Department of Fish and Game

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THE STATE of ALASKA
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

2023 King and Tanner Crab Task Force Meeting
May 12, 2023

Attendees
- **ADF&G:** Andrew Olson, Joe Stratman, Adam Messmer, Zane Chapman, Katie Palof, Anne Reynolds-Manney, Lowell Fair, and Tessa Bergmann.
- **AWT**: Sgt. Cody Lister
- **Industry:** Andy Kittams (F/V Sara Dawn), Megan O'Neil (PVOA), Kathy Hansen (SEAFA), Dennis O'Neil (F/V Banter Bay), Justin Peeler (F/V Defiant), Chris Buschmann (F/V St. Teresa), Aaron Miller (F/V Outlook), Chris Basinger, Jared Bright (F/V Obsession), Jerry Dahl (F/V Rebel Isle), Ladd Norheim (F/V Windham Bay), Jeb Phillips, Dan Foley (F/V Steller), Nels Otness (F/V Commander), Rob Becker (F/V Carlynn), Brian Newman (F/V Ocean Summer), Mark Severson (F/V Jodi Marie & F/V Odin).

SUMMARY

The Department met with industry on May 12, 2023, to discuss management and research ideas to 1) identify actionable items to improve the golden king crab harvest strategy (GKC) and management of fishery and 2) increase understanding of the GKC stock structure and life history by developing collaborative research. Herein are the following ideas developed and discussed at the meeting.

MANAGEMENT AND RESEARCH IDEAS

A) **Add 5th reference point, upper upper trigger, for greater increases in GHLS.**
   a. Pros: Allows for increased harvest opportunities when crab stocks are rebounding and provides a tool for increasing GHLs at a higher rate.
   b. Cons: Potential for increased harvest rates and stock declines. Possible confusion with other established reference points.
   c. Management Challenges: Ensuring GHRs are not exceeded and consolidation of fleet to fewer areas could increase management difficulty.

B) **Increase the percentage of the upper end of the GHR from 5–10% to 15–20% when reopening areas after a period of closure.**
   a. Pros: Provides flexibility when crab stocks recover and allows more opportunity for fishermen. Can benefit from unexpected increases in crab abundance.
   b. Cons: Potential for overfishing due to unknown stock abundance. Increased effort may hinder stock recovery.
   c. Management Challenges: Managing areas with low GHLs and potential increase in fishing pressure.

C) **If CPUE is greater than the upper trigger reference point, but less than 25–35% of the upper end of an area's GHR then the GHL may be increased by the poundage equal to 25–35% of the GHR.**
   Example: 2023 GHL for East Central was 13,255 lbs and 35% of this area's upper GHR is 78,750 lbs resulting in a GHL that could be increased to 92,005 lbs.
   a. Pros: Provides an additional tool that allows for larger increases when the GHL is considered low and fishery performance is high.
   b. Cons: Potential for increased harvest rates and stock declines. Risk of overfishing during unexpected stock declines.
   c. Management Challenges: Large increases in GHL can affect fleet distribution and increase difficulty in managing for area GHLs. Addressing poor fishery performance despite GHL not being reached.

D) **A reduction in the number of pots permit holders may operate.**
   a. Pros: Decreases the pace of the fishery and improves management precision in harvest area GHLs.
   b. Cons: Restricts fishermen from exploring new areas and reduces information provided to the department. Strong pushback from stakeholders. Potentially impacts pot escape ring efficiency due to gear being hauled more frequently.
   c. Management Challenges: Managing fishermen compliance.

E) **Implement hauling hours where gear may only be hauled during a specified period.**
   a. Pros: Decreases the pace of the fishery, improves monitoring of gear location, and provides better information on daily catch levels.
   b. Cons: Challenges with tides, hauling gear, and determining inseason closures.
   c. Management Challenges: Adds more regulations to manage the fishery and logistically challenging to ensure compliance.

F) **Separate the Tanner and GKC fishing seasons, where the Tanner core and noncore areas would open first and after the closure of noncore area the GKC fishery would open**.
   a. Pros: Reduces the pace of the fishery and improves information on fishing effort and harvest in each area.
   b. Cons: Regulatory complexity and increased pressure both on Tanner and GKC species. Increased administrative work with registration process.
   c. Management Challenges: Major regulatory changes and justifications. Increased pressure in areas with low GHLs.

G) **Adjust season opening date to reflect when the tidal range between February 10 and 17 starts to decrease instead of at the smallest value.**
   a. Pros: Industry and department support. Allows for better fishing conditions at the start of the season.
   b. Cons: Changes to regulations and potential impact on registration deadlines.
   c. Management Challenges: None.

H) **Integrate fishermen's knowledge survey at the end of each fishing season to capture permit holders' observations during current season compared to previous seasons and integrate into management.**
   a. Pros: Provides additional information for management decisions and involves stakeholders.
   b. Cons: Lack of participation and potential for inaccurate reporting.

    c.   Management Challenges: Ensuring accurate reporting and fishermen participation.

I) Adopt an effort-based approach where a preseason GHL is set and average season length for a given area is used as a baseline and number of days within a season are increased or decreased based on inseason CPUE.
    a.   Pros: Allows for increased effort and participation. Utilizes increased abundance of crab when GHLs are quickly reached.
    b.   Cons: Lack of control over harvest in specific areas. Potential for overfishing and delayed response to declining fishery performance.
    c.   Management Challenges: Consideration of tides and accurate call-ins. Setting guidelines for increasing or decreasing the number of days.

J) Collect information on juvenile and prerecruit crab through a partial observer program where after an area closes a permit holder may set 5-10 pots in an area and an observer boards vessel when ready to haul gear to collect biological information on crab.
    a.   Pros: This program would provide more data, which could be highly beneficial over a longer time period. Establishing a baseline over a few years would allow tracking of trends in juvenile crab populations and help identify recruitment patterns.
    b.   Cons: Several years of data collection would be required before integrating into an assessment. Funding the project and getting fishermen participation could be challenging. Fishermen may oppose using this data to reduce GHLs.
    c.   Management Challenges: Determining whether the same juvenile grounds should be chosen every year or different areas each year. Balancing the need for immediate impact on current GHLs with potential resistance from fishermen if the fishery is reduced based on the data. Incorporating the data into setting GHLs would require careful consideration.

K) When fishermen register require them to state where they plan to start fishing and which species they plan to target, this would not restrict them to only that area or fishery but would help effort and fleet distribution preseason. Require them to state their fishing plans when they call in, ex. Staying in the same area, switching target species, moving areas.
    a.   Pro: Knowing the fishing plans of registered fishermen would provide a better understanding of the distribution of effort in specific areas. If the information is reliable, it could eliminate the need for aerial surveys to monitor fishing activity.
    b.   Con: Stakeholders may not have a fixed plan when they register, as their decision could be influenced by economics and other factors.
    c.   Management Challenges: Ensuring fishermen accurately report their fishing plans when they call in. Expecting them to be in the area they initially registered to start in. Like any fishery dependent data, accuracy and timelines would be crucial considerations for effective management.