

Tanner Crab Subsistence

PROPOSAL 68

5 AAC 02.208. Customary and traditional subsistence uses of shellfish stocks and amounts necessary for subsistence.

Adopt amounts reasonably necessary for subsistence for Tanner crab in the Prince William Sound Area, outside the Valdez Nonsubsistence Area, as follows:

(d) The board finds that XXX – XXX Tanner crab are reasonably necessary for subsistence uses in the Prince William Sound Area.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

In March 2008, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) found that shrimp, Dungeness crab, Tanner crab, king crab, and miscellaneous shellfish of the Prince William Sound Area are customarily and traditionally used for subsistence. (5 AAC 02.208(a)). Alaska Statute 16.05.258(b) directs the board to determine the amount of the harvestable portion of fish stocks that support customary and traditional (C&T) uses that is reasonably necessary for subsistence uses (ANS). This proposal would provide an opportunity for the board and public to consider adopting an ANS for the Tanner crab stock in the Prince William Sound Area (outside of the Valdez Nonsubsistence Area described at 5 AAC 99.015(a)(5)). There are ANS amounts for the other shellfish stocks for which the board has found there are customary and traditional subsistence uses, but not for Dungeness, king, or Tanner crab.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) surveys to estimate Tanner crab, *Chionoecetes bairdi* abundance have been conducted since the early 1990s in Prince William Sound (PWS). Commercial Tanner crab fisheries in PWS were closed from 1989 until 2016 when a Tanner crab test fishery was conducted. In 2017, a limited commissioner's permit Tanner crab fishery was

adopted into regulation, followed by the fishery being prosecuted in 2018 and 2019. In PWS, legal Tanner crab abundance levels have been high enough to allow a subsistence fishery since 2008.

The number of permits issued for this fishery has averaged approximately 200 from the 2014/15 season through the 2018/19 season. Participation has remained steady, although 50% or less of permit holders actually participated in the fishery in all seasons except the 2012/13 season when it reached a high of 58%. This was probably the result of fishing success where the average catch of 24 legal male crab per permit was the highest harvest in this permit fishery's history.

During the 11 seasons when the subsistence fishery was open, the 2012/13 season harvest was exceptional. This above-average harvest success was corroborated by the ADF&G survey results of Tanner crab abundance from 2011 and 2013. All of the metrics of the fishery were high, including the 368 trips made; the next highest was 225 trips during the 2015/16 season. The number of legal males harvested reached a high of 2,067 crab in the 2012/13 season; the next highest harvest was 1,073 legal male crab in the 2017/18 season. Also, the total number of legal crab caught in the 2012/13 season, which is the number of legal male crab harvested plus the number of legal male crab released, was the highest on record at 3,514 male crab. The number of sublegal male crab that were released during the 2012/13 season was 3 times higher than any other season, close to 5,000 crab.

At the 2017 board meeting, the bag and possession limit was increased from 5 legal crab per person to 12 legal crab per person. With this increase, the legal male Tanner crab harvested increased from 548 crab in the 2016/17 season to 1,073 crab during the following season. However, in the 2018/19 season, the harvest dropped to 624 crab and total legal crab caught dropped to 876 crab, the lowest values since the 2011/12 season. The number of trips was relatively consistent over this three-year period: 192 in 2016/17, 196 in 2017/18, and 202 in 2018/19.

An ANS finding will provide the board with a metric to determine if the regulations are providing a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses of Tanner crab in this area.

For this proposal, the department drafted ANS options for consideration by the board for PWS Tanner crab. ADF&G staff will prepare a report prior to the December 2020 board meeting with additional background data and, if necessary, revised options. The following options use harvest estimates based on subsistence permit returns. Subsistence permits for this fishery have been required since 2008, when the fishery reopened after being closed since 1999. Participation increased from an average of 90 permits issued and 34 permits fished from 2008 through 2011, to 185 permits issued and 87 permits fished from 2012 through 2018. Therefore, options based on two time periods are offered: all years (2008 – 2018) and 2012 – 2018.

Option A. Low and high annual harvests, rounded to nearest 50 crab, 2008 – 2018

50 to 2,050 Tanner crab

Option B. Low and high annual harvests, rounded to nearest 50 crab, 2012 – 2018

550 to 2,050 Tanner crab

Option C. The mean harvest for the period 2008 – 2018 (634 crab) bounded by the standard deviation (560 crab) and rounded to the nearest 50 crab

50 to 1,200 Tanner crab

Option D. The mean harvest for the period 2012 – 2018 (936 crab) bounded by the standard deviation (501 crab) and rounded to the nearest 50 crab

450 to 1,450 Tanner crab

Option E. Take no action. The board might choose this option given the relatively short time series for the harvest data, as well as the 5 legal crab per person limit in place until 2017 (subsequently increased to 12 legal crab per person).

The Prince William Sound Dungeness and red king crab stocks are not at an abundance level that would allow a subsistence fishery, and the fisheries have been closed for these stocks for a number of years. Therefore, we do not recommend adoption of ANS findings for king or Dungeness crab at this time. Additionally, because golden king crab currently have a harvest limit of 3 crab per year per household limit, established in 2008, we recommend waiting another board cycle to gather enough data for a determination.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F20-147)
