



NOAA FISHERIES

Alaska Region Sustainable Fisheries

Guided Angler Fish Program 2015 Annual Report

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In 2014, NMFS implemented the guided angler fish (GAF) program to authorize limited annual transfers of commercial halibut IFQ as GAF to qualified charter halibut permit holders for harvest by charter vessel anglers in International Pacific Halibut Commission Regulatory Areas 2C (Southeast Alaska) and 3A (South Central Alaska). Using GAF, qualified charter halibut permit holders may offer charter vessel anglers the opportunity to retain halibut up to the limit for unguided anglers when the charter management measure in place limits charter vessel anglers to a more restrictive harvest limit.

For 2015, charter vessel anglers in Area 2C were limited to one halibut per day that was less than or equal to 42 inches or greater than or equal to 80 inches total length. In Area 3A, charter vessel anglers were allowed to keep two fish per day. If two fish were kept, one had to be less than or equal to 29 inches total length. Additionally, charter anglers in Area 3A had a 5-fish annual limit. Charter vessels in Area 3A were limited to one trip per day, and no charter fishing for halibut was allowed in Area 3A on Thursdays from June 15 through August 31. Using GAF, charter vessel anglers in Area 2C and Area 3A could harvest up to two halibut of any size per day.

NMFS issues GAF in numbers of halibut based on a conversion factor from IFQ pounds. In 2014, the first year of the GAF program, the conversion factors were based on the average weight of all charter halibut harvested by area in the most recent year without a size limit in effect (Table 1). For 2015 and beyond, the conversion factors are based on the average net weight of GAF harvested by area. Because the conversion factor was based on the average of all charter halibut harvested in 2014, and on the average of only GAF halibut harvested in 2015 and thereafter, it is not surprising that the GAF conversion increased dramatically between the first and second years of the program. The conversion factors appear to have stabilized between 2015 and the estimated 2016 values. The 2015 conversion factors were 67.3 lb IFQ per GAF in Area 2C and 38.4 lb IFQ per GAF in Area 3A (Table 1).

For 2015, NMFS processed 144 transfers totaling 47,271 lb of IFQ to 40 different charter halibut permit holders. These transfers allowed the harvest of up to 817 additional halibut as GAF by charter vessel anglers (Table 2). The number of transfers and pounds of IFQ transferred increased compared to 2014; however, because the IFQ to GAF conversion factor increased from 2014 to 2015, the number of fish that GAF permit holders were allowed to harvest decreased in 2015 (Table 2). The number of charter halibut permit holders who obtained GAF permits decreased only slightly from 2014 to 2015, from 43 to 40.

The percentage of GAF transfers that were “self-transfers,” i.e., the same person held both the IFQ and the charter halibut permit and transferred the IFQ to himself, decreased from 20% in 2014 to 12% in 2015 (Table 2). In Area 3A, 40% of all transfers were self-transfers, while only 7% were self-transfers in Area 2C.

GAF participants are given the option of self-reporting cost information for GAF transfers. Of the transfers for which price information was reported, and excluding self-reported prices for self-transfers, lease prices averaged \$5.62/lb in Area 2C and \$4.66/lb in Area 3A (weighted averages). The overall weighted average price per pound of IFQ leased was \$5.48, about the same as in 2014 (Table 2).

Charter vessel anglers harvested 571 GAF (70%) in 2015, mostly in Area 2C, compared to 1,069 GAF harvested in 2014 (Table 3). In 2014 only 53% of available GAF were harvested. The increased cost of

GAF in 2015 (owing to the larger conversion factors) and increased familiarity with the program likely increased the percentage of GAF used because charter halibut permit holders only transferred as much as they thought they could use and were better able to predict how many GAF they would need. The higher percentage of self-transfers in Area 3A may partially explain why a lower proportion of GAF were harvested in Area 3A. If the halibut were not harvested as GAF, the GAF/IFQ holder would still have an opportunity to harvest those pounds in the commercial fishery after the automatic return date 15 days prior to the end of the commercial season. Twenty three voluntary returns of GAF to IFQ totaling 7,016 lb were processed in September 2015, compared to only 3 voluntary returns totaling 2,140 lb in 2014. Again, this is likely due to increased familiarity with the rules governing the program. Unused GAF were automatically returned to the IFQ account from which they originated on October 23, 2015. Approximately 3,855 lb of Area 2C IFQ and 2,194 lb of Area 3A IFQ were returned from the charter sector to the commercial sector under the automatic return provision.

The average length of GAF harvested in 2015 was 53.5 inches in Area 2C (Table 3 and Figure 1) and 44.5 inches in Area 3A (Table 3 and Figure 2). Using the IPHC halibut length weight conversion table, these lengths translate into estimated average net weights of 65.1 lb in Area 2C and 36.1 lb in Area 3A. The conversion factors are based on these average net weights and will therefore decrease slightly in 2016 compared to 2015 (Table 1). NMFS will announce the official GAF conversion factors early in 2016.

NMFS' 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

*estimated conversion factor

Table 2. Summary of IFQ to GAF transfers

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	IFQ Pounds Transferred	Number of GAF Transferred	Number of Transfers (Permits Issued)	Weighted Avg. price per pound	Percentage of self-transfers
2014	2C	29,498	1,117	92	\$ 5.62	14
	3A	11,654	910	19	\$ 5.01	47
	Total	41,152	2,027	111	\$ 5.46	20
2015	2C	36,934	548	119	\$ 5.62	7
	3A	10,337	269	25	\$ 4.66	40
	Total	47,271	817	144	\$ 5.48	12

Table 3. Summary of GAF landings

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	Number of GAF harvested (% of total)	Average Length in inches (range)
2014	2C	800 (72%)	55 (18-77)
	3A	269 (30%)	45 (30-75)
	Total	1069 (53%)	
2015	2C	428 (78%)	53.5 (27-83)
	3A	143 (53%)	44.5 (31-84)
	Total	571 (70%)	

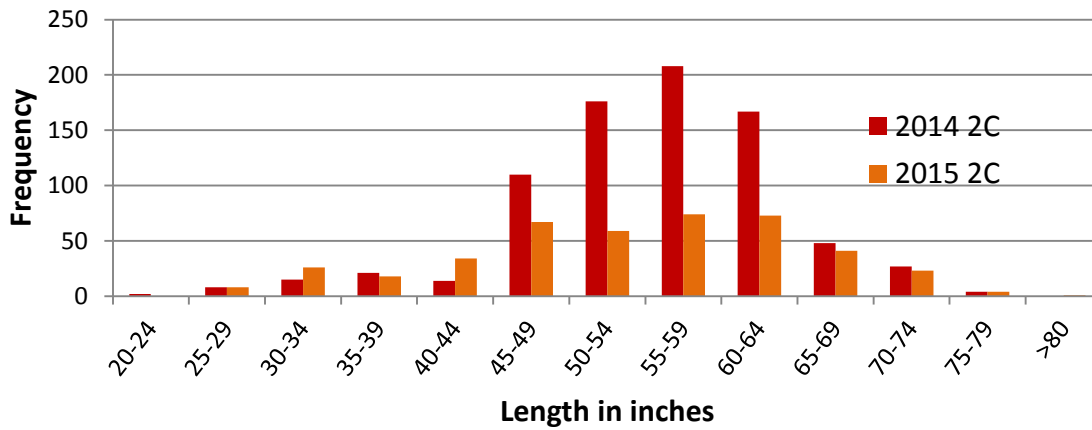


Figure 1. 2014 and 2015 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 2C.

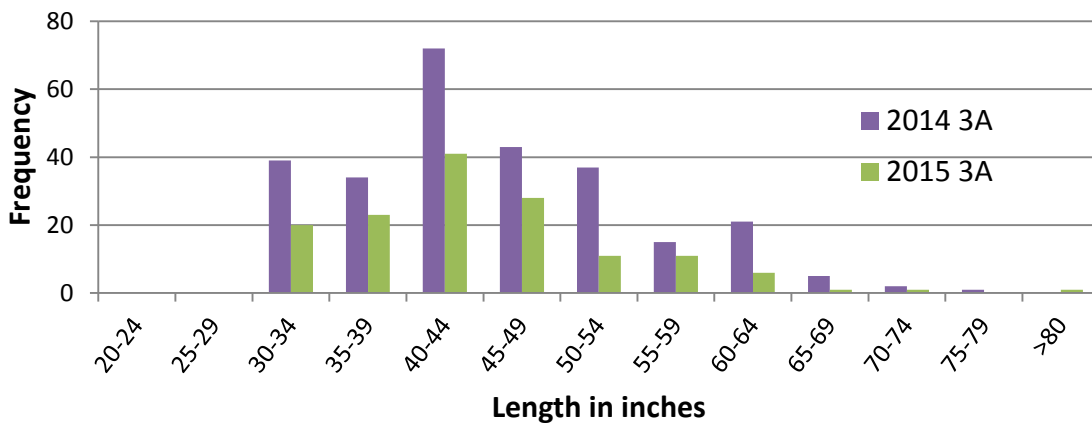


Figure 2. 2014 and 2015 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 3A.