
ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



Cora Campbell, Commissioner
Jeff Regnart, Director



Contact:		Petersburg Area Office
Joe Stratman		P.O. Box 667
Adam Messmer		Petersburg, Alaska 99833
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Fax: (907) 772-9336	(907) 465-4944	Time: 1:30 p.m.

SOUTHEAST ALASKA RED AND BLUE KING CRAB COMMERCIAL FISHERY CLOSURE ANNOUNCEMENT

Petersburg. . . The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) announced today that the Southeast Alaska (Registration Area A) commercial red king crab fishery will not open during the 2014/2015 fishing season.

The Southeast Alaska Red King Crab Management Plan [5 AAC 34.113] directs the department to manage the Southeast Alaska red king crab fishery in accordance with the Alaska Board of Fisheries' "Policy on King and Tanner Crab Resource Management". The department shall close the fishery if the department's estimate of available harvest is below the minimum threshold of 200,000 lb of legal male red king crab. The estimate of available harvest based on 2014 stock assessment survey results is well below the minimum threshold.

Regionally, the biomass estimate did increase from last season, but is still at historically low levels. Five of nine survey areas exhibited poor stock health in this year's stock assessment survey. Four other areas showed improvements in stock health, largely fueled by increasing numbers of non-legal sized, pre-recruit male crabs. The biomass estimates for legal and mature RKC for the Southeast Region are 0.76 million lbs and 1.39 million lbs respectively for the 2014/2015 season. This is virtually the same amount of legal crab estimated in 2013, but a 52% increase in the mature male biomass. These legal and mature biomass estimates have also been adjusted to incorporate mark/recapture assessments for seven areas in total. Regional biomass is estimated from eight survey areas and extrapolated to the entire region.

Survey and Analysis

Areas surveyed include Pybus Bay, Gambier Bay, Seymour Canal, Peril Strait, the Juneau area, Lynn Sisters, Excursion Inlet, Port Frederick, and Holkham Bay. The estimate of available harvest was determined through a catch-survey analysis (CSA) for all surveyed bays with the exception of Holkham Bay, where the CSA model does not currently allow for a biomass estimate to be produced. The CSA incorporates department stock assessment survey data from 2014 and prior years, commercial harvest in 2011 and prior years, and port sampling data obtained during landings of commercial harvest. Biomass estimates produced for each survey area were adjusted based on mark/recapture assessments done in the surveyed areas. Harvest data indicate that an average of 52% of historical harvest has been taken from surveyed areas and 48% of historical harvest has been taken from non-surveyed areas. This surveyed/non-surveyed area ratio was used to calculate legal and mature biomass estimates for the non-surveyed areas. Harvest rates, appropriate to stock health, were applied to each surveyed area. Stock health ratings of poor in half of the survey areas, and well below average and moderate ratings in the others, offered no harvestable surplus towards the minimum threshold in regulation.

The 2014 stock assessment survey employed a re-stratified sample design. Re-stratification of all survey areas was initiated in 2005 to reduce variance in estimates of population size. This was accomplished by adjusting sampling intensity within substrata to correspond with variation in survey catch along with other factors such as bathymetry and input on crab distribution from the commercial fleet. Re-stratification has resulted in reductions in variance around survey catch per unit effort and population estimates, and a reduction in the number of survey pots with a catch of zero crab.

North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) Red King Crab Project

In 2009, the department initiated a collaborative study with the commercial crab industry to ground truth department pot survey-based biomass estimates using mark/recapture techniques surveying the Lynn Sisters area. The department received both NPRB funding and a legislative increment to support this effort. Pybus Bay, Gambier Bay, and Excursion Inlet were surveyed in 2010, and Seymour Canal, Peril Strait, and Port Frederick were completed in 2011. Holkham Bay was completed in 2012. Though all eight areas originally slated for mark/recapture work have been completed, new mark/recapture estimates need to be completed in all eight areas to provide additional data to use in assessing regional red king crab abundance. Fishermen are advised that the department will continue to work collaboratively with industry to repeat mark/recapture experiments in survey areas and continue improvements to red king crab stock assessment in Southeast Alaska.

Additional information may be found in regulation 5 AAC 34.113. SOUTHEAST ALASKA RED KING CRAB MANAGEMENT PLAN on page 97 of the 2014-2015 Commercial King and Tanner Crab Fishing Regulations booklet available in area offices, or online at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/regulations/fishregulations/pdfs/commercial/KingTannerCrab-2014-2015.pdf>

The Emergency Order corresponding with this announcement is EO 1C1914.

News releases web site: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>.

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