



Guided Angler Fish Program 2018 Annual Report

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In 2014, NMFS implemented the Guided Angler Fish (GAF) Program as part of the Catch Sharing Plan for International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Regulatory Areas 2C (Southeast Alaska) and 3A (South Central Alaska) (78 FR 75843, December 12, 2013). The 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 in Area 2C and Area 3A. 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.

This report summarizes the most recent year of GAF activity and provides historical details of the GAF Program since its inception. Among the information presented are the conversion factors that are used to calculate IFQ to GAF for the 2019 fishing season. Regulations for the GAF Program are found at 50 CFR 300.65(c)(5).

In 2018, charter vessel anglers in Area 2C were limited to one halibut per day that was less than or equal to 38 inches or greater than or equal to 80 inches in total length. 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. Additionally, charter anglers in Area 3A had a 4-fish annual limit. Charter vessels in Area 3A were limited to one trip per day, and halibut could not be retained on charter vessels in Area 3A on Wednesdays for the entire season, and on six consecutive Tuesdays from July 10 through August 14. 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 the annual limit or daily closures in Area 3A.

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. The conversion factors for GAF leases in 2018 were 71 lb of IFQ per GAF in Area 2C and 44 lb of IFQ per GAF in Area 3A (Table 1). For 2019, the conversion factors will be 66 lbs. of IFQ per GAF in Area 2C and 42 lbs. of IFQ per GAF in Area 3A (Table 1).

Table 2 indicates that in 2018, NMFS processed 363 GAF transfers totaling 93,416 lbs. of IFQ to 63 different charter halibut permit holders. These transfers authorized the potential harvest of up to 1,526 additional halibut as GAF by charter vessel anglers. Table 2 also indicates the number of transfers and the pounds of IFQ transferred has increased each year from 2014 through 2018, although the number of fish that could be harvested has varied from year to year, depending upon the conversion factors mentioned above. The number of charter halibut permit holders who obtained GAF permits ranged from 40 to 47 persons each year over the 2014-2017 period, then rose to 63 persons in 2018.

Nine percent of the total GAF transfers in 2018 were “self-transfers;” that is, the same person held both the IFQ and the charter halibut permit and transferred the IFQ to themselves (Table 2). The percentage of

self-transfers has consistently been higher in Area 3A than 2C: over the 2014-2018 period in Area 3A, self-transfers ranged from 35% to 47% of the total, whereas in Area 2C 6% to 14% were 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 for self-transfers, lease prices in 2018 averaged \$5.17/lb in Area 2C and \$5.11/lb in Area 3A (weighted averages). For both areas combined, the overall weighted average price per pound of IFQ leased as GAF in 2018 was \$5.17, which is somewhat lower than prices reported in earlier years (Table 2).

Charter vessel anglers harvested 1,187 GAF from the combined IPHC areas in 2018, which is a significant increase compared to the previous three years (Table 3). The result is that in 2018, 78% of available GAF were harvested. The increased cost of GAF in recent years (owing to the larger conversion factors) and increased familiarity with the program likely increased the percentage of GAF that was used, compared to the first year of the program. As the program developed, it is likely that charter halibut permit holders were better able to predict how many GAF they would need.

Unused GAF are returned to the commercial IFQ holders, either voluntarily in August/September or automatically 15 days before the end of the commercial halibut season, which ends on November 7, 2018. Twenty-three voluntary returns of GAF to IFQ totaling 4,657 lbs. were processed by the end of August. Automatic returns of GAF to the original IFQ account occurred in late October 2018; 10,358 total lbs. were returned under 72 individual, automatic transfers: 8,378 lbs. of IFQ was returned in Area 2C, and 1,980 lbs. of Area 3A IFQ were returned.

Guides are required to electronically report the length of each GAF harvested. The average length of GAF harvested in 2018 was 54 inches in Area 2C and 47 inches in Area 3A (Table 3). Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the frequency distribution of the lengths of GAF harvested over the 2014-2018 period. In all years, the majority of GAF in Area 2C falls between 45 and 64 inches, whereas in Area 3A, the length of GAF are somewhat smaller and more widely distributed, with the majority of fish taken in the categories of 30 to 59 inches.

As mentioned above, using the IPHC halibut length/weight conversion table, the average net weight of GAF harvested in 2018 was 66.2 lb in Area 2C and 42.1 lb in Area 3A. These weights are converted to the nearest whole pound for the 2018 conversion factor. The 2018 conversion factor in Area 2C is five pounds less than it was in 2017; in Area 3A, it is two pounds less than 2017.

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.

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
2017	74	42
2018	71	44
2019	66	42

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%

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	

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

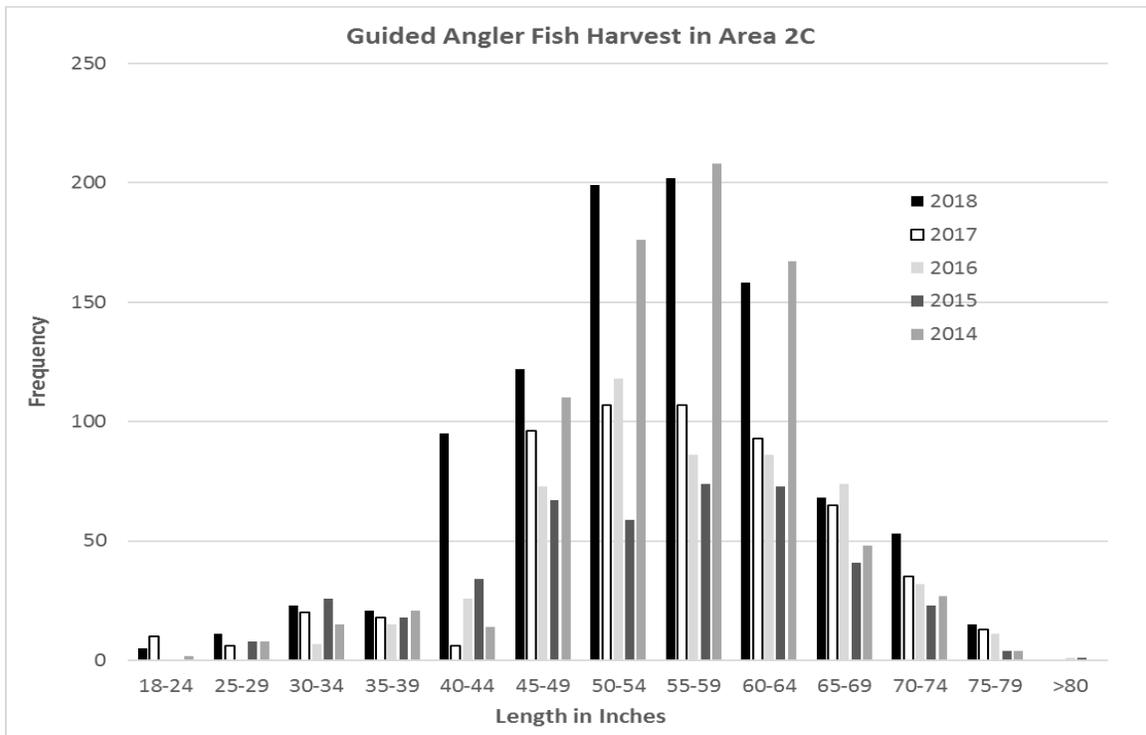


Figure 1. 2014 through 2018 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 2C.

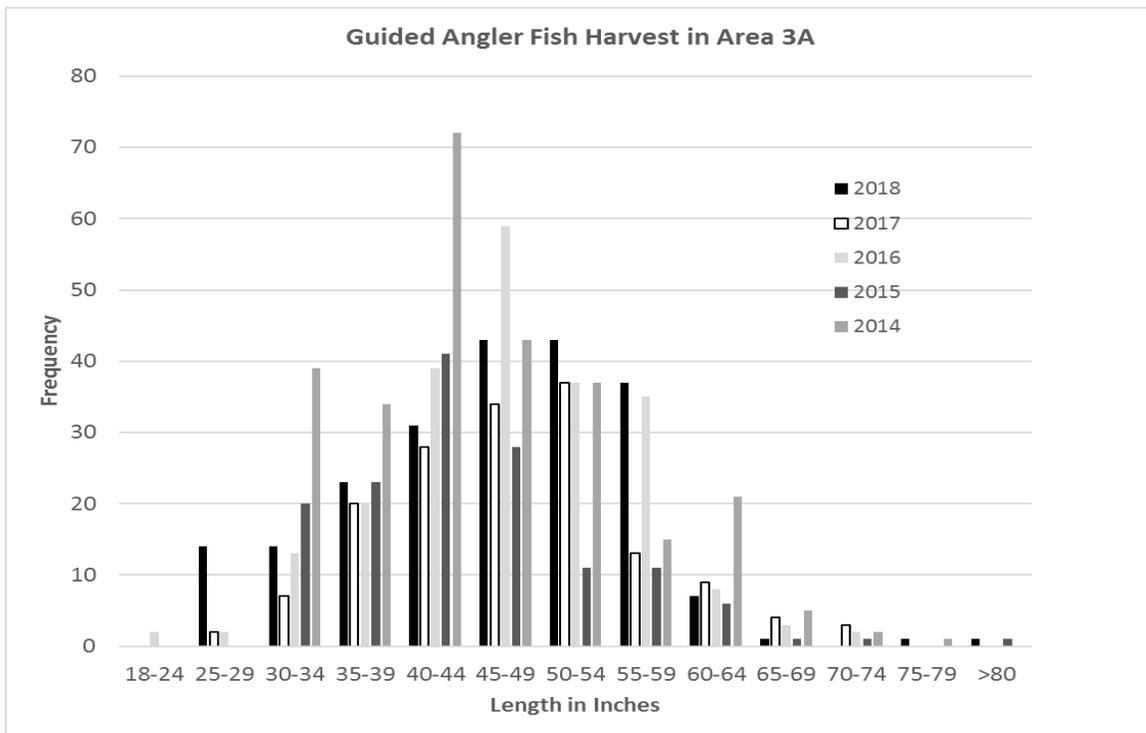


Figure 2. 2014 through 2018 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 3A.