

margate, combined, as estimated by the SRD, reach or are projected to reach the commercial complex ACL of 218,539 lb (99,128 kg), round weight, the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to close the commercial sector for this complex for the remainder of the fishing year. * * *

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(ii) * * * If recreational landings for white grunt, sailor's choice, tomtate, and margate, as estimated by the SRD, exceed the recreational ACL of 588,113 lb (266,764 kg), round weight, then during the following fishing year, recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings and, if necessary, the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register, to reduce the length of the following recreational fishing season for this complex by the amount necessary to ensure recreational landings do not exceed the recreational ACL in the following fishing year. * * *

[FR Doc. 2013-06417 Filed 3-20-13; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 130215145-3145-01]

RIN 0648-BD01

Control Date for Qualifying Landings History in the Western Gulf of Alaska Trawl Groundfish Fisheries

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Advance notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPR); control date.

SUMMARY: At the request of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), this notice announces a control date of March 1, 2013, that may be used as a reference for future management actions applicable to, but not limited to, qualifying landings and permit history for an allocation-based management or catch share program in the Western Gulf of Alaska (GOA) trawl groundfish fisheries. This notice is intended to discourage speculative entry into the fisheries while the Council considers whether and how allocations of fishing privileges should be developed under a future management program. The Council selected the control date based on previous fishing

activity in the Western GOA groundfish fisheries, in which the majority of the fishery has concluded by March 1 each year. This notice is publishing close to the control date of March 1, 2013, and so will not either prompt speculation in advance of its publication, or disadvantage any fishers regarding their fishing activity after the control date, but before publication. This notice is also intended to promote awareness of possible rulemaking and provide notice to the public that any accumulation of landings history in the Western GOA trawl groundfish fisheries occurring after the control date may not be credited for purposes of making any allocation under a future management program.

DATES: March 1, 2013, shall be known as the control date for the Western GOA trawl groundfish fisheries and may be used as a reference for allocations in a future management program that is consistent with the Council's objectives and applicable Federal laws.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rachel Baker: 907-586-7228 or rachel.baker@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fisheries in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the GOA under the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP). The Council prepared, and NMFS approved, the FMP under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.* Regulations governing U.S. fisheries and implementing the FMP appear at 50 CFR parts 600 and 679.

This advance notice of proposed rulemaking would apply to owners and operators of catcher vessels and catcher/processors participating in Federal fisheries prosecuted with trawl gear in the Western Reporting Area of the GOA. The Western Reporting Area, defined at § 679.2 and shown in Figure 3 to 50 CFR part 679, includes the Western Regulatory Area (Statistical Area 610).

The Council and NMFS annually establish biological thresholds and annual total allowable catch limits for groundfish species to sustainably manage the groundfish fisheries in the GOA. To achieve these objectives, NMFS requires vessel operators participating in GOA groundfish fisheries to comply with various restrictions, such as fishery closures, to maintain catch within specified total allowable catch limits. The GOA groundfish fishery restrictions also include prohibited species catch (PSC) limits for species that are generally required to be discarded when

harvested. When harvest of a PSC species reaches the specified PSC limit for that fishery, NMFS closes directed fishing for the target groundfish species, even if the total allowable catch limit for that species has not been harvested.

The Council and NMFS have long sought to control the amount of fishing in the North Pacific Ocean to ensure that fisheries are conservatively managed and do not exceed established biological thresholds. One of the measures used by the Council and NMFS is the license limitation program (LLP), which limits access to the groundfish, crab, and scallop fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands and the GOA. The LLP is intended to limit entry into federally managed fisheries. For groundfish, the LLP requires that persons hold and assign a license to each vessel that is used to fish in federally managed fisheries, with some limited exemptions. The preamble to the final rule implementing the groundfish LLP provides a more detailed explanation of the rationale for specific provisions in the LLP (October 1, 1998; 63 FR 52642).

Over the past few years, the Council has recommended amendments to the FMP to reduce the use of PSC in the GOA fisheries. Under Amendment 93 to the FMP, the Council recommended, and NMFS approved, Chinook PSC limits in the GOA pollock (*Theragra chalcogramma*) trawl fisheries (77 FR 42629, July 20, 2012). In June 2012, the Council recommended an FMP amendment to reduce Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) PSC limits for the trawl and longline fisheries in the Central GOA and Western GOA. This series of actions reflects the Council's commitment to reduce PSC in the GOA fisheries. Participants in these fisheries have raised concerns that the current limited access management system creates a substantial disincentive for participants to take actions to reduce PSC usage, particularly if those actions could reduce target catch rates. Additionally, any participants who choose not to take actions to reduce PSC usage stand to gain additional target catch by continuing to harvest groundfish at a higher catch rate, at the expense of any vessels engaged in PSC avoidance. In February 2013, the Council unanimously adopted a purpose and need statement, and goals and objectives, to support the development of a management system that would remove this disincentive to reduce PSC usage in Western GOA trawl groundfish fisheries.

The Council intends to develop a management program that would replace the current limited access

management program with allocations of allowable harvest (catch shares) to individuals, cooperatives, or other entities. The goal of the program is to improve stock conservation by creating vessel-level and/or cooperative-level incentives to control and reduce PSC, and to create accountability measures for participants when utilizing target, secondary, and PSC species. The Council also intends for the program to improve operational efficiencies, reduce incentives to fish during unsafe conditions, and support the continued participation of coastal communities that are dependent on the fisheries. The Council intends to develop an analysis of alternatives for a catch share management program that meets its goals and objectives. In developing the alternatives for analysis, the Council will consider how other fishery management programs have considered and applied MSA catch share provisions to meet similar goals and objectives.

The Council announced a control date of March 1, 2013, to reduce the incentive for, and dampen the effect of, speculative entry into the Western GOA trawl groundfish fisheries in anticipation of the future management program. The Council intended to establish a control date as soon as possible after its February 2013 decision to initiate development of a new management program for the Western GOA groundfish trawl fisheries. The Council selected the control date because it anticipated that the majority of the 2013 Western GOA trawl groundfish fishery would be concluded by March 1, 2013. The Council stated that it may not credit any catch history in those fisheries after the control date for purposes of making allocations under a future management program. The control date may be used as a reference for future management measures in determining how to credit landings and permit history acquired before or after this date for purposes of establishing an allocation-based management program. The establishment of a control date, however, does not obligate the Council to use this control date or take any action or prevent the Council from selecting another control date or imposing limits on permits acquired prior to the control date. Accordingly, this notification is intended to promote awareness that the Council may develop a catch share management program to achieve its objectives for the Western GOA trawl fisheries; to provide notice to the public that any current or future accumulation of fishing privilege interests in the Western GOA trawl

fisheries may be affected, restricted, or even nullified; and to discourage speculative participation and behavior in the fisheries while the Council considers whether and how fishing privileges should be assigned or allocated in the future. Any measures the Council considers may require changes to the FMP. Such measures may be adopted in a future amendment to the FMP, which would include opportunity for further public participation and comment.

NMFS encourages public participation in the Council's development of the Western GOA trawl groundfish fisheries catch share management program. Please consult the Council's Web site at <http://www.alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/npfmc/> for information on public participation in the Council's decision-making process.

This notification and control date do not impose any legal obligations, requirements, or expectation.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: March 18, 2013.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, performing the functions and duties of the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2013-06542 Filed 3-20-13; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 680

[Docket No. 120806311-3213-01]

RIN 0648-BC25

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Program

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS issues a proposed rule that would implement Amendment 42 to the Fishery Management Plan for Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crabs (FMP). If approved, these regulations would revise the annual economic data reports (EDRs) currently required of participants in the Crab Rationalization Program (CR Program)

fisheries. The EDRs include cost, revenue, ownership, and employment data that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and NMFS use to study the economic impacts of the CR Program on harvesters, processors, and affected communities. This proposed action is necessary to eliminate redundant reporting requirements, standardize reporting across participants, and reduce participants' costs associated with the data collection. This action is intended to promote the goals and objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the FMP, and other applicable laws.

DATES: Comments must be received no later than April 22, 2013.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by FDMS Docket Number NOAA-NMFS-2012-0111, by any one of the following methods.

- **Electronic submissions:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal Web site at <http://www.regulations.gov>. To submit comments via the e-Rulemaking Portal, first click the "submit a comment" icon, then enter NOAA-NMFS-2012-0111 in the keyword search. Locate the document you wish to comment on from the resulting list and click on the "submit a comment" icon on that line.

- **Mail:** Address written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Mail comments to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668.

- **Fax:** Address written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Fax comments to 907-586-7557.

- **Hand delivery to the Federal Building:** Address written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Deliver comments to 709 West 9th Street, Room 420A, Juneau, AK.

Instructions: Comments must be submitted by one of the above methods to ensure that the comments are received, documented, and considered by NMFS. Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying