

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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FISHERY UPDATE

2014 CENTRAL REGION GROUNDFISH FISHERIES OUTLOOK

General

This annual news release provides a brief overview of Cook Inlet (CI) and Prince William Sound (PWS) groundfish fishing opportunities for the 2014 calendar year.

Fishermen, processors, and buyers are reminded that they must adhere to the 2013-2014 Groundfish Fishery Commercial Fishing Regulations available at ADF&G offices in Homer (235-8191), Cordova (424-3212), Anchorage (267-2104), Soldotna (262-9368), second floor of the Seward City Building, and on the state website at: www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us. Questions regarding interpretation of regulations should be directed to ADF&G groundfish staff in the Homer or Cordova offices.

In order to land groundfish or halibut, an individual must possess a gear-appropriate, valid Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) interim use or a limited entry permit card. In addition, all vessels operating gear for groundfish must possess an Area Registration from ADF&G. A vessel may be registered for only one groundfish registration area at a time and must check-out of an area prior to registering for another area. Check-out is accomplished by contacting the area ADF&G office during business hours and, depending on the fishery, there may be additional requirements listed on the registration form. Cook Inlet or Prince William Sound registrations can be obtained in person or by fax from department offices in Homer, Cordova, Anchorage, Soldotna, and Kodiak. A fisherman must present a CFEC permit card to register. To register by fax, a legible photocopy of the permit card must be received with a request for an area registration. Non-pelagic trawl gear may not be used to target groundfish in the CI and PWS areas.

Incidental groundfish species allowable bycatch levels are set by Emergency Order (EO) and listed below under the species headings for each respective management area. In both CI and

PWS, all rockfish must be retained and any rockfish bycatch in excess of the allowances listed under the rockfish headings below, must be weighed and reported on the fish ticket, by species, as an overage. Proceeds from overages are paid to the State of Alaska. The commissioner may, by emergency order, close and immediately reopen a season in which the bycatch limit for any species is reduced.

Octopus may be retained as bycatch to directed groundfish fisheries in both the Cook Inlet and PWS management areas up to 20% by weight of the directed groundfish harvest on board the vessel. Octopus will be closed to retention once the 35,000 lb GHL is achieved in each respective area. In PWS, octopus may not be retained by vessels using jig gear. See the octopus management plans for Cook Inlet (5 AAC 38.360) and PWS (5 AAC 38.217) for additional information.

When a directed season is open for Pacific cod or pollock, regulations for improved retention and improved utilization (IR/IU) of groundfish (5 AAC 28.070 & 5 AAC 28.075) require that all captured Pacific cod or pollock be retained by the fisherman and accepted by a buyer. Similarly, all Pacific cod or pollock harvested must be retained up to the maximum retainable bycatch limits when a bycatch season is open for these species.

All groundfish species or fisheries not specifically mentioned in this document will be managed via the miscellaneous groundfish commissioner's permit requirements specified in CI regulation 5 AAC 28.379 or PWS regulation 5 AAC 28.220.

Anyone intending to fish in federal waters (greater than 3 nautical miles (nmi) from shore), should contact the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for information prior to fishing.

Area NMFS Offices

Homer:	907-235-2337	Seward:	907-224-5348	Anchorage:	907-271-5006
Kodiak:	907-481-1780	Juneau:	907-586-7228		

State regulation 5 AAC 28.055 adopts by reference federal regulations at 50 CFR 679.24 (e), which require **seabird avoidance measures (SAM)** in all longline fisheries for groundfish and halibut in state waters except the Inside District of PWS and the Cook Inlet District of the Cook Inlet Area. For additional information see this link: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds/guide.htm>.

All vessels participating in a parallel groundfish fishery, except those using jig or hand troll gear, must have a NMFS-approved **vessel monitoring system (VMS)**. Information on VMS can be obtained from the NMFS website: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/vms/>.

The National Marine Fisheries Service implemented a **new Observer Program in 2013** and continues to prosecute and improve that program. It changed how observers are deployed, how the program is funded, and the pool of vessels and processors covered under the program. Information and frequently asked questions on the restructured observer program can be found at: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/observers/> or by contacting the NMFS Sustainable Fisheries Division in Juneau at (907) 586-7228.

Prince William Sound Area

Prince William Sound Area (5AAC 28.200): All waters of Prince William Sound and waters of Alaska bounded on the west by the longitude of Cape Fairfield ($148^{\circ}50.25'$ W. long.) south to the latitude of Cape Douglas ($58^{\circ}51.10'$ N. lat.), then west to $149^{\circ}00.00'$ W. long., then south along $149^{\circ}00.00'$ W. long., and on the east by $144^{\circ}00.00'$ W. long.

PWS Inside District: All waters of PWS enclosed by lines from Pt. Whitshed to Pt. Bentinck, Cape Hinchinbrook to Zaikof Pt., and Cape Cleare to Cape Puget.

PWS Outside District: All waters of PWS that are seaward of the Inside District are divided into two sections:

Eastern Section: waters of the PWS Outside District between $147^{\circ}00'$ W. long. and $144^{\circ}00'$ W. long.

Western Section: waters of the PWS Outside District west of $147^{\circ}00'$ W. long.

Groundfish fishing closures related to Steller sea lion (SSL) conservation include waters surrounding two rookeries in the PWS area, Seal Rocks and Wooded Island (Fish Island) (Figure 1). Directed commercial fishing for groundfish is closed to all gear types within 3 nmi of each of these rookeries. For specific regulatory language describing the closure areas, contact NMFS in Kodiak at 907-481-1780 or consult the website at: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/regs/679b22.pdf>.

Pollock – The directed fishery will open at 12:00 noon January 20 with a 8.57 million pound guideline harvest level (GHL). Participants must obtain a pollock fishery registration from the department no later than 5:00 pm January 13. Regulation 5 AAC 28.263. PWS Pollock Pelagic Trawl Management Plan requires in-season catch reports, logbooks, and accommodation of a department observer upon request. After the directed fishery closes, pollock must be retained up to the maximum allowable bycatch amount of 20% to other open directed groundfish fisheries, unless a directed fishery for Pacific cod is open and then all pollock must be retained (5 AAC 28.070 (e)), except that all pollock taken with jig gear in the state-waters Pacific cod fishery may be retained.

Sablefish – PWS limited entry sablefish permit holders must obtain a PWS management area 2014 sablefish registration prior to the April 1 deadline in order to participate in the 2014 fishery. Fishery season dates are April 15–August 31. The 242,000-pound GHL is divided among registered permit holders under the shared quota approach described in regulation 5 AAC 28.272. CFEC regulations allow an interim-use or limited entry permit holder to use a vessel with an overall length greater than the vessel category for which the permit is designated. The department will distribute a news release during the first week of April outlining 2014 fishery management and allocation by permit class. Sablefish in PWS may not be retained as bycatch. Be aware that killer whale depredation on hooked sablefish has been a problem in recent years and has resulted in the removal of undocumented numbers of sablefish during longline retrieval.

Rockfish – Rockfish in PWS may only be retained as bycatch to other directed fisheries. The PWS Rockfish Management Plan in regulation 5 AAC 28.265 requires full retention of all rockfish caught and mandates that proceeds from the sale of any bycatch overage be paid to the State of Alaska. Rockfish bycatch limits in PWS are 20% to directed sablefish, 5% to directed state-waters Pacific cod, and 10% to other directed groundfish and halibut. The rockfish GHL of

150,000 lb and the 5-day trip limit of 3,000 lb remain in effect. Black and dark rockfish in federal waters of the PWS Area are managed by ADF&G as part of the GHL.

Lingcod – ADF&G manages lingcod in both state and federal waters. Lingcod may not be retained until July 1. Participants in the PWS directed lingcod fishery must obtain an ADF&G PWS management area 2014 non-exclusive groundfish registration. Harvest guidelines for the directed fishery are 7,300 lb for the Inside District and 25,300 lb for the Outside District. Lingcod may be retained as bycatch up to 20% of the directed finfish species on board a vessel after July 1 and following the closure of the directed fishery. The department will also issue an emergency order to require all lingcod be landed with the head on and the vent intact, for gender determination, so that biological sampling goals can be met.

Pacific cod – Two Pacific cod fisheries, the “parallel” and the “state-waters” occur within PWS state waters. These fisheries have distinct requirements including different registrations and gear limits. Parallel Pacific cod fishery participants must obtain a PWS 2014 non-exclusive groundfish registration while state-waters Pacific cod fishery participants must obtain a separate PWS 2014 exclusive area registration that is specific to gear type.

The parallel Pacific cod season will open January 1 and be managed concurrently with NMFS management of the Pacific cod fishery in adjacent federal waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska (CGOA). The federal CGOA Pacific cod “B” season for vessels using jig gear will open June 10, while other fixed gear types will open September 1.

The state-waters season will open to longline, pot, and mechanical jigging and hand troll gears in the following manner. The season will open to longline gear seven days following the closure of the parallel longline season for the less than 50 foot hook and line gear sector (<50' HAL) or concurrent with the individual fishing quota (IFQ) halibut season opening date whichever occurs later, and will close to longline gear when 85% of the GHL is achieved, a parallel season for longline gear is opened, or on December 31, whichever occurs first. The season will open to pot gear 24 hours following the closure of the parallel season for pot gear, and will close to pot gear when 90% of the GHL is achieved, a parallel season for pot gear is opened, or on December 31, whichever occurs first. The season will open to mechanical jigging machines and hand troll gear 24 hours following the closure of the parallel season for jig gear and will close to jig gear when the GHL is achieved, a parallel season for jig gear is opened, or on December 31, whichever occurs first.

Refer to the “General” section at the beginning of this document for **VMS and seabird avoidance** requirements for parallel fishery participants and the new **NMFS Observer Program**. The seasons for pot, jig, and longline gear will open in the Inside District, Western Section of the Outside District, and that portion of the Eastern Section of the Outside District west of Hook Point (146° 15.12' W. long.). Fishermen are reminded that portions of the PWS Inside District are closed to fishing with groundfish pot gear (5 AAC 28.250).

Regulations require that Pacific cod be retained up to the maximum bycatch allowance when a directed fishery for Pacific cod is closed, or all Pacific cod caught incidentally to other groundfish fisheries must be retained when a directed fishery for Pacific cod is open (5 AAC 28.070 (e)). In PWS, Pacific cod may be retained at a 20% bycatch allowance to other directed fisheries for vessels using longline, pot, or mechanical jig gear.

The Prince Williams Sound Area Pacific cod state-waters fishery GHL for the 2014 season is 1.46 million pounds. A subsequent news release will provide additional information on this fishery.

Skates and Sharks – There is no directed season for skates and sharks (including spiny dogfish) in PWS, however, these species may be retained as bycatch up to 15% of directed finfish species on board a vessel. The allowable bycatch level applies separately to each combined skates and combined sharks.

Cook Inlet Area

Cook Inlet Area (5AAC 28.300) - All waters of Alaska within Cook Inlet and along the outer Kenai Peninsula north of the latitude of Cape Douglas ($58^{\circ}51.10'$ N. lat.) and west of the longitude of Cape Fairfield ($148^{\circ}50.25'$ W. long.).

Cook Inlet District: Waters of Alaska in the Cook Inlet Area north of a line from Cape Douglas to Point Adam ($59^{\circ} 15.27'$ N lat.).

North Gulf District: Waters of Alaska in the Cook Inlet Area north of the latitude of Cape Douglas, and west of the longitude of Cape Fairfield excluding the Cook Inlet District.

Pollock – There is no directed fishery for pollock in the Cook Inlet Area. However, pollock must be retained up to the maximum bycatch amount of 20%, unless a directed fishery for Pacific cod is open and then all pollock must be retained (5 AAC 28.070 (e)), except that pollock taken with jig gear in the state-waters Pacific cod fishery may be retained.

Sablefish – The season will open at 12:00 noon July 15 by emergency order with a fishery GHL of 56,000 pounds. Participation in the fishery requires a separate sablefish registration and logbooks, which are available at department offices. The fishery has a vessel trip limit of 3,000 pounds of sablefish (round weight) in any two consecutive days. Sablefish may be retained in the state waters of the Cook Inlet Management Area only by a vessel registered for the directed fishery and only when the directed season is open.

Rockfish – There is a 150,000 lb GHL for all rockfish species in the Cook Inlet Area. All rockfish caught must be retained. A jig-only (mechanical or hand troll) fishery targeting **pelagic rockfish** opens July 1. Black and dark rockfish in federal waters of CI area are managed by ADF&G as part of the Cook Inlet GHL. There is a 1,000 lb trip limit in the Cook Inlet District and a 4,000 lb trip limit in the North Gulf District. A trip is defined as any landing in five consecutive days. Rockfish bycatch allowances are 10% during directed groundfish and halibut fisheries. Proceeds from bycatch overages must be paid to the State of Alaska.

Lingcod – ADF&G manages lingcod in both state and federal waters. Directed fishing for lingcod opens July 1, is restricted to harvest with jig (mechanical or hand troll) gear, and has a 52,500 lb GHL. Lingcod may be retained as bycatch to other directed fisheries at the 20% level **only** when the directed fishery is open. Resurrection Bay, north of a line from Aialik Cape to Cape Resurrection, is closed to retention of lingcod.

Pacific cod – The parallel Pacific cod season will open January 1 and be managed concurrently with NMFS management of the Pacific cod fishery in adjacent federal waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska (CGOA). The federal CGOA Pacific cod “B” season for vessels using jig gear will open June 10, while other fixed gear types will open September 1. See the “General” section at the top of this document regarding the **VMS and seabird avoidance** requirements for parallel fishery participants and the new **NMFS Observer Program**. Portions of both Kachemak and Kamishak Bays are closed to fishing with groundfish pot gear. Fishermen are reminded to check with groundfish staff in Homer or consult regulations regarding specific areas of Cook Inlet that are closed to fishing with pot gear. Pacific cod fishing closures related to **SSL conservation** establish longline and pot gear closures within 10 nmi, in addition to no-transit zones within 3 nmi, of Sugarloaf Island and Outer Pye Island rookeries to protect endangered Steller sea lions (Figure 2). For specific regulatory language describing the closure areas, contact NMFS in Kodiak at 907-481-1780 or consult the NMFS website at: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/regs/679b22.pdf>.

Twenty-four hours following closure of the parallel Pacific cod seasons for pot and jig gear, the respective state-waters Pacific cod seasons for pot and jig gear will open in the Cook Inlet Management Area. The Cook Inlet Area GHL for the 2014 season is 4.39 million pounds. The GHL will be allocated 85% to pot gear and 15% to jig gear. This fishery requires a separate exclusive area registration for either pot or jig gear.

Regulations require that Pacific cod be retained up to the maximum bycatch allowance, set at 20%, when a directed fishery for Pacific cod is closed, and all Pacific cod caught incidentally to other groundfish fisheries must be retained when a directed fishery for Pacific cod is open (5 AAC28.070(e)).

Skates and Sharks – There is no directed season for skates and sharks (including spiny dogfish) in CI, however, these species may be retained as bycatch up to 15% of directed finfish species on board a vessel. The allowable bycatch level applies separately to each combined skates and combined sharks.

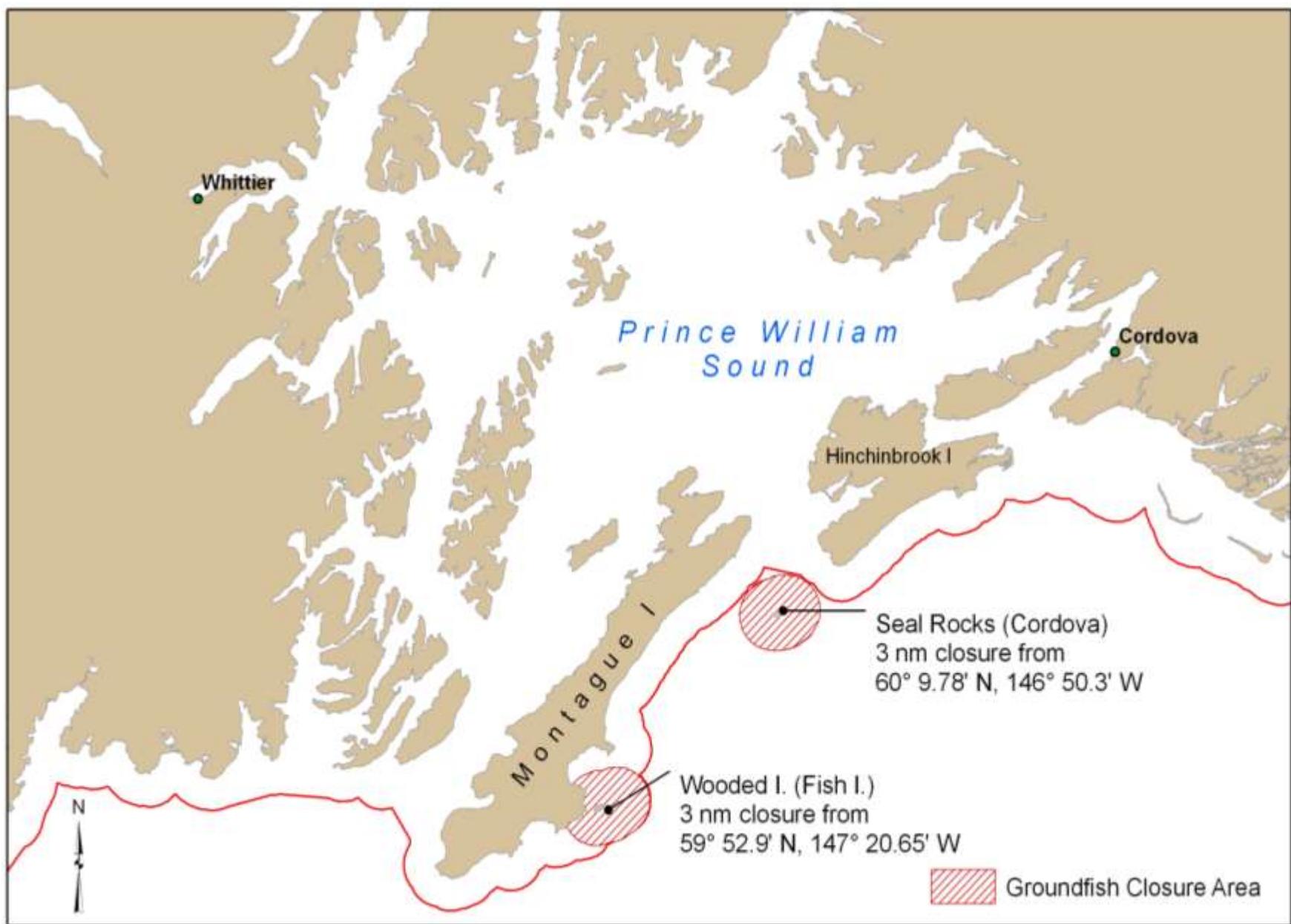


Figure 1. Directed groundfish fishing closure areas surrounding Steller sea lion rookeries in the Prince William Sound Area.

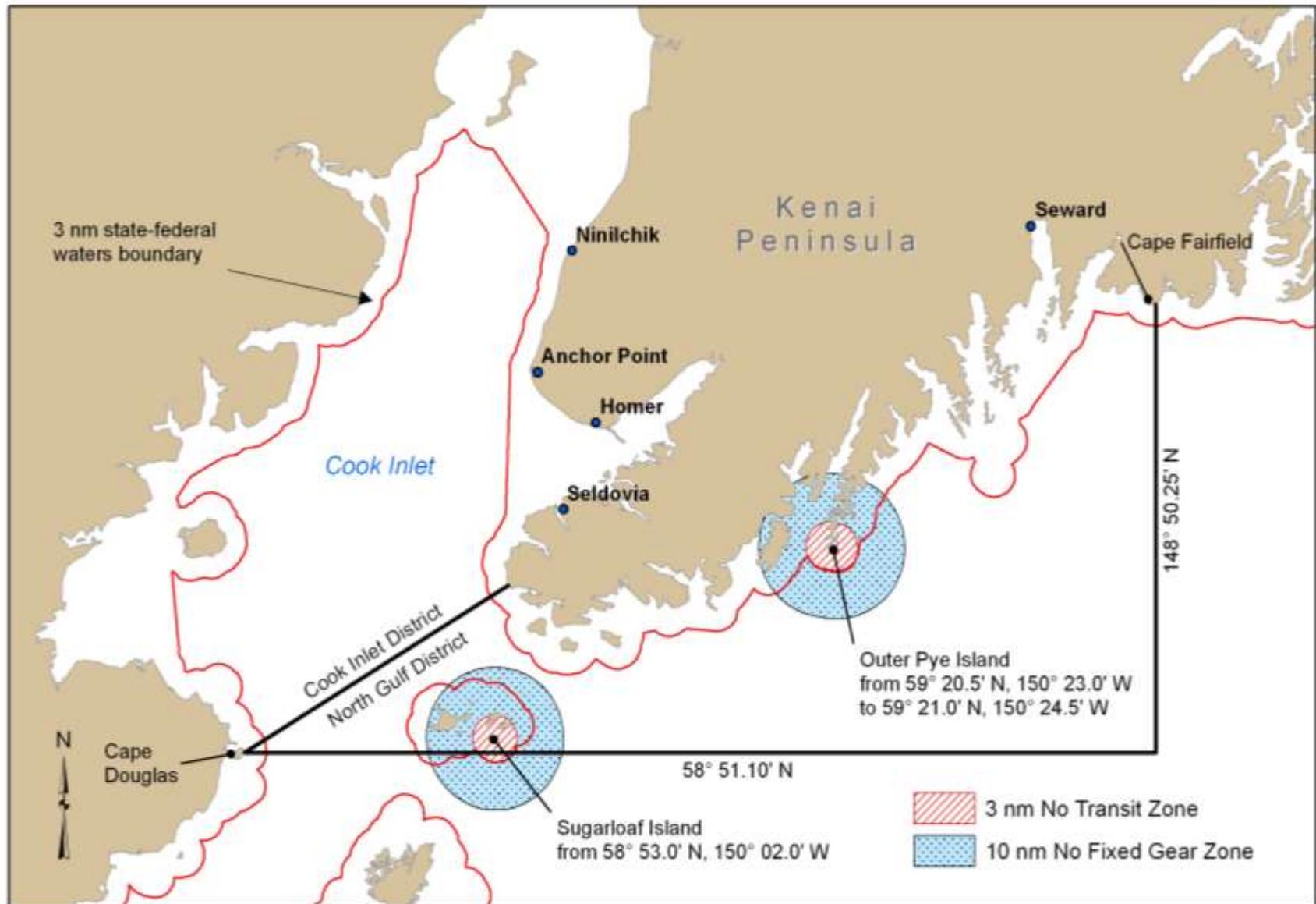


Figure 2. Vessel no-transit and fixed gear Pacific cod fishing closure zones around Steller sea lion rookeries within the Cook Inlet Management Area.