



NOAA FISHERIES

Alaska Region Sustainable Fisheries

Guided Angler Fish Program 2023 Annual Report

Prepared by Kurt Iverson
November 28, 2023

The Guided Angler Fish (GAF) Program authorizes limited annual transfers of commercial halibut individual fishing quota (IFQ) as GAF to qualified charter halibut permit holders for harvest by charter vessel anglers. When charter management measures place size or harvest restrictions on charter anglers, qualified charter halibut permit holders may offer GAF to charter anglers as a means for the angler to retain halibut of any size, and up to the limits allowed for unguided anglers. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implemented the GAF Program in 2014 as part of the Catch Sharing Plan for International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Regulatory Areas 2C (Southeast Alaska) and 3A (Southcentral Alaska) (78 FR 75843, December 12, 2013).

This report summarizes the most recent year of GAF activity and provides historical details on the GAF Program since its inception. Among the information presented are the conversion factors that will be used to calculate IFQ to GAF for the 2024 fishing season. Regulations for the GAF Program are found at 50 CFR 300.65(c)(5).

In 2023, charter vessel anglers in Area 2C were limited to one halibut per day that was less than or equal to 40 inches or greater than or equal to 80 inches in total length. Additionally, halibut could not be retained on charter vessels in Area 2C on all Mondays from July 24 through the end of year. In Area 3A, charter vessel anglers were allowed to keep two halibut per day; however, if two fish were kept, one had to be no more than 28 inches in total length. Charter vessels in Area 3A were also limited to one trip per day, and halibut could not be retained on all Wednesdays and on nine Tuesdays from June 20 through August 15 (88 FR 14066, March 7, 2023). These size and harvest restrictions could be reduced by GAF, where charter vessel anglers in Areas 2C and 3A could harvest up to two halibut of any size per day, and GAF were not subject to daily closures.

NMFS issues GAF in numbers of halibut, based on a conversion factor from the average weight of GAF harvested in the respective area in the previous year. For this report, halibut weights were calculated from measured lengths using length-weight relationships adopted by IPHC in 2022. The conversion factors for GAF leases in 2023 were 65 lbs of IFQ per GAF in Area 2C and 23 lbs of IFQ per GAF in Area 3A (Table 1). For 2024, the conversion factors will be 61 lbs of IFQ per GAF in Area 2C and 23 lbs of IFQ per GAF in Area 3A (Table 1).

Table 2 indicates that in 2023, NMFS processed 600 IFQ to GAF transfers totaling 160,609 lbs. of IFQ to 96 different charter halibut permit holders. These transfers authorized the potential harvest of up to 2,951 additional halibut as GAF by charter vessel anglers. Table 2 also indicates the pounds of IFQ transferred has generally increased each year from 2014 through 2019, then dropped significantly in the atypical 2020 season. Through 2023, the total pounds of IFQ transferred to GAF continued the increasing trend. Note the number of fish that could be harvested has varied from year to year, depending upon the conversion factors mentioned above.

Approximately 5% of the GAF permits transferred in 2023 were “self-transfers”; that is, the same person held both the IFQ and the charter halibut permit, and they transferred the IFQ to themselves (Table 2). The percentage of self-transfers has been consistently higher in Area 3A than 2C: over the 2014-2023 period in Area 3A, self-transfers ranged from 29% to 67% of the total, whereas in Area 2C only 3% to 14% have been self-transfers.

If GAF transfers involve a monetary transaction (as opposed to self-transfers or gifts of GAF) then GAF participants are required to report the value of the transaction. Of the transfers for which price information was reported, and excluding prices associated with self-transfers, lease prices in 2023 averaged \$6.13/lb in Area 2C and \$4.65/lb in Area 3A (weighted averages). For both areas combined, the overall weighted average price per pound of IFQ leased as GAF in 2023 was \$6.03, which is similar to the 2022 overall weighted average price (Table 2).

The actual number of pounds harvested annually as GAF is calculated by summing the weights for individual fish, which are determined from the IPHC halibut length conversion table. Table 3 summarizes the estimated pounds of halibut harvested as GAF for each year since the program was implemented. Charter vessel anglers harvested 2,158 GAF from the combined IPHC areas in 2023, which represented 73% of the available GAF.

Unused GAF are returned to the commercial IFQ holders, either voluntarily in August and September, or automatically 15 days before the end of the commercial halibut season, which is December 7 in 2023. Twenty voluntary returns of GAF to IFQ totaling 2,343 lbs. were processed by the end of September. Automatic returns of GAF to the original IFQ account occurred on November 22, with 33,502 total IFQ lbs returned through 189 individual, automatic transfers: 25,935 lbs in Area 2C, and 7,567 lbs in Area 3A.

Guides are required to electronically report the length of each GAF harvested. The average length of GAF harvested in 2023 was 54 inches in Area 2C and 39 inches in Area 3A (Table 3). Since the beginning of the program, the size of GAF in Area 3A has consistently been smaller than Area 2C. Tables 4 and 5 provide the frequency distribution of the lengths of GAF harvested over the 2014-2023 period. In all years, the majority of GAF in Area 2C falls between 50 and 60 inches, whereas in Area 3A, the length of GAF are smaller and more widely distributed, with the majority of fish taken in the categories of 30 to 59 inches.

NMFS’s costs associated with management, data collection, and enforcement of the GAF Program are recoverable through IFQ Program cost recovery fees. NMFS does not track fees associated with GAF separately from other IFQ Program fees.

Table 1. IFQ to GAF conversion factors

Year	Conversion Factor (IFQ lb / GAF)	
	Area 2C	Area 3A
2014	26.4	12.8
2015	67.3	38.4
2016	65.1	36.1
2017	74	42
2018	71	44
2019	66	42
2020	61	40
2021	72	57
2022	74	27
2023	65	23
2024	61	23

Note: Starting in 2017, the conversion factor is rounded to the nearest whole number to more accurately reflect regulatory requirements of 50 CFR 300.65(c)(5)(E).

Table 2. Summary of IFQ to GAF transfers

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	IFQ Pounds Transferred	Number of GAF Transferred	Number of GAF Permits Issued	Number of GAF Permit Holders	Weighted Avg. price per pound	Percentage of self-transfers
2014	2C	29,498	1,117	92	30	\$ 5.62	14%
	3A	11,654	910	19	13	\$ 5.01	47%
	Total	41,152	2,027	111	43	\$ 5.46	20%
2015	2C	36,934	548	119	27	\$ 5.62	7%
	3A	10,337	269	25	13	\$ 4.66	40%
	Total	47,271	817	144	40	\$ 5.48	12%
2016	2C	47,064	723	132	32	\$ 5.43	10%
	3A	10,442	289	26	11	\$ 5.46	38%
	Total	57,506	1,012	158	43	\$ 5.43	21%
2017	2C	53,206	719	207	34	\$ 5.32	7%
	3A	9,786	233	22	13	\$ 4.59	41%
	Total	62,992	952	229	47	\$ 5.27	11%
2018	2C	80,656	1,222	332	46	\$ 5.17	6%
	3A	12,760	304	31	17	\$ 5.11	35%
	Total	93,416	1,526	363	63	\$ 5.17	9%
2019	2C	97,680	1,601	341	56	\$ 5.33	5%
	3A	13,524	338	29	13	\$ 5.28	45%
	Total	111,204	1,939	370	69	\$ 5.32	8%
2020	2C	57,645	801	235	48	\$ 4.99	8%
	3A	5,240	92	15	7	\$ 4.00	67%
	Total	62,885	893	250	55	\$ 4.97	11%
2021	2C	97,056	1,312	407	59	\$ 5.20	5%
	3A	11,913	441	24	8	\$ 5.00	29%
	Total	108,969	1,753	431	67	\$ 5.19	7%
2022	2C	128,094	1,971	459	67	\$ 6.13	3%
	3A	11,475	499	29	12	\$ 6.12	48%
	Total	139,569	2,470	488	79	\$ 6.13	6%
2023	2C	143,520	2,208	560	77	\$ 6.13	3%
	3A	17,089	743	40	19	\$ 4.65	33%
	Total	160,609	2,951	600	96	\$ 6.03	5%

Table 3. Summary of GAF landings

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	Number of GAF Transferred	Number of GAF Harvested (% of amount transferred)	Actual Net Pounds of IFQ Harvested as GAF	Average Length in Inches (range)
2014	2C	1,117	800 (72%)	53,864	55 (18-77)
	3A	910	269 (30%)	10,336	45 (30-75)
	Total	2,027	1,069 (53%)	64,200	
2015	2C	548	428 (78%)	27,849	53 (27-83)
	3A	269	143 (53%)	5,158	45 (31-84)
	Total	817	571 (70%)	33,007	
2016	2C	723	529 (73%)	38,968	56 (32-82)
	3A	289	220 (76%)	9,332	47 (24-74)
	Total	1,012	749 (74%)	48,300	
2017	2C	719	576 (80%)	40,860	55 (18-79)
	3A	233	157 (67%)	6,920	48 (29-72)
	Total	952	733 (77%)	47,780	
2018	2C	1,222	972 (80%)	64,365	54 (22-79)
	3A	304	215 (71%)	9,052	47 (25-89)
	Total	1,526	1,187 (78%)	73,417	
2019	2C	1,601	1,237 (77%)	75,039	53 (22-83)
	3A	338	266 (79%)	10,652	46 (25-66)
	Total	1,939	1,503 (78%)	85,691	
2020	2C	801	764 (95%)	55,061	56 (23-85)
	3A	92	38 (41%)	2,147	52 (34-64)
	Total	893	802 (90%)	57,208	
2021	2C	1,312	1,031 (79%)	76,529	57 (29-75)
	3A	441	128 (29%)	3,446	39 (19-65)
	Total	1,753	1,159 (66%)	79,976	
2022	2C	1,971	1,548 (79%)	99,962	55 (24-81)
	3A	499	277 (56%)	6,487	39 (25-70)
	Total	2,470	1,825 (74%)	106,449	
2023	2C	2,208	1,794 (81%)	109,952	54 (17-83)
	3A	743	364 (50%)	8,430	39 (22-76)
	Total	2,951	2,158 (73%)	118,382	

Note: IPHC length/weight conversions can be found at: www.iphc.int/publications/bulletins/lenwtimp.pdf

Table 4. 2015 through 2023 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 2C.

Length in Inches	2023		2022		2021		2020		2019	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
18-24	8	0.4%	1	0.1%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%	1	0.1%
25-29	16	0.9%	4	0.3%	1	0.1%	1	0.1%	2	0.2%
30-34	41	2.3%	9	0.6%	11	1.1%	10	1.3%	13	1.1%
35-39	65	3.6%	13	0.8%	42	4.1%	30	3.9%	50	4.0%
40-44	187	10.4%	126	8.1%	35	3.4%	13	1.7%	164	13.3%
45-49	250	13.9%	221	14.3%	25	2.4%	98	12.8%	164	13.3%
50-54	376	21.0%	351	22.7%	220	21.3%	139	18.2%	253	20.5%
55-59	343	19.1%	339	21.9%	290	28.1%	174	22.8%	308	24.9%
60-64	260	14.5%	263	17.0%	242	23.5%	194	25.4%	184	14.9%
65-69	145	8.1%	152	9.9%	133	12.9%	69	9.0%	61	4.9%
70-74	75	4.2%	52	3.4%	31	3.0%	19	2.5%	23	1.9%
75-79	27	1.5%	16	1.0%	1	0.1%	13	1.7%	13	1.1%
>80	1	0.1%	1	0.1%	0	0.0%	3	0.4%	1	0.1%
Total	1,794		1,548		1,031		764		1,237	

Length in Inches	2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
18-24	5	0.5%	10	1.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.3%
25-29	11	1.1%	6	1.0%	0	0.0%	8	1.9%	8	1.0%
30-34	23	2.4%	20	3.5%	7	1.3%	26	6.1%	15	1.9%
35-39	21	2.2%	18	3.1%	15	2.8%	18	4.2%	21	2.6%
40-44	95	9.8%	6	1.0%	26	4.9%	34	7.9%	14	1.8%
45-49	122	12.6%	96	16.7%	73	13.8%	67	15.7%	110	13.8%
50-54	199	20.5%	107	18.6%	118	22.3%	59	13.8%	176	22.0%
55-59	202	20.8%	107	18.6%	86	16.3%	74	17.3%	208	26.0%
60-64	158	16.3%	93	16.1%	86	16.3%	73	17.1%	167	20.9%
65-69	68	7.0%	65	11.3%	74	14.0%	41	9.6%	48	6.0%
70-74	53	5.5%	35	6.1%	32	6.0%	23	5.4%	27	3.4%
75-79	15	1.5%	13	2.3%	11	2.1%	4	0.9%	4	0.5%
>80	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Total	972		576		529		428		800	

Table 5. 2015 through 2023 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 3A.

Length in Inches	2023		2022		2021		2020		2019	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
18-24	7	1.9%	0	0.0%	9	7.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
25-29	33	9.1%	24	8.7%	27	21.1%	0	0.0%	8	3.0%
30-34	107	29.4%	79	28.5%	13	10.2%	2	5.3%	31	11.7%
35-39	80	22.0%	64	23.1%	16	12.5%	0	0.0%	37	13.9%
40-44	51	14.0%	35	12.6%	14	10.9%	5	13.2%	34	12.8%
45-49	29	8.0%	28	10.1%	21	16.4%	3	7.9%	42	15.8%
50-54	21	5.8%	23	8.3%	15	11.7%	8	21.1%	54	20.3%
55-59	22	6.0%	16	5.8%	10	7.8%	14	36.8%	44	16.5%
60-64	9	2.5%	5	1.8%	2	1.6%	6	15.8%	12	4.5%
65-69	4	1.1%	2	0.7%	1	0.8%	0	0.0%	4	1.5%
70-74	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
75-79	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
>80	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	364		277		128		38		266	

Length in Inches	2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
18-24	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
25-29	14	6.5%	2	1.3%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
30-34	14	6.5%	7	4.5%	13	5.9%	20	14.0%	39	14.5%
35-39	23	10.7%	20	12.7%	20	9.1%	23	16.1%	34	12.6%
40-44	31	14.4%	28	17.8%	39	17.7%	41	28.7%	72	26.8%
45-49	43	20.0%	34	21.7%	59	26.8%	28	19.6%	43	16.0%
50-54	43	20.0%	37	23.6%	37	16.8%	11	7.7%	37	13.8%
55-59	37	17.2%	13	8.3%	35	15.9%	11	7.7%	15	5.6%
60-64	7	3.3%	9	5.7%	8	3.6%	6	4.2%	21	7.8%
65-69	1	0.5%	4	2.5%	3	1.4%	1	0.7%	5	1.9%
70-74	0	0.0%	3	1.9%	2	0.9%	1	0.7%	2	0.7%
75-79	1	0.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
>80	1	0.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.7%	0	0.0%
Total	215		157		220		143		269	