

Rockfish

PROPOSAL 206

5 AAC 47.020. General provisions for seasons and bag, possession, annual, and size limits for the salt waters of the Southeast Alaska Area.

Reopen yelloweye sport fishery for residents, as follows:

5 AAC 47.020-General provisions for season, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and method and means for the salt waters of SE Alaska Area.

(8) rockfish may be taken from January 1-December 31 as follows:...

C) demersal shelf rockfish, as defined in [5 AAC 39.975](#):

i.[EXCEPT AS PROVIDED IN (D) OF THIS PARAGRAPH,] resident: bag limit of one fish; possession limit of two fish; no annual limit; no size limit;

ii.nonresident; no open season; may not be taken or possessed;

D) yelloweye rockfish: [NO OPEN SEASON; MAY NOT BE TAKEN OR POSSESSED]

i.resident: bag limit of one fish; possession limit of two fish; no annual limit; no size limit;

ii. nonresident; no open season; may not be taken or possessed

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Starting in 2020, the department closed all directed harvest of yelloweye rockfish in Southeast, citing a sharp decline that had occurred twenty years prior. This closure occurred despite the population having been stable for several years prior to the closure. Since 2015 yelloweye abundance has been increasing, yet all directed harvest remains closed. The increasing biomass combined with the recent closures have combined to leave the majority of the already highly-conservative TAC unharvested in several of the past years

It is time to reopen the resident sport yelloweye fishery which (prior to the closure) was a long-established fishery with a small and consistent harvest for locals to enjoy an occasional fresh yelloweye. The resident sportfishery has historically accounted for only about 2% of the TAC. With over 25-50% of the TAC consistently going unharvested, it is fully appropriate for resident sportfishermen to again be given access to this under-utilized resource.

Contrary to sensationalized accounts, the December 2022 NOAA *Assessment of the DSR Stock Complex in SE Outside Subdistrict of the GOA* shows that SE yelloweye population was healthy prior to the 2020 closure and continue to be healthy. Specifically:

- All three NOAA models show a consistent upward trend in yelloweye biomass since at least 2013 (See Table 14.8)
- Average length of both male and female yelloweye has been increasing in all SE subdistricts (East Yakutat, Northern SE Outside, Central SE Outside and Southern SE Outside) since at least 2010 (See figures 14.13 -14.16)
- The yelloweye catch has been consistently managed to a level well below the Over Fishing Limit for about 2 decades, with a typical year's catch being only about 50% of this threshold. (See Fig 14.5)
- The Yelloweye CPUE in the 2021 IPHC longline survey was up in all SE subdistricts (East Yakutat, Northern SE Outside, Central SE Outside and Southern SE Outside) compared to 2016. (See Table 14.3)

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. The Sitka AC supported proposal 230 in 2022 which was very similar.

PROPOSED BY: Tad Fujioka (EF-F24-020)

PROPOSAL 207

5 AAC 47.020. General provisions for seasons and bag, possession, annual, and size limits for the salt waters of the Southeast Alaska Area.

Allow retention of demersal shelf rockfish by nonresidents, as follows:

Establish a bag and possession limit for Demersal Shelf Rockfish (DSR) for Non-Residents. Non-Resident bag limit of one fish; possession limit of two fish; annual limit of two fish; no size limit.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Establish in regulation a bag, possession and annual limit for DSR species (Quillback, Copper, Canary, China and Tiger). There is no survey and/or data that shows a conservation concern for the DSR species. Anglers commonly catch all species of rockfish in SE AK and the inability to harvest these species is a lost opportunity to the sport fishery. Most anglers agree that all the DSR rockfish are excellent table fare and readily abundant. The mandatory use of deep water release mechanisms has significantly reduced release mortality.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Yes, but this prop is being submitted on behalf of myself. A daily bag limit of 1 fish and an annual bag limit of 2 fish is very reasonable.

PROPOSED BY: Kurt Whitehead (EF-F24-029)

PROPOSAL 208

5 AAC 47.020. General provisions for seasons and bag, possession, annual, and size limits for the salt waters of the Southeast Alaska Area.

Allow retention of demersal shelf rockfish by nonresidents, as follows:

Establish a bag and possession limit for Demersal Shelf Rockfish (DSR) for Non-Residents. Non-Resident bag limit of one fish; possession limit of one fish; annual limit of one fish; no size limit.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Currently, non-residents cannot harvest any DSR species (Quillback, Copper, Canary, China and Tiger). There is no survey and/or data that shows a conservation concern for the DSR species. Anglers commonly catch all species of rockfish in Southeast Alaska and the inability to harvest these species is a lost opportunity to the sport fishery. Most anglers agree that all the DSR rockfish are excellent table fare and readily abundant. The mandatory use of deep water release mechanisms has significantly reduced release mortality.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Yes. This prop was developed in the Craig AC.

PROPOSED BY: Craig AC

(EF-F24-031)

PROPOSAL 209

5 AAC XX.XXX New Section. Pelagic rockfish delegation of authority and provisions for management.

Establish provisions for a resident priority within emergency order authority for pelagic rockfish, as follows:

Direct the department to confine EO restrictions to non-resident anglers and hold resident anglers harmless unless residents are harvesting at least half of the sport catch:

5 AAC 47.020-General provisions for season, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and method and means for the salt waters of SE Alaska Area.

(8) rockfish may be taken from January 1-December 31 as follows:

1. pelagic rockfish: bag limit of five fish, possession limit of 10 fish, no annual limit; **Unless the resident harvest of pelagic rockfish has exceeded 50% of the sport harvest for 2 consecutive years, the department shall not use EO authority to reduce resident limits or season length.**

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? In response to a decade-long trend of increasing harvest of pelagic rockfish by non-residents, beginning in 2016 ADFG repeatedly used EO authority to reduce bag limits for non-residents and residents in Central Southeast Outside (CSEO) alike. In 2018, the BoF specifically refuted that practice by amending ADFG-sponsored proposal 127 which would have permanently reduced the bag limit for all anglers from 5 fish to 3 fish, with RC406 which affirmed the historic 5 fish limit for residents while dropping the non-resident limit to 3.

However, lacking the authority to hold resident anglers harmless as the increase in non-resident harvest resumed, in 2023 ADFG again used EO authority to reduce the CSEO resident and nonresident bag limits. The Sitka AC would like the BoF to authorize the department to prioritize resident access of pelagic rockfish and to direct the department to refrain from reducing resident limits of pelagic rockfish as a means of addressing increased harvest by non-residents.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. The Sitka AC supported proposal 127 in 2018 which was very similar.

PROPOSED BY: Sitka AC

(EF-F24-019)

PROPOSAL 210

5 AAC 47.020. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the salt waters of the Southeast Alaska Area.

Reduce the bag and possession limit for pelagic rockfish in Southeast Alaska, as follows:

5 AAC 47.020(8)(A) is amended to read:

...

(A) pelagic rockfish: bag limit of **three** [FIVE] fish; possession limit of **six** [10] fish; no annual limit; no size limit;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The sport harvest of pelagic rockfish has been on an increasing trend in the Southeast Alaska region and is assumed to be associated with shifting patterns of effort by charter (guided) anglers as restrictions on Pacific halibut and king salmon have been in effect. The department is currently working to develop a stock assessment for black rockfish in Southeast Alaska through the Statewide Rockfish Initiative. The anticipated continued increase in harvest and the potential for overexploitation of pelagic rockfish warrants a precautionary management approach.

The harvest of pelagic rockfish has increased in Southeast Alaska despite recent action to reduce harvest opportunity in the Sitka area where the majority of pelagic rockfish have historically been harvested. Rockfish harvest in the vicinity of Prince of Wales Island and the Ketchikan Areas have continued to increase and are now nearing the levels of pelagic rockfish harvest observed in the Sitka Area before management action was taken.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F24-179)

PROPOSAL 211

5 AAC 28.171. Rockfish possession and landing requirements for Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area.

Clarify regulations regarding fish ticket documentation of rockfish overages in the groundfish and halibut fisheries. Also, add a demersal shelf rockfish (DSR) overage reporting requirement for the Eastern Gulf of Alaska salmon troll fishery, as follows:

5 AAC 28.171 (a) is amended to read:

(a) In the Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area, a CFEC permit holder fishing for groundfish or halibut must retain, weigh, and report all rockfish and thornyhead rockfish caught. Except as provided in (b) of this section, all demersal shelf rockfish in excess of 10 percent, round weight, of all target species on board the vessel must be weighed and reported as bycatch overage on an ADF&G fish ticket. All rockfish and thornyhead rockfish in excess of allowable bycatch limits shall be reported as bycatch overage on an ADF&G fish ticket. **Rockfish and thornyhead rockfish exceeding bycatch limits may be retained for personal use or donation and must be documented as overage on the fish ticket.** All proceeds from the sale of excess rockfish and thornyhead rockfish bycatch shall be surrendered to the state. Based on harvest data, the commissioner may, by emergency order, close a fishing season or a bycatch season and immediately reopen a fishing season or a bycatch season during which a different rockfish or thornyhead rockfish bycatch level is allowed.

5 AAC 28.171 (i) is added to read:

(i) In the Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area, a CFEC salmon troll permit holder operating hand or power troll gear during an open commercial salmon fishing period is not required to retain incidental rockfish caught while fishing for salmon but must weigh and report, on an ADF&G fish ticket, all demersal shelf rockfish retained in excess of bycatch limits

established by emergency order, based on the round weight of all salmon on board the vessel, and must report it as bycatch overage on an ADF&G fish ticket. Rockfish bycatch taken in excess of allowable limits may be retained by the permit holder for personal use or donation and must be documented as overage on the fish ticket. All proceeds from the sale of excess rockfish bycatch shall be surrendered to the state. Based on harvest data, the commissioner may, by emergency order, close a fishing season or a bycatch season and immediately reopen a fishing season or a bycatch season during which a different rockfish bycatch level is allowed.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? This clarifies that rockfish, including thornyhead rockfish, bycatch overages may be retained for personal use or donation by CFEC permit holders fishing for groundfish or halibut. Current regulations only specify that rockfish overages may be sold but they do not explicitly state that overages may be retained for personal use or donation which has been standard practice. This would clarify regulations for processors, permit holders, managers, and enforcement. Also, this proposal would establish that rockfish must be reported on a fish ticket and clarify the regulations regarding overages in the salmon troll fishery. At present, the salmon troll fishery does not have full retention requirements for any groundfish species and DSR are the only rockfish restricted to a bycatch allowance. However, because there are bycatch allowances for DSR species but no full retention requirements, regulations do not support that DSR bycatch overage may be retained for personal use or donation and therefore must be discarded at sea or subject to law enforcement action if landed. This would improve consistency on how DSR bycatch overages are managed across the region and among fisheries and would assist groundfish staff in accounting for DSR bycatch in the salmon troll fishery by reducing DSR discards at sea.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F24-146)
