

Dated: December 13, 2024.

Samuel D. Rauch, III,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for
Regulatory Programs, National Marine
Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 240227–0061; RTID 0648–
XE542]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Inseason Adjustment to the 2025 Gulf of Alaska Pollock and Pacific Cod Total Allowable Catch Amounts

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; inseason
adjustment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS is adjusting the 2025 total allowable catch (TAC) amounts for the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) pollock and Pacific cod fisheries. This action is necessary because NMFS has determined these TACs are incorrectly specified, as they are not informed by the most recent specifications recommended by the Council for the start of the 2025 fishing year. This action will ensure the GOA pollock and Pacific cod TACs are the correct, appropriate amount based on the best scientific information available for pollock and Pacific cod in the GOA. This action is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP).

DATES: Effective 0001 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), January 1, 2025, until the effective date of the final 2025 and 2026 harvest specifications for GOA groundfish, unless otherwise modified or superseded through publication of a notification in the **Federal Register**.

Comments must be received at the following address no later than 4:30 p.m., A.l.t., January 3, 2025.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by docket number NOAA–NMFS–2023–0133 by any of the following methods:

Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <https://www.regulations.gov> and enter NOAA–NMFS–2023–0133 in the Search box. Click on the “Comment” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

Mail: Submit written comments to Gretchen Harrington, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS. Mail comments to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802–1668.

Instructions: 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 by NMFS. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on <https://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Abby Jahn, 907–586–7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the FMP prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at 50 CFR part 679 and at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600.

The final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (89 FR 15484, March 4, 2024) set the 2025 pollock TAC at 163,494 metric tons (mt) in the GOA. In December 2024, the Council recommended a 2025 pollock TAC of 186,245 mt for the GOA, which is greater than the 163,494 mt established by the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA. The Council’s recommended 2025 TACs and the area and seasonal apportionments are based on the Science and Statistical Committee’s (SSC’s) overfishing limit (OFL) and allowable biological catch (ABC) recommendations. The SSC recommendations are informed by the Groundfish Plan Team’s recommended

OFLs and ABCs as well as a review of the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report dated November 2024.

The final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA set the 2025 Pacific cod TAC at 20,757 mt in the GOA. In December 2024, the Council recommended a 2025 Pacific cod TAC of 23,670 mt for the GOA, which is greater than the 20,757 mt established by the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA. The Council’s recommended 2025 TACs and the area and seasonal apportionments are based on the SSC’s OFL and ABC recommendations. The SSC recommendations are informed by the Groundfish Plan Team’s recommended OFLs and ABCs as well as a review of the SAFE report dated November 2024.

Steller sea lions occur in the same location as the pollock and Pacific cod fisheries and are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Pollock and Pacific cod are principal prey species for Steller sea lions in the GOA. The seasonal apportionment of pollock and Pacific cod harvests are necessary to ensure the groundfish fisheries are not likely to cause jeopardy of extinction or adverse modification of critical habitat for Steller sea lions. The regulations at § 679.20(a)(5)(iv) specify how the pollock TAC will be apportioned and the regulations at § 679.20(a)(6)(ii) and (a)(12)(i) specify how the Pacific cod TAC will be apportioned.

In accordance with § 679.25(a)(1)(iii), (a)(2)(i)(B), and (a)(2)(iv) the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that, based on the best scientific information available for this fishery, the current GOA pollock and Pacific cod TACs are incorrectly specified, as they are not using the most recent data available. Consequently, pursuant to § 679.25(a) the Regional Administrator is adjusting the 2025 GOA pollock TAC to 186,245 mt and the 2025 Pacific cod TAC to 23,670 mt. Therefore, tables 4 and 6 of the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA are revised consistent with this adjustment.

Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iv), table 4 of the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA is revised for the 2025 TACs of pollock in the Central and Western Regulatory Area of the GOA.

TABLE 4—FINAL 2025 DISTRIBUTION OF POLLOCK IN THE WESTERN AND CENTRAL REGULATORY AREAS OF THE GULF OF ALASKA; AREA APPORTIONMENTS; AND SEASONAL ALLOWANCES OF ANNUAL TAC

[Values are rounded to the nearest metric ton]

Season ¹	Shumigan (Area 610)	Chirikof (Area 620)	Kodiak (Area 630)	Total ²
A (January 20–May 31)	5,589	63,267	16,751	85,607
B (September 1–November 1)	31,755	18,998	34,854	85,607
Annual Total	37,344	82,265	51,605	171,214

¹ As established by §679.23(d)(2)(i) through (ii), the A and B season allowances are available from January 20 through May 31 and September 1 through November 1, respectively. The amounts of pollock for processing by the inshore and offshore components are not shown in this table.

² The West Yakutat and Southeast Outside District pollock TACs are not allocated by season and are not included in the total pollock TACs shown in this table.

Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(6)(ii) and (a)(12)(i), table 6 of the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA is revised for the 2025 TACs of Pacific cod in the GOA.

TABLE 6—FINAL 2025 SEASONAL APPORTIONMENTS AND ALLOCATION OF PACIFIC COD TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH AMOUNTS IN THE GOA; ALLOCATIONS IN THE WESTERN GOA AND CENTRAL GOA SECTORS, AND THE EASTERN GOA INSHORE AND OFFSHORE PROCESSING COMPONENTS

[Values are rounded to the nearest metric ton]

Regulatory area and sector	Annual allocation (mt)	A Season		B Season	
		Sector percentage of annual non-jig TAC	Seasonal allowances (mt)	Sector percentage of annual non-jig TAC	Seasonal allowances (mt)
Western GOA:					
Jig (3.5% of TAC)	213	n/a	128	n/a	85
Hook-and-line CV	82	0.7	41	0.7	41
Hook-and-line CP	1,165	10.9	641	8.9	524
Trawl CV	2,259	31.54	1,856	6.86	404
Trawl CP	141	0.9	53	1.5	88
All Pot CV and Pot CP	2,236	19.8	1,165	18.2	1,071
Total	6,097	63.84	3,884	36.1	2,213
Central GOA:					
Jig (3% of TAC)	461	n/a	277	n/a	185
Hook-and-line <50 CV	2,178	9.32	1,390	5.29	789
Hook-and-line ≥50 CV	1,000	5.61	837	1.1	164
Hook-and-line CP	761	4.11	613	0.9975	149
Trawl CV ¹	6,203	25.29	3,773	16.29	2,430
Trawl CP	626	2	299	2.19	327
All Pot CV and Pot CP	4,148	17.83	2,660	9.98	1,488
Total	15,379	64.16	9,848	35.84	5,531
Eastern GOA					
		Inshore (90% of Annual TAC)		Offshore (10% of Annual TAC)	
Total	2,194		1,975		219

¹ Trawl catcher vessels participating in Rockfish Program cooperatives receive 3.81 percent, or 586 mt, of the annual Central GOA TAC (see table 28c to 50 CFR part 679), which is deducted from the Trawl CV B season allowance. This inseason adjustment updates the apportionment found in table 13 of the 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications (i.e., Final 2025 Apportionments of Rockfish Secondary Species in the Central GOA).

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This action is required by 50 CFR part 679, which was issued pursuant to section 304(b), and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), there is good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action, as notice and comment would be 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 allow for harvests that

exceed the appropriate allocation for pollock and Pacific cod based on the best scientific information available. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of December 13, 2024.

Without this inseason adjustment, NMFS could not allow the fishery for pollock and Pacific cod in the GOA to be harvested in an expedient manner and in accordance with the regulatory

schedule. Under § 679.25(c)(2), interested persons are invited to submit written comments on this action to the above address until January 3, 2025.

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

Dated: December 16, 2024.

Kelly Denit,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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