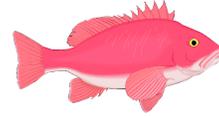


**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



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Date Issued: 12/15/17

**FISHERY ANNOUNCEMENT
2018 CENTRAL REGION GROUND FISH FISHERIES OUTLOOK
EO # 2-GF-H-01-18 and # 2-GF-E-01-18**

General

This annual news release provides a brief overview of Cook Inlet Area (CI) and Prince William Sound Area (PWS) commercial groundfish fishing opportunities for the 2018 calendar year.

Fishermen, processors, and buyers are reminded that they must adhere to the 2017-2018 Statewide Commercial Groundfish Fishing Regulations available at Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) offices in Homer (235-8191), Cordova (424-3212), Anchorage (267-2104), and Soldotna (262-9368), the 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 Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) groundfish staff in the Homer office.

In order to land groundfish or halibut, an individual must possess a gear-appropriate, valid Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) interim-use or limited entry permit card. In addition, all vessels operating gear for groundfish must possess a valid fishery-specific area registration form 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 Area or Prince William Sound Area registrations may be obtained in person from ADF&G offices in Homer, Cordova, Anchorage, Soldotna, and Kodiak. A fisherman must possess the appropriate CFEC permit card to register. To register by fax or email, contact the Homer area office.

Allowable bycatch levels for incidental groundfish species are set by Emergency Order (EO) and are 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 EO, close and immediately reopen a season in which the bycatch limit for any species is adjusted.

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

When a directed season is open for Pacific cod or pollock, there are regulations for improved retention and improved utilization (IR/IU) of groundfish. In 2016, 5 AAC 28.070 (e) was modified by the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) for clarification; the regulation requires that the permit holder shall retain

(1) all Pacific cod brought on board a vessel when a directed fishery for Pacific cod is open and all Pacific cod brought on board a vessel up to the maximum retainable bycatch of Pacific cod when a directed fishery for Pacific cod is closed;

(2) all walleye pollock brought on board a vessel when a directed fishery for walleye pollock is open and all walleye pollock brought on board a vessel up to the maximum retainable bycatch of walleye pollock when a directed fishery for walleye pollock is closed.

Under 5 AAC 28.075, a processor or processor's agent that purchases groundfish shall accept delivery of all Pacific cod and walleye pollock retained by the vessel under 5 AAC 28.070 (e).

Non-pelagic trawl gear may not be used to target groundfish in the CI or PWS areas.

All groundfish species or fisheries not specifically mentioned in this document will be managed via the miscellaneous groundfish commissioner's permit requirements specified in Cook Inlet 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. Go to: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/seabird-avoidance-gear> for additional information.

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: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/cwm>.

NMFS continues to implement the North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program. Information and frequently asked questions on the 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°50.25' W. long.) south to the latitude of Cape Douglas (58°51.10' N. lat.), then west to 149°00.00' W. long., then south along 149°00.00' W. long., and on the east by 144°00.00' W. long.

PWS Inside District: All waters of PWS enclosed by lines from Pt. Whittshed 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°00' W. long. and 144°00' W. long.

Western Section: waters of the PWS Outside District west of 147°00' W. long.

Groundfish fishing closures related to Steller sea lion (SSL) conservation include waters surrounding two rookeries in PWS, 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: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/sslpm>.

In December 2017, the Board of Fisheries (BOF) adopted a regulation that prohibits a vessel from having more than one type of gear on board when participating in a groundfish fishery with the exception of mechanical jigging machines and hand troll gear, which are considered jig gear.

Pollock – The directed fishery will open at 12:00 noon January 20 with a **7.1 million lb** guideline harvest level (GHL), a 24% decrease from the 2017 GHL. Fishermen must obtain a 2018 Pollock Fishery Registration from ADF&G no later than 5:00 pm Monday, January 15, in order to participate (ADF&G offices are closed on Saturday, January 13, the regulatory deadline). Inseason catch reports, logbooks, and accommodation of an ADF&G observer upon request are required (5 AAC 28.263).

While the directed pollock fishery is open, all pollock caught as bycatch must be retained by fishermen participating in other groundfish fisheries in PWS. After the directed fishery closes, pollock must be retained up to the maximum allowable bycatch amount of 20% to other open directed groundfish fisheries, (5 AAC 28.070 (e)). ADF&G will solicit bids for a test fishery, which funds groundfish research in PWS, before the season begins; the available harvest will be approximately 900,000 lb.

Sablefish – PWS limited entry sablefish permit holders must obtain a 2018 PWS Sablefish Registration no later than 5:00 pm Monday, April 2 (ADF&G offices are closed on Sunday,

April 1, the regulatory deadline) in order to participate in the 2018 fishery. Fishery season dates are April 15–August 31. The 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 2017 sablefish harvest was 73,113 lb, of the 117,000 lb GHL, nearly twice the 2016 season harvest (40,457 lb), continuing an increasing trend following the 2015 harvest of 16,910 lb, the lowest harvest in the history of the fishery (GHL of 122,000 lb). Beginning in 2015, the GHL has been adjusted by applying the relative change each year in the NMFS Gulf of Alaska sablefish acceptable biological catch (ABC), which is derived from NMFS stock assessment surveys. This adjustment will continue this season.

The 2018 sablefish GHL is 133,000 lb, up 14% from 2017 due to a slight increase in the NMFS ABC. ADF&G will distribute a news release during the first week of April outlining 2018 fishery management and allocation by permit class.

In December 2017, the BOF adopted a regulation clarifying log sheet requirements. This new regulation lists the information that must be reported on log sheets. Log sheets must be submitted with fish tickets (new requirement) within **seven** days of landing.

Sablefish in PWS may not be retained as bycatch. Be aware that killer whale depredation on hooked sablefish has been an ongoing problem, resulting in the removal of undocumented numbers of sablefish during longline retrieval. Please note any whale depredation on your log sheets.

ADF&G will continue to conduct additional in person and phone interviews to collect anecdotal information about the PWS sablefish fishery. We appreciate the cooperation of the fleet.

Rockfish – Rockfish in PWS may only be retained as bycatch to other directed fisheries. The PWS Rockfish Management Plan, 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 Pacific cod, 10% to other directed groundfish and halibut, and 0.5% to the pelagic trawl pollock fishery. There is an **overall rockfish GHL of 150,000 lb** and a 5-day trip limit of 3,000 lb. 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 a 2018 lingcod fishery registration. **GHLs 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. Lingcod have a minimum size requirement of 35 inches (5 AAC 28.270). ADF&G will also issue an EO 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 fishery seasons, the “parallel” and the “state-waters,” occur within PWS state waters. These seasons have distinct requirements including different registrations and

gear limits. Parallel Pacific cod season participants must obtain a PWS 2018 Parallel Pacific Cod Season Registration, while state-waters Pacific cod season participants must obtain a separate PWS 2018 State-Waters Pacific Cod Registration. Each registration is specific to gear type, and the PWS Area is designated an exclusive registration area for vessels using longline and pot gear, and a nonexclusive registration area for vessels using jig gear, during the state-waters season. Pot tags are also required for pot vessels participating in the state-waters season.

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, whereas for pot and longline gear the “B” season will open September 1.

The state-waters Pacific cod season will open to longline gear seven days following the closure of the parallel longline season, which coincides with the federal less than 50 foot hook-and-line gear sector, but not earlier than the individual fishing quota (IFQ) halibut season opening date. The state-waters season will open to jig gear and/or pot gear 24 hours following the closure of the parallel season to those respective gear types.

The PWS **Pacific cod state-waters fishery GHL for the 2018 season is 992,080 lb.** The GHL is allocated 15% to pot and jig gear combined and 85% to longline gear (843,268 lb). The 2018 GHL decreased 77% from the 2017 GHL of 4.3 million lb. A subsequent news release will provide additional fishery information.

Refer to the “General” section at the beginning of this document for VMS and seabird avoidance requirements for parallel fishery participants and information on the NMFS Observer Program. The state-waters Pacific cod season 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, and that 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 jig gear.

Skates– There is no directed season for skates in PWS; however, skates may be retained as bycatch as a percentage of directed finfish species on board a vessel. **The allowable bycatch limit for combined skates is 5%**, which mirrors federal 2018 MRA for the Gulf of Alaska.

Sharks – There is no directed season for 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.

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°51.10' N. lat.) and west of the longitude of Cape Fairfield (148°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° 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 walleye pollock in the Cook Inlet Area. However, pollock must be retained up to the maximum bycatch amount of 20% (5 AAC 28.070 (e)).

Although there is no regulatory directed fishery for pollock, a limited Commissioners Permit pollock fishery using seine gear was prosecuted in recent years but **will not** continue in 2018.

Sablefish – The season will open at 12:00 noon July 15 by EO with a fishery **GHL of 62,000 lb**, up 15% from 54,000 lb in 2017. Participation in the fishery requires a Cook Inlet Area 2018 Sablefish Registration and log sheets, which are available at ADF&G offices. The fishery has a vessel trip limit of 3,000 lb of sablefish (round weight) in any two consecutive days. Sablefish may be retained in the state waters of the Cook Inlet Area only by a vessel registered for the directed fishery and only when the directed season is open.

In 2016, prior notice of landing (PNOL) for the Cook Inlet Area was adopted into regulation by the BOF for the sablefish fishery. Fishermen are required to report to ADF&G after each sablefish trip in the Cook Inlet Area by telephoning (907) 226-2121 at least 6 hours prior to landing and reporting the following: 1) vessel name/ADF&G#, 2) date and location of landing, 3) estimated time of arrival, 4) buyer or processor, and 5) estimated pounds of sablefish on board. Other texting options can be arranged on a case by case basis with ADF&G for individual fishermen.

Two additional regulations were passed by the BOF in 2016. One allows sablefish pots to be longlined. No more than 15 groundfish pots may be attached to the same longline and at least one buoy, properly marked, must be attached to each end of the longline (5AAC 28.330 (c)). In addition, BOF passed a regulation clarifying log sheet requirements in the sablefish fishery (5AAC 28.360 (b)). This new regulation lists the information that must be reported on log sheets. Log sheets must be submitted with fish tickets (new requirement), within seven days of landing.

Rockfish – The Cook Inlet Rockfish Management Plan, regulation 5 AAC 28.365, 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 allowances are 10% during directed groundfish and halibut fisheries. A jig-only (mechanical or hand troll) fishery targeting **pelagic shelf rockfish** (PSR), defined in 5 AAC 39.975 as black, dark, dusky, widow, yellowtail, and blue rockfish, opens July 1 and allows rockfish bycatch up to 20% for non-PSR species. Participation in the directed fishery requires a Cook Inlet Area 2018 directed rockfish fishery registration and log sheets, which are available at ADF&G offices. There is a **150,000 lb GHL** for all rockfish species combined in the Cook Inlet Area. Black and dark rockfish in federal waters of the CI

Area are managed by ADF&G as part of the Cook Inlet Area 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; these trip limits apply to a period of five consecutive days.

Prior notice of landing (PNOL) for the Cook Inlet Area was adopted into regulation by the BOF for the directed rockfish fishery at the December 2016 meeting. Fishermen are required to check out with ADF&G after each directed pelagic rockfish jig trip in the Cook Inlet Area by telephoning (907) 226-2121 at least 6 hours prior to landing and must report the following information: 1) vessel name/ADF&G#, 2) date and location of landing, 3) estimated time of arrival, 4) buyer or processor, and 5) estimated pounds of rockfish onboard. Other texting options can be arranged on a case by case basis with the department for individual fishermen. In addition, BOF passed a regulation clarifying log sheet requirements (5AAC 28.365 (e)(1)). This new regulation lists the information that must be reported on log sheets. Log sheets must be turned in along with fish tickets (new requirement), within seven days of landing.

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**. Participation in the directed fishery requires a Cook Inlet Area 2018 lingcod fishery registration, which is available at ADF&G offices. Lingcod may be retained as bycatch to other directed fisheries at the 20% level only when the directed fishery is open. There is a minimum size requirement of 35 inches (5 AAC 28.370). Resurrection Bay, north of a line from Aialik Cape to Cape Resurrection, is closed to retention of lingcod.

Pacific cod – Two Pacific cod fishery seasons, the “parallel” and the “state-waters,” occur within Cook Inlet Area state waters. These seasons have distinct requirements including different registrations and gear limits. Parallel Pacific cod season participants must obtain a Cook Inlet Area 2018 Parallel Pacific Cod Season Registration while state-waters Pacific cod season participants must obtain a separate Cook Inlet Area 2018 State-Waters Pacific Cod Registration. Each registration is specific to gear type, and CI is designated an exclusive registration area during the state-waters season. Pot tags are also required for pot vessels participating in the state-waters season.

The parallel Pacific cod season will open January 1 for vessels using pot and longline gear and will 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, whereas for pot and longline gear the “B” season will open September 1.

Twenty-four hours following the closure of the initial 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 Area.

The Cook Inlet Area **GHL for the 2018 season is 671,141 lb**. The GHL will be allocated 85% to pot gear (570,470 lb) and 15% to jig gear; only 25% of the total GHL can be harvested by vessels >58 feet fishing with pot gear (167,785 lb). The 2018 GHL decreased 82% from the 2017 GHL (3.6 million lb). A subsequent news release will provide additional fishery information.

Refer to the “General” section at the beginning of this document regarding the VMS and seabird avoidance requirements for parallel fishery participants and information on the NMFS Observer Program. Portions of both Kachemak Bay and Kamishak Bay 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 the Cook Inlet Area closed to fishing with pot gear.

The pot closure area in Kachemak Bay in the Cook Inlet Area was reduced at the BOF meeting in December 2016 (Figure 3).

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) 481-1711 or consult the NMFS website at: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/sslpm>.

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 AAC 28.070(e)).

Skates– There is no directed season for skates in the Cook Inlet Area; however, skates may be retained as bycatch as a percentage of directed finfish species on board a vessel. **The allowable bycatch limit for combined skates is 5%**, which mirrors federal 2018 MRA for the Gulf of Alaska.

Sharks – There is no directed season for sharks (including spiny dogfish) in the Cook Inlet Area, however, these species **may be retained as bycatch up to 15%** of directed finfish species on board a vessel.

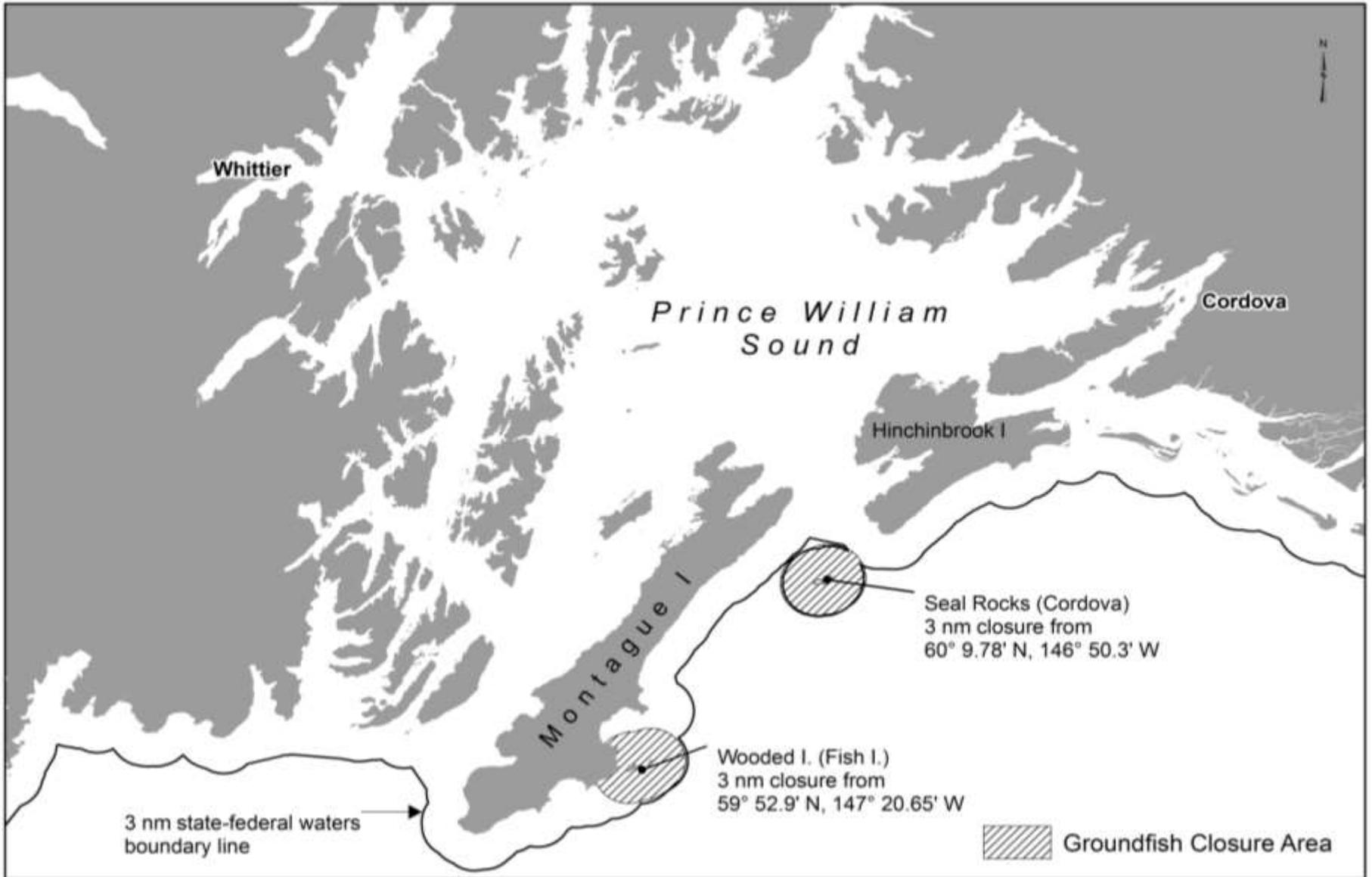


Figure 1.—Directed groundfish fishing closure areas surrounding Steller sea lion rookeries in the Prince William Sound Area.

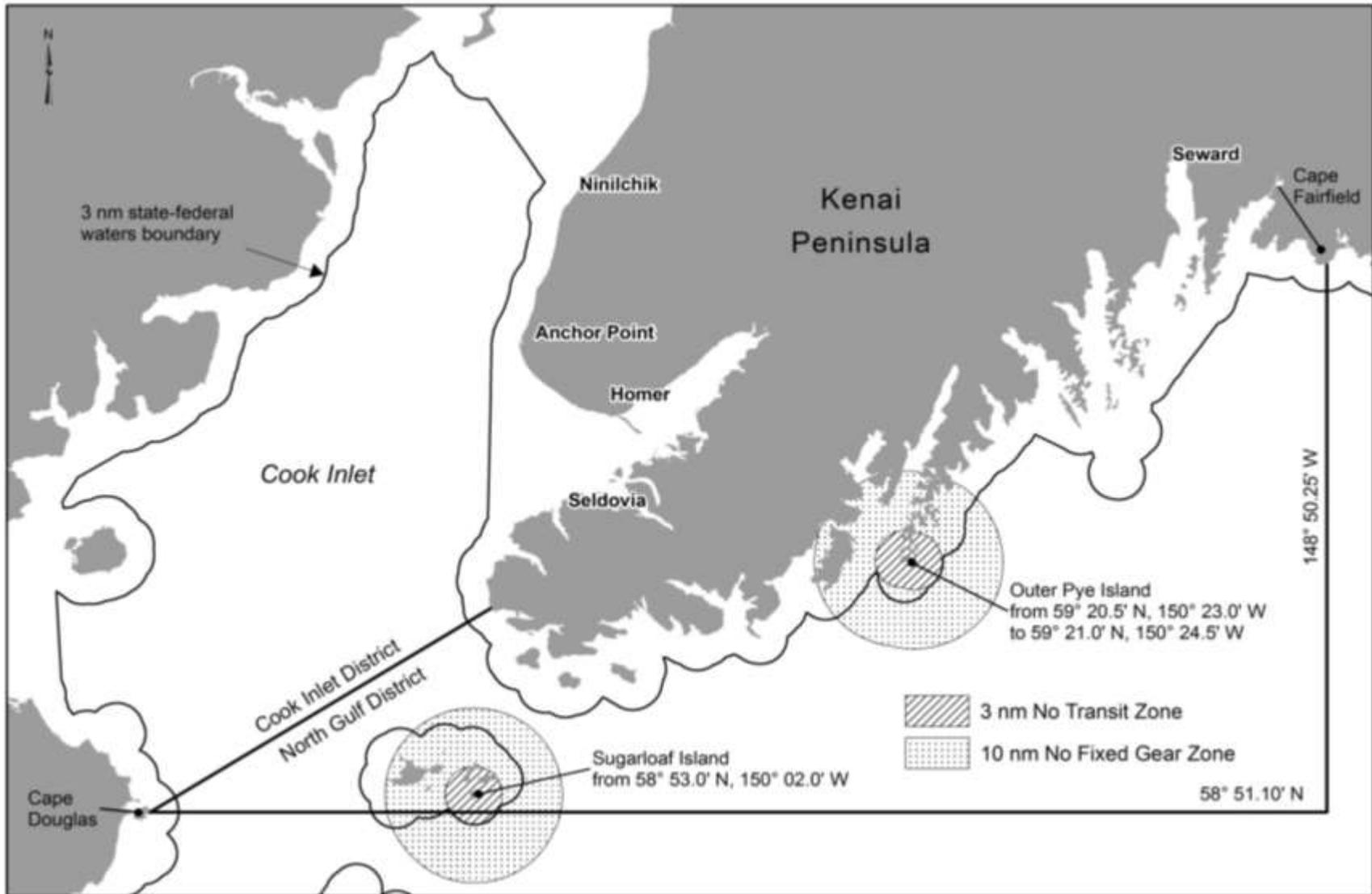


Figure 2.—Vessel no-transit and fixed gear Pacific cod fishing closure zones around Steller sea lion rookeries within the Cook Inlet Area.

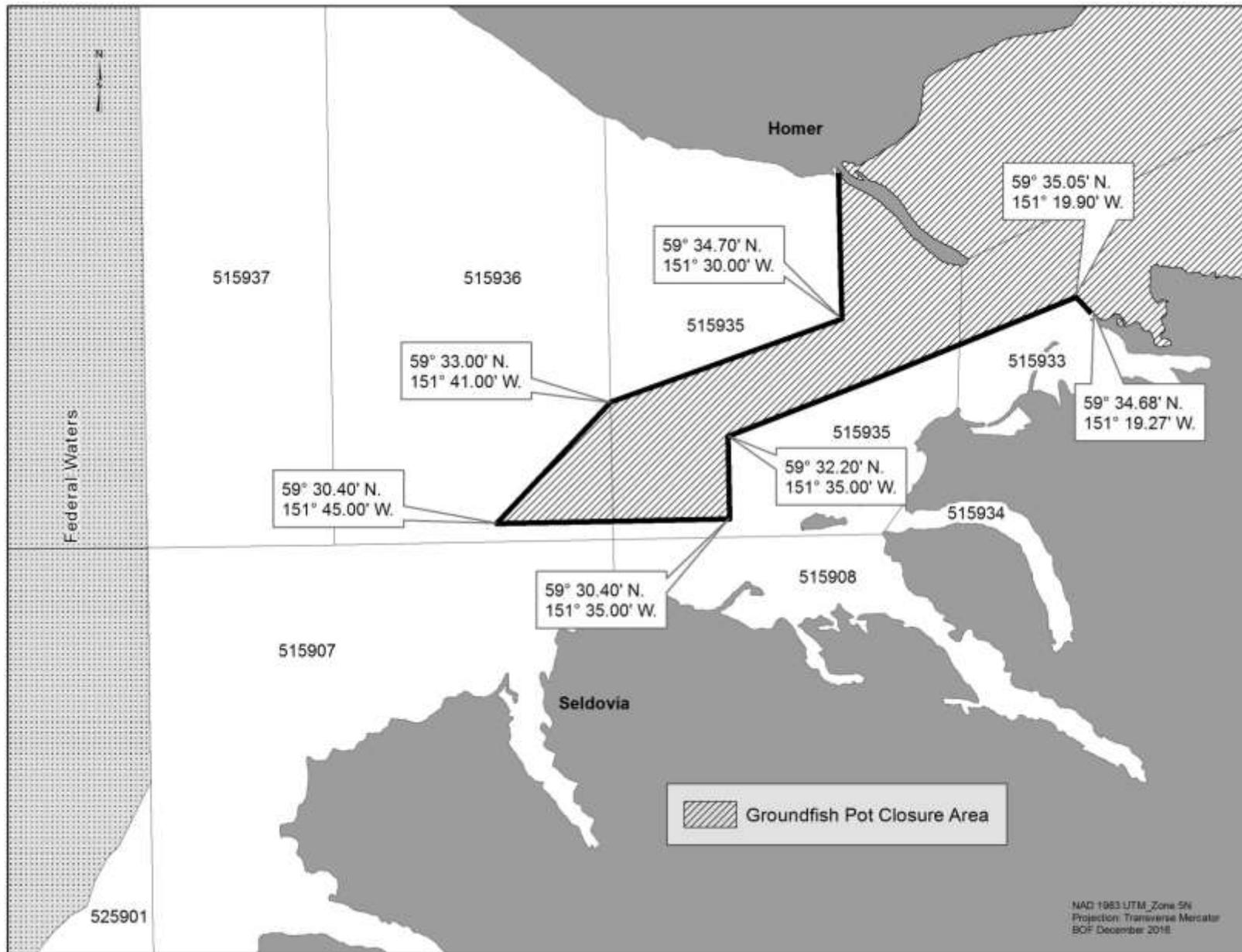


Figure 3.—Updated Kachemak Bay groundfish pot closure area with coordinates for the Cook Inlet Area.