

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-RF-7-20-23

Issued at: Homer/Anchorage, Thursday, April 13, 2023

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m. Monday, May 15, 2023

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Sunday December 31, 2023, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order reduces rockfish bag and possession limits in the salt waters of Cook Inlet from five per day, 10 in possession and the North Gulf Coast/Resurrection Bay salt waters from four per day, eight in possession to three per day, six in possession of which only one per day, two in possession can be nonpelagic, in both areas.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 58.022(a)(6) and (b)(3)(C) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order the following provisions are effective 12:01 a.m. Monday, May 15 through 11:59 p.m. Sunday, December 31, 2023:

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

(a)(6) rockfish: may be taken from May 15 – December 31; bag limit of three fish and six in possession, of which only one per day and two in possession may be nonpelagic rockfish as defined in 5 AAC 75.995; no size limit;

(b)(3)(C) rockfish: in the waters between Gore Point and Cape Fairfield, the bag limit is three fish and six in possession, of which only one per day and two in possession may be a nonpelagic rockfish as defined in 5 AAC 75.995; no size limit;

Doug Vincent-Lang,
Commissioner

By delegation to:



Mike Booz
Lower Cook Inlet Sport Fish Area Manager

and


Brittany Blain-Roth
North Gulf Coast Sport Fish Area Manager

JUSTIFICATION:

In recent years, the harvest of rockfish in Cook Inlet and North Gulf Coast areas has increased substantially and sustainable levels of rockfish harvest are currently unknown. On average from 2019 through 2022, the total rockfish harvest in Cook Inlet salt waters was over 50,000 fish annually, which is over a 300% increase from the historical (2006–2013) average. In the North Gulf Coast/Resurrection Bay salt waters, rockfish harvest has nearly doubled since 2014, and the 2021 and 2022 harvests were higher than any previously documented. Most of this increase in harvest has been black rockfish in both areas. With these increased harvest trends, there have also been declines detected in the biological compositions of black rockfish. The harvest of black rockfish in both areas has been comprised of a large percentage (60-90%) of juveniles, which has resulted in an 18-25% smaller average length in the total harvest compared to previous years.

Although black rockfish stocks currently appear healthy, these increased harvest trends and changes in biological data indicate a possible change in the population structure and that current harvest levels may be unsustainable.

These changes in harvest and biological trends are 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 Share Plan. It is likely that effort will continue to shift to state-managed sport fisheries including rockfish, salmon, and lingcod and requires a precautionary approach given the recent trends.

DISTRIBUTION:

The distribution list for this emergency order is on file at the Region 2 Office of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, 333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage, AK 99518, (907) 267-2218.