

## *Sport Groundfish (3 proposals)*

### **PROPOSAL 27**

#### **5 AAC 55.022. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area.**

Modify rockfish bag and possession limits, as follows:

5 AAC 55.022(a)(9)(A) is amended to read:

...

(9) rockfish:

(A) may be taken from January 1 – December 31; bag limit of **three** [FOUR] fish; possession limit of **six** [EIGHT] fish, of which only one per day and in possession may be nonpelagic rockfish; no size limit; **yelloweye rockfish may only be retained from July 1 – December 31;**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The harvest of rockfish in many areas of Alaska has been increasing and is assumed to be associated with a shifting of effort from Pacific halibut to other species by charter (guided) anglers due to reduced sport fishing opportunities associated with the Halibut Catch Sharing Plan. The anticipated continued shifting of effort and the late-maturing life history strategy of rockfish requires a precautionary management approach until better information is available.

Recognizing the increasing statewide harvest trends in rockfish, the department formed the Statewide Rockfish Initiative in September 2017 with a goal of developing strategies that will support long-term adaptive management for rockfish. Work towards stock assessments that include data from all fisheries has been ongoing. Most recently, stock assessments on yelloweye rockfish for Prince William Sound Inside waters have neared completion and management staff are working towards final development of sustainable harvest levels and are considering additional management tools to help manage these fish at a sustainable level.

In addition, sport fish rockfish bag and possession limits are not aligned between Prince William Sound (PWS) and Cook Inlet–Resurrection Bay saltwater areas due to changes that took place at the November 2023 Lower Cook Inlet Board of Fisheries meeting. During the Lower Cook Inlet Board of Fisheries meeting the board took up multiple proposals to address the increasing rockfish harvest trends and declines in biological compositions, with a focus on pelagic species such as black rockfish. The board adopted Proposal 19 and reduced bag limits to three fish and possession limits to six fish, of which only one per day and two in possession could be a nonpelagic rockfish. To maintain continuity between areas and taking proactive conservation measures, the department has determined that a bag limit of three and possession limit of six rockfish is necessary in Prince William Sound as well. Currently the possession limit for nonpelagic rockfish is only one, which should stay the same considering the higher harvest of nonpelagic rockfish, mainly yelloweye rockfish, in the PWS area. However, the Cook Inlet–Resurrection Bay saltwaters do not have a seasonal closure for yelloweye rockfish due to lower harvest and no stock assessment information available. By adding a seasonal retention period for yelloweye rockfish that aligns with the lingcod open season in PWS, there will not only be an overall reduction of harvest of yelloweye rockfish, but also the timeframe would be considered a spawning closure. This closure time period is when yelloweye rockfish copulate, gestate, and majority release their larvae, based on studies conducted by the department for yelloweye rockfish in PWS. These proposed regulatory changes were put in place by emergency order during the 2022 and 2023 seasons.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F24-165)

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**PROPOSAL 28**

**5 AAC 55.023. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area.**

Modify the rockfish area, bag and possession limit, as follows:

Bag and possession limits for inside PWS waters should follow what the Department has recommended by emergency order in 2023 and 2024. However, outside waters should be 4 per daily bag limit and 8 in possession. In addition, outside waters nonpelagic possession should be the same as North Gulf Coast and allow for a double bag limit of 2.

(9) rockfish:

**(A) Inside PWS Waters** may be taken from January 1-December 31; bag limit of [FOUR] **three** fish; possession limit of [EIGHT] **six** fish, of which only one per day and in possession may be nonpelagic rockfish; no size limit **(B) Outside PWS Waters:** may be taken from January 1-December 31; bag limit of four fish; possession limit of eight fish, of which only one per day and **two** in possession may be nonpelagic rockfish; no size limit; **only one nonpelagic in possession may be a yelloweye rockfish**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Current PWS rockfish regulation:

(9) rockfish:

(A) may be taken from January 1 - December 31; bag limit of four fish; possession limit of eight fish, of which only one per day and in possession may be nonpelagic rockfish; no size limit; -In 2023 and 2024, ADFG has reduced the bag and possession limit by one fish and also closed the retention of yelloweye for 2-3 months.

My previous proposal was to break out the Prince William Sound sport fish management area. This proposal is to allow different bag limits for the inside and outside PWS areas for rockfish. As stated in the previous proposal, the area is so vast that regulatory and management requirements could be different in these different waters. The Department is already examining some rockfish species by inside and outside waters. I believe this will allow more effective management of PWS inside waters and relaxed management of PWS outside waters. I believe it to be necessary to further regulate PWS inside rockfish regulations however PWS outside waters have far less effort and I believe populations are stronger outside therefore bag and possession limits could be higher without causing further damage to the inside waters.

In my experience as a charter operator for 13 years, I have noticed a decline in size and number of rockfish on inside waters and a more constant number and size on outside waters.

**Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.** Consulted ADFG for information.

PROPOSED BY: Raymond Nix

(HQ-F24-083)

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**PROPOSAL 29**

**5 AAC 55.xxx. Yelloweye rockfish delegation of authority and provisions for management for the Prince William Sound Area.**

Create additional provisions for yelloweye rockfish management, as follows:

5 AAC 55.xxx is to create new language to read:

...

**(a) The purpose of this delegation of authority is to stabilize the harvest of yelloweye rockfish in the waters of the Prince William Sound Area. Yelloweye rockfish will be managed for long-term sustainability of the stock. If the commissioner determines that the yelloweye rockfish sport fishing regulations must be modified to keep the sport fishery within a sustainable harvest level, the commissioner may, by emergency order, require one or more of the following management measures:**

- (1) modify bag and possession limits for nonresident anglers;**
- (2) implement an annual limit for nonresidents;**
- (3) charter vessel operators and crewmembers may not retain rockfish while clients are on board the vessel;**
- (4) implement an annual limit for resident anglers;**
- (5) implement a size restriction.**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The Statewide Rockfish Initiative was established in September 2017 with a goal of developing strategies that will support long-term adaptive management for rockfish. Work towards stock assessments that include data from all fisheries have been ongoing, most recently for yelloweye rockfish in Prince William Sound Inside waters (PWSI). Department staff are working towards determining sustainable harvest levels and the Division of Sport Fish will need additional tools to manage yelloweye rockfish at a sustainable level and prioritize harvest opportunity for Alaska residents.

There are limited provisions for management of the yelloweye rockfish sport fishery in Prince William Sound, outside of existing emergency order authority. With the increases in the harvest of yelloweye rockfish and stock assessment data for PWSI yelloweye rockfish indicating that current harvest levels are not sustainable in the long-term, additional tools are needed to allow harvest opportunity while managing for sustainability in the sport fishery.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F24-166)

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