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Advisory Announcement

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Prince William Sound Area Pacific Cod Parallel Season Closes to Pot Gear Pacific Cod State-Waters Season Opens to Pot Gear Emergency Order # 2-GF-E-05-24

The Prince William Sound Area (PWS) Pacific cod **parallel season will close to vessels using pot gear at 12:00 noon on February 9**. This coincides with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) closure of the Pacific cod pot gear sector in the federal Central Gulf of Alaska Area (CGOA). The parallel season will remain open to jig and longline gear.

There is a 24-hour delivery time requirement following closure of a groundfish fishery. All fish harvested in the parallel season must be landed prior to participating in the state-waters season.

The PWS Pacific cod **state-waters season will open to vessels using pot gear at 12:00 noon on February 10**. In accordance with the *PWS Pacific Cod Management Plan* (5 AAC 28.267), the state-waters season for pot gear shall open 24 hours following the CGOA closure of the initial federal season for pot gear.

The guideline harvest level (GHL) for the PWS Pacific cod state-waters season is 1,618,744 lb. Due to the step-up provision outlined in the *Prince William Sound Pacific Cod Management Plan* (5AAC 28.267(e)(1)(A)), the GHL is allocated 20%, or 323,749 lb, to pot and jig gear combined and 80% or 1,294,995 lb, to longline gear.

The department has growing concerns about the status of rockfish stocks. The rockfish GHL in PWS was exceeded in 2022 and 2023. To stay within the 2023 annual PWS rockfish GHL the department reduced rockfish bycatch limits, did not re-open the parallel Pacific cod season, and sought emergency authority from the Board of Fisheries (BOF) to close areas to commercial fishing with specific gear types by emergency order. The department is seeking the assistance of participants in directed groundfish and halibut fisheries to set gear away from areas of known rockfish abundance and is considering pursuing additional regulatory management measures to control rockfish bycatch. Voluntary measures taken to aid in the conservation of rockfish are greatly appreciated and may have a positive effect on future opportunities.

Area registration for the state-waters season is exclusive, no more than 60 groundfish pots may be operated from a vessel, and each pot must display a buoy identification tag. Registrations may be obtained through ADF&G offices in Homer, Cordova, Anchorage, Soldotna, and Kodiak or by appointment in Seward (contact Homer ADF&G office) and buoy tags may be obtained in Homer, Anchorage, and Seward ADF&G office or by mail. Registrations may also be completed by fax or e-mail and buoy tags may be mailed. A vessel may not participate in a Pacific cod state-waters season and any other Pacific cod season at the same time. Contact the Homer office with groundfish regulatory and registration questions (907-235-8191).

Following the closure of the parallel Pacific cod season, all groundfish pot gear must be removed from the water, except that pot vessels registered for the state-waters Pacific cod season may store groundfish pots as provided in 5 AAC 28.232. Groundfish storage provisions allow groundfish pot gear to be stored in waters not more than 25 fathoms deep on the north side of Montague Island between 147° 25.00' W. long. and 147° 35.00' W. long. for

up to ten days prior to the opening and 10 days following the closure of the state-waters season to pot gear, provided all bait and bait containers are removed and all doors are secured open at the time of the parallel season (or state-waters season) closure. After the ten day period has elapsed, no groundfish pot storage is permitted.

Bycatch limits by species or species aggregate for PWS are set by Emergency Order 2-GF-E-02-24 and may be found in the Central Region Groundfish Fisheries Outlook Advisory Announcement.

Pot fishing closure areas: Some areas are closed by regulation 5 AAC 28.250 to fishing with groundfish pot gear (Figure 1). Check the regulation book or contact Homer ADF&G at (907) 235-8191 prior to fishing.

Fishing area: During a state-waters season, Pacific cod may be taken in waters of PWS (5 AAC 28.205) except for those waters of the Outside District east of 146° 15.12' W. long. (the latitude of Hook Point) (5 AAC 28.267 (e) (2)); see map in Figure 1.

Steller Sea Lion rookery closures: Directed fishing for all groundfish species is closed in waters within 3 nautical miles of two Steller sea lion rookeries within PWS (Figure 1). For specific regulatory language contact NMFS in Kodiak at (907) 481-1780 or <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/sslpm>.

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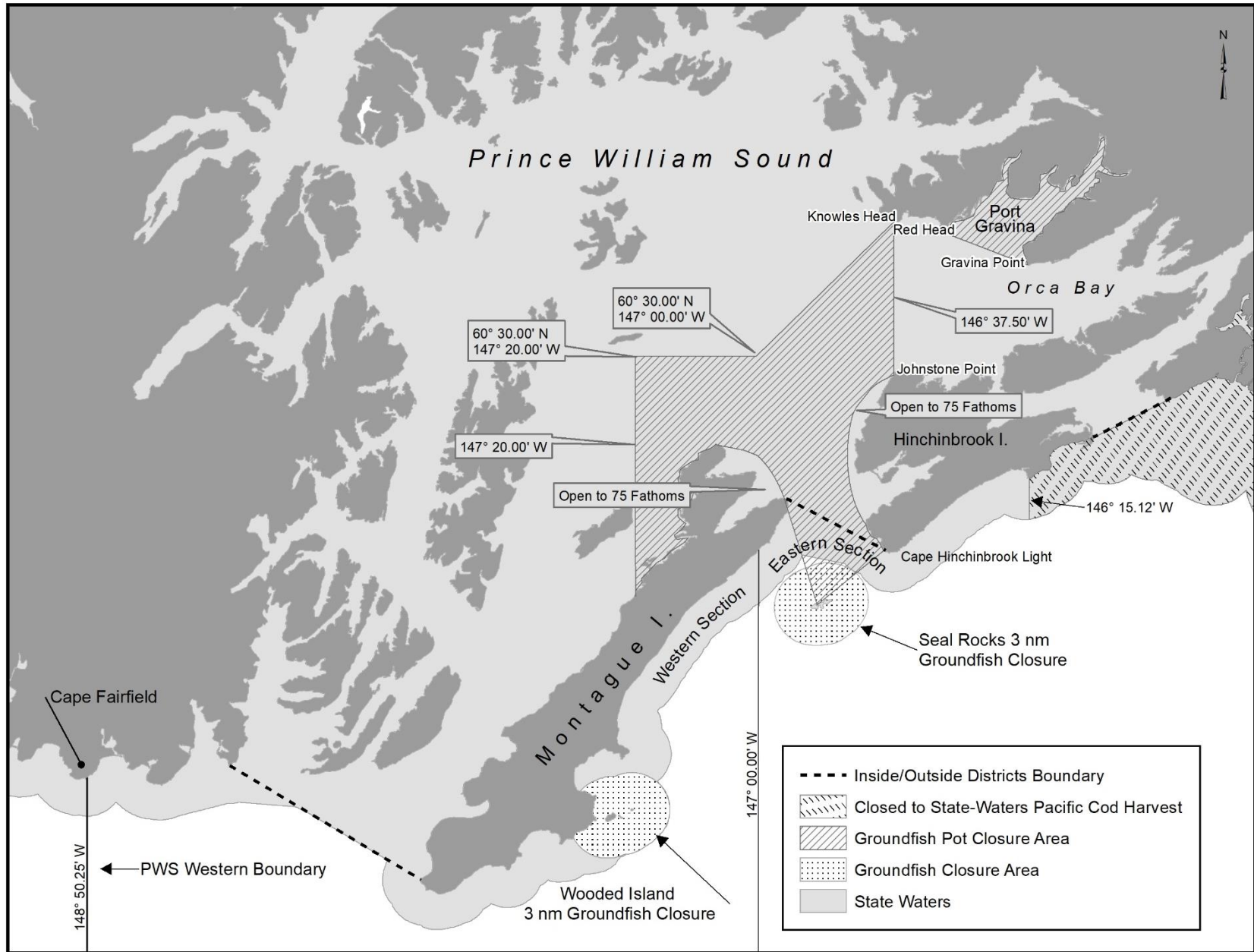


Figure 1. Prince William Sound Area closures to groundfish pot gear, groundfish fishing, and to the state-waters Pacific cod season.

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