

aggregated LCS management group sub-regional quota is projected to exceed 80 percent of the available quota very soon and is projected to exceed 100 percent of the available quota before the end of the fishing season. Thus, NMFS has determined that a closure of the commercial western Gulf of Mexico aggregated LCS fishery is warranted at this time. While the western Gulf of Mexico hammerhead shark sub-regional quota has reached less than 1 percent of the available quota, it is linked to the aggregated LCS fishery, and therefore, closes when the aggregated LCS management group in the western Gulf of Mexico sub-region closes. Accordingly, NMFS is closing the commercial aggregated LCS and hammerhead shark management groups in the western Gulf of Mexico sub-region as of 11:30 p.m. local time March 14, 2020.

All other shark species or management groups in the western Gulf of Mexico sub-region that are currently open will remain open, including the commercial blacktip sharks, non-blacknose small coastal sharks, blue sharks, smoothhound sharks, and pelagic sharks other than porbeagle or blue sharks.

The boundary between the Gulf of Mexico region and the Atlantic region is defined at § 635.27(b)(1) as a line beginning on the East Coast of Florida at the mainland at 25°20.4' N lat, proceeding due east. Any water and land to the south and west of that boundary is considered for the purposes of monitoring and setting quotas, to be within the Gulf of Mexico region. The boundary between the western and eastern Gulf of Mexico sub-regions is drawn along 88° 00' W long (§ 635.27(b)(1)(ii)). Persons fishing aboard vessels issued a commercial shark limited access permit (LAP) under § 635.4 may still retain sharks in the aggregated LCS and/or hammerhead shark management groups in the eastern Gulf of Mexico sub-region (east of 88° 00' W long).

During the closure, retention of sharks in the aggregated LCS and/or hammerhead shark management groups in the western Gulf of Mexico sub-region is prohibited for persons fishing aboard vessels issued a commercial shark LAP under § 635.4. However, persons aboard a commercially permitted vessel that is also properly permitted to operate as a charter vessel or headboat for HMS, has a shark endorsement, and is engaged in a for-hire trip could fish under the recreational retention limits for sharks and “no sale” provisions (§ 635.22(c)). Similarly, persons aboard a

commercially permitted vessel that possesses a valid shark research permit under § 635.32 may continue to harvest and sell aggregated LCS and/or hammerhead sharks in the western Gulf of Mexico sub-region pursuant to the terms and conditions of the shark research permit, if a NMFS-approved observer is onboard and the shark research fishery, as applicable, is open.

During this closure, a shark dealer issued a permit pursuant to § 635.4 may not purchase or receive aggregated LCS and/or hammerhead sharks in the western Gulf of Mexico sub-region from a vessel issued an Atlantic shark LAP, except that a permitted shark dealer or processor may possess aggregated LCS and/or hammerhead sharks in the western Gulf of Mexico sub-region that were harvested, off-loaded, and sold, traded, or bartered prior to the effective date of the closure and were held in storage consistent with § 635.28(b)(6). Additionally, a permitted shark dealer may possess aggregated LCS and/or hammerhead sharks in the western Gulf of Mexico sub-region that were harvested by a vessel issued a valid shark research fishery permit per § 635.32 with a NMFS-approved observer onboard during the trip the sharks were taken on as long as the LCS research fishery quota remains open. Similarly, a shark dealer issued a permit pursuant to § 635.4 may, in accordance with relevant State regulations, purchase or receive aggregated LCS and/or hammerhead sharks in the western Gulf of Mexico sub-region if the sharks were harvested, off-loaded, and sold, traded, or bartered from a vessel that fishes only in State waters and that has not been issued an Atlantic Shark LAP, HMS Angling permit, or HMS Charter/Headboat permit pursuant to § 635.4.

Classification

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds that providing prior notice and public comment for this action is impracticable and contrary to the public interest because the fishery is currently underway and any delay in this action would result in overharvest of the quotas for these species and management groups and thus would be inconsistent with fishery management requirements and objectives. The regulations implementing the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP and amendments provide for inseason retention limit adjustments and fishery closures to respond to the unpredictable nature of availability on the fishing grounds, the migratory nature of the species, and the regional variations. NMFS is not able to give notice sooner

nor would sooner notice be practicable given the structure of the regulations, which close the fisheries under specified regulatory criteria or thresholds, and closure determinations need to be based on near real-time data to balance fishing opportunities against the management goal of preventing quota overharvests. Similarly, affording prior notice and opportunity for public comment on this action is contrary to the public interest because if a quota is exceeded, the stock may be negatively affected and fishermen ultimately could experience reductions in the available quota and a lack of fishing opportunities in future seasons. For these reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effective date pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This action is required under § 635.28(b)(3) and § 635.28(b)(4) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: March 10, 2020.

Karyl K. Brewster-Geisz,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable
Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 200221-0062; RTID 0648-XY081]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pollock in Statistical Area 630 in the Gulf of Alaska

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock in Statistical Area 630 in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the B season allowance of the 2020 total allowable catch of pollock for Statistical Area 630 in the GOA.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 11, 2020, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., May 31, 2020.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Phil Ganz, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of

Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The B season allowance of the 2020 total allowable catch (TAC) of pollock in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA is 2,318 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2020 and 2021 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (85 FR 13802, March 10, 2020).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(i), the Regional Administrator has determined that the B season allowance of the 2020 TAC of pollock in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA will soon be reached. Therefore, the Regional Administrator is establishing a directed fishing allowance of 1,800 mt and is setting aside the remaining 518 mt as bycatch to support other anticipated groundfish fisheries. In accordance with

§ 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Regional Administrator finds that this directed fishing allowance has been reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for pollock in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA.

While this closure is effective the maximum retainable amounts at § 679.20(e) and (f) apply at any time during a trip.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries

data in a timely fashion and would delay the closure of directed fishing for pollock in Statistical Area 630 of the GOA. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of March 10, 2020.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: March 11, 2020.

Karyl K. Brewster-Geisz,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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