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NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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C3 BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Team Reports and Proposed Harvest Specifications; Final SSC OFL and ABC Recommendations for Select Stocks

October 2026

Action Memo

Council Staff: Dr. Diana Stram (BSAI), Sara Cleaver (GOA)

Other Presenters (SSC): BSAI Plan Team: Dr. Kalei Shotwell (AFSC, Co-Chair), Dr. Steve Barbeaux (AFSC, Co-Chair), Dr. Cindy Tribuzio (Vice Chair)

GOA Plan Team: Dr. Jim Ianelli (AFSC, Co-Chair), Chris Lunsford (AFSC, Co-Chair)

Additional presenters: Dr. Dan Goethel (AFSC), Dr. Matt Cheng, Dr. Cole Monnahan (AFSC), Aaron Lambert (ADF&G), Dr. Meaghan Bryan (AFSC)

Action Required: C3a: Review Joint and GOA Groundfish Plan Team reports and recommend GOA groundfish harvest limits, prohibited species catch (PSC) limit apportionments, and halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs) for 2027-2028

C3b: Review BSAI Groundfish Plan Team report and recommend proposed BSAI groundfish harvest limits, PSC limit apportionments, and halibut DMRs for 2027-2028

C3c: Review Plan Team reports and recommend final OFLs/ABCs/BRDs on select stocks (SSC only)

BACKGROUND

C3a-b: Groundfish Plan Team reports and October *proposed* harvest specifications

The Council's BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Teams met jointly on September 8-9 and individually on September 10-11, 2026. The Teams reviewed assessment information in preparation for the November Plan Team meetings and recommended proposed groundfish harvest specifications for the 2027 and 2028 fishing years. The Teams also received a climate update which previews some of the information to be included in the ecosystem status reports (ESRs), to be finalized for the November meetings. The complete list of items covered at the joint and individual meetings can be found on the Groundfish Plan Teams [eAgenda](#).

At this meeting, the SSC, AP, and Council will follow the usual October process for proposed 2027–2028 groundfish harvest specifications. The SSC will receive presentations from assessment authors and Plan Team co-chairs on proposed models, final assessments, and harvest specification recommendations. The

SSC will recommend overfishing limits (OFLs), acceptable biological catch (ABCs), and biologically-informed recommended distributions (BRDs) for proposed specifications.

Plan Team coordinators will provide summary presentations on the Plan Team reports to the AP and Council. The action for the Council is to provide BSAI and GOA groundfish OFL, ABC, and total allowable catch (TAC) recommendations for proposed rulemaking, providing public notice of expected Council action on final harvest specifications in December 2026. The Council will also recommend, for proposed rulemaking, halibut, crab, and herring prohibited species catch (PSC) limits and updated halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs).

In December 2025, the Council adopted final harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027, which were published as a final rule in the Federal Register in March 2026 (91 FR 11750, March 10, 2026 (BSAI); 91 FR 11902, March 11, 2026 (GOA)). The existing 2027 specifications from that rule will be effective beginning January 1, 2027, and these will be replaced by the final 2027–2028 harvest specifications based on recommendations made in December and implemented through the final rule in March 2027. Proposed harvest specifications for groundfish and PSC limits in the GOA and BSAI are further detailed in the C3a and C3b sections below.

C3c (SSC only): *Final Plan Team and SSC recommendations in October 2026, for December*

The timing of final assessment review and harvest specification recommendations for this year has been adjusted from the typical process to account for impacts from the government shutdown in fall 2025. In 2026, rather than reviewing all final assessments at the November Plan Team and December SSC meetings, the Plan Teams and SSC are reviewing final assessments for select stocks and all harvest projections at their respective September and October meetings and making final OFL, ABC, and BRD recommendations for those stocks at that time. The SSC has previously reviewed and approved assessment methods for these stocks, either through model review in October 2025 or through a previous operational assessment.

Final assessments and harvest specification recommendations for the remaining stocks will follow the typical schedule, with Plan Team review in November and SSC recommendations in December.

The SSC is scheduled to review SAFE chapters and provide final BRD/ABC/OFL recommendations for 2027-2028 for the following stocks at this meeting:

Full or Update Assessments	Harvest Projections
● Bogoslof pollock	● AI pollock
● GOA arrowtooth flounder	● BSAI northern rock sole
● GOA rex sole	● BSAI Kamchatka flounder
● GOA skates	● BSAI northern rockfish
	● BSAI flathead sole
	● BSAI arrowtooth flounder
	● BSAI Alaska plaice
	● GOA dusky rockfish
	● GOA flathead sole
	● GOA shallow-water flatfish, incl. northern & southern rock sole
	● GOA deepwater flatfish

These stocks will not be reviewed again by the Plan Teams or SSC in November/December 2026.

The OFLs, ABCs, and BRDs for those stocks will not be reflected in the proposed harvest specifications for consistency with prior years. The Plan Team OFL, ABC, and BRD recommendations for these stocks are included in the [BSAI Plan Team Final 27 28 Recs Select Stocks for December](#) and the [GOA Plan Team Final 27 28 Recs Select Stocks for December](#) attachments on the SSC eAgenda. The OFLs, ABCs, and BRDs recommended by the SSC for these stocks in October will be reflected in the SSC's final recommendations and provided to the Council in December 2026 when the AP and Council can consider these SSC recommendations together with recommendations on all groundfish stocks and use this information to help inform the TAC setting process. The Ecosystem Status Report preview provided under agenda item C2 will highlight any pertinent information on groundfish to inform the SSC's final recommendations for these stocks. Final harvest specifications in December 2026 will be based on additional stock assessments for BSAI and GOA groundfish which will be finalized in late November 2026. Stock assessments for the select stocks above are available on the [Council's SAFE webpage](#).

C3a: Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Proposed Harvest Specifications

The GOA Groundfish Plan Team's harvest recommendations for 2026 and 2027 are shown in the Proposed Tables attachment on the eAgenda. The Team adopted proposed 2027 and 2028 OFLs, ABCs, and BRDs which match the existing 2027 harvest specifications that were published in the Federal Register in March 2026 and rolled over the same limits for 2028. The nomenclature for what was previously called sub-area ABCs was changed to BRDs to more accurately reflect the function of these sub-area apportionments. However, the BRD limits match the sub-area apportionment ABC limits from the 2027 harvest specifications.

TAC considerations for State waters pollock, Pacific cod, and octopus fisheries

The Council will need to recommend pollock TACs for the GOA that account for the GHF for the State waters Prince William Sound (PWS) pollock fishery. The State waters PWS GHF is 2.5% of the annual W/C/WYK pollock ABC.

The Council will need to recommend Pacific cod TACs for the GOA that are a 25% to 35% reduction from the BRD for each area to account for State GHF fisheries. Using the area apportionments from the proposed 2027 Pacific cod ABCs recommended by the Plan Team, the 2027 and 2028 Federal TACs for Pacific cod would be adjusted as listed in the BRD column of Table 2 of the GOA 2027-28 Proposed Tables attachment on the eAgenda.

The Council will need to recommend Octopus TACs for the GOA that are a 32 mt reduction from the ABC to account for State GHF octopus fisheries.

GOA Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) Limit Apportionments

In addition to harvest specifications, the Council will recommend, for proposed rulemaking, gear and target fishery apportionments of PSC limits for halibut. Recommended 2027 and 2028 halibut PSC apportionments (**Tables 9, 10, 11** in the GOA 2027-28 Proposed Tables attachment on the eAgenda) are based on the recommended 2027 apportionments for the GOA groundfish fisheries.

The GOA Groundfish FMP (Section 3.6.2.1) sets out the procedure for modifying halibut PSC limit apportionments during the annual harvest specifications process. To adjust the PSC limit apportionments, the Council and NMFS must consider biological and socioeconomic factors about the halibut stock and groundfish fisheries that intercept halibut as bycatch. To accommodate these considerations, the FMP identifies a time-specific procedure for adjusting PSC apportionments to target fishery categories in the GOA, and seasonal allocations thereof, which requires this information to be provided for Council review

in October, so the Council can set different apportionments in December. No additional information pertaining to GOA halibut PSC apportionments was requested by the Council for review in October.

Salmon PSC limits in the GOA groundfish fisheries are not specified on an annual basis because they are set in regulations.

GOA Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

At the September meeting, the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams reviewed halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs) for implementation in 2027 and 2028 in the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries and supported the Halibut DMR Working Group's recommendations. Proposed 2027 and 2028 Pacific halibut DMRs for the GOA are shown in **Table 12** of the GOA 2027-28 Proposed Tables attachment on the eAgenda.

C3b: Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Proposed Harvest Specifications

The BSAI Groundfish Plan Team recommendations for the proposed 2027 and 2028 BSAI groundfish annual harvest specifications are shown in the Proposed Tables attachment on the eAgenda. The Team adopted proposed 2027 and 2028 BSAI OFLs, ABCs, and BRDs which match the existing final 2027 harvest specifications which were published in the Federal Register in March 2026 and rolled over the same limits for 2028. The nomenclature for what was previously called sub-area ABCs was changed to BRDs to more accurately reflect the function of these sub-area apportionments. However, the BRD limits match the sub-area apportionment ABC limits from the 2027 harvest specifications.

TAC considerations for State waters Pacific cod fishery and sablefish fishery

In setting TACs for 2027 and 2028, the Council accounts for guideline harvest levels (GHLs) for groundfish fisheries in State waters. In the proposed harvest specification, the GHL in the Aleutian Islands (AI) will be set at 31% of the AI Pacific cod ABC (to a maximum of 15,000,000 pounds). The GHL in the Bering Sea (BS) will be set at 13% of the eastern BS Pacific cod ABC. Due to step up and step down provisions in State regulation, these percentages will be reevaluated at the December Council meeting once the 2026 GHL fisheries have concluded. An additional 45 mt will be set aside for the BS jig fishery.

The GHL for vessels using pot, longline, jig, and hand troll gear in the State's AI state-waters sablefish registration area includes all state waters west of Scotch Cap Light (164° 44.72' W longitude) and south of Cape Sarichef (54° 36' N latitude). The State's sablefish GHL is set at 5 percent of the combined 2027 BS and AI BRDs. The State's AI sablefish registration area includes areas adjacent to parts of the federal BS subarea. Based on the 2026 GHL sablefish catch, most of the State's 2027 and 2028 GHL sablefish fishery is expected to occur in State-waters adjacent to the federal BS subarea. Therefore, the Council may recommend that the 2027 and 2028 sablefish TACs in the BS and AI account for the State's GHL for sablefish caught in State waters.

Flatfish flexibility ABC reserve

Under Amendment 105, an ABC reserve is specified for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole. These species are allocated to Community Development Quota (CDQ) groups and the Amendment 80 cooperative using formulas from the annual harvest specifications process. The ABC reserve for each species is specified by the Council by evaluating the difference between the ABC and TAC for each species (i.e., the ABC surplus) and considering whether the amount needs to be reduced by a discretionary buffer based on social, economic, or ecological considerations. The Council then designates some, all, or none of the ABC surplus as the ABC reserve. The Council provides its rationale for setting the ABC reserve at a particular level each year. The 2027 and 2028 CDQ and Amendment 80 ABC reserves have been provided by NMFS staff based on 2026 TAC levels and past Council action to set the ABC reserve at the maximum amount. The proposed 2027 and 2028 ABC Surplus, ABC Reserves, CDQ

ABC Reserves, and Amendment 80 ABC Reserves in the BSAI for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole are shown in **Table 7** of the BSAI 2027-8 Proposed Tables attachment on the eAgenda.

Bering Sea and Eastern Aleutian Islands Atka Mackerel jig fishery allocation

The allocation to jig vessels for Atka mackerel in the Bering Sea and eastern Aleutian Islands may be set at up to 2% of the TAC for these subareas. The criteria for determining this apportionment are:

- (A) The amount of Atka mackerel harvested by vessels using jig gear during recent fishing years;
- (B) The anticipated harvest of Atka mackerel by vessels using jig gear during the upcoming fishing year; and
- (C) The extent to which the jig-gear allocation will support the development of a jig-gear fishery for Atka mackerel while minimizing the amount of Atka mackerel TAC annually allocated to vessels using jig gear that remains unharvested at the end of the fishing year.

These regulations came from a 1997 FMP amendment to provide Atka mackerel as bait for the pot fleet. It was fished in 1994 and 1995 and the highest catch was 40 metric tons. It has not been fished since this time. The 2026 and 2027 final harvest specifications set the jig Atka mackerel allocation at zero % due to the historical lack of participants.

The Council should consider setting the percentage at zero for the 2027 and 2028 final harvest specifications unless there is public testimony stating an intention to participate with jig gear, to stay in compliance with the regulation.

BSAI Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) Limit Apportionments

Final BSAI harvest specifications will include PSC limit apportionments for halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab (*Chionoecetes bairdi*), *C. opilio* crab, and herring, which are set in Federal regulations. Proposed harvest specifications for these PSC limits are shown as **Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11** of the BSAI 2027-8 Proposed Tables attachment on the eAgenda. The proposed limits are based on the 2027 apportionments unless new biomass data is available as described below.

The overall crab and herring PSC limits are determined under the authority of regulations outside of the groundfish harvest specification process, based on biomass from survey results. However, the Council does apportion the overall crab PSC limit by target fishery in the groundfish specification process. The 2027 and 2028 crab PSC limits have been revised using current biomass estimates. Herring PSC limits for the proposed rule have also been revised with the most recent biomass estimate from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). For halibut, the BSAI halibut limit for the Amendment 80 sector will be updated with the most recent abundance estimate from the International Pacific Halibut Commission setline survey when known, but the eastern Bering Sea shelf trawl survey index continues to estimate halibut abundance in 2026 as below the threshold level of 150,000 mt in the low abundance state.

Federal regulations at §679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)(1) state that the Red King Crab Savings Subarea is closed to nonpelagic trawl gear if ADF&G does not set a TAC for red king crab in the Bristol Bay area in the previous year. If a TAC is not set for the 2026/2027 Bristol Bay red king crab season, the area would be closed to nonpelagic trawl gear in 2027.

BSAI Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

At the September meeting the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams reviewed halibut DMRs for implementation in 2027 and 2028 in the BSAI and GOA and supported the Halibut DMR Working Group's recommendations. Proposed 2027 and 2028 Pacific halibut DMRs for the BSAI are shown in **Table 12** of the BSAI 2027-78 Proposed Tables attachment on the eAgenda.

Three-River Index for EBS Pollock Fishery Chinook Salmon PSC Threshold

Under BSAI Groundfish FMP Amendment 110, in addition to other bycatch reduction measures, the Council recommended, and NMFS implemented a reduction to overall Chinook PSC levels for the EBS pollock fishery sectors in times of low Western Alaskan Chinook salmon abundance. Low Western Alaskan Chinook salmon abundance is assessed annually using a three-system index of combined in-river adult Chinook salmon run sizes from the Unalakleet, Upper Yukon, and Kuskokwim Rivers. The PSC limits are reduced when this index of Western Alaskan salmon abundance is below a threshold of 250,000 Chinook salmon. Cap levels are then reduced from a performance standard of 47,491 to 33,318 and a PSC limit from 60,000 to 45,000. This reduction in cap levels in times of low abundance is designed to provide increased incentives for the pollock fleet to reduce bycatch to the maximum extent practicable to help in efforts to rebuild critically low Western Alaskan Chinook salmon stocks.

Reduced cap levels are enacted in all years when the index is below the designated threshold of 250,000 Western Alaskan Chinook salmon, which indicates very poor run sizes. All other provisions of Chinook salmon bycatch management will also be in place in these years.

The ADF&G provides post-season abundance estimates to NMFS by October 1 to determine if adult Chinook abundance in the index system falls at or below the threshold level of 250,000. The performance standard and hard cap applicable to the BS pollock fishery will then be lowered in the year following the year in which the index was $\leq 250,000$. A letter from ADF&G to NMFS is posted to the eAgenda, which reports that the 2026 three-system index of in river adult Chinook salmon run sizes from the Unalakleet, Upper Yukon, and Kuskokwim rivers is 155,860 and is below the threshold level of 250,000. Therefore, the performance standard will remain at 33,318 Chinook salmon and the PSC limit will remain at 45,000 Chinook salmon, as identified at §679.21.