



Advisory Announcement

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CONTACT:

Martin Schuster, Area Management Biologist
Andy Pollak, Asst. Area Management Biologist
(907) 235-8191

Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet Areas 2026 Groundfish Fisheries Outlook

Emergency Orders # 2-GF-E-01-26 and # 2-GF-H-01-26

Scan me for links to registrations,
logbooks, harvest information, etc!



General

This annual advisory announcement provides a brief overview of Prince William Sound Area (PWS) and Cook Inlet Area (CI) commercial groundfish fishing opportunities for the 2026 calendar year.

Fishers, processors, and buyers must adhere to current Statewide Commercial Groundfish Fishing Regulations available online at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishregulations.commercial> or from ADF&G offices in Homer, Cordova (907-424-3212), Anchorage (907-267-2104), and Soldotna (907-262-9368). Contact the Homer office with groundfish regulatory and registration questions (907-235-8191).

To land groundfish or halibut, an individual must possess a gear-specific, valid Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) interim-use or limited entry permit card. In addition, all vessels operating gear for groundfish, in state-waters fisheries, must possess a valid 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. Area registrations and fishery logbooks may be obtained at these links:

CI: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareacookinlet.groundfish>

PWS: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareapws.groundfish>

Registrations may also be obtained in person from ADF&G offices in Homer, Cordova, Anchorage, Soldotna, and Kodiak. A fisher must possess the appropriate CFEC permit card to register for PWS and CI groundfish fisheries. To register by fax or email, contact the Homer office.

Allowable bycatch levels for groundfish species are set by Emergency Order (EO) and are listed below under the species headings for each respective management area. Any bycatch in excess of the allowances listed 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.

The department has growing concerns about the status of rockfish stocks. The rockfish Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) in PWS was exceeded in 2022 and 2023 and management actions were taken in 2022–2024 to reduce

rockfish bycatch. To stay within the 2023 annual PWS rockfish GHLL the department reduced rockfish bycatch limits, did not re-open the parallel Pacific cod season, and obtained emergency authority from the Board of Fisheries (BOF) to close areas to commercial fishing with specific gear types. In 2024, the department reduced rockfish bycatch limits. The BOF recently adopted a new regulation at the December 2024 meeting in Cordova, AK to allow ADF&G to close areas of concern in PWS, by gear type, to aid in rockfish conservation efforts. The department is seeking the assistance of fishery participants to set gear away from areas of known rockfish abundance. The rockfish GHLL has not been exceeded in CI in recent years.

When a directed season is open for Pacific cod or walleye pollock, there are regulations for improved retention and improved utilization of groundfish. Statewide regulation 5 AAC 28.070 (e) requires that a 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 allowance 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 allowance of walleye pollock when a directed fishery for walleye pollock is closed.

Additionally, 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).

All groundfish species or fisheries not specifically mentioned in this document will be managed via the miscellaneous groundfish commissioner's permit requirements specified in PWS regulation 5 AAC 28.220 or CI regulation 5 AAC 28.379. Please contact the Homer ADF&G office for more information.

Anyone intending to fish in federal waters, further than 3 nautical miles (nmi) from shore, should contact the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for information prior to fishing.

Area NMFS Offices

Kodiak: 907-486-3298 Juneau: 907-586-7221

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://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/bycatch/seabird-avoidance-gear-and-methods> 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). For additional information, see the NOAA website: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/enforcement/regional-vessel-monitoring-information>.

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: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/fisheries-observers/north-pacific-observer-program> or by contacting the NMFS Sustainable Fisheries Division in Juneau at (907) 586-7228.

Bycatch Allowances

ADF&G bycatch allowances for PWS and CI directed fisheries are summarized below. These may be adjusted in-season by EO. Bycatch allowances are calculated as a round weight from the allowable bycatch percentage of the round weight of the directed fishery harvest on a trip. Please refer to the directed fishery sections below for more detailed information.

Area	Directed Fishery	Pacific cod	Rockfish (includes black and dark in fed water)	Lingcod after July 1 35" or greater (includes from fed water)	Skates	Pollock	Sablefish	Other species (includes octopus)	Shark
Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet Area	Halibut	20%	10%	20%	5%	20%	0%	20%	15%
Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet Area	Lingcod	20%	10%	n/a	5%	20%	0%	20%	15%
Prince William Sound Area	Pacific cod	n/a	5%	20%	5%	20%	0%	20%	15%
Prince William Sound Area	Sablefish	20%	20%	20%	5%	20%	n/a	20%	15%
Cook Inlet Area	Pacific cod	n/a	10%	20%	5%	20%	0%	20%	15%
Cook Inlet Area	Sablefish	20%	10%	20%	5%	20%	n/a	20%	15%
Cook Inlet Area	Pelagic Rockfish	20%	20% non pelagic	20%	5%	20%	0%	20%	15%

Prince William Sound Area

The PWS Area (5 AAC 28.200) encompasses all 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. (Figure 1).

PWS Inside District: All waters of PWS enclosed by lines from Pt. Whitt 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 east of 147° 00' W. long.

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

Regulation 5 AAC 28.230 (j) prohibits a vessel from having more than one type of gear on board when participating in a groundfish fishery. There are two exceptions, 5 AAC 28.230 (k) where mechanical jigging machines and hand troll gear may be used at the same time. And 5 AAC 28.230 (l) where longline hook gear and longline pot gear may be used at the same time while participating in the state managed sablefish fishery or the IFQ halibut fishery.

The Prince William Sound Science Center (PWSSC) has acoustic receiver moorings set in PWS. Moorings are located near Hinchinbrook entrance, Montague Strait, the southwest passages (Latouche, Elrington, Prince of Wales, and Bainbridge), Canoe Pass/Cedar Bay, Red Head, Gravina, Glacier Island, NW Montague Strait (3 moorings), and Knight Island Passage (2 moorings). Maps are provided to pollock fishers at the time of registration, online at <http://pwssc.org/locations-of-pws-acoustic-arrays/>, and available by request at ADF&G offices in Homer, Cordova, and Anchorage; contact PWSSC in Cordova at 907-424-5800 for more information.

Pollock – The directed pollock pelagic trawl fishery will open at 12:00 noon January 20 with a 7.3 million lb guideline harvest level (GHL), a 26% decrease from the 2025 GHL. Fishers must have a valid 2026 PWS Pollock Fishery Registration from ADF&G no later than 4:30 p.m. January 13. (5 AAC 28.206). In-season catch reports, log sheets, and accommodation of an ADF&G observer upon request are required (5 AAC 28.263). Log sheets are available at the link posted above to the ADF&G website. Log sheets must be submitted with fish tickets within seven days of landing. Fishery participant packets with more detailed information will be distributed with each validated registration.

Pollock trip limits are 300,000 lb; harvest above 300,000 lb must be documented as an overage on the fish ticket. Overage proceeds must include a relative percentage of sold pollock consistent with disposition codes reported on the fish ticket for all pollock landed. Therefore, a pollock trip limit overage will contain both pollock with disposition sold and other applicable disposition codes (e.g. pollock destined for fish meal). Proceeds from trip limit overages shall be submitted to ADF&G in Homer by the processor by check with a copy of the fish ticket documenting the overage.

Sablefish – PWS limited entry sablefish permit holders must obtain a 2026 PWS Sablefish Registration no later than 5:00 pm, February 20 to participate (5 AAC 28.206). Fishery season dates will open in conjunction with the IFQ opening of halibut and close December 31 by regulation unless closed earlier by EO. (5 AAC 28.210 (b)). The GHF is divided among registered permit holders under the shared quota system 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 2026 PWS sablefish GHF is 261,000 lb, down 1% from 2025. After the registration deadline, ADF&G will distribute an announcement in the first week of March outlining 2026 harvest allocation by permit class.

A prior notice of landing (PNOL) is required for the PWS sablefish fishery. Fishers are required to contact ADF&G at least 6 hours prior to landing by telephoning (907) 424-7225 or by setting up alternative communication plans before fishing. Details to report are outlined on the registration.

Sablefish in PWS may not be retained as bycatch. Whale depredation on hooked sablefish has been an ongoing issue, resulting in the removal of unknown numbers of sablefish during longline retrieval; fishers may document this by reporting any whale depredation on log sheets. In the PWS sablefish fishery, groundfish pots must be longlined (5 AAC 28.230 (c)(d)).

Rockfish – Rockfish in PWS may only be retained as bycatch to other directed groundfish and halibut fisheries. The PWS Rockfish Management Plan, 5 AAC 28.265, requires full retention of all rockfish, except for rockfish caught on mechanical jig and handtroll gear. Rockfish caught as bycatch using mechanical jig or handtroll gear may be released using an approved deep water release (DWR) device. Approved DWR device videos can be found here - [Deepwater Release and Rockfish Conservation - YouTube](#) and information about them may also be obtained at the Homer ADF&G office. 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. All rockfish harvest must be weighed by species and reported on a fish ticket. Proceeds from the sale of any bycatch overage must be paid to the State of Alaska. There is an overall rockfish GHF of 150,000 lb and a 5-day trip limit of 3,000 lb. Black and dark rockfish in federal waters of PWS are managed by ADF&G and accrue to the GHF. The department is seeking the assistance of participants in directed fisheries to set gear away from areas of known rockfish concentrations. Voluntary measures taken to aid in the conservation of rockfish are greatly appreciated.

Lingcod – ADF&G manages lingcod in both state and federal waters. Lingcod may not be retained until July 1. GHFs for the 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 groundfish or halibut species on board a vessel. 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 sex determination, so that biological sampling goals can be met. A PNOL is required for the PWS directed lingcod fishery. Fishers are required to contact ADF&G at least 6 hours prior to landing by telephoning (907) 226-2121 or by setting up alternative communication plans before fishing.

Pacific cod – Two Pacific cod fishery seasons, the “parallel” and the “state-waters” seasons, occur within PWS state waters. These seasons have distinct requirements including different gear limits and independent registration forms. Each registration is specific to gear type, and PWS is designated an exclusive registration area for vessels using longline hook and pot gear, and a nonexclusive registration area for vessels using jig gear, during the state-waters season. PWS is a nonexclusive registration area during the parallel season for all gear types. A 60-pot limit

and pot tags are required for pot vessels participating in the state-waters season. Since March of 2023, groundfish pots may be longlined in the state-waters Pacific cod pot fishery (5AAC 28.230 (c)). Each end of the buoy line must be marked and each pot must have an ADF&G issued pot tag attached. Further marking regulations are defined in 5AAC 28.230 (d)(2)).

The parallel Pacific cod season will open January 1 and will be managed concurrently with NMFS management of the Pacific cod fisheries in adjacent federal waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska (CGOA). The federal CGOA Pacific cod “B” season for vessels using jig gear may open June 10, whereas for pot and longline gear the “B” season may open September 1. Longlining of groundfish pots is not permitted in any parallel Pacific cod season.

The state-waters Pacific cod season will open to longline hook gear seven days following the closure of the less than 50 foot parallel longline hook season, 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. Participants in the state-waters Pacific cod season are required to check in with the department prior to each fishing trip by telephoning (907) 424-7225; this requirement is detailed on the area registration form.

The 2026 PWS Pacific cod state-waters season GHF is 1.5 million lb, a 6% decrease from the 2025 season. In 2026 the GHF is allocated 55% to pot and jig gear combined (833,000 lb) and 45% to longline gear (682,000 lb). A subsequent advisory announcement 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.

Steller sea lion closures: There is a 3 nmi parallel season Pacific cod closure for all gear types surrounding the rookeries at Wooded Island (Fish Island) and Seal Rocks (Figure 1). For specific regulatory language describing the closure areas, contact NMFS in Kodiak at (907) 486-3298 or consult the NMFS website at: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/sslpm>. The federal regulations are also posted on the Code of Federal Regulations website starting at, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-679#Table-5-to-Part-679> or available from NOAA Fisheries offices in Alaska.

Skates – There is no directed season for skates in PWS; however, skates may be retained as bycatch as a percentage, by weight, of directed groundfish or halibut on board a vessel. The allowable bycatch limit for combined skate species is 5%, which mirrors the federal 2026 maximum retainable amount (MRA) for the GOA.

Sharks – There is no directed season for sharks (including spiny dogfish) in PWS; however, these species may be retained as bycatch up to 15%, by weight, of directed groundfish or halibut on board a vessel.

Octopus – The 2026 octopus GHF is 35,000 lb. Octopus may be retained as bycatch to directed PWS fisheries using pot, trawl, or longline hook gear up to 20% by weight of the directed groundfish harvest on board the vessel. Octopus may also be retained through a directed octopus lair pot fishery that was adopted at the 2024 BOF meeting in Cordova, AK. Please contact Homer ADF&G for information regarding this new octopus fishery.

Cook Inlet Area

The CI Area (5 AAC 28.300) encompasses all waters of Alaska 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.; Figure 2).

Cook Inlet District: Waters of Alaska in CI north of a line from Cape Douglas to Point Adam (59° 15.27' N. lat.).

North Gulf District: Waters of Alaska in CI north of the latitude of Cape Douglas, and west of the longitude of Cape Fairfield excluding the CI District.

There is a 3 nmi no transit zone and a 10 nmi parallel Pacific cod season closure for longline hook and pot gear surrounding the rookeries at Sugarloaf and Outer Pye Island (Figure 2).

Pollock – There is no directed fishery for walleye pollock in the CI Area. However, pollock must be retained up to the maximum bycatch allowance of 20% to other directed groundfish or halibut fisheries (5 AAC 28.070 (e)).

Sablefish –The CI sablefish 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 CI only by a vessel registered for the directed fishery and only when the directed season is open.

The 2026 CI sablefish fishery will open April 15 with a GHL of 115,000 lb, a 1% decrease from the 2025 GHL. The GHL is adjusted annually by applying the relative change each year in the NMFS CGOA ABC, which is derived from NMFS stock assessment surveys and adopted by the NPFMC.

A PNOL is required for the CI Area sablefish fishery. Fishers are required to contact ADF&G at least 6 hours prior to landing by telephoning (907) 226-2121 or by setting up alternative communication plans before fishing. Details to report are outlined on the registration form.

Sablefish pots may 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 (5 AAC 28.330 (c)). In addition, there are log sheet requirements in this fishery (5 AAC 28.360 (b)) and log sheets must be submitted with corresponding fish tickets within seven days of landing. Log sheets are available at the link posted above to the ADF&G website.

Rockfish – The CI Rockfish Management Plan (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% to other directed groundfish and halibut fisheries. A jig-only (mechanical jig or hand troll gear) fishery targeting pelagic shelf rockfish (PSR), defined in 5 AAC 39.975 as black, dark, dusky, widow, yellowtail, and deacon rockfish, opens July 1 and allows rockfish bycatch up to 20% for non-PSR species. There is 150,000 lb GHL for all rockfish species combined in CI. Black and dark rockfish in federal waters are managed by ADF&G as part of the CI 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; trip limits apply to a five consecutive day period.

A PNOL is required for the CI directed pelagic rockfish fishery. Fishers are required to contact ADF&G at least 6 hours prior to landing by telephoning (907) 226-2121 or by setting up alternative communication plans before fishing. In addition, there are log sheet requirements (5AAC 28.365 (e)(1)); log sheets must be submitted with corresponding fish tickets within seven days of landing. Log sheets are available at the link posted above to the ADF&G website.

Lingcod – ADF&G manages lingcod in both state and federal waters. Lingcod may be retained starting July 1 as bycatch, up to 20%, to other directed groundfish fisheries and during the directed lingcod fishery. Directed fishing for lingcod is restricted to harvest with jig (mechanical and hand troll) gear. The GHL for CI lingcod is 52,500 lb. 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.

A PNOL is required for the CI directed lingcod fishery. Fishers are required to contact ADF&G at least 6 hours prior to landing by telephoning (907) 226-2121 or by setting up alternative communication plans before fishing. There is no log sheet requirement for the directed lingcod fishery, but participants are encouraged to use log sheets from the directed rockfish fishery to provide the department with more information on lingcod harvest.

Pacific cod – Two Pacific cod fishery seasons, the “parallel” and the “state-waters” seasons, occur within CI state waters. These seasons have distinct requirements including different gear limits and independent registration forms. Each registration is specific to gear type, and CI is designated an exclusive registration area during the state-waters season. There is a 60-pot limit and pot tags are required for pot vessels participating in the state-waters season; pots may not be longlined for Pacific cod in CI.

The parallel Pacific cod season will open January 1 for vessels using pot, jig, 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 may open June 10, whereas for pot and longline gear the “B” season may 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. Longline hook gear is not a legal gear type in the CI state-waters Pacific cod season.

The CI GHF for the 2026 season is 1.6 million lb, a 6% decrease from 2025. The GHF will be allocated 85% to pot gear (1,354,000 lb) and 15% to jig gear (239,000 lb); only 25% of the total GHF may be harvested by vessels greater than 58 feet fishing with pot gear (398,000 lb). A subsequent advisory announcement will provide additional fishery information.

Regulations require that Pacific cod be retained up to the maximum bycatch allowance 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)). The maximum bycatch allowance of Pacific cod in CI is 20% to other directed groundfish and halibut fisheries for vessels using longline hook gear, pot gear, or jig gear.

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 (Figures 2 and 3).

Stellar sea lion closures: There is a 3 nmi no transit zone and a 10 nmi parallel season Pacific cod closure for longline hook and pot gear surrounding the rookeries at Sugarloaf and Outer (Pye) Islands (Figure 2). For specific regulatory language describing the closure areas, contact NMFS in Kodiak at (907) 486-3298 or consult the NMFS website at: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/sslpm>. The federal regulations are also posted on the Code of Federal Regulations website starting at, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-679#Table-5-to-Part-679> or available from NOAA Fisheries offices in Alaska.

Skates – There is no directed season for skates in CI; however, skates may be retained as bycatch as a percentage, by weight, of directed groundfish or halibut on board a vessel. The allowable bycatch limit for combined skate species is 5%, which mirrors federal 2026 MRA for GOA.

Sharks – There is no directed season for sharks (including spiny dogfish) in CI, however, these species may be retained as bycatch up to 15%, by weight, of directed groundfish or halibut on board a vessel.

Octopus – Octopus may only be retained as bycatch to directed groundfish fisheries up to 20% by weight to the directed groundfish harvest on board the vessel. Retention of octopus will close by EO when the GHF of 35,000 lb has been reached.

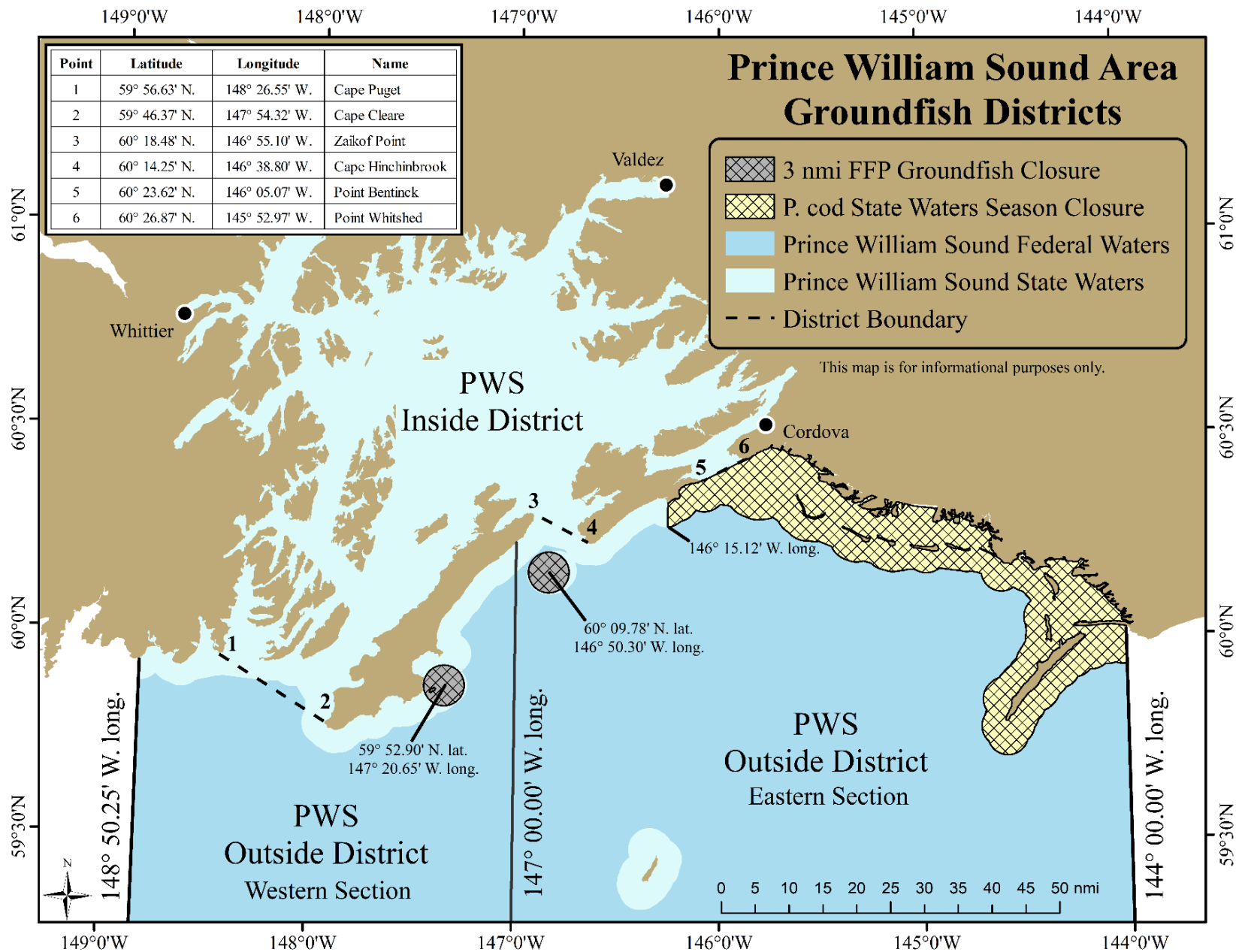


Figure 1.—Prince William Sound Area groundfish districts and closed waters.

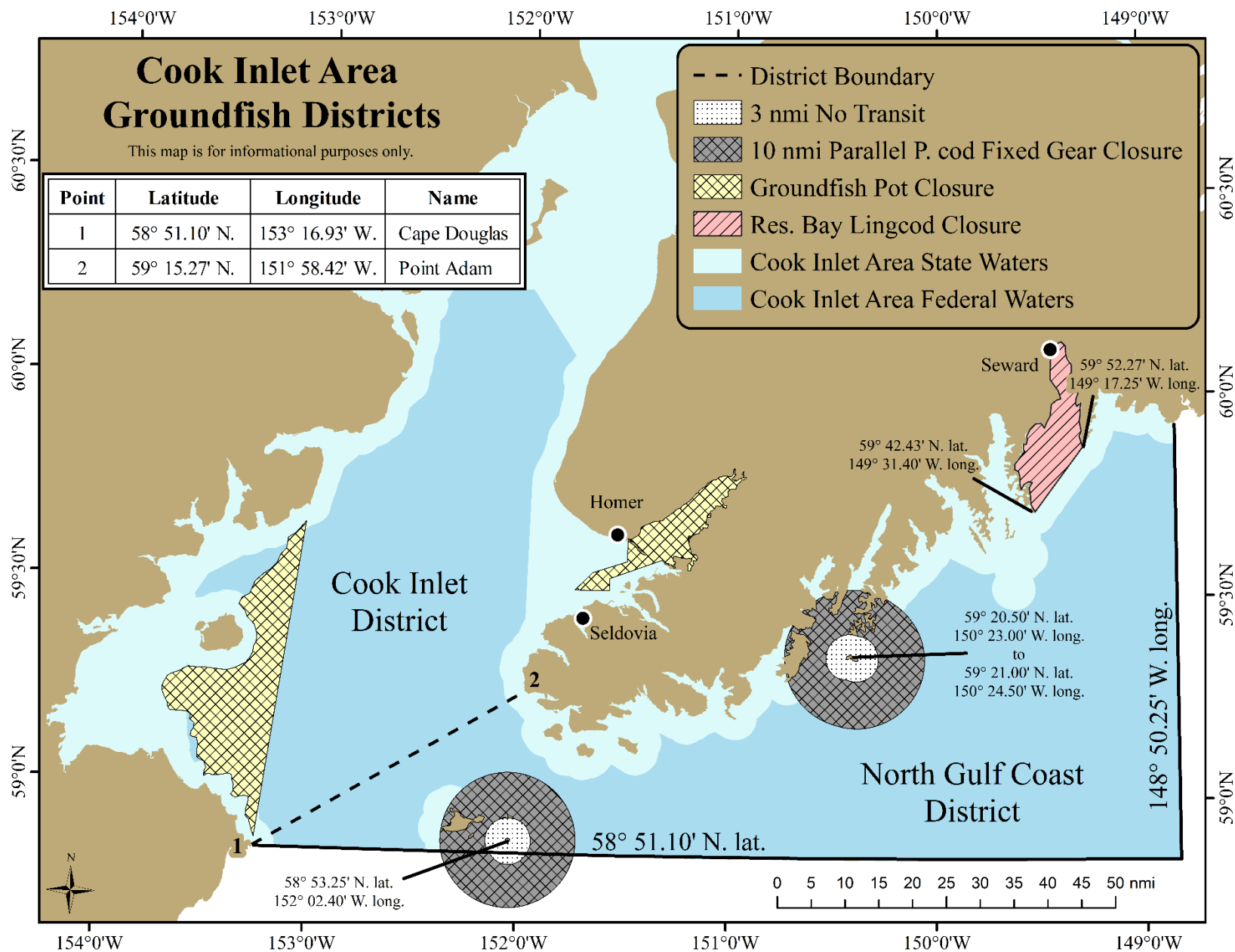


Figure 2.– Cook Inlet Area groundfish districts and closed waters.

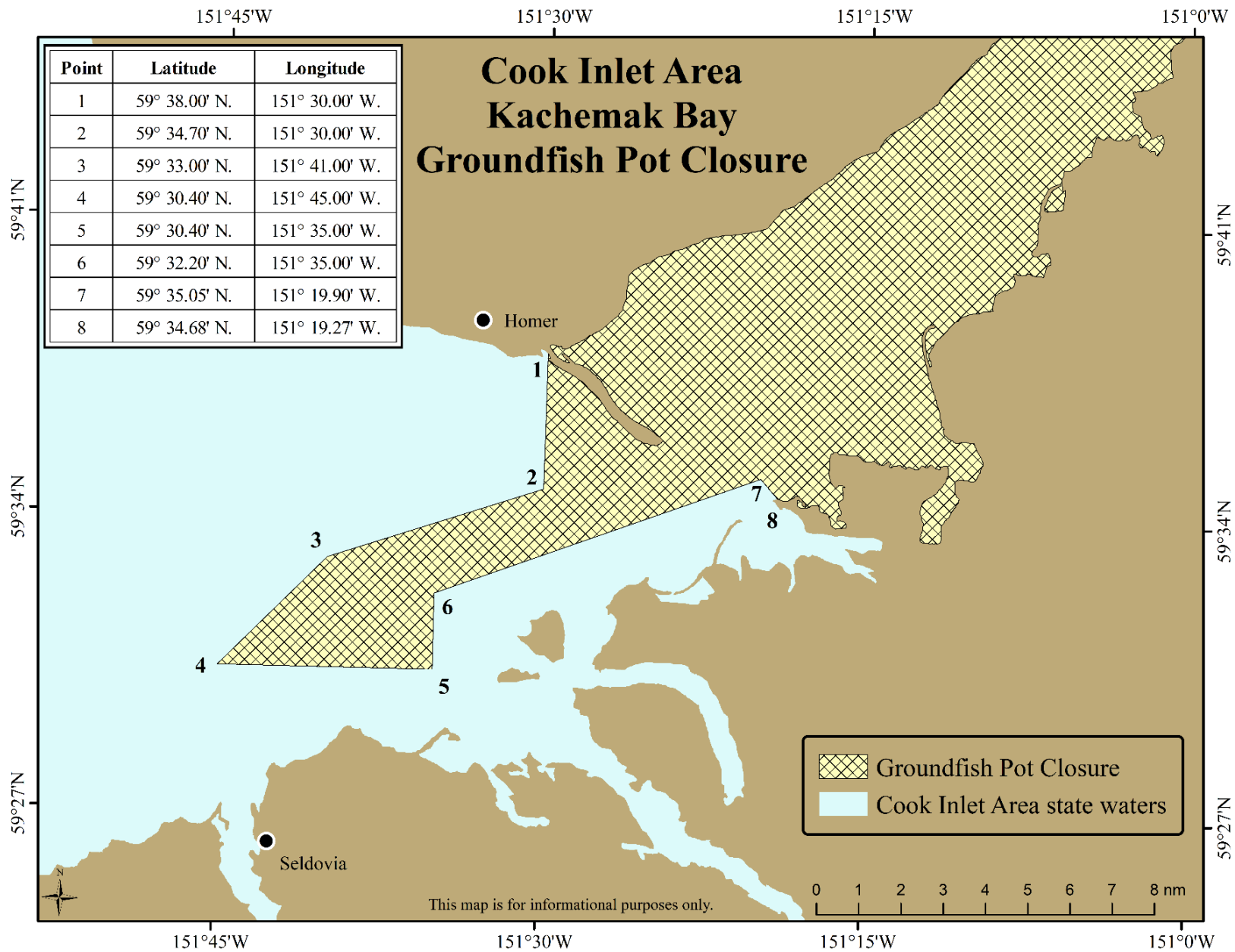


Figure 3.— Kachemak Bay groundfish pot closure area.