

§ 648.85(a)(3)(iii)(A); a Ruhle trawl, as specified in § 648.85(b)(6)(iv)(j)(3); a rope separator trawl, as specified in § 648.84(e); or any other gear approved consistent with the process defined in § 648.85(b)(6).

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(iv) *AMs if the sub-ACL for the Atlantic sea scallop fishery is exceeded.* At the end of the scallop fishing year, NMFS will evaluate whether Atlantic sea scallop fishery catch exceeded the sub-ACLs for any groundfish stocks allocated to the scallop fishery. On January 15, or when information is available to make an accurate projection, NMFS will also determine whether total catch exceeded the overall ACL for each stock allocated to the scallop fishery. When evaluating whether total catch exceeded the overall ACL, NMFS will add the maximum carryover available to sectors, as specified at § 648.87(b)(1)(i)(C), to the estimate of total catch for the pertinent stock.

(A) *Threshold for implementing the Atlantic sea scallop fishery AMs.* If scallop fishery catch exceeds the scallop fishery sub-ACLs for any groundfish stocks in paragraph (a)(4) of this section by 50 percent or more, or if scallop fishery catch exceeds the scallop fishery sub-ACL by any amount and total catch exceeds the overall ACL for a given stock, then the applicable scallop fishery AM will take effect, as specified in § 648.64 of the Atlantic sea scallop regulations.

(B) *2017 and 2018 fishing year threshold for implementing the Atlantic sea scallop fishery AMs for GB yellowtail flounder and Northern windowpane flounder.* For the 2017 and 2018 fishing years only, if scallop fishery catch exceeds either GB yellowtail flounder or northern windowpane flounder sub-ACLs specified in paragraph (a)(4) of this section, and total catch exceeds the overall ACL for that stock, then the applicable scallop fishery AM will take effect, as specified in § 648.64 of the Atlantic sea scallop regulations. For the 2019 fishing year and onward, the threshold for implementing scallop fishery AMs for GB yellowtail flounder and northern windowpane flounder will return to that listed in paragraph (a)(5)(iv)(A) of this section.

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§ 648.201 [Amended]

■ 6. In § 648.201, amend paragraph (a)(2) by removing “§ 648.85(d)” and

adding “§ 648.90(a)(4)(iii)(D)” in its place.

[FR Doc. 2017–16133 Filed 7–31–17; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 151211999–6343–02]

RIN 0648–XF586

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Multispecies Fishery; Georges Bank Cod Trimester Total Allowable Catch Area Closure for the Common Pool Fishery

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; area closure.

SUMMARY: This action closes the Georges Bank (GB) Cod Trimester Total Allowable Catch Area to Northeast multispecies common pool vessels fishing with trawl gear, sink gillnet gear, and longline/hook gear for the remainder of Trimester 1, through August 31, 2017. The closure is required by regulation because the common pool fishery is projected to have caught 90 percent of its Trimester 1 quota for GB cod. This closure is intended to prevent an overage of the common pool’s quota for this stock.

DATES: This action is effective July 28, 2017, through August 31, 2017.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Claire Fitz-Gerald, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281–9255.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Federal regulations at § 648.82(n)(2)(ii) require the Regional Administrator to close a common pool Trimester Total Allowable Catch (TAC) Area for a stock when 90 percent of the Trimester TAC is projected to be caught. The closure applies to all common pool vessels fishing with gear capable of catching that stock for the remainder of the trimester.

As of July 27, 2017, the common pool fishery is projected to have caught approximately 90 percent of the Trimester 1 TAC (2.9 mt) for Georges Bank (GB) cod. Effective July 28, 2017, the GB Cod Trimester TAC Area is closed for the remainder of Trimester 1, through August 31, 2017, to all common pool vessels fishing on a Northeast multispecies trip with trawl gear, sink gillnet gear, and longline/hook gear. The

GB Cod Trimester TAC Area consists of statistical areas 521, 522, 525, and 561. The area reopens at the beginning of Trimester 2, on September 1, 2017.

If a vessel declared its trip through the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) or the interactive voice response system, and crossed the VMS demarcation line prior to July 28, 2017, it may complete its trip within the Trimester TAC Area. A vessel that has set gillnet gear prior to July 28, 2017, may complete its trip by hauling such gear.

Any overage of the Trimester 1 or 2 TACs must be deducted from the Trimester 3 TAC. If the common pool fishery exceeds its total quota for a stock in the 2017 fishing year, the overage must be deducted from the common pool’s quota for that stock for fishing year 2018. Any uncaught portion of the Trimester 1 and Trimester 2 TACs is carried over into the next trimester. However, any uncaught portion of the common pool’s total annual quota may not be carried over into the following fishing year.

Weekly quota monitoring reports for the common pool fishery are on our Web site at: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/ro/fso/MultiMonReports.htm>. We will continue to monitor common pool catch through vessel trip reports, dealer-reported landings, VMS catch reports, and other available information and, if necessary, we will make additional adjustments to common pool management measures.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) and 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment and the 30-day delayed effectiveness period because it would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest.

The regulations require the Regional Administrator to close a trimester TAC area to the common pool fishery when 90 percent of the Trimester TAC for a stock has been caught. Updated catch information only recently became available indicating that the common pool fishery is projected to have caught 90 percent of its Trimester 1 TAC for GB cod as of July 27, 2017. The time necessary to provide for prior notice and comment, and a 30-day delay in effectiveness, would prevent the immediate closure of the GB Cod Trimester TAC Area. This increases the likelihood that the common pool fishery

will exceed its trimester or annual quota of GB cod to the detriment of this stock, which could undermine management objectives of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Additionally, an overage of the trimester or annual common pool quota could cause negative economic impacts to the common pool fishery as a result of overage paybacks deducted from a future trimester or fishing year.

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

Dated: July 27, 2017.

Jennifer M. Wallace,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable
Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2017-16176 Filed 7-28-17; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 660

[Docket No. 160614521-7624-02]

RIN 0648-BF96

Fisheries Off West Coast States; Coastal Pelagic Species Fisheries; Amendment to Regulations Implementing the Coastal Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan; Change to Pacific Mackerel Management Cycle From Annual to Biennial

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

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) states that each year the Secretary will publish in the **Federal Register** the final specifications for all stocks in the actively managed stock category, which includes Pacific mackerel. NMFS is changing the management framework for Pacific mackerel so specifications will be set biennially instead of on an annual basis. The purpose of this change is to reduce the costs, while providing frequent enough reevaluation and adjustment in the specifications to manage and conserve Pacific mackerel.

DATES: Effective August 31, 2017.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Joshua Lindsay, West Coast Region, NMFS, (562) 980-4034, Joshua.Lindsay@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the Pacific mackerel fishery in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

off the Pacific coast (California, Oregon, and Washington) in accordance with the CPS FMP. The CPS FMP states that each year the Secretary will publish in the **Federal Register** the specifications for all stocks in the actively managed stock category, which includes Pacific mackerel. In 2013, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) recommended that the harvest specification process for Pacific mackerel move from a 1-year management cycle to a 2-year management cycle beginning in 2015. The Council recommended this revision to the management cycle under the CPS FMP's framework mechanism, which allows such changes by rulemaking without formally amending the fishery management plan itself. NMFS published separate annual specifications for Pacific mackerel for the 2015-16 and the 2016-17 fishing seasons to keep pace with the schedule of the fishery, and is now changing the annual notice requirement under the framework mechanism of the CPS FMP. From now on, NMFS will implement 2 years of harvest specifications with one rulemaking, beginning with the 2017 fishing season.

The CPS FMP and its implementing regulations require NMFS to set annual catch levels for the Pacific mackerel fishery based on the annual specification framework and control rules in the CPS FMP. These control rules include the harvest guideline control rule, which in conjunction with the overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC) and annual catch limit (ACL) rules in the CPS FMP are used to manage harvest levels for Pacific mackerel, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.* Annual estimates of biomass are an explicit part of these various harvest control rules, therefore, annual stock assessments are currently conducted for Pacific mackerel to provide annual estimates of biomass. Then, during public meetings each year, the estimated biomass for Pacific mackerel from these assessments is presented to the Council's CPS Management Team (Team), the Council's CPS Advisory Subpanel (Subpanel) and the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), and the biomass and the status of the fishery are reviewed and discussed. The biomass estimate is then presented to the Council along with recommendations and comments from the Team, Subpanel and SSC. Following review by the Council and after hearing public comment, the Council adopts a biomass

estimate and makes its catch level recommendations to NMFS. Based on these recommendations, NMFS implements these catch specifications for each fishing year and publishes the specifications annually. Over recent years, little new information has been available for informing Pacific mackerel stock assessments from one year to the next. Therefore, stock assessment scientists at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC), along with the SSC, concluded that conducting stock assessments annually is not necessary to manage Pacific mackerel sustainably; conducting assessments every 2 years can provide the necessary scientific information to continue to manage the stock sustainably. Annual landings of Pacific mackerel have also remained at historically low levels with landings averaging 5,000 mt over the last 10 years, well below the annual quotas over this time period. This highlights that the biomass of this stock is not being greatly impacted by fishing pressure. Low landings since 2011 are also one of the limitations of the recent stock assessments because they result in limited fishery-dependent sample information for use in the stock assessment. Based on this information, and in light of the monetary and personnel costs associated with conducting and reviewing each stock assessment as well as adopting specifications each year, the Council established a new Pacific mackerel management and assessment schedule under which full stock assessments would be conducted every 4 years, and in the second year of each cycle, the assessment will be updated using catch-only projection estimates. Each of these assessments would provide the biomass estimate for the current year as well as a projection of what the biomass will be in the following year. Those biomass estimates would then be used in the harvest control rules for Pacific mackerel, which the Council would use to provide NMFS with recommendations for the OFL, ABC and ACL for the following 2 years.

This final rule changes the review and implementation schedule for setting Pacific mackerel harvest specifications, allowing NMFS to implement 2 years of catch specifications with a single notice and comment rulemaking. Reviewing biomass estimates and implementing catch specifications for 2 years at a time instead of 1 allows NMFS and the Council to use available time and resources in a more efficient manner, while still preserving the conservation and management goals of the CPS FMP, and using the best available science.