



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, AK 99802-1668

November 29, 2024

Agenda B-2: NMFS Management Report

Status of Actions Report Online

Updated daily at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/amendments.pdf>

Progress on Rulemaking

Highlights on progress since the October 2024 meeting include:

- On **November 29, 2024**, NMFS published the Proposed 2025 and 2026 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska. Comments are invited through **December 30, 2024**.
- On **October 23, 2024**, NMFS published a proposed rule to authorize hook-and-line catcher/processors to use longline pot gear when directed fishing for Greenland turbot in the Bering Sea subarea of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands . The comment period closed on **November 22, 2024**. If approved, NMFS expects a final rule to be published in early 2025.
- On **October 31, 2024**, NMFS published a proposed rule to require a charter halibut stamp for charter vessel anglers. Funds from purchased stamps would be transferred to the Recreational Quota Entity to purchase halibut Quota Share issued under the Halibut and Sablefish Individual Fishing Quota Program on behalf of the charter halibut fishery. The comment period closed **December 2, 2024**. If approved, NMFS expects a final rule to be published in early 2025.
- On **November 29, 2024**, NMFS published the Cost Recovery Fee Notice for the Western Alaska Community Development Quota and Trawl Limited Access Privilege Programs (American Fisheries Act, Amendment 80, Aleutian Islands Pollock) for the 2024 fishing year. Payment for cost recovery fees is due by **December 31, 2024**.
- **The Status of Actions Report** provides additional detail.

Additional NMFS Documents

In addition to this B2 NMFS Management Report, NMFS also posted the following documents on the Council agenda:

1. 2025 Final Annual Deployment Plan
2. Year-end Inseason Management Report
3. Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP Biological Opinion
4. Tribal Engagement Report
5. Conservation Plan for the Eastern Pacific Stock of Northern Fur Seal (Laaqudaĕ)
6. [Alaska Region FY 2025 Priorities](#)



National Seafood Strategy Implementation Plan

Mr. Michael Rubino will walk through the National Seafood Strategy Implementation Plan. NOAA Fisheries released its first-ever [National Seafood Strategy](#) in August 2023. The Strategy outlines NOAA Fisheries' direction for supporting a thriving domestic seafood economy, and enhancing the resilience of the seafood sector and its critical role in food security in the face of climate change and other stressors. NOAA Fisheries released the [Implementation Plan](#) in September 2024 that outlines actions the agency can take. Central to the implementation is a whole-of-government approach and a focus on NOAA Fisheries' industry services and tools, plus a few pilot initiatives.

Magnuson-Stevens Act and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Procedures Update

Section 304(i) of the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act states that the Secretary of Commerce shall revise and update the agency procedures for compliance with NEPA. As a result, NMFS developed Policy Directive 30-132 in 2015. In 2017, the Policy Directive was adopted into the NOAA-level NEPA procedures. Due to recent statutory and regulatory revisions, NMFS needs to revise the procedures that outline the implementation of NEPA for fishery management actions taken under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. While NMFS is working on a draft of the revised procedures, we are also assessing recent court decisions and other developments that may impact how we implement NEPA. We intend to update the Council at the April 2025 meeting.

2025 Final Annual Deployment Plan

The final 2025 Annual Deployment Plan (ADP) for Observers and Electronic Monitoring (EM) in the Groundfish and Halibut Fisheries off Alaska is posted under the B-2 Agenda Item. The North Pacific Observer Program is the largest observer program in the country and covers vessels in both partial coverage and full coverage. In the full coverage component of the program, every trip is monitored by one or two observers and the vast majority of groundfish harvest is covered by this portion of the program. The ADP mainly focuses on the partial coverage component of the program and specifies the scientific deployment design and selection rate—the portion of trips that are sampled by observers and EM.

In 2025, fishing trips will be divided into groups, or selection pools, defined by whether monitoring is required on either all trips or a subset of trips and whether the trips will be monitored by observers or EM. In addition, groups will be further split into sampling strata, based on the FMP area (BSAI, GOA), and gear that combines hook-and-line and pot gear (Fixed, Trawl). NMFS will implement the Proximity allocation method to deploy observers and fixed-gear EM in the partial coverage component. The Proximity allocation method is designed to spread sampled trips throughout the fisheries to increase the proportion of trips that are sampled or near a sampled neighbor and to be consistent between strata within a specified budget, while also protecting against small sample sizes within a stratum. The method is precautionary with respect to obtaining data from all types of fishing activity (decreasing data gaps) while protecting against high variance associated with low sample sizes.

The budget for EM and observer deployment in the partial coverage component of the program in 2025 is \$4.19M. The fixed-gear EM pool will consist of 178 vessels. Nine vessels requested to be added to the fixed-gear pool. Based on criteria established by NMFS and the Council, one vessel

was approved and the remaining eight were denied. One vessel was denied for having a high potential to increase data gaps whereas the other seven vessels either had no recent fishing history or fished too few trips to be cost-effective participants. The first year of the trawl EM regulated program is 2025 and the trawl EM pool is composed of all vessels fishing carrying EM on pollock catcher vessels using pelagic trawl gear in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. In 2025, 112 vessels are expected to participate in this pool, 53 of which are expected to participate in partial coverage fisheries.

Overall, NMFS will implement 10 sampling strata in 2025 and expects to monitor 3,822 trips and 20,711 days, consisting of 2,602 trips and 15,991 days in the full coverage component of the program, and 1,220 trips and 4,720 days in the partial coverage component.

The selection rates (rounded to the nearest whole number) in 2025 are—

- Partial Coverage:
 - Observer Partial Coverage Trip Selection
 - Trawl BSAI – 40%
 - Trawl GOA – 15%
 - Fixed-gear BSAI – 20%
 - Fixed-gear GOA – 6%
 - Fixed-Gear EM
 - BSAI – 48%
 - GOA – 11%
 - Trawl EM GOA: all vessels 100% at-sea coverage with EM; plus 100% shoreside monitoring for salmon and halibut PSC; plus 33% shoreside monitoring for groundfish biological samples.
 - No Selection – 0%
- Full Coverage
 - Trawl EM BSAI - 100% for at-sea coverage with EM & shoreside monitoring for salmon and halibut PSC and biological samples.
 - Full Observer Coverage - 100%

New in 2025, the Observer Declare and Deploy System (ODDS) will rely on users logging trips in the observed strata to modify their trips if needed, rather than canceling the trip. Past annual reports have shown a disproportionate cancellation of trips between those that were selected for observer coverage and those that were not selected. The changes in 2025 will help address the potential for bias in monitoring data, which leads to inaccurate catch estimates. NMFS is hosting an Information Session on the changes to ODDS on Thursday, December 5 from 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm in the Advisory Panel Room. [See this flyer for details.](#)

Data Confidentiality Final Rule

On March 11, 2024, NMFS published a proposed rule ([89 FR 17358](#)) to revise regulations governing the confidentiality of fishery data submitted in compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Act. NMFS has considered public comments and is preparing a final rule.

Salmon Fisheries in Southeast Alaska Subject to the Pacific Salmon Treaty

In accordance with provisions of the NEPA, NMFS release the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Issuance of an Incidental Take Statement under the Endangered Species Act for Salmon Fisheries in Southeast Alaska Subject to the Pacific Salmon Treaty and Funding to the State of Alaska to Implement the Pacific Salmon Treaty (SEAK EIS) on November 22, 2024. This and associated documents are available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/environmental-impact-statement-issuance-incidental-take-statement-under>.

Termination of Fisherman's Finest Additional Sideboards

On December 4, 2018, the President signed the Frank LoBiondo Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2018 (Coast Guard Act) into law (Pub. L. 115-282). Sections 835 and 836 of the Coast Guard Act contain provisions that apply to vessels owned, and a License Limitation Program (LLP) Permits held by Fishermen's Finest. Section 836 contains provisions that limit the amount of groundfish that may be harvested in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) by the vessels specified in section 836(a)(2), and the amount of Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and GOA groundfish that may be processed from vessels delivering to the vessels specified in section 836(a)(2). NMFS implemented these limits as described in the Coast Guard Act. These limits were in addition to the sideboards already listed for Amendment 80 and Rockfish Program vessels in 50 CFR 679. Section 836(b) clarifies that these additional sideboard limits will apply only until the earlier of — the end of the 6-year period beginning on the date of enactment of this Act (December 4, 2024), or the date on which the Secretary of Commerce issues a final rule, based on recommendations developed by the Council consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act, that limits processing deliveries of that groundfish species from other vessels in any Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and GOA groundfish fisheries that are not subject to conservation and management measures under section 206 of the American Fisheries Act (See section 836(b)). Since the Council did not recommend rulemaking for any species that are subject to these sideboard limits, these sideboard limits remain in place until December 4, 2024. After December 4, 2024, these additional sideboards imposed through the Coast Guard Act will no longer be in effect. The Amendment 80 and Rockfish Program sideboards listed in 50 CFR 679 will continue to remain in place for these vessels.

Guided Angler Fish (GAF) Report

On November 25, NMFS published the annual report on the performance of the Guided Angler Fish (GAF) program in the charter halibut fishery. GAF continues to be an important component of the Catch Sharing Plan, especially in Area 2C (Southeast Alaska), where approximately 147,000 pounds of GAF was used by some 106 permit holders. The report is posted to the eAgenda.

Halibut IFQ Season Start Time and Impacts on Sablefish Catch

As previously reported in the April 2024 B2 NMFS Management report, the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) changed the time of day for the 2024 opening of the commercial halibut fishery from 12:00 pm (noon) on opening day (for 2024 this was March 15), which was in place in previous years, to 6:00 am. Under Federal regulations at 50 CFR 679.23(b), the time of groundfish openings and closures (including the IFQ sablefish fishery) is set at 12:00 pm (noon) on the first day of the fishing season. Therefore, for halibut gear that was deployed in the commercial fishery before 12:00 pm (noon) on March 15 in 2024, sablefish caught from that deployment could

not be retained. If a vessel operator holds both halibut and sablefish IFQ, and the operator intended to retain sablefish on March 15, then the vessel would have to deploy its commercial fishing gear after the start of the IFQ sablefish fishery at 12:00 pm (noon). The difference in the start and end times also applies to the fishery closing day on December 7, 2024. Because of the differences in the season opening and closing times in the IPHC regulations and those at 50 CFR 679.23(b), the IFQ sablefish fishery ends on December 7, 2024 at 12:00 pm (noon) and the IFQ halibut fishery ends on December 7, 2024 at 11:59pm (almost midnight).

For vessels harvesting IFQ or CDQ halibut between noon and midnight on December 7, sablefish IFQ and CDQ may only be retained up to the Maximum Retainable Amount (MRA) during that same time period. If a vessel operator holds both halibut and sablefish IFQ or CDQ, and the operator intends to retain sablefish on December 7, 2024, after 12:00 pm (noon) ALT, then the vessel may only retain IFQ or CDQ sablefish in accordance with the MRA regulations at § 679.20(e).

In the next Council action to modify the IFQ Program, the Council may want to consider options to establish the sablefish IFQ and CDQ season opening and closure times to correspond with the halibut IFQ and CDQ halibut opening and closure times in the same manner the opening and closure dates are already adopted. Revisions to Federal regulations could provide additional flexibility to maintain the season opening and closing for halibut and sablefish the same in future years.

Revised Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) Road Map Released

In January 2024, NMFS updated its [EBFM Policy](#), which provides the background, definition, rationale, and legislative context for implementing EBFM under relevant mandates. In September 2024, NMFS released the [2024 revised EBFM Road Map](#), which provides specific actions under each goal identified in the EBFM Policy that will guide and enhance our efforts to implement the Policy over the next five years. This includes specific actions aimed at advancing climate-ready decisionmaking, which includes climate-informed science and management for trust resources and habitats.

The EBFM Policy provides six Guidelines to implement EBFM, builds on past progress, and clarifies NMFS's commitment to integrating its management programs for living marine resources and their habitats. The EBFM Road Map provides a national implementation strategy for the Policy. This Road Map describes how to operationalize the Policy's six Guidelines with Goals and Action Items to implement each Goal.

These Guidelines are—

1. Implement ecosystem-level planning,
2. Advance our understanding of ecosystem processes,
3. Prioritize vulnerabilities and risks to ecosystems and their components,
4. Explore and address trade-offs within an ecosystem,
5. Implement ecosystem considerations into management, and
6. Support ecosystem resilience via monitoring and adjusting of management actions.

This Road Map’s Guidelines, Goals, and the Action Items are actionable steps for implementing EBFM within NMFS. NMFS will review and, as appropriate, update the Road Map every five years. This will enable NMFS to address further guidance on EBFM as needs evolve.

NMFS has made significant progress in the eight years since the initial 2016 Road Map was released, including completing climate vulnerability assessments in all regions, providing ecosystem status reports in most regions, testing out risk tables and scenario planning in multiple regions, and significantly advancing the use of ecosystem models.

During the public comment period on the proposed revisions to the Road Map, NMFS received comments from NPFMC, several Alaska fisheries interests, including Alaska Native communities and organizations, among the broader suite of comments sent from individuals and entities nationwide. NMFS appreciates the thoughtful considerations provided in the comments and has incorporated that feedback, along with our internal discussions into the revised document.

NMFS revised the final revised Road Map to incorporate ideas and comments from fishery management councils, including NPFMC. NMFS agrees with the NPFMC’s principle comment on the importance of at-sea surveys to fisheries science and management; that idea is already part of the guiding documents and the EBFM Road Map. NMFS also revised the Road Map based on comments received from Alaska fisheries interests, including Alaska Native communities and organizations. NMFS’s revisions included:

- Adding language recognizing the necessity of understanding fishing community vulnerability and dependence on fishery resources, the rights of indigenous peoples and dependence of indigenous communities on fishery resources.
- Revising language to reflect the importance of fish and fisheries to “fishery-dependent communities,” not just to “coastal communities.”
- Adding language to recognize that seafood systems and seafood supplies can be affected by market forces, as well as by fisheries and natural disasters.
- Adding references to the [*NOAA Procedures for Government-to-Government Consultation with Federally Recognized Indian Tribal Governments, and NOAA Guidance and Best Practices for Engaging and Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in Decision-Making.*](#)

Protected Species Updates

Conservation Plan for the Eastern Pacific Stock of Northern Fur Seal (Laaqudaĕ)

In accordance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), NMFS has finalized the Conservation Plan for the Eastern Pacific Stock of Northern Fur Seal (Laaqudaĕ) (available [here](#)). The goal of the Conservation Plan is to conserve and restore the stock to its optimum sustainable population. The plan was significantly improved as a result of public comments on the draft plan and the contributions of our Tribal comanagers. A presentation will be provided by Michael Williams (NMFS PRD) and Lauren Divine (Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, Ecosystem Conservation Office).

In response to comments received from the Marine Mammal Commission on the Conservation Plan, NMFS and The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island submitted a proposal to the North Pacific Research Board to use new methods to involve a greater variety of experts and knowledge

holders to prioritize threats to Northern fur seals. That proposal was not funded. We are exploring alternatives to address this need.

Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP Biological Opinion

The Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD) prepared a Biological Assessment and submitted it to PRD to reinitiate consultation on August 9, 2024. SFD's proposed action includes all groundfish fisheries managed under GOA FMP, including State of Alaska parallel groundfish fisheries. PRD is completing a Biological Opinion on the effects of the GOA groundfish FMP on ESA-listed species and designated critical habitat.

Alaska Aquaculture Opportunity Area Updates

The Alaska Regional Office and State of Alaska agencies (ADNR, ADF&G, ADEC) are currently completing final decision points on the Alaska Aquaculture Opportunity Area (AOA) Atlas suitability model methodology prior to NOAA's National Centers of Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) running the first round of suitability model results. Once the preliminary run is complete NCCOS will conduct an informal review with constituents. This will be followed by formal public review through a Notice of Availability (NOA) sharing the preliminary results of the marine spatial planning study which uses a scoring and ranking process to narrow the suitability analysis results to Draft AOA Options that have high relative suitability scores. NOAA anticipates releasing the NOA by the end of February/beginning of March 2025.

The AOA identification process is a long-term planning effort. It is not a regulatory or permitting action. AOAs are not identified until the NEPA review is completed and the decision document is final. More information on the Alaska AOA identification process can be found [here](#).

Personnel Changes

Benjamin Cheeseman is the new NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) Assistant Director of the Alaska Division. Although Ben has been the acting Assistant Director since January, he officially began his new role on October 6, 2024. Ben earned his Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Psychology from the University of Alaska Anchorage and was a student intern for OLE in Anchorage, AK. Before his federal career, he worked as a deckhand and captain on various charter fishing vessels in Seward, Alaska, and still holds a USCG 100-ton Near Coastal Captain's License. In 2019, Ben rejoined OLE as the Assistant Special Agent in Charge for Alaska Division's Southeast District. In 2022, he was promoted to Deputy Special Agent in Charge of the Alaska Division. As a key member of the division's leadership team, Ben has demonstrated a strong commitment to the division's priorities and mission, building a collaborative environment and leading efforts with important partners such as the Council, International Pacific Halibut Commission, North Pacific Fisheries Commission, and North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission. He has also developed close working relationships with other NOAA line offices. Ben's dedication to the future of OLE, its mission, and the people within the organization is evident, and we are excited to have him lead the OLE Alaska Division in this new capacity.

Dr. Kelly Cates is the Alaska Region's new NEPA Coordinator. Kelly received her PhD from University of Alaska-Fairbanks and her Bachelors from Western Washington University. Kelly brings a wealth of experience working on Alaska fishery and marine resource issues and working

on NEPA and Endangered Species Act analytical documents. Most recently, she simultaneously successfully led the Environmental Impact Statement for the Southeast Alaska salmon fisheries and the Biological Assessment for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries, producing high quality documents on deadline that meet our many requirements.

Thank you to **Doug Shaftel** for serving as the Acting Alaska Region NEPA Coordinator since July. Doug will continue in his role as a Fishery Management Specialist working on projects moving through the Council Process.

Julie Fair recently retired from federal service after an outstanding 14-year career as the Alaska Region's Public Affairs Officer. Throughout her tenure, Julie expertly led both external and internal communications. She handled media inquiries on critical issues such as sustainable fisheries, habitat conservation, and protected species in Alaska, and developed captivating web stories that highlighted the agency's work. Julie also coordinated communication strategies for high-profile agency actions and played a key role in keeping Alaska Region employees informed and connected with the larger organization. We're grateful for Julie's many contributions and wish her all the best in retirement.

Jennifer Angelo is the Alaska Region's new Public Affairs Officer. Jennifer has an extensive background in public affairs and came to us from the U.S. Forest Service, where she led the Alaska Regional Communications Team for internal communication, digital communication, visual information, and media relations. Previously, Jennifer served as the public affairs officer for the National Guard in Oklahoma and North Carolina. While in the National Guard, she deployed to Afghanistan to serve as the Commander of the 382nd Public Affairs Detachment, responsible for mobilization, deployment, and welfare of an eight-person detachment. Jennifer is an Equity Bridge Builder, member of the employee civil rights group, and has received numerous awards, including the Regional Forester's Award for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility and the USDA Secretary's Honor Award. Jennifer is the recipient of the Meritorious Civilian Service Medal and we're happy to have her on our team, leading the Alaska Region's communications.