

PROPOSAL 56

5 AAC 06.370. Registration and reregistration.

Allow drift gillnet fishermen to make 'test sets' under certain circumstances, as follows:

Permit holders participating in the SO3T fishery shall be allowed to lawfully set their gear (hereinafter called a "test set"), whether or not they had dropped their "blue or green card," under the following circumstances:

- From June 1 through June 16 in Egegik; and from June 1 through June 23 in all other areas.
- Between the hours of 8:00am – 8:00pm.
- For a duration of not more than two-hours total, set between one hour before and after high water on a tide table designated by the local ADF&G office. This time will be agreed to and under permission from ADF&G enforcement, and determined with advance notice of at least sixteen-hours.
- A test set area shall be designated in each regulatory area in which this fishing shall be allowed. This area shall be in deep, open water, away from obstructions, and considerate of the distance which may be traveled while the gear is in the water drifting (which will be near slack tide so the gear will not travel too far).
- A vessel shall not utilize this test set opportunity more than three times total in a season.
- Any and all SO3T permits associated with the vessel must be renewed for the current season, registered to the vessel which will be making the test set, and be in possession of the permit holder on the vessel when test set activities are commenced.
- Any and all fish caught shall be delivered on an ADFG fish ticket; it is the responsibility of the permit holder to assure they have a processor who is willing to make the landing of fish caught.
- Any and all revenues earned from fish sales shall be directed to ADF&G; revenues paid shall be fair market value.
- If the fisher's permit has been registered in a different regulatory area, or if they are waiting through a transfer period, they shall be allowed to make their test set in a different regulatory area (i.e. if registered in Ugashik they can test-set in the prescribed test area in Naknek).

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? "Test Set" Proposal:

Permit holders shall be allowed to test-set fishing gear without dropping registration card. This proposal addresses a safety concern for all fishermen, especially those with boats that have any amount of deferred maintenance.

The situation as it currently exists:

The first fishing opening of the season produces a list of repairs that weren't seen, noticed, or existed before the equipment and gear had been tested. Often this list becomes apparent after the fisherman has left their home port, or at the start of regular and frequent fishing openings. Due to this timing, bigger things like more efficient or safer deck modifications never get completed, nor do smaller things like float-switches on bilge pumps, or "non-critical" electrical issues. It is the combination of problems stemming from these smaller issues that combine into creating larger problems, that can lead to a catastrophic incident (this is how boats are lost).

Vessel modifications also beg for a full-stress, full-situation trial run, to assure everything will work when it is go-time. Examples are:

- New net reel installed
- New refrigeration system installed
- New steering, engine controls, hydraulic pump or any modification to these systems
- New crew member(s) working on deck
- New structural components to the vessel (like a tow bit moved to higher up in mast)
- Old operator with a new boat (like a jet boat) and needs to learn how to “drive” it.

The time for all of the above to be tested is when there is no pressure from boundary lines, piles of fish, or nasty weather.

Currently, the only way to test-run a boat is for a permit holder to drop their card and start fishing for the season, but many fishermen value “holding their card” so they can position themselves on good fish abundance when they start fishing. So they forgo the safety and sensibility of dropping their card to give their boat a “shakedown, which frequently puts their first fishing/learning/test-running opportunity right in the middle of precarious situations.

Situation if this proposal were enacted:

This proposal allows fisherman time to field test their boat and “break in” their crew before the fishing season. It will reduce the risk of injury or catastrophic incident, by allowing “first opening” problems to be encountered and addressed in a stress-free state of mind, with no dramatic variables causing extra mental and physical pressure on the situation.

Each fishing district would have an area, perhaps two square miles, that is the designated location of this “test-set” area. The allowed time would be one-hour before and after the high-water as indicated in the NOAA tide predictions, making easy accessibility for the fishermen, and easy predictability for ADF&G enforcement. The 16-hours advance notice would allow fisherman to contact the ADF&G office before closing time in the evening, then be able to make the test set if the start time is around 8:00 a.m. the next morning. Fishermen could fill out their test-set request online, which would require very little man-hours.

The cost of this proposal includes time involved in fielding fishermen’s request for test-set authorization, which will likely peak in Naknek and Nushagak in the week prior to the initiation of the emergency order, after which time the option is no longer available. There will be proportionately fewer test-sets in Egegik, and very few requests for test-sets in Ugashik because of the fewer number of boats stored in those areas in comparison to Naknek and Nushagak. I do not have the means to quantify a dollar amount on the cost of implementing this proposal, but I know it will be cost-effective to the value gained in reducing incidents on the fishing grounds in the early season..

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