

Prince William Sound State-Waters Walleye Pollock Fishery – Summary

This summary was produced by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) for the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) CGOA Pollock Workgroup. The purpose of the summary is to provide information regarding the Prince William Sound State-Waters walleye pollock fishery.

Regulations

The Prince William Sound (PWS) directed pollock trawl fishery began in 1995 when Kodiak based trawlers and a Cordova processor combined efforts to establish the fishery, and was adopted into regulation in 2000 (5 AAC 28.263). The fishery has a registration deadline of January 13 (5 AAC 28.206) and the season opens at 12:00 noon January 20. There is a regulatory closure date of March 31 in order to avoid herring bycatch. The fishery occurs in the Inside District, which is further divided into three sections described in 5 AAC 28.263 (a); no more than 60 percent of the guideline harvest level (GHL) may be taken from any one section. Bycatch is restricted to no more than 5 percent of the total round weight of pollock harvested, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) further manages bycatch by apportioning the percentage among the following species groups: rockfish (0.5%), salmon (0.04%), shark (0.96%), squid (3.0%), and other species (0.5%). The directed fishery for pollock in PWS has typically experienced low bycatch rates relative to many other groundfish fisheries.

Guideline Harvest Level (GHL)

The GHL is deducted from the combined federal Western, Central, and West Yakutat Gulf of Alaska Regulatory Area (W/C/WYAK) acceptable biological catch (ABC), and has ranged from 2.0 million lb in 2004 and 2005 to 8.7 million lb in 2014 (Table 1). ADF&G has used several different approaches to determine the GHL through the years including: 1) applying 8–10% harvest rates to biomass estimates derived from ADF&G summer bottom trawl assessment surveys, 2) derivations from a spring acoustic survey biomass estimate, 3) mirroring relative annual changes in harvest levels in federal waters of the Gulf of Alaska, and 4) applying the Tier 5 approach similar to that used by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to establish the ABC for some groundfish species. Starting with the 2013 season, ADF&G and the Groundfish Plan team agreed to calculate the PWS directed pollock trawl fishery GHL as 2.5% of the W/C/WYAK ABC. This percentage was justified as the midpoint between the 2001–2010 average of GHL percent of W/C/WYAK ABC (2.44%) and the 1996 and 2012 level (2.55%).

ADF&G has and may reserve a percentage of the calculated GHL for a test fishery. Revenues from these test fisheries are used to fund PWS commercial fishery management, including groundfish stock assessment and inseason pollock catch sampling.

Management

Inseason management during the PWS state-waters Pollock fishery is intensive with close contact between the fleet and the manager because of the 60 % harvest limit in any one of the three sections as well as bycatch limits. Management requirements include mandatory check-in and check-out procedures before fishing in or leaving a management section as well as logbooks. The majority of the fleet transits from Kodiak, which increases the lead time necessary to make management decisions. Trip limits of 300,000 lb are established in regulation (5 AAC 28.073) and are an important management tool in which helps to control the rate of harvest in the fishery. Vessels frequently achieve this limit in less than 10 hours of fishing time, making this a quick

paced fishery. ADF&G closely monitors bycatch and has and may close the season when bycatch limits are achieved.

Effort

Interest and participation has varied from a maximum of 33 vessels registered during the 1999 season to a minimum of six vessels registered during the 2003 season. An average of 37% of those vessels have participated although interest has been rising in recent years; in 2013, 52% of registered vessels (14) participated and in 2014, 68% of registered vessels (19) participated, the highest levels in the history of the fishery.

The length of the season has varied. In the earliest years of the fishery, the season lasted approximately one week. Between 1999 and 2010, season length varied between 36 days and 84 days, and the season has shortened to 14 days to 21 days in recent seasons (2011–2013). The 2014 season was only 7 days long. Because of section harvest caps which were instituted in 2000, individual sections may close in advance of season closures. These section closures show similar trends with lengths between 20 days and 84 days during 2000 to 2010, and between 2 and 13 days in recent years (2011–2014).

Inseason Sampling

Sampling the harvest is accomplished by dockside sampling and fisherman interviews. Staff from the groundfish sampling program travel from Homer to Seward and Kodiak in order to achieve their sampling goals during the season. Additionally, if a test fishery is prosecuted, ADF&G typically requires a department observer onboard the vessel.

Bycatch

Although bycatch in this fishery is low relative to other groundfish fisheries, bycatch rates have sometimes warranted management measures; bycatch is shown in Table 2 as both pounds harvested and as a percentage of round weight of pollock harvested. In 2002, when there was a dramatic increase in bycatch rates for all species, committee meetings at the Alaska Board of Fisheries determined that ADF&G would encourage cleaner fishing practices by instituting the bycatch limits which are outlined in the regulations section of this document. While it is feasible to close the fishery when a bycatch cap is approached or has been met, full accounting of bycatch may not be available until after the closure of the fishery, when all fish ticket data are reviewed.

Here are several examples of fishery closures due to bycatch limits being achieved:

In 2008, only 38% of the 2008 GHL was harvested due to closure of the fishery when the rockfish bycatch cap was exceeded; the Hinchinbrook section was closed on March 7 and the remaining sections (Knight Island and Bainbridge) closed on March 17.

In 2009, the fishery was closed before attainment of the GHL due to exceeding both the miscellaneous finfish and rockfish bycatch caps; the Hinchinbrook section was closed on February 11 and the remaining sections closed on March 21.

In 2014, the fishery closed before attainment of the GHL when the rockfish bycatch cap was exceeded; all sections were closed on January 27.

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Table 1.—Annual guideline harvest level (GHL), season length, number of vessels, and harvest from the Prince William Sound pollock fishery, 1995–2014.

Year	GHL (million lb)	Season Days	Vessels	Harvest (lb)	Harvest (% of GHL)	Test Fish (lb)
1995	2.1-4.4	26	9	6,325,575	144%	215,025
1996	3.1	5	11	3,265,740	106%	421,137
1997	3.9	8	10	4,319,707	98%	539,123
1998	3.9	7	11	4,031,725	102%	631,751
1999	4.6	36	6	4,673,074	106%	490,761
2000 ^a	3.1	70	4	2,256,504	72%	366,724
2001	3.1	64	^b	^b	^b	381,502
2002	3.8	70	3	2,364,143	62%	177,071
2003	3.8	84	3	2,421,773	55%	54,224
2004	2.0	68	3	1,928,458	95%	400,677
2005	2.0	48	6	1,677,157	38%	317,183
2006	3.6	58	8	3,486,449	96%	590
2007	3.6	69	5	2,339,978	53%	259,155
2008	3.6	56	5	1,395,933	38%	0
2009	3.6	60	8	3,249,441	74%	300,806
2010	3.6	42	11	3,662,919	101%	311,853
2011	3.6	17	7	3,377,325	77%	339,683
2012	6.1	24	9	5,785,295	95%	0
2013	5.8	14	14	5,779,241	100%	488,666
2014	8.6	7	19	5,220,121	61%	0
Average 2000–2014	4.0	50	7	3,210,338	73%	299,768

^a Pollock harvest sections were created in 2000.

^b Confidential information.

Table 2.—Pollock harvest and bycatch by species or group in the Prince William Sound pollock fishery, 1995–2014.

Year	Pollock Harvest	Reported Bycatch ^{ab}										Total Bycatch	
		Rockfish		Salmon		Shark		Squid		Misc.		lb	%
		lb	%	lb	%	lb	%	lb	%	lb	%		
1995	6,325,575	67	0.00	104	0.00	378	0.01	1,346	0.02	2,308	0.04	4,203	0.07
1996	3,265,740	13	0.00	0	0.00	2,738	0.08	468	0.01	3,884	0.12	7,103	0.22
1997	4,319,707	12	0.00	90	0.00	648	0.02	18,316	0.42	2,188	0.05	21,254	0.49
1998	4,013,725	10	0.00	371	0.01	8,026	0.20	23,577	0.59	10,293	0.26	42,277	1.05
1999	4,673,074	325	0.01	2,148	0.05	14,133	0.30	6,162	0.13	3,135	0.07	25,903	0.55
2000	2,256,504	1,421	0.06	860	0.04	2,042	0.09	5,880	0.26	982	0.04	11,185	0.50
2001	3,128,037	4,211	0.13	655	0.02	4,084	0.13	31,101	0.99	1,644	0.05	41,695	1.33
2002	2,364,143	30,172	1.28	1,274	0.05	52,486	2.22	180,250	7.62	3,431	0.15	267,613	11.32
2003	2,421,773	3,912	0.16	195	0.01	8,054	0.33	20,547	0.85	8,385	0.35	41,093	1.70
2004	1,928,458	3,236	0.17	151	0.01	3,648	0.19	11,175	0.58	3,848	0.20	22,058	1.14
2005	1,677,157	8,289	0.49	775	0.05	11,483	0.68	6,044	0.36	9,841	0.59	36,432	2.17
2006	3,486,499	11,303	0.32	672	0.02	3,410	0.10	31,768	0.91	17,846	0.51	64,999	1.86
2007	2,339,978	10,262	0.44	836	0.04	2,650	0.11	11,155	0.48	2,233	0.10	27,136	1.15
2008	1,395,933	20,790	1.49	48	0.00	1,550	0.11	30,619	2.19	1,066	0.08	54,073	3.87
2009	3,249,441	21,100	0.65	142	0.00	19,101	0.59	15,747	0.48	14,108	0.43	70,199	2.16
2010	3,662,919	3,703	0.10	223	0.01	3,133	0.09	17,052	0.47	21,741	0.59	45,852	1.25
2011	3,377,325	5,290	0.16	50	0.00	411	0.01	15,006	0.44	2,410	0.07	23,167	0.69
2012	5,785,295	16,916	0.29	1,431	0.02	1,810	0.03	8,123	0.14	12,670	0.22	40,950	0.71
2013	5,779,241	27,824	0.48	61	0.00	3,230	0.06	86,116	1.49	3,401	0.06	120,632	2.09
2014	5,220,121	67,446	1.29	260	0.00	526	0.01	171,946	3.29	24,322	0.47	264,500	5.07

^a Includes at-sea discards.

^b 1995–2006 data from Berceli et al., Special publication No. 08-12; 2007–2014 data from OceanAK database.