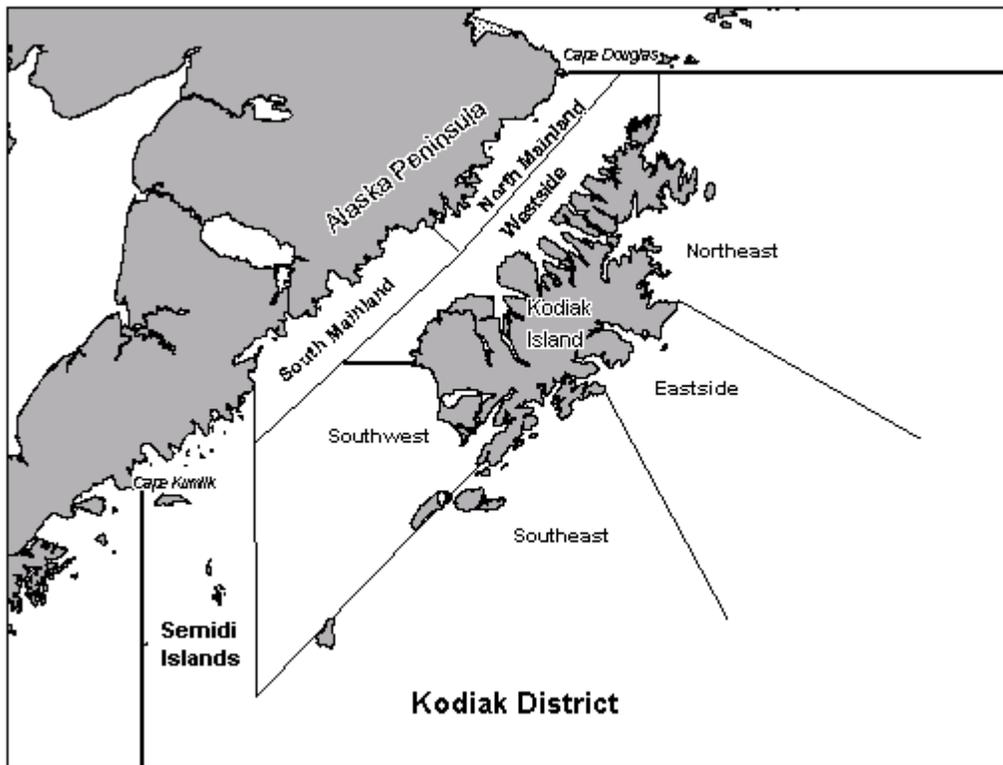


Figure 1. Kodiak Tanner crab fishing District and Sections, 2001.

The domestic Kodiak District Tanner crab *Chionoecetes bairdi* commercial fishery began in 1967. Commercial harvest peaked in the 1977/78 season when over 33 million pounds were harvested from the Kodiak District (Table 1).

In 1980, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) began to use a trawl survey, developed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), to obtain relative abundance estimates and predict future recruitment trends of Tanner crabs around Kodiak. Prior to this time, pot surveys were used as stock assessment tools with varying levels of success.

Progressive declines in the harvestable surplus of Tanner crabs in the Kodiak District led to decreased quotas and harvests through the 1980s and early 1990s (Table 2). By 1994, stocks were reduced and commercial fisheries were closed in all Kodiak Sections and have remained closed.

The Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) adopted a comprehensive harvest strategy in 1999 for management of Tanner crabs in the Kodiak District. Under this strategy, a commercial Tanner crab fishery occurs only when 1) preseason trawl survey abundance estimates exceed established thresholds; 2) two or more sections, excluding the South Mainland and Semidi Island Sections, are above threshold and will be opened; 3) minimum harvest in any open section will exceed 100,000 lbs; and 4) abundance is sufficient to provide a total district guideline harvest level (GHL) of at least 400,000 pounds (Urban et al. 1999). Additional measures under the strategy include a revised stair-step pot limit for the Kodiak District of 30, 40, or 60 pots per vessel depending on the GHL and restrictions on the hours that gear can be operated. The harvest strategy can be found on pages 188-190 of the 2000-2002 Commercial Shellfish Fishing Regulations, which will be referred to as ‘shellfish regulations’ for the remainder of this report. The harvest strategy regulation is 5 AAC 35.507 KODIAK, CHIGNIK, AND SOUTH PENINSULA DISTRICTS, *C. bairdi* TANNER CRAB HARVEST STRATEGIES.

REGULATIONS

General 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 164 of the 2000-02 shellfish regulations. Specific regulations that pertain to the Tanner crab fisheries in Registration Area J (Westward Region) begin on page 186. Some of the regulations regarding Tanner crab fishing are summarized below, particularly those that have changed since the last commercial Kodiak District fishery in 1994. For additional information on regulations, contact the ADF&G office in Kodiak and rely on the shellfish regulations (available at ADF&G offices or at our website: <http://www.state.ak.us/adfg/>).

Fishing Season and Gear Operation Hours

Sections of the Kodiak District determined to be above the established thresholds will open to commercial fishing on January 15 at 12:00 NOON. The following GHLs will be in place for the Northeast and Eastside Sections of the Kodiak District for the 2001 commercial Tanner crab fishing season:

<u>Section</u>	<u>2001 Guideline Harvest Level</u>
Northeast	225,000 pounds
<u>Eastside</u>	<u>275,000 pounds</u>
Total Kodiak District	500,000 pounds

The estimated number of legal crabs from the 2000 trawl survey in these two sections is slightly over 2,005,000 animals. Appendix A contains the estimated population of male Tanner crabs by shell width from the 2000 survey. The remainder of the 2000 survey information cannot be released until the fishery is complete. Figure 2 shows the distribution of molting mature animals from the 1999 trawl survey.

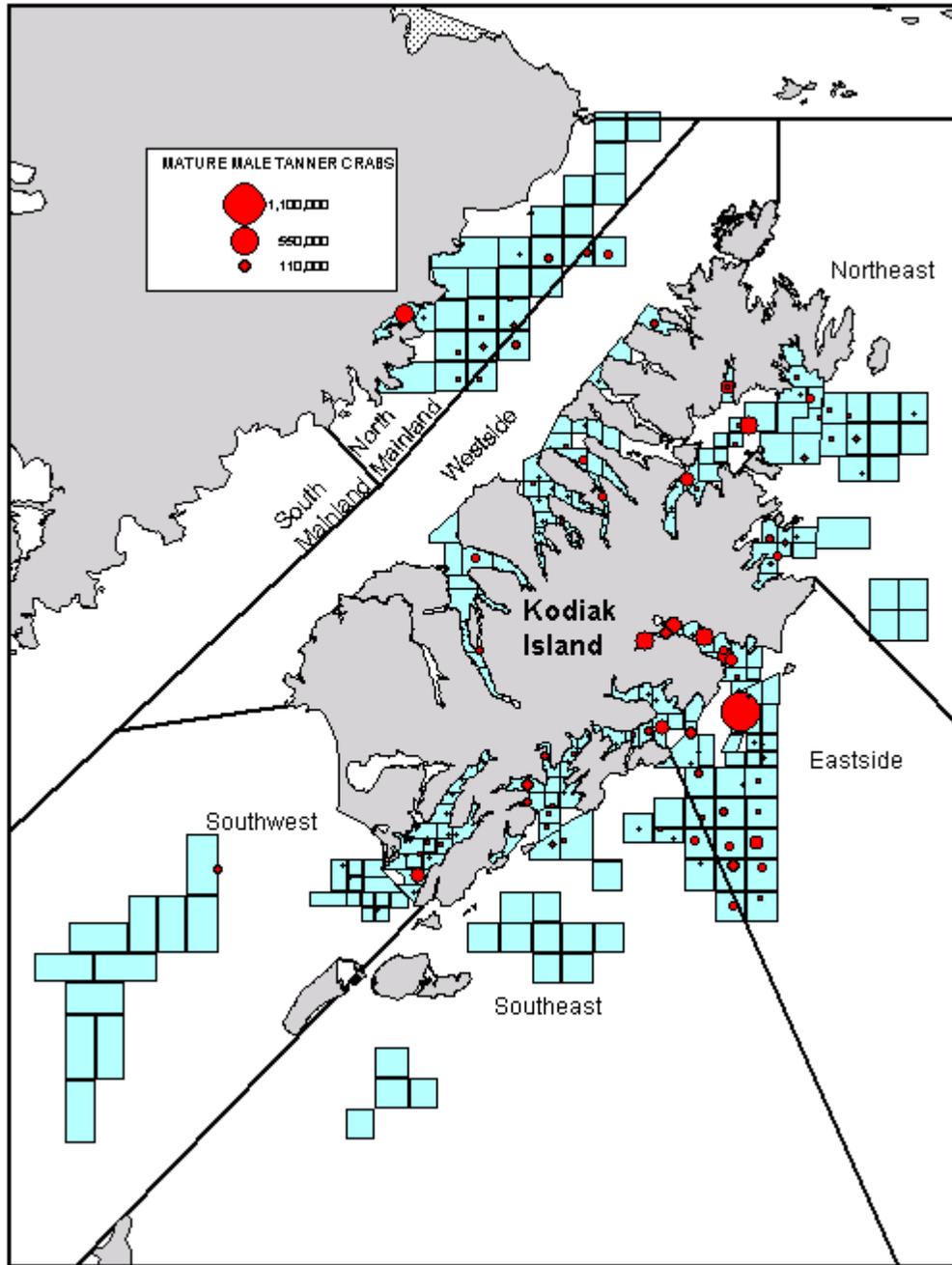


Figure 2. Number of molting mature Tanner crabs per kilometer towed in the 1999 Kodiak trawl survey.

The fishery will close when ADF&G determines that the GHM is achieved or when conditions, which threaten 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.

In 1999, the BOF adopted gear operation hours for the Kodiak District. Pot gear may only be operated from 08:00 AM to 7:59 PM (19:59 hours). Operation of gear, which includes setting or retrieving pots, is strictly prohibited from 8:00 PM (20:00 hours) to 07:59 AM.

Further information on fishing seasons and gear operation hours can be found under 5 AAC 35.510 on pages 191-192 of the shellfish regulations.

Pot Limit

New pot limits for the Kodiak District, based on GHLS, were adopted by the BOF in 1999. When the district GHLS is less than 2,500,000 pounds, no more than 30 aggregate pots may be operated from a validly registered Tanner crab vessel. When the district GHLS is more than 2,500,000 pounds but less than 5,000,000 pounds, no more than 40 pots may be operated. When the district GHLS is greater than 5,000,000 pounds no more than 60 pots may be used. **The pot limit for the 2001 Kodiak District fishery will be 30 pots per vessel.**

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. The regulation 5 AAC 35.526 TANNER CRAB POT MARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA J ON page 196-197 of the shellfish regulations contains guidelines for replacing lost tags. The vessel owner, operator, or agent must complete an affidavit form describing how the tags were lost and supplying the unique number(s) of each lost tag.

Tags will be available for purchase beginning in mid-December at a cost of \$1.50 per tag. Participants from areas outside the city of Kodiak can purchase tags via U.S. Mail; call the ADF&G office in Kodiak for details (907) 486-1840.

Legal Gear

Legal gear for the commercial Tanner crab fishery in the Kodiak District 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 not more than five inches in height. Tunnel eye opening perimeters must be individually more than 36 inches. 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.

Since the last commercial fishery in Kodiak in 1994, escape mesh or ring requirements have been added to regulations for legal Tanner gear. 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 specific language on escape device requirements can be found under 5 AAC 35.525 LAWFUL GEAR FOR REGISTRATION AREA J on page 195 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 44 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 utilized on pots must comply with 5 AAC

35.051 TANNER CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS listed on page 169 of the shellfish regulations.

Operation of Other Pot Gear, Pot Storage, and Landing Requirements

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

After the closure of the Tanner crab season, vessels wishing to participate in the Pacific cod fishery must either store or bring in all Tanner pots and register with ADF&G for the cod fishery. Additional stipulations on the operation of other pot gear within the Kodiak District can be found under 5 AAC 35.053 OPERATION OF OTHER POT GEAR on page 170 of shellfish regulations.

Up to 30 pots may be stored 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). Pots may be legally stored in waters deeper than 25 fathoms seven days following the closure of a registration district provided all bait and bait containers are removed and the doors are secured fully open. Although gear storage does exist, no vessel may have more than the specified pot limit of pots onboard or in storage in the registration district (all waters from Cape Douglas to Kilokak Rocks) while the vessel is validly registered. The regulatory language concerning pot storage can be found at 5 AAC 35.052 TANNER CRAB GEAR STORAGE REQUIREMENTS on page 197 of the shellfish regulations.

Vessels are required to be at their port of delivery within the registration district within 24 hours of the fishery closure. Vessels wishing to deliver to ports outside the district are required to contact the ADF&G office in Kodiak. Vessels delivering outside the district must provide the estimated number of crabs onboard the vessel at the time of the closure, intended port and processing facility where delivering, and estimated time of arrival. Additional requirements exist for catcher-processors and/or vessels mechanically disabled. Vessels legitimately delayed due to circumstances of weather will be addressed on a case by case basis. The specific regulation is 5 AAC 35.031 TANNER CRAB LANDING REQUIREMENTS and is on pages 166-167 of the shellfish regulations.

Registration and Tank Inspections

Vessel operators must have a 2001 interim use permit card for Area J Tanner crab and a current 2001 commercial vessel license. Both can be obtained from the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) in Juneau.

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. Gear will also be inspected at the time of tank inspection to ensure it is legal. Tanks will be inspected beginning at noon on January 14, twenty-four hours prior to the fishery opening. Arrangements will be made to accommodate vessel inspections in Old Harbor and Port Lions. Upon successful completion of the tank

inspection and gear inspection process, a valid 2001 shellfish registration will be issued to the vessel. A copy of this registration must remain onboard the vessel while fishing.

Legal Size Limit

The legal minimum size of Tanner crabs which can be harvested in the Kodiak District is 5.5” 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.

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AND VOLUNTEER CATCH REPORTING

ADF&G will manage the Kodiak District commercial Tanner crab fishery from inseason catch reports provided by fishers. Inseason management will allow for real-time fishery decisions and the ability to consider changes in effort, fleet behavior, and weather. ADF&G staff will make every effort to allow sufficient time for fishers to configure gear for storage or to place gear onboard before a closure. There is, however, the possibility that a very short notice of a fishery closure could occur.

Any validly registered vessel may participate in the reporting process. Reports will be taken over marine VHF, single sideband (SSB), telephone, and e-mail. Vessel operators will be asked during tag sales and tank inspections to participate in inseason reporting. ADF&G will need to know how many vessels are operating in each section for accurate estimates of effort and for harvest projection purposes. Vessels will be permitted to fish in both sections simultaneously, however, separate inseason reports will be requested for the catch and effort in each section.

Contents of the daily report will contain confidential codes for the section in which vessel operators are fishing, statistical area, number of pots lifts, and number of crabs retained for each 12 hour fishing period. Reports will be taken at 8:00 PM (20:00 hours) daily and may be transmitted via SSB, marine telex, e-mail, and satellite or cell phone. Operators will be asked during inseason reporting signup which method they will use to submit daily reports. ADF&G will update the fleet on SSB 4125 kHz with the status of the fishery each morning at 7:30 AM (07:30 hours). Any closure announcement will be made on this frequency. Updates and closure announcements will be distributed via e-mail, FAX, and passed along to all participating processing facilities.

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

LITERATURE CITED

Urban, D., D. Pengilly, D. Jackson, 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 Kodiak Management District Tanner crab *Chionoecetes bairdi* fishery, 1967-2000.

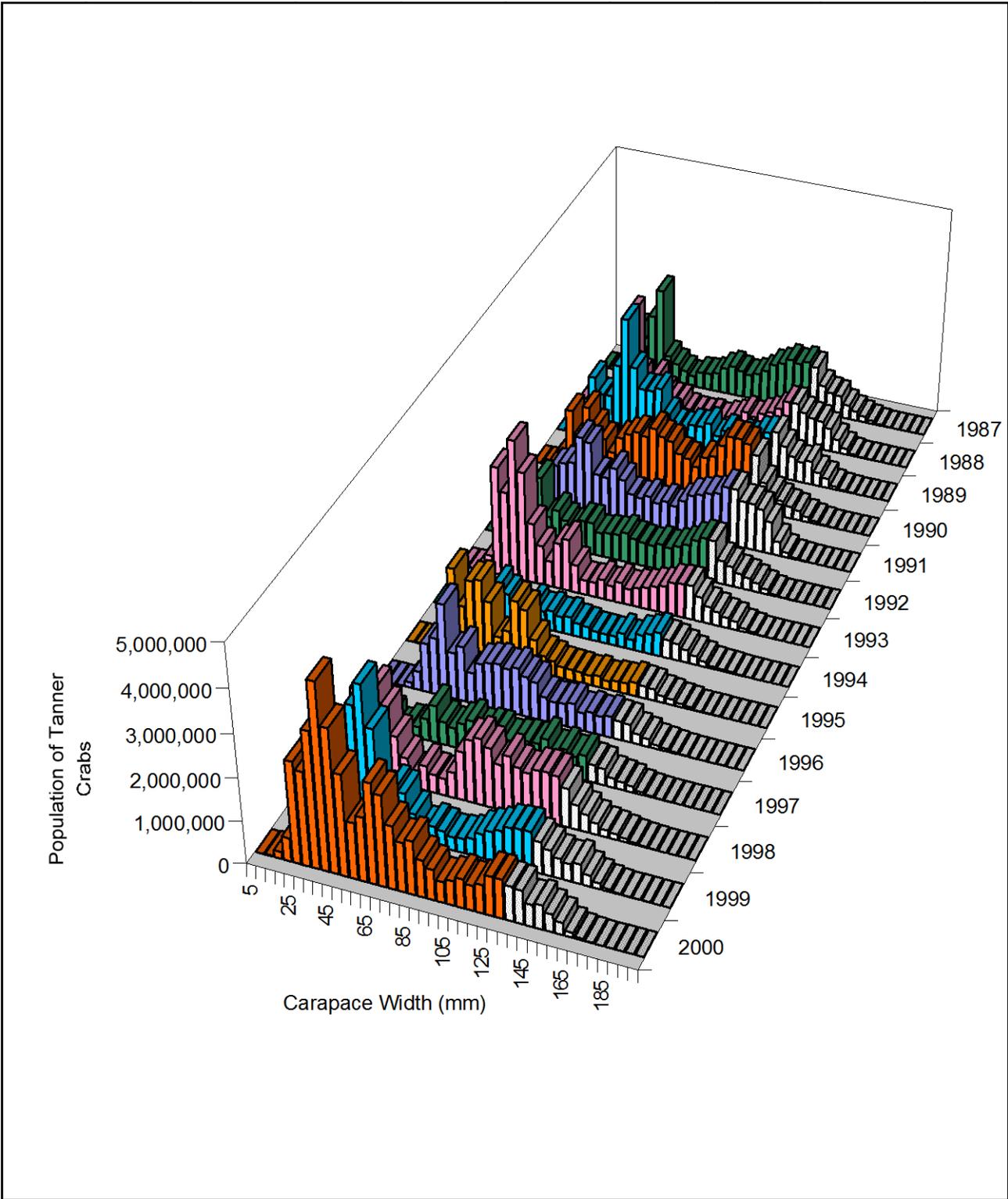
Year	Vessels	Landings	Number of crabs	Number of Pounds	Pots Lifted	CPUE	Average Weight	Price Per Pound (\$)
1967	NA	83	NA	110,961	NA	NA	NA	0.07
1968	NA	817	NA	2,560,687	NA	NA	NA	0.10
1969	85	955	NA	6,827,312	72,748	43	NA	0.11
1969/70	67	833	3,237,244	8,416,782	78,266	42	2.6	0.11
1970/71	82	453	2,686,067	6,744,163	60,967	44	2.5	0.11
1971/72	46	505	3,878,618	9,475,902	65,907	59	2.4	0.13
1972/73	105	1,466	13,609,688	30,699,777	188,158	67	2.3	0.17
1973/74	123	1,741	11,857,573	29,820,899	217,523	59	2.5	0.20
1974/75	74	471	5,459,940	13,649,966	73,826	83	2.5	0.17
1975/76	104	1,168	10,748,958	27,336,909	199,304	64	2.5	0.20
1976/77	102	998	7,830,727	20,720,079	164,213	48	2.6	0.33
1977/78	148	1,483	12,401,243	33,281,472	251,621	49	2.6	0.43
1978/79	218	1,225	10,702,829	29,173,807	275,455	38	2.7	0.55
1979/80	211	1,385	6,813,128	18,623,875	282,946	24	2.7	0.55
1980/81	188	771	4,398,631	11,748,629	174,351	25	2.7	0.65
1981/82	221	950	5,413,467	13,756,159	230,403	24	2.5	1.65
1982/83	348	1,439	7,744,812	18,927,061	377,562	21	2.4	1.25
1983/84	303	1,229	5,891,968	14,478,066	303,764	10	2.5	1.20
1984/85	214	710	4,567,037	12,024,553	176,830	26	2.6	1.50
1985/86	233	601	3,457,930	8,996,151	160,808	21	2.6	1.90
1986/87	189	503	1,830,365	4,833,473	110,963	16	2.6	2.62
1987/88	176	557	1,614,874	3,888,906	101,488	16	2.4	2.40
1988/89	171	567	2,106,320	5,208,999	86,556	24	2.5	3.05
1989/90	233	548	1,435,477	3,456,314	97,333	15	2.4	2.40
1990/91	137	448	764,107	1,917,713	54,110	14	2.5	1.59
1991/92	143	434	982,391	2,400,213	47,384	20	2.4	2.22
1992/93	140	353	518,982	1,318,446	43,528	12	2.5	2.10
1993/94	129	378	510,681	1,252,342	41,527	12	2.5	2.25
1994/95 to 1999/2000								
NO COMMERCIAL FISHERY								
TOTAL	NA	NA	130,463,057	341,649,616	3,937,541	NA	NA	NA
AVERAGE ^a	162	827	5,218,522	12,201,772	140,626	31	2.6	NA

^a Average of years with harvest data.

Table 2. Tanner crab *Chionoecetes bairdi* catch in pounds by fishing section for the Kodiak District, 1991/92 - 1999/2000.

Section	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95-1999/2000
Northeast	381,512	264,913	238,079	Closed
Eastside	2,018,701	728,191	395,062	Closed
Southeast	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Southwest	Closed	325,342	279,074	Closed
Semidi Islands	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
North Mainland	Closed	Closed	340,127	Closed
South Mainland	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Westside	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Total	2,400,213	1,318,446	1,252,342	-0-

APPENDIX



Appendix A. Estimated population of male Tanner crabs by carapace width in the Kodiak District 1987-2000.

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

Appendix B. Listing of contact persons, by agency and location.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

web site: <http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region4/>

Kodiak office

Mail address: 211 Mission Road *physical address:* 211 Mission Road Phone: (907) 486-1840
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Division of Fish and Wildlife Protection

web site: <http://www.dps.state.ak.us/fwp/>

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Lieutenant Joanna Roop Post Lieutenant joanna_roop@dps.state.ak.us

National Marine Fisheries Service

web site: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/>

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