

Sport/Personal Use

PROPOSAL 255

5 AAC 77.518. Personal use clam fishery.

Close the harvest of littleneck clams and butter clams, as follows:

(2)(B) **littleneck clams and butter clams: no open season; may not be retained or possessed;**
[THE COMBINED BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT FOR LITTLENECK CLAMS AND BUTTER CLAMS IS 80 CLAMS AND THE MINIMUM SIZE FOR LITTLENECK CLAMS IS ONE AND ON-HALF INCHES IN LENGTH ACROSS THE WIDEST PART OF THE SHELL; AND FOR BUTTER CLAMS IS TWO AND ONE-HALF INCHES IN LENGTH ACROSS THE WIDEST PART OF THE SHELL;]

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Hardshell clams (Pacific littleneck clams and butter clams) have declined to historical low abundances throughout Kachemak Bay. Recent monitoring in three subareas (Jakolof Bay, China Poot Bay, and Chugachik Island) has found that densities of legal sized hardshell clams have declined 94–100% from their historical densities in all subareas. Additionally, the recent observed densities of sublegal sized hardshell clams in these subareas suggests that these stocks will not likely recover in the near future. Based on Statewide Harvest Survey data, the sport harvest of hardshell clams in Kachemak Bay has declined over 90% since 2011.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F20-164)

PROPOSAL 256

5 AAC 77.518. Personal use clam fishery.

Modify razor clam bag and possession limit, as follows:

(A) from the mouth of the Kenai River to the southernmost tip of the Homer Spit, the bag limit for razor clams is the first 60 clams [HARVESTED] **taken or possessed** and the possession limit is 120 clams; **in all other waters, the bag and possession limit for razor clams is the first 10 gallons taken or possessed.**

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? There is no bag and possession limit for the razor clam sport or personal use fisheries, except for the fisheries on beaches from the mouth of the Kenai River to the tip of the Homer Spit (east Cook Inlet beaches). In the Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay area, razor clams primarily occur in east and west Cook Inlet. The east Cook Inlet sport and personal use fisheries have been closed since 2015 due to low abundance of adult clams. West Cook Inlet sport and personal use clam fisheries may only be accessed using boat or aircraft.

In west Cook Inlet approximately 95% of the razor clam harvest occurs in the commercial fishery. From 2017 through 2019, the commercial fishery annual harvest averaged approximately 171,00 lbs and has not reached the guideline harvest level since 2013. The 2016–2018 average west Cook Inlet sport razor clam harvest (37,177) and days fished (1,320) were similar from their

historical (1986–2015) harvest (38,324) and days fished (1,397) averages. However, some declines in size and age of the harvest have been observed in both the sport and commercial fisheries.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F20-165)

PROPOSAL 257

5 AAC 58.0xx and 5 AAC 77.5xx. East Cook Inlet Razor Clam Sport and Personal Use Fishery Management Plan.

Create a management plan for east Cook Inlet sport and personal use fisheries, as follows:

- (a) **The purpose of this plan is to direct the department in the management of sport and personal use razor clam fisheries in east Cook Inlet from the mouth of the Kenai River to the southernmost tip of the Homer Spit and to establish abundance thresholds for adult clams greater than or equal to 80 mm and stock productivity indices for the fisheries in the Clam Gulch and Ninilchik Areas.**

- (b) **In the Clam Gulch Area from the mouth of the Kenai River south to the latitude of 60° 5.54'N. lat.,**
 - 1) **if the estimated adult clam abundance is greater than or equal to the average 1989-2012 abundance, and adult clam recruitment replaces or exceeds harvest and natural mortality, and the size composition index of the harvest is equal to the 1989-2012 average, then the fisheries will be managed as provided in 5 AAC 58.022 (14)(A) and 5 AAC 77.511 (2)(A). The combined harvest rate of the sport and personal use fisheries are not expected to exceed 20% of the adult clam abundance.**
 - 2) **if the estimated adult clam abundance is greater than or equal to 50% of the average 1989-2012 abundance but the population does not meet the criteria outlined in (b)(1), then razor clams may be taken May 1 through September 30 and the bag and possession limit is the first 30 clams taken or possessed. The combined harvest rate of the sport and personal use fisheries is not expected to exceed 10% of the adult clam abundance.**

- (c) **In the Ninilchik Area from the southernmost tip of the Homer Spit north to the latitude of 60° 5.54'N. lat.,**
 - 1) **if the estimated adult clam abundance is greater than or equal to the average 1989-2012 abundance, and adult clam recruitment replaces or exceeds harvest and natural mortality, and the size composition index of the harvest is equal to the 1989-2012 average, then the fisheries will be managed as provided in 5 AAC 58.022 (14)(A) and 5 AAC 77.511 (2)(A). The combined harvest rate of the sport and personal use fisheries are not expected to exceed 20% of the adult clam abundance.**
 - 2) **if the estimated adult clam abundance is greater than or equal to 50% of the average 1989-2012 abundance but the population does not meet the criteria outlined in (c)(1), then razor clams may be taken May 1 through September 30 and the bag and possession limit is the first 30 clams taken or possessed. The**

combined harvest rate of the sport and personal use fisheries is not expected to exceed 10% of the adult clam abundance.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The east Cook Inlet sport and personal use fisheries have been closed by emergency order annually since 2015 due to low abundance of adult clams. The department has annually surveyed the abundance of razor clams on beaches in Ninilchik since 2011 and Clam Gulch since 2014. These surveys provide estimates of juvenile and adult clam abundances as well as estimates of natural mortality and recruitment. Recruitment of new cohorts of juvenile clams were detected in 2016 through 2019 at both Ninilchik and Clam Gulch beaches. Due to below average growth in 2017 and 2018 and a high natural mortality rate, adult abundances have not significantly improved since those recruitments. It is anticipated that these juvenile clam cohorts will recruit to the adult size at Ninilchik and Clam Gulch over the next few years, but the stock is not likely to rebuild to historical productivity. Currently, there is no management plan to structure razor clam fisheries once the stocks are sufficient to support harvest opportunity. Creating a management plan will allow for public and board input to structure sustainable razor clam fisheries.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F20-166)

PROPOSAL 258

5 AAC 58.022. Waters; Seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet- Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.

Close the harvest of littleneck clams and butter clams, as follows:

(a)(12) littleneck clams and butter clams: **no open season; may not be retained or possessed;** [MAY BE TAKEN FROM JANUARY 1- DECEMBER 31 ; WITH A COMBINED BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT OF 80 CLAMS; MINIMUM SIZE FOR LITTLENECK CLAMS IS ONE AND ON-HALF INCHES IN LENGTH ACROSS THE WIDEST PART OF THE SHELL; MINIMUM SIZE FOR BUTTER CLAMS IS TWO AND ONE-HALF INCHES IN LENGTH ACROSS THE WIDEST PART OF THE SHELL;]

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Hardshell clams (Pacific littleneck clams and butter clams) have declined to historical low abundances throughout Kachemak Bay. Recent monitoring in three subareas (Jakolof Bay, China Poot Bay, and Chugachik Island) has found that densities of legal-sized hardshell clams have declined 94–100% from their historical densities in all subareas. Additionally, the recent observed densities of sublegal-sized hardshell clams in these subareas suggests that these stocks will not likely recover in the near future. Based on Statewide Harvest Survey data, the sport harvest of hardshell clams in Kachemak Bay has declined over 90% since 2011.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F20-167)

PROPOSAL 259

5 AAC 58.022. Waters: seasons: bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.

Modify the razor clam bag and possession limit, as follows:

(14)(B) on the remaining beaches of Cook Inlet – Resurrection Bay Area: **the bag and possession limit is the first 10 gallons taken or possessed** [NO BAG, POSSESSION, OR SIZE LIMITS]; all clams taken or possessed must be retained;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? There is no bag and possession limit for the razor clam sport or personal use fisheries, except for the fisheries on beaches from the mouth of the Kenai River to the tip of the Homer Spit (east Cook Inlet beaches). In the Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay area, razor clams primarily occur in east and west Cook Inlet. The east Cook Inlet sport and personal use fisheries have been closed since 2015 due to low abundance of adult clams. Participation in the West Cook Inlet sport and personal use fisheries has limited access, requiring large boats or small wheel planes from the Kenai Peninsula.

Currently, west Cook Inlet razor clam stock and fisheries assessments are limited to harvest data. In west Cook Inlet approximately 95% of the razor clam harvest occurs in the commercial fishery. From 2017 through 2019, the commercial fishery annual harvest averaged approximately 171,00 lb and has not reached the guideline harvest level since 2013. The 2016–2018 average west Cook Inlet sport razor clam harvest (37,177) and days fished (1,320) were similar from their historical (1986–2015) harvest (38,324) and days fished (1,397) averages. However, some declines in size and age of the harvest have been observed in both the sport and commercial fisheries.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F20-168)
