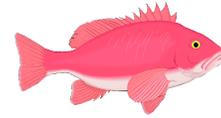


**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME  
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES  
NEWS RELEASE**



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**FISHERY ANNOUNCEMENT  
2016 CENTRAL REGION GROUND FISH FISHERIES OUTLOOK  
EO # 2-GF-H-01-16 and # 2-GF-E-01-16**

**General**

This annual news release provides a brief overview of Cook Inlet (CI) and Prince William Sound (PWS) commercial groundfish fishing opportunities for the 2016 calendar year.

Fishermen, processors, and buyers are reminded that they must adhere to the 2015-2016 Groundfish Fishery Commercial Fishing Regulations available at 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](http://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 limited entry permit card. In addition, all vessels operating gear for groundfish must possess a fishery-specific 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 from department 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 area office, Homer or Cordova, for the fishery in which you want to participate.

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 EO, 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 GHF 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 (e) & 5 AAC 28.075) require that all captured Pacific cod or pollock shall be retained by the fisherman and accepted by a buyer. When a directed fishery is closed for these species, all Pacific cod or pollock harvested must be retained up to the maximum retainable bycatch limits.

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: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds/guide.htm> 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: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/vms/>.

NMFS continues to implement the North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program with changes and improvements in 2016. 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 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 13.1 million pound guideline harvest level (GHL). Fishermen must obtain a 2016 Pollock Fishery Registration from the department no later than 5:00 pm Wednesday, January 13, in order to participate. In-season catch reports, logbooks, and accommodation of a department observer upon request are required (5 AAC 28.263).

Department observers will be deployed during the 2016 season. Coordination for deployment of observers will be critical and a preseason plan will be communicated to the fishery registrants.

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 can and must be retained (5 AAC 28.070 (e)). The department will solicit bids for a test fishery, which funds groundfish research in PWS, before the season begins; the available harvest will be 900,000 lb.

**Sablefish** – PWS limited entry sablefish permit holders must obtain a PWS management area 2016 Sablefish Registration no later than 5:00 pm Wednesday, April 1, in order to participate in the 2016 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 2015 harvest (16,910 lb) was the lowest harvest in the history of the fishery; far below the guideline harvest level of 122,000 lb. Catch per unit effort (CPUE) in 2015 was also at its lowest level and has been in a general decline since 2000. Because of the low harvest level and corresponding CPUE, the department is currently determining how to adjust the GHL for the

2016 season, and will distribute a news release during the first week of April outlining 2016 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 an ongoing problem, resulting 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 and parallel 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 an ADF&G PWS management area 2016 Lingcod 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. 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 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 2016 Parallel Pacific Cod Season Registration while state-waters Pacific cod season participants must obtain a separate PWS 2016 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.

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 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. A new regulation adopted by the Board of Fisheries at the December 2014 meeting removed the triggered closure at 90% for pot gear and allocates 15% of the GHL to pot and jig gear combined; it also designated the PWS Area as a nonexclusive registration area during the state-waters season for jig gear only.

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 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, 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 jig gear.

The Prince William Sound Area Pacific cod state-waters fishery GHl for the 2016 season is 4.84 million pounds. A subsequent news release will provide additional fishery information.

**Skates**– There is no directed season for skates in PWS; however, skates may only be retained as bycatch as a percentage of directed finfish species on board a vessel. In 2016, PWS and CI skate bycatch limits will follow the federal waters reduction in maximum retainable amounts (MRA) for the Gulf of Alaska (GOA), therefore the bycatch limit for combined skates has been reduced to 5%.

**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 regulatory directed fishery for walleye 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)).

Although there is no regulatory directed fishery for pollock, there has been a limited Commissioners Permit pollock fishery using seine gear prosecuted for the past two years with two participants. This fishery will most likely continue in 2016.

**Sablefish** – The season will open at 12:00 noon July 15 by emergency order with a fishery GHl of 48,000 pounds. Participation in the fishery requires a Cook Inlet Area 2016 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** – 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 2016 Directed Pelagic Rockfish Jig Fishery Registration and logbooks, which are available at department 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 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; these trip limits apply to a period of five consecutive days.

**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 2016 Directed Lingcod Jig Fishery Registration, which are available at department offices. 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** – 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 2016 Parallel Pacific Cod Season Registration while state-waters Pacific cod season participants must obtain a separate Cook Inlet Area 2016 State-Waters Pacific Cod Registration; each registration is specific to gear type, and the CI Area 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, while other fixed gear types 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 Management Area. The Cook Inlet Area GHL for the 2016 season is 4.08 million pounds. The GHL will be allocated 85% to pot gear and 15% to jig gear. 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 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 907-481-1711 or consult the NMFS website at: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/regs/679b22.pdf>.

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**– There is no directed season for skates in the Cook Inlet Area; however, skates may only be retained as bycatch as a percentage of directed finfish species on board a vessel. In 2016, PWS and CI skate bycatch limits will follow the federal waters reduction in maximum retainable amounts (MRA) for the Gulf of Alaska (GOA), therefore the bycatch limit for combined skates has been reduced to 5%.

**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.

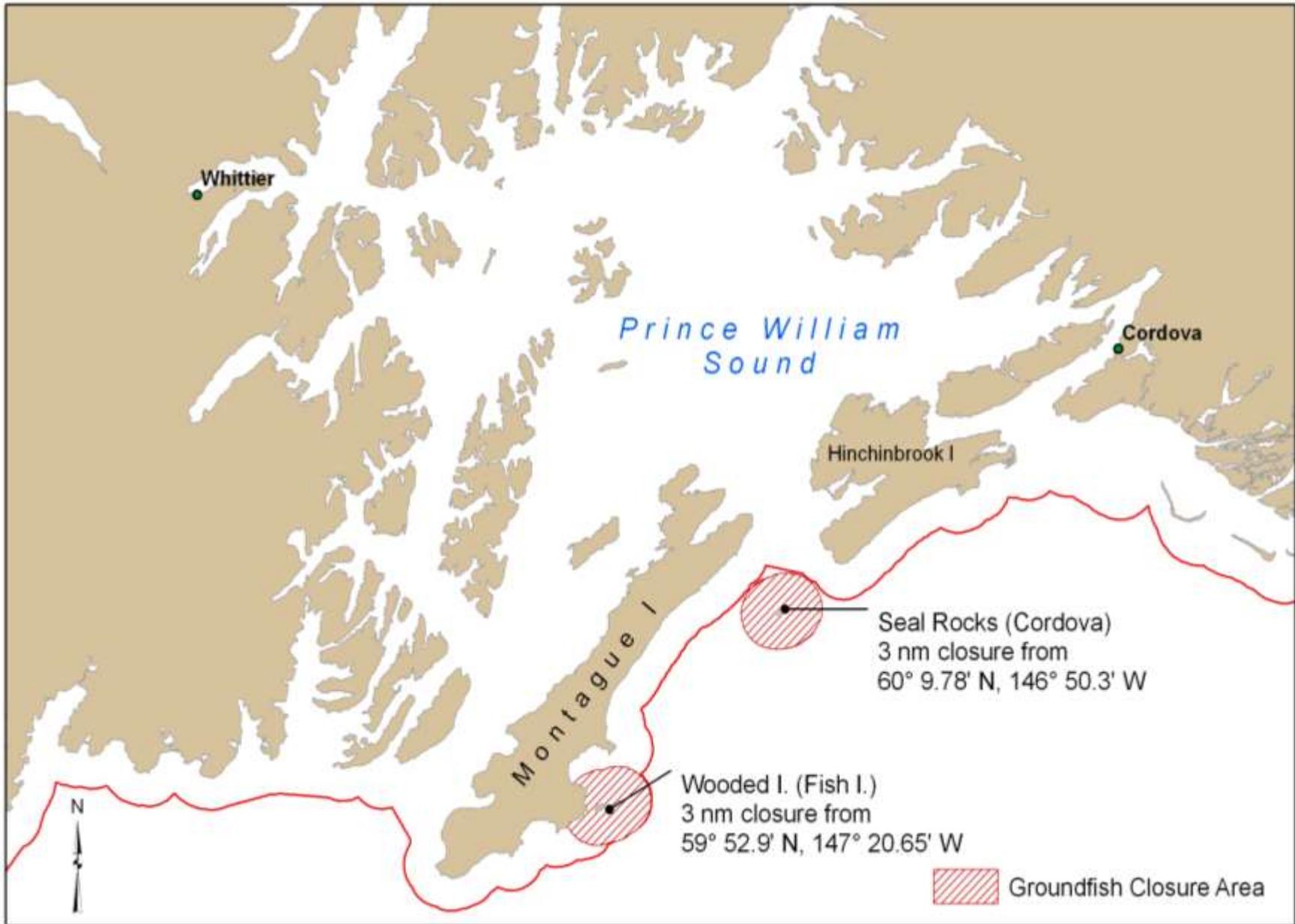


Figure 1. Directed groundfish fishing closure areas surrounding Steller sea lion rookeries in the Prince William Sound Area.

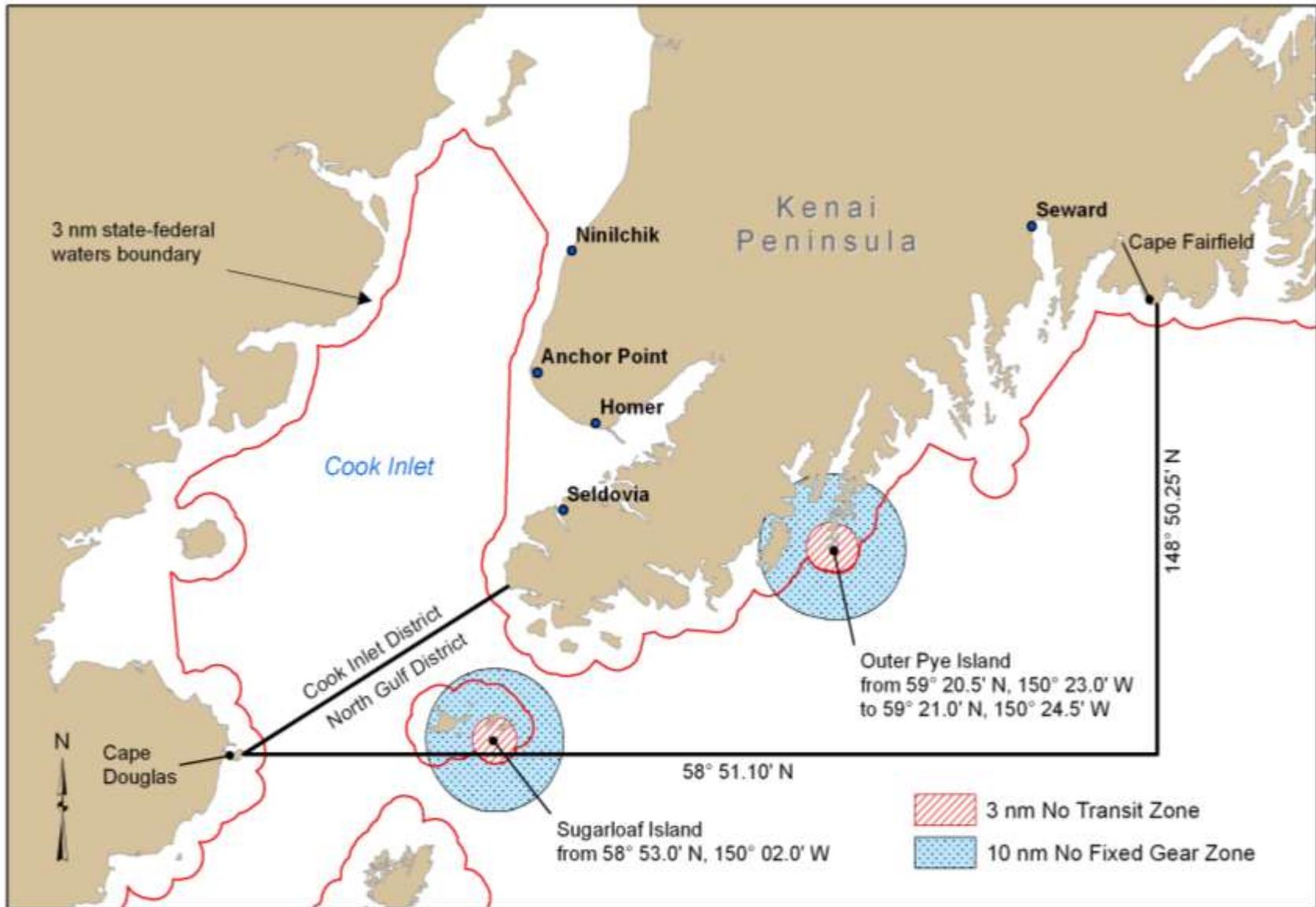


Figure 2. Vessel no-transit and fixed gear Pacific cod fishing closure zones around Steller sea lion rookeries within the Cook Inlet Management Area.