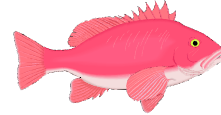


**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



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**FISHERY UPDATE
2012 CENTRAL REGION GROUND FISH FISHERIES OUTLOOK**

General

This annual news release provides a brief overview of Cook Inlet (CI) and Prince William Sound (PWS) groundfish fishing opportunities for the 2012 calendar year.

Fishermen, processors, and buyers are reminded that they must adhere to the 2011-2012 Groundfish Fishery Commercial Fishing Regulations available at ADF&G offices in Homer (235-8191), Cordova (424-3212), Anchorage (267-2104), Soldotna (262-9368), second floor of the Seward City Building, and on the state website at: www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us. Questions regarding interpretation of regulations should be directed to ADF&G groundfish staff in the Homer or Cordova offices.

In order to land groundfish or halibut, an individual must possess a gear-appropriate, valid Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) interim use or a limited entry permit card. In addition, all vessels operating gear for groundfish must possess an Area Registration from ADF&G. A vessel may be registered for only one groundfish registration area at a time and must check out of an area prior to registering for another area. Cook Inlet or Prince William Sound registrations can be obtained in person or by fax from department offices in Anchorage, Cordova, Homer, Soldotna, and Kodiak. A fisherman must present a CFEC permit card to register. To register by fax, a legible photocopy of the permit card must be received with a request for an area registration. Non-pelagic trawl gear may not be used to target groundfish in the CI and PWS areas.

Unless otherwise specified by emergency order or regulation, no combination of retained incidental species (bycatch) may exceed 20 percent of the total round weight of directed groundfish and halibut aboard the vessel (5AAC 28.070). However, all rockfish must be retained and any rockfish bycatch in excess of the allowances listed under the Rockfish headings below, must be weighed and reported on the fish ticket, by species, as an overage. Proceeds from overages are paid to the State of Alaska.

When a directed season is open for Pacific cod or pollock, regulations for improved retention and improved utilization (IR/IU) of groundfish (5 AAC 28.070 & 5 AAC 28.075) require that all captured Pacific cod or pollock be retained by the fisherman and accepted by a buyer. Similarly, all Pacific cod or pollock harvested must be retained up to the maximum retainable bycatch amounts when a bycatch season is open for these species.

All groundfish species or fisheries not specifically mentioned in this document will be managed via the miscellaneous groundfish commissioner's permit requirements specified in CI regulation 5 AAC 28.379 or PWS regulation 5 AAC 28.220.

Anyone intending to fish in federal waters (greater than 3 nautical miles (nmi) from shore), should contact the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for information prior to fishing.

Area NMFS Offices

Homer:	907-235-2337	Seward:	907-224-5348	Anchorage:	907-271-5006
Kodiak:	907-481-1780	Juneau:	907-586-7228		

State regulation 5 AAC 28.055 adopts by reference federal regulations at 50 CFR 679.24 (e), which **require seabird avoidance measures (SAM) in all longline fisheries for groundfish and halibut in state waters except the Inside District of PWS and the Cook Inlet District of the Cook Inlet Area.** For additional information see this link: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds/guide.htm>

All vessels participating in a parallel groundfish fishery, except those using jig or hand troll gear, must have a NMFS-approved vessel monitoring system (VMS). Information on VMS can be obtained from the NMFS website: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ole/ak_faqs.html.

Prince William Sound Area

Prince William Sound Area (5AAC 28.200): All waters of Prince William Sound and waters of Alaska bounded on the west by the longitude of Cape Fairfield (148°50.25' W. long.) south to the latitude of Cape Douglas (58°51.10' N. lat.), then west to 149°00.00' W. long., then south along 149°00.00 W. long., and on the east by 144°00.00' W. long.

PWS Inside District: All waters of PWS enclosed by lines from Pt. Whitshed to Pt. Bentinck, Cape Hinchinbrook to Zaikof Pt., and Cape Cleare to Cape Puget.

PWS Outside District: is divided into two sections:

Eastern Section: waters of the PWS Outside District between 147°00' W. long. and 144°00' W. long.

Western Section: waters of the PWS Outside District west of 147°00' W. long.

Groundfish fishing closures related to Steller sea lion (SSL) conservation include waters surrounding two rookeries in the PWS area, Seal Rocks and Wooded Island (Fish Island) (Figure 1). Directed commercial fishing for groundfish is closed to all gear types within 3 nmi of each of these rookeries. For specific regulatory language describing the closure areas, contact NMFS in Kodiak at 907-481-1780 or consult the website at: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/regs/679b22.pdf>.

Pollock – The directed fishery will open at 12:00 noon January 20 with a 6.1 million pound guideline harvest level (GHL). Participants must obtain a pollock fishery registration from the department no later than 5:00 pm January 13. Regulation 5 AAC 28.263 PWS Pollock Pelagic Trawl Management Plan requires in-season catch reports, logbooks, and accommodation of a department observer upon request. After the directed fishery closes, pollock must be retained up to the maximum allowable bycatch amount to other open directed groundfish fisheries. Additionally, all pollock taken with jig gear in the state-waters Pacific cod fishery may be retained.

Sablefish – PWS limited entry sablefish permit holders must obtain a PWS management area 2012 sablefish registration prior to the April 1 deadline in order to participate in the 2012 fishery. Fishery season dates are April 15–August 31. The 242,000-pound GHL is divided among registered permit holders under the shared quota approach described in regulation 5 AAC 28.272. CFEC regulations allow an interim-use or limited entry permit holder to use a vessel with an overall length greater than the vessel category for which the permit is designated. The department will distribute a news release during the first week of April outlining 2012 fishery management and allocation by permit class. Sablefish in PWS may not be retained as bycatch. Killer whale depredation on hooked sablefish has been a problem in recent years, resulting in the removal of undocumented numbers of sablefish during longline retrieval.

Rockfish – Rockfish in PWS may only be retained as bycatch to other directed fisheries. The PWS Rockfish Management Plan in regulation 5 AAC 28.265 requires full retention of all rockfish caught and mandates that proceeds from the sale of any bycatch overage be paid to the State of Alaska. Rockfish bycatch limits in PWS are 20% to directed sablefish, 5% to directed state-waters Pacific cod, and 10% to other directed groundfish and halibut. The rockfish harvest cap of 150,000 lb and the 5-day trip limit of 3,000 lb remain in effect. Black and dark rockfish in federal waters of the PWS Area are managed by ADF&G as part of the 150,000 lb GHL.

Lingcod – ADF&G manages lingcod in both state and federal waters. Participants in the PWS directed lingcod fishery must obtain an ADF&G PWS management area 2012 non-exclusive groundfish registration. Lingcod may be retained when the directed fishery is open (July 1 - December 31, unless closed earlier by emergency order) and as bycatch at the 20% level following closure of the directed fishery. Harvest guidelines are 7,300 lb for the Inside District and 25,300 lb for the Outside District. The department will also issue an emergency order to require all lingcod be landed with the head on and the vent intact, for gender determination, so that biological sampling goals can be met.

Pacific cod – Two Pacific cod fisheries, the “parallel” and the “state-waters” occur within PWS state waters. These fisheries have distinct requirements including different registrations and gear limits. Parallel Pacific cod fishery participants must obtain a PWS 2012 non-exclusive groundfish registration while state-waters Pacific cod fishery participants must obtain a separate PWS 2012 exclusive area registration that is specific to gear type. New regulations were adopted by the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) to coordinate the parallel and state-waters Pacific cod seasons with the new federal gear sector allocation program in effect for 2012.

- For longline gear, the parallel season will coincide with the federal season in the CGOA for the less than 50 foot hook-and-line (<50’ HAL) gear group. The state-waters season

for longline gear will open seven days following the closure of the parallel longline season or concurrent with the individual fishing quota (IFQ) halibut season opening date whichever occurs later. The state-waters season for longline gear will close when 85% of the GHL is achieved, a parallel season for longline gear is opened, or on December 31st, whichever occurs first.

- For pot gear, the parallel season will coincide with the federal season in the CGOA for pot gear. The state-waters season for pot gear will open 24 hours following the closure of the parallel season for pot gear. The state waters season for pot gear will close when 90% of the GHL is achieved, a parallel season for pot gear is opened, or on December 31st, whichever occurs first.
- For jig gear (mechanical or hand troll), the parallel season will coincide with the federal season in the CGOA for jig gear. The state-waters season for mechanical jiggling machines and hand troll gear will open 24 hours following the closure of the parallel season for jig gear. The state waters season for all jig gear will close when the GHL is achieved, a parallel season for jig gear is opened, or on December 31st, whichever occurs first.

See the “General” section at the top of this document regarding **VMS and seabird avoidance** requirements for parallel fishery participants. The seasons for pot, jig, and longline gear will open in the Inside District, Western Section of the Outside District, and that portion of the Eastern Section of the Outside District west of Hook Point (146° 15.12' W. long.). Fishermen are reminded that portions of the PWS Inside District are closed to fishing with groundfish pot gear (5 AAC 28.250).

Regulations require that Pacific cod be retained up to the maximum bycatch allowance unless it is closed to retention by emergency order or the vessel is participating in a directed Pacific cod fishery. In PWS, Pacific cod may be retained at a 20% bycatch allowance to other directed fisheries for vessels using longline, pot or mechanical jig gear. This bycatch allowance is in addition to the bycatch allowance of 20% for other species specified in 5 AAC 28.070. However, the landed weight of Pacific cod retained as bycatch may not exceed 20% of the directed finfish species on board the vessel. The commissioner may, by emergency order, close and immediately reopen a season in which the bycatch limit for any species is reduced.

The Prince Williams Sound Area state-waters fishery GHL for the 2012 season is 1.45 million pounds. A subsequent news release will provide additional information on this fishery.

Skates – Skates may be retained as bycatch. There will be no directed skate season in 2012.

Cook Inlet Area

Cook Inlet Area (5AAC 28.300) - All waters of Alaska within Cook Inlet and along the outer Kenai Peninsula north of the latitude of Cape Douglas (58°51.10' N. lat.) and west of the longitude of Cape Fairfield (148°50.25' W. long.).

Cook Inlet District: Waters of Alaska in the Cook Inlet Area north of a line from Cape Douglas to Point Adam (59° 15.27' N lat.).

North Gulf District: Waters of Alaska in the Cook Inlet Area north of the latitude of Cape Douglas, and west of the longitude of Cape Fairfield excluding the Cook Inlet District.

Pollock – Cook Inlet Area pollock must be retained up to maximum bycatch amounts. However, all pollock taken with jig gear in the state-waters Pacific cod fishery may be retained.

Sablefish – The season will open at 12:00 noon July 15 by emergency order and the fishery GHL is expected to be 68,626 pounds. Participation in the fishery requires a separate sablefish registration and logbooks. The fishery has vessel trip limits of 3,000 pounds of sablefish (round weight) in any two consecutive days. Registrations and logbooks are available at department offices. Sablefish may be retained in the state waters of the Cook Inlet Management Area only by a vessel registered for the directed fishery and only when the directed season is open.

Rockfish – There is a 150,000 lb GHL for all rockfish species in the Cook Inlet Area. All rockfish caught must be retained. A jig-only (mechanical or hand troll) fishery targeting **pelagic rockfish** opens July 1. Black and dark rockfish in federal waters of CI area are managed by ADF&G as part of the Cook Inlet GHL. There is a 1,000 lb trip limit in the Cook Inlet District and a 4,000 lb trip limit in the North Gulf District. A trip is defined as any landing in five consecutive days. Rockfish bycatch allowances are 10% during directed groundfish and halibut fisheries. Proceeds from bycatch overages must be paid to the State of Alaska.

Lingcod – ADF&G manages lingcod in both state and federal waters. Directed fishing for lingcod opens July 1, is restricted to harvest with jig (mechanical or hand troll) gear, and has a 52,500 lb GHL. Lingcod may be retained as bycatch to other directed fisheries at the 20% level **only** when the directed fishery is open. Resurrection Bay, north of a line from Aialik Cape to Cape Resurrection, is closed to retention of lingcod.

Pacific cod – The parallel Pacific cod season will open January 1 and be managed concurrently with NMFS management of the Pacific cod fishery in adjacent federal waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska (CGOA). New changes to state regulations adopted by the Alaska Board of Fisheries for the 2012 season in response to federal gear sector allocations will result in different season closing dates by gear type. Additionally, the federal CGOA Pacific cod “B” season for vessels using jig gear will open June 10, while other fixed gear types will continue to open September 1. See the “General” section at the top of this document regarding the **VMS and seabird avoidance** requirements for parallel fishery participants. Portions of both Kachemak and Kamishak Bays are closed to fishing with groundfish pot gear. Fishermen are reminded to check with groundfish staff in Homer or consult regulations regarding specific areas of Cook Inlet that are closed to fishing with pot gear. Pacific cod fishing closures related to SSL conservation establish longline and pot gear closures within 10 nmi, in addition to no-transit zones within 3 nmi, of Sugarloaf Island and Outer Pye Island rookeries to protect endangered Steller sea lions (Figure 2). For specific regulatory language describing the closure areas, contact NMFS in Kodiak at 907- 481-1780 or consult the NMFS website at: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/regs/679b22.pdf>.

New regulations governing the prosecution of the state-waters Pacific cod fishery will be implemented in 2012. Twenty-four hours following closure of the parallel Pacific cod seasons for pot and jig gear, the respective state-waters Pacific cod seasons for pot and jig gear will open in the Cook Inlet Management Area. The Cook Inlet Area GHL for the 2012 season is 4.7 million pounds. The GHL will be allocated 85% to pot gear and 15% to jig gear. This fishery requires a separate exclusive area registration for either pot or jig gear.

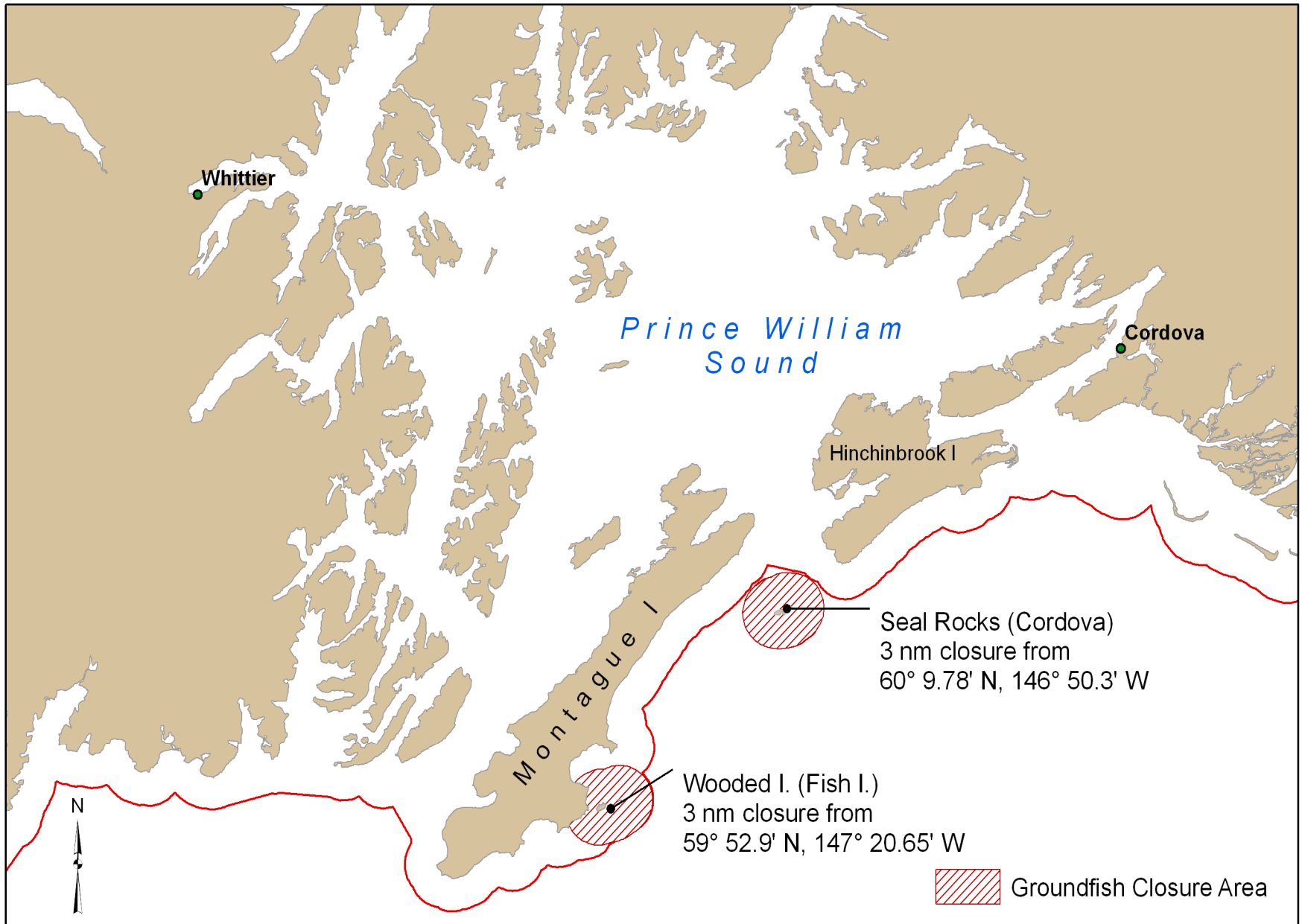


Figure 1. Directed groundfish fishing closure areas surrounding Steller sea lion rookeries in the Prince William Sound Area.

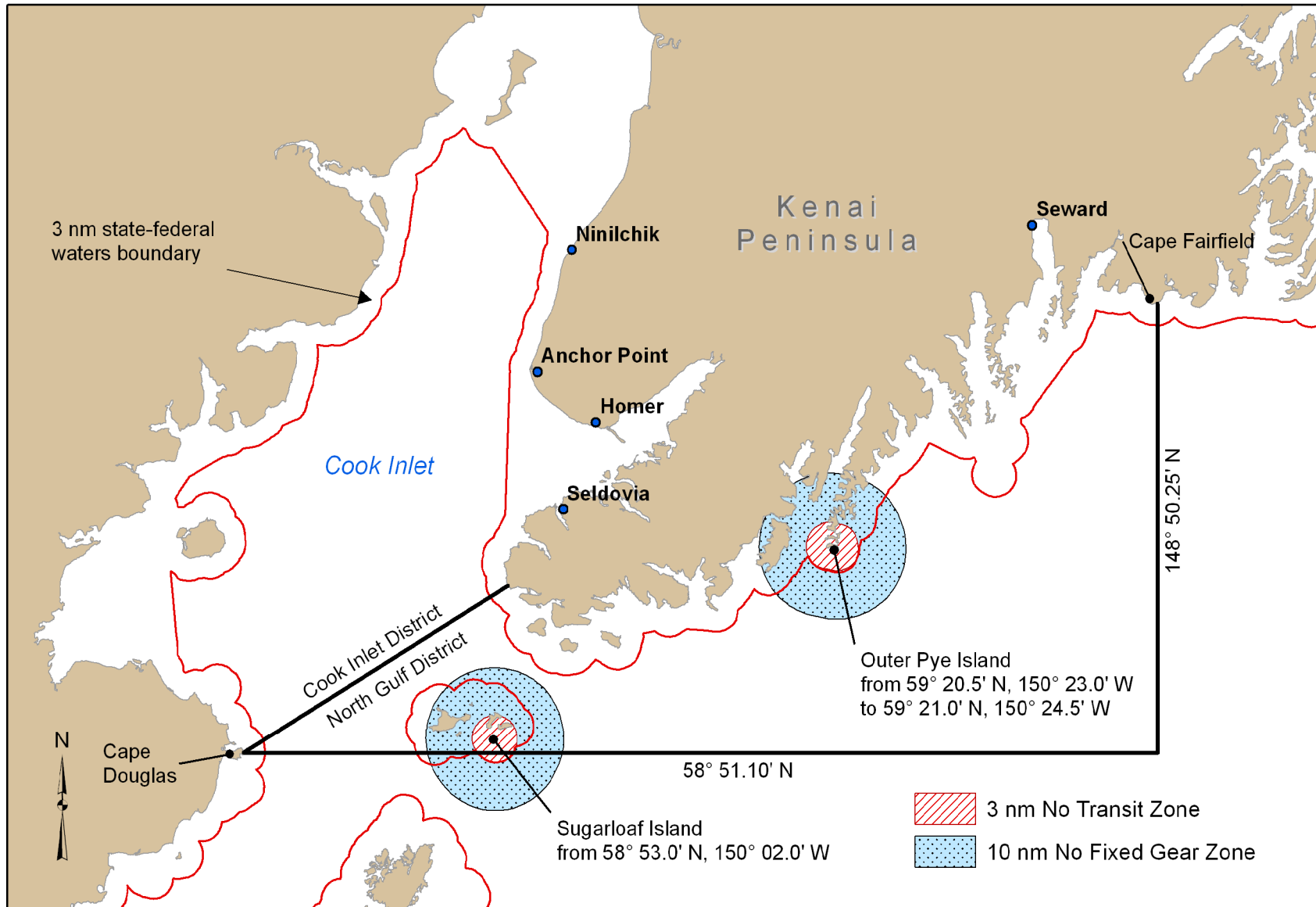


Figure 2. Vessel no-transit and fixed gear Pacific cod fishing closure zones around Steller sea lion rookeries within the Cook Inlet Management Area.