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Advisory Announcement

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Prince William Sound Area 2024 Parallel Pacific Cod Seasons Open January 1 Emergency Order # 2-GF-E-03-24

The 2024 parallel Pacific cod season will open to vessels using pot, jig, and longline (hook) gear at 12:01 a.m. January 1. Parallel Pacific cod seasons are established via emergency order (EO) to coincide with the season dates and gear types set by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for the initial Pacific cod season in the adjacent federal Central Gulf of Alaska Regulatory Area (CGOA). Longlined pots are not legal in the Prince William Sound (PWS) parallel Pacific cod season. The PWS parallel Pacific cod season for jig and pot gear will close by EO to coincide with their respective closures in the CGOA. The PWS parallel season closure for longline (hook) gear will coincide with the federal closure of the less than 50 foot hook-and-line (<50' HAL) gear sector in the CGOA.

Fishers are reminded: 1) to obtain a PWS parallel Pacific cod season registration from Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) prior to fishing; 2) of the requirement for fishers using pot or longline (hook) gear in parallel Pacific cod fisheries to have a functioning, activated, NMFS-approved vessel monitoring system (VMS) as described at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/enforcement/regional-vessel-monitoring-information> and; 3) to adhere to federal seabird avoidance measures (SAM) as required in all longline fisheries for groundfish in the Outside District of PWS. Additional information on SAM may be found: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/bycatch/seabird-avoidance-gear-and-methods>.

Registrations are available in ADF&G offices in Homer, Cordova, Anchorage, Soldotna, and Kodiak and may also be completed by fax or e-mail. Contact the Homer office with groundfish regulatory and registration questions (907-235-8191).

The department has growing concerns about the status of rockfish stocks. The rockfish Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) in PWS was exceeded in 2022 and 2023. The rockfish GHL has not been exceeded in CI in recent years. To stay within the 2023 annual PWS rockfish GHL the department reduced rockfish bycatch limits, did not reopen the parallel Pacific cod season, and sought emergency authority from the Board of Fisheries (BOF) to close areas to commercial fishing with specific gear types by emergency order. The department is seeking the assistance of participants in directed groundfish and halibut fisheries to set gear away from areas of known rockfish abundance and is considering pursuing additional regulatory management measures to control rockfish bycatch. Voluntary measures taken to aid in the conservation of rockfish are greatly appreciated and may have a positive effect on future opportunities.

NMFS continues to prosecute the North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program. Vessel operators participating in parallel groundfish fisheries are encouraged to become familiar with this federal program.

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Information on the observer program can be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/fisheries-observers/north-pacific-observer-program> or by contacting the NMFS Sustainable Fisheries Division in Juneau at (907) 586-7228.

Directed fishing for all groundfish species is closed in waters within 3 nautical miles of two Steller sea lion rookeries within PWS and certain waters are closed to fishing with groundfish pot gear (Figure 1; 5 AAC 28.250(a)). For specific regulatory language regarding Stellar sea lion protection areas contact NMFS in Kodiak at (907) 481-1780 or consult the NMFS website at <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/sslpm>.

Bycatch limits by species or species aggregate for PWS are set by Emergency Order 2-GF-E-01-24 and may be found in the Central Region Groundfish Fisheries Outlook Advisory Announcement.

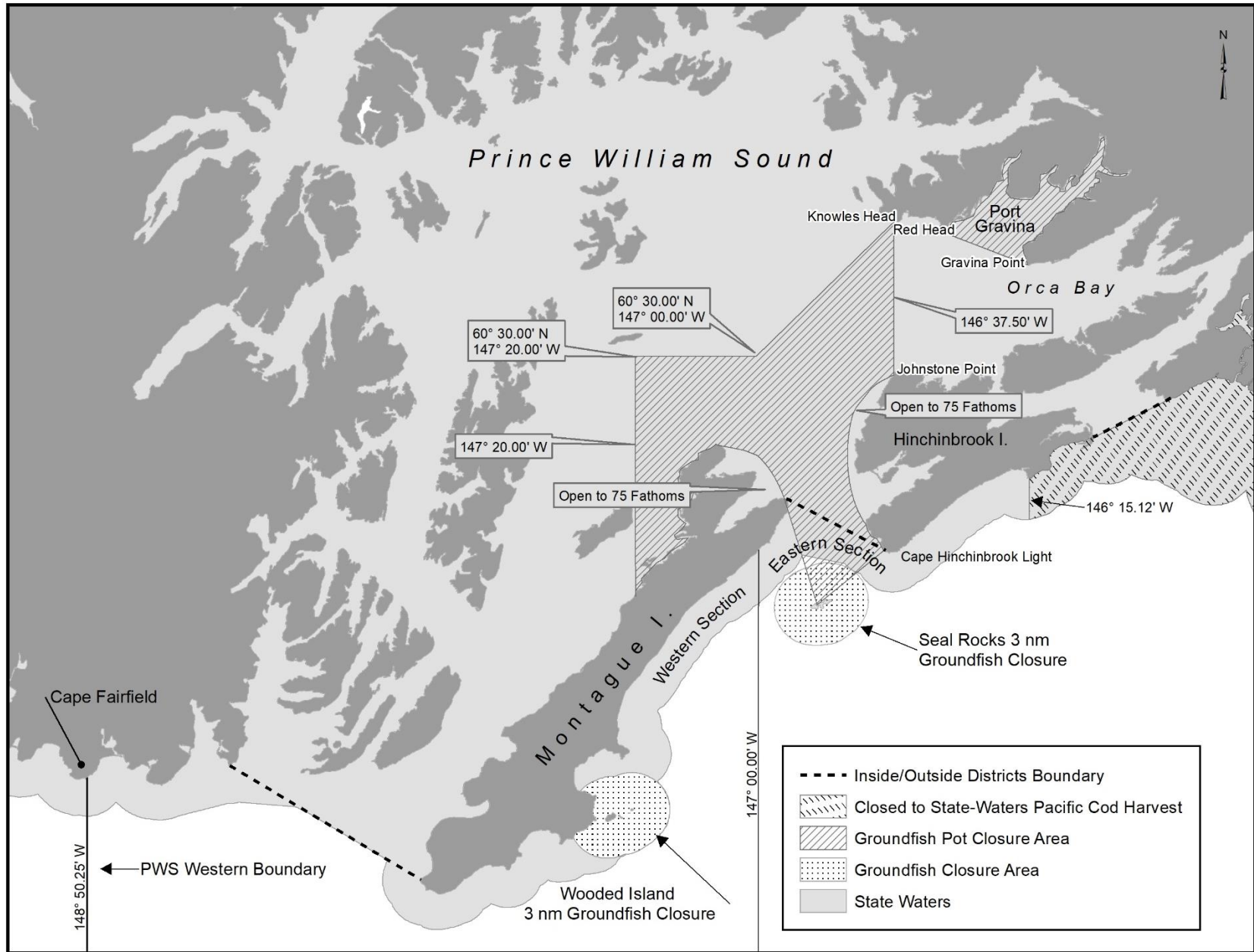


Figure 1. Prince William Sound Area closures to groundfish pot gear, groundfish fishing, and to the state-waters Pacific cod season.

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