
ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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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 2016/2017 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 pounds of legal male red king crab. The estimate of available harvest, based on 2016 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. Of the seven survey areas, five had increases in legal biomass and five had increases in mature biomass, while the others decreased or remained constant since last season. The adjusted biomass estimates for legal and mature RKC for the Southeast Region are 1.36 million pounds and 1.89 million pounds respectively for the 2016/2017 season; an 11% increase in the legal male biomass and a 19% increase in mature male biomass from the 2015/2016 season. Regional biomass is estimated from the seven surveyed 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, and Excursion Inlet. Port Frederick and Holkham Bay were dropped as survey areas in 2015 due to budget constraints. The estimate of available harvest was determined through a catch-survey analysis (CSA) for all surveyed areas. The CSA incorporates data from the department's stock assessment pot survey (2016 and prior years), commercial harvest (2011 and prior years), and port sampling data from landings of commercial harvest. Biomass estimates produced for each survey area were adjusted based on mark/recapture work conducted in six of the seven surveyed areas. Harvest data indicate that an average of 53.1% of historical harvest has been taken from surveyed areas and 46.9% 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 the stock health rating in each surveyed area were applied to biomass estimates. Stock health ratings are based on catch per unit effort (CPUE) of all size/sex classes compared to long-term (10-year) and short-term (4-year) averages. Stock health ratings of poor and below average in all seven survey areas, most sex/size classes

in all seven survey areas below long-term averages, and below average biomass estimates identified in each survey area, offered no harvestable surplus towards the minimum threshold in regulation.

The 2016 stock assessment survey employed a restratified sample design. Restratification 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. Restratification has resulted in reductions in variance around survey catch per unit effort and population estimates and fewer survey pots with a catch of zero crab.

Mark/Recapture 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 beginning with the Lynn Sisters area. The department received both North Pacific Research Board 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. Mark/recapture work was repeated in Pybus Bay in 2014 and in Seymour Canal in 2015. Repeating the mark/recapture work in each area provides additional information on the variance around the estimates used to adjust the red king crab biomass estimates from the CSA. Fishermen are advised that as budgets allow, the department will continue to work collaboratively with industry to repeat mark/recapture experiments in the four remaining survey areas.

Additional information may be found in regulation 5 AAC 34.113. SOUTHEAST ALASKA RED KING CRAB MANAGEMENT PLAN on page 13 of the 2015-2017 King and Tanner Crab Commercial Fishing Regulations booklet available in area offices, or online at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishregulations.commercial>

The Emergency Order corresponding with this announcement is EO 1C1516.

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

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