

# **Fishery Management Report No. 14-46**

---

---

## **Report to the Board of Fisheries, Miscellaneous Shellfish Fisheries**

by

**Kyle Hebert**

---

---

November 2014

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Divisions of Sport Fish and Commercial Fisheries



## Symbols and Abbreviations

The following symbols and abbreviations, and others approved for the Système International d'Unités (SI), are used without definition in the following reports by the Divisions of Sport Fish and of Commercial Fisheries: Fishery Manuscripts, Fishery Data Series Reports, Fishery Management Reports, and Special Publications. All others, including deviations from definitions listed below, are noted in the text at first mention, as well as in the titles or footnotes of tables, and in figure or figure captions.

<b>Weights and measures (metric)</b>		<b>General</b>		<b>Mathematics, statistics</b>	
centimeter	cm	Alaska Administrative Code	AAC	<i>all standard mathematical signs, symbols and abbreviations</i>	
deciliter	dL	all commonly accepted abbreviations	e.g., Mr., Mrs., AM, PM, etc.	alternate hypothesis	$H_A$
gram	g	all commonly accepted professional titles	e.g., Dr., Ph.D., R.N., etc.	base of natural logarithm	$e$
hectare	ha	at	@	catch per unit effort	CPUE
kilogram	kg	compass directions:		coefficient of variation	CV
kilometer	km	east	E	common test statistics	(F, t, $\chi^2$ , etc.)
liter	L	north	N	confidence interval	CI
meter	m	south	S	correlation coefficient (multiple)	R
milliliter	mL	west	W	correlation coefficient (simple)	r
millimeter	mm	copyright	©	covariance	cov
		corporate suffixes:		degree (angular)	°
<b>Weights and measures (English)</b>		Company	Co.	degrees of freedom	df
cubic feet per second	ft <sup>3</sup> /s	Corporation	Corp.	expected value	$E$
foot	ft	Incorporated	Inc.	greater than	>
gallon	gal	Limited	Ltd.	greater than or equal to	≥
inch	in	District of Columbia	D.C.	harvest per unit effort	HPUE
mile	mi	et alii (and others)	et al.	less than	<
nautical mile	nmi	et cetera (and so forth)	etc.	less than or equal to	≤
ounce	oz	exempli gratia (for example)	e.g.	logarithm (natural)	ln
pound	lb	Federal Information Code	FIC	logarithm (base 10)	log
quart	qt	id est (that is)	i.e.	logarithm (specify base)	log <sub>2</sub> , etc.
yard	yd	latitude or longitude	lat. or long.	minute (angular)	'
		monetary symbols (U.S.)	\$, ¢	not significant	NS
<b>Time and temperature</b>		months (tables and figures): first three letters	Jan,...,Dec	null hypothesis	$H_0$
day	d	registered trademark	®	percent	%
degrees Celsius	°C	trademark	™	probability	P
degrees Fahrenheit	°F	United States (adjective)	U.S.	probability of a type I error (rejection of the null hypothesis when true)	$\alpha$
degrees kelvin	K	United States of America (noun)	USA	probability of a type II error (acceptance of the null hypothesis when false)	$\beta$
hour	h	U.S.C.	United States Code	second (angular)	"
minute	min	U.S. state	use two-letter abbreviations (e.g., AK, WA)	standard deviation	SD
second	s			standard error	SE
<b>Physics and chemistry</b>				variance	
all atomic symbols				population sample	Var
alternating current	AC			sample	var
ampere	A				
calorie	cal				
direct current	DC				
hertz	Hz				
horsepower	hp				
hydrogen ion activity (negative log of)	pH				
parts per million	ppm				
parts per thousand	ppt, ‰				
volts	V				
watts	W				

***FISHERY MANAGEMENT REPORT NO. 14-46***

**REPORT TO THE BOARD OF FISHERIES, MISCELLANEOUS  
SHELLFISH FISHERIES**

by  
Kyle Hebert

Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Douglas

Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Division of Sport Fish, Research and Technical Services  
333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage, Alaska, 99518-1565

November 2014

The Fishery Management Reports series was established in 1989 by the Division of Sport Fish for the publication of an overview of management activities and goals in a specific geographic area, and became a joint divisional series in 2004 with the Division of Commercial Fisheries. Fishery Management Reports are intended for fishery and other technical professionals, as well as lay persons. Fishery Management Reports are available through the Alaska State Library and on the Internet: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/publications/>. This publication has undergone regional peer review.

*Kyle Hebert,  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries,  
Douglas Island Center Building, 802 3<sup>rd</sup> St., Douglas Alaska, 99824 USA*

*This document should be cited as:*

*Hebert, K. 2014. Report to the Board of Fisheries, miscellaneous shellfish fisheries. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Management Report No.14-46, Anchorage.*

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) administers all programs and activities free from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, pregnancy, parenthood, or disability. The department administers all programs and activities in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

**If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility please write:**

ADF&G ADA Coordinator, P.O. Box 115526, Juneau, AK 99811-5526  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042, Arlington, VA 22203  
Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW MS 5230, Washington DC 20240

**The department's ADA Coordinator can be reached via phone at the following numbers:**

(VOICE) 907-465-6077, (Statewide Telecommunication Device for the Deaf) 1-800-478-3648,  
(Juneau TDD) 907-465-3646, or (FAX) 907-465-6078

**For information on alternative formats and questions on this publication, please contact:**

ADF&G Division of Sport Fish, Research and Technical Services, 333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage AK 99518 (907) 267-2375

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Southeast Alaska Dive Fisheries .....	1
Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission .....	2
Southeast Alaska Regional Dive Fisheries Association .....	3
SEA CUCUMBER .....	3
Background.....	3
Fishery Development and History .....	4
Management Strategy and Regulation Development.....	5
2013/14 Sea Cucumber Commercial Harvest Season.....	6
2014/15 Outlook.....	6
GEODUCK CLAM .....	6
Background.....	6
Fishery Development and History .....	7
Management Strategy And Regulation Development .....	7
2013/2014 Geoduck Commercial Harvest Season .....	10
2014/2015 Outlook.....	10
RED SEA URCHIN .....	10
Background.....	10
Fishery Development and History .....	10
Management Strategy and Regulation Development.....	11
2013/14 Red Sea Urchin Commercial Harvest.....	12
2014/15 Outlook.....	12
ABALONE .....	12
Background.....	12
Fishery Development and History .....	13
Management Strategy and Regulation Development.....	14
Fishery Outlook.....	15
SEA OTTERS .....	15
Background.....	15
Commercial Fishery Interaction .....	16
REFERENCES CITED .....	17
TABLES AND FIGURES.....	19

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>		<b>Page</b>
1.	Registration Area A commercial sea cucumber harvest, effort, and value, 1986/87 through 2013/14.....	20
2.	Registration Area A commercial geoduck clam harvest, effort, and value, 1985/86 through 2013/14.....	21
3.	Registration Area A commercial red sea urchin harvest, effort, and value, 1980/81 through 2013/14.....	22
4.	Registration Area A commercial abalone harvest, effort, value, and season length, 1970/71 through 1996/97.....	23

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure</b>		<b>Page</b>
1.	Sea cucumber commercial harvest areas and rotational seasons.....	24
2.	Geoduck clam commercial harvest and rotation cycles and control areas in the Ketchikan Management Area.....	25
3.	Geoduck clam commercial harvest and rotation cycles in the Sitka Management Area.....	26
4.	Red sea urchin commercial harvest areas.....	27
5.	Sea cucumber commercial harvest areas negatively affected by sea otters.....	28
6.	Geoduck commercial harvest areas negatively affected by sea otters.....	29
7.	Red urchin commercial harvest areas negatively affected by sea otters.....	30

## ABSTRACT

The commercial miscellaneous shellfish (or “dive”) fisheries in the Southeast Region (Registration Area A/Southeast Alaska and Registration Area D/Yakutat) are a group of fisheries targeting geoduck clams, red sea urchins, sea cucumbers and abalone. The common feature of these fisheries is that all are limited to hand picking by diving. With the exception of abalone, all of the dive fisheries have well developed management plans, with abundance-based stock assessment programs at their core. Most development of these fisheries has occurred since the 1990s, making the dive fisheries relatively new to Alaska. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game works closely with the Southeast Alaska Regional Dive Fisheries Association (SARDFA) to develop management plans for these fisheries. SARDFA is a non-profit organization that represents limited entry permit holders of the dive fisheries, and that generates funds for management, research, and the promotion of dive fisheries. Sea otters pose a major threat to the dive fisheries in Southeast Alaska. The department has documented substantial declines in population levels of sea cucumbers, sea urchins, and geoducks in areas occupied by sea otters. Consequently, guideline harvest levels have been reduced, and some areas have been closed to commercial harvest.

Keywords: abalone, Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission, dive fisheries, geoduck clams, red sea urchins, sea cucumbers, Southeast Alaska Regional Dive Fisheries Association (SARDFA), Alaska Board of Fisheries

## INTRODUCTION

### SOUTHEAST ALASKA DIVE FISHERIES

This report provides a general overview of miscellaneous shellfish fisheries, commonly referred to as “dive fisheries”, in Southeast Alaska and Yakutat. Southeast Alaska dive fisheries currently harvest three species of invertebrates: geoduck clams *Panopea abrupta*, California sea cucumbers *Parastichopus californicus*, and red sea urchins *Strongylocentrotus franciscanus*. All three fisheries occur primarily in southern Southeast Alaskan waters. The pinto abalone *Haliotis kamschatkana* fishery is currently closed to commercial harvest. A small experimental sea cucumber fishery was prosecuted during the 2007/08 season in the Yakutat area but not continued because of lack of harvestable sea cucumber biomass.

The Southeast Alaska/Yakutat area (Region I) consists of Alaska waters between Cape Suckling on the north and Dixon Entrance on the south. The region is divided into two registration areas: Area A, the Southeast Alaska area, extends from Dixon Entrance to Cape Fairweather and Area D, the Yakutat area, extends from Cape Fairweather to Cape Suckling. Southeast Alaska dive fisheries primarily occur in miscellaneous shellfish registration Area A. The Southeast Alaska area is divided into 16 regulatory districts (Districts 1 through 16) with each district divided into several statistical subdistricts for harvest reporting. For management purposes, the Ketchikan area office is primarily concerned with fisheries that occur in Districts 1–4, the Petersburg and Wrangell area offices with Districts 5–10 (excluding Section 9-A), the Sitka area office with Section 9-A and District 13, and the Juneau area office with Districts 11–15.

Southeast dive fisheries are relatively recent entrants into the region’s commercial fishing industry. The first commercial landings for abalone occurred in the mid 1960s, and red sea urchins, sea cucumbers, and geoduck clams in the early to mid 1980s (Tables 1–4). Initial participation in each fishery was often limited to just one or two divers and has developed to current effort levels. Currently, each fishery is a competitive limited entry fishery. Fish ticket information indicates 278 permits reported landings during the 2013/14 season, including 198 sea cucumber, 70 geoduck clam, and 10 red sea urchin permits.

The exvessel value of the 2010/11 Southeast Alaska dive fisheries was estimated to be over \$10,000,000. This estimate is considered conservative as it is based on the price reported on fish

tickets and does not include unreported price adjustments or situations where price information was not reported. The actual exvessel value will not be known until final processor reports are received and analyzed through the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC). The harvest of sea cucumbers at was valued at \$6,181,223, and geoduck clam harvest was valued at \$4,071,173. Due to fewer than three participants, the red sea urchin fishery harvest is confidential.

## **COMMERCIAL FISHERIES ENTRY COMMISSION**

Prior to July 1, 1996, entry into Southeast Alaska's dive fisheries was open access, requiring an interim-use permit by the CFEC for participation. Historically, most fisheries began slowly with little effort but interest grew quickly as exvessel value increased, new markets opened, and fishers expanded beyond the more traditional fisheries such as salmon or groundfish. Effort quickly increased to levels that made it difficult for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) to manage each fishery.

In 1996, the Alaska State Legislature established a four-year moratorium on interim-use permits for the Southeast dive fisheries. The legislation, HB 547, was incorporated into statute as AS 16.43.228. The moratorium specified a cap on the total number of interim-use permits in the Southeast Alaska geoduck, sea cucumber, sea urchin, and abalone fisheries. This legislation temporarily halted growth in the number of participants in these fisheries and provided specific eligibility criteria to be used in each fishery.

The effective date of the moratorium was July 1, 1996 and expired automatically on June 30, 2000. During the moratorium, the legislation directed the CFEC to consult with the Board of Fisheries (board), the department, and the participants in these fisheries about a permanent limited entry program. The legislation also directed the CFEC to determine the type of limited entry program that would be most appropriate for these fisheries. These fisheries would have returned to open access on the expiration date unless the CFEC limited these fisheries under the current limited entry law.

In September 1999, the CFEC proposed to adopt regulations for limiting entry into the geoduck and sea urchin dive fisheries. For these fisheries, CFEC proposed to establish:

- 1) the maximum numbers of permits to be issued for each fishery;
- 2) July 1, 1996 as the date for determining an applicant's qualifications for a Southeast Alaska geoduck or sea urchin dive entry permit;
- 3) time periods for each fishery in which an individual must have participated in the fishery as an interim-use permit holder to be eligible to apply for an entry permit; and
- 4) definitions for the proposed limitation of the geoduck and sea urchin dive fisheries.

The CFEC originally proposed a return to open access status for the sea cucumber and abalone dive fisheries at the end of the then current moratorium. Following a series of public comment periods and meetings, and after obtaining staff developed options for limiting entry, all current dive fisheries became limited entry fisheries. Regulations for red sea urchins were finalized in November 2000 and sea cucumbers and geoducks in May 2001. The maximum number of limited entry permits originally authorized for each fishery was 104 for geoduck clams, 436 for sea cucumber, and 95 for red sea urchins. In 2014 there were a total of 424 permits for the



Southeast Alaska dive fisheries: 89 for geoduck clams, 277 for sea cucumbers and 58 for red sea urchins. Abalone is currently an open access fishery (CFEC 2014).

## **SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL DIVE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION**

Southeast Alaska Regional Dive Fisheries Association (SARDFA) is a non-profit, economic development corporation, whose voting members are all permit holders for the three Southeast dive fisheries (geoduck clams, sea cucumbers, and red sea urchins). SARDFA's mission is to develop, expand, and enhance new and existing dive fisheries in Southeast Alaska in a sustainable and economically feasible manner. SARDFA is managed by a board of directors which is elected by the membership. The board is composed of (1) one member from each of five Southeast communities (Ketchikan, Prince of Wales Island, Sitka, Petersburg, and Wrangell), (2) one member from out of state, (3) one at-large director, (4) one municipal director, and (5) one processor-director; for a total of nine directors. SARDFA has helped fund department stock assessment programs and has coordinated with department management to open fishery areas during each season.

State general funds have not been sufficient to fund the costs of management and research activities required for the dive fishery program. In the early development of these fisheries this funding gap was filled through financial contributions by industry processors, local municipalities, federal funding, voluntary diver assessments, and test fishing projects in which the resource was harvested and sold by the state. Southeast industry divers saw a need to establish an organization and provide for a funding mechanism to meet the funding gap and continue to expand the dive fisheries. Through municipality funding, industry divers hired a project coordinator to develop and promote state legislation addressing this need. The legislation, CSHB 198, passed unanimously in the House and Senate, was signed by the governor June 20, 1997 and became effective June 21, 1997. CSHB 198 allowed for the creation of SARDFA and empowered it to exact taxes on dive fishery landings to help pay for fishery development.

SARDFA has created committees to focus on the individual needs of each dive fishery. The committees are a valuable source of input to the department regarding fishery management concerns and ideas. These committees are advisory to the SARDFA Board. The Board reviews and votes on committee recommendations and negotiates approved recommendations together with the department. The department is required by the State of Alaska to protect the integrity of the state's fisheries, therefore the department will not approve any recommendations that are not consistent with the state's constitutional and statutory fishery sustainability clauses.

The first year taxes collected on the dive fisheries totaled \$227,986. For the state fiscal year 2014, total tax collected was \$532,831.

## **SEA CUCUMBER**

### **BACKGROUND**

The commercial species of sea cucumber harvested in Southeast Alaska is the California sea cucumber *Parastichopus californicus*. It is a common species distributed from Mexico to Southeast Alaska and has been observed at least as far west and north as the Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands, Bering Sea, and Kodiak Island where there is a small sea cucumber fishery. It occupies a broad range of subtidal habitats from nearshore shallows to over 100 fathoms. The sea cucumber's primary food is detritus, which it ingests along with significant amounts of fine

substrate. Its ecological function includes recycling detrital material into nutrients for the primary producers in the marine food chain (Lambert 1997, O'Clair and O'Clair 1998). *P. californicus* favors locations with moderate current, avoiding mud bottoms and areas subject to inundation by freshwater or glacial runoff. The abundance of sea cucumbers in Southeast Alaska is greatest in the southern and western portions in protected bays and inlets.

## **FISHERY DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORY**

The first experimental fishing permits for sea cucumbers were requested in 1981. One or two permits were issued each year between 1981 and 1986, with only one vessel reporting landings. The first fisheries were based in Ketchikan and, over the years, evolution of management strategies resulted in a partition of most of the statistical subdistricts into one of three seasonal rotations. The initial fishery had no established season; now, harvests are reported from October to September, the current management season (Table 1).

Most of the vessels pioneering this fishery were small skiffs of limited range and capability operating in the vicinity of either Ketchikan or Sitka, mostly as a day fishery. Currently, larger vessels operate with two divers and a crewman with living quarters and the capability of transporting product and divers during typical fall and winter weather conditions. Harvest is conducted by scuba or hookah diving gear usually at depths of 30 to 60 feet. The number of hours each diver can work each day depends on the maximum working depths and may be as little as three or four hours. Harvest consists of collecting sea cucumbers in large mesh bags and transporting the filled bags to the tendering vessel.

Processing is currently conducted in a two-step process. The freshly caught animal is eviscerated on the fishing grounds where a knife is used to make an inch long puncture in the body wall of the animal. Drained sea cucumbers are then placed in totes and transported to the processing facility where they are either processed immediately or held for up to two days in a refrigerator. Sea cucumbers were purchased by the bucket in early years but are now sold exclusively by drained weight. Holding times for the eviscerated, densely packed sea cucumbers are limited by their rapid decomposition even when refrigerated.

Processing at the plant consists of separating the muscle bundles from the skin with a scraper or knife. The major products from this fishery are the longitudinal and transverse muscle bundles, or meat, and the skins. Skin processing involves cooking or boiling the skins to a specific texture and drying the product. The dried skins are a preferred item in upscale oriental cuisine. Sea cucumbers harvested in Southeast Alaska have been processed in Craig, Juneau, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Sitka, British Columbia, and the state of Washington.

Effort increased in the fishery to a maximum of 424 divers during the 1995/96 season because of high prices the previous season and concerns that the fishery was to be limited by the CFEC. Beginning July 1, 1996 the CFEC imposed a moratorium into Southeast dive fisheries that limited the number of divers able to participate in the sea cucumber fishery to 472. The CFEC moratorium ended July 1, 2000 with a maximum of 436 limited entry permits authorized for the sea cucumber fishery. Currently there are 389 permits in the Southeast Alaska sea cucumber fishery. The guideline harvest level (GHL) has been established at, or in excess of, one million pounds (drained weight) for the past 17 seasons (Table 1).

Between 2006 and 2011, with SARDFA input and funding, the department surveyed 13 and added 8 new areas to the sea cucumber commercial harvest. Additionally, two previously

surveyed and opened sea cucumber areas were expanded. The total GHL increase with newly opened and expanded areas was approximately 430,100 pounds.

Yakutat Bay was surveyed during the 2005 season with an estimated biomass of 225,006 lb and a 31,200 lb GHL. This fishery did not fall within the limited entry jurisdiction in Southeast Alaska and was an open access fishery. Six divers participated in the fishery making 34 landings and harvesting 31,353 lb. Yakutat Bay was surveyed again in 2010 but the biomass would not support a commercial fishery.

## **MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND REGULATION DEVELOPMENT**

The *Southeast Alaska Sea Cucumber Commercial Fisheries Management Plan* (5 AAC 38.140) was developed because the sea cucumber fishery was expanding rapidly in the late 1980s, and ADF&G could not manage the fishery with the interim-use permit system. The department closed the fishery in May 1990 and reopened it in October 1990 following development of the plan. This plan seeks to protect subsistence opportunities and provides for sustained commercial fishing harvests. To protect subsistence opportunities, the sea cucumber management plan established 16 areas closed to commercial fishing (5 AAC 38.140 (k)). There are also provisions to prevent the use of diving gear in the subsistence (5 AAC 02.020 (1)) and personal use (5 AAC 77.010 (1)(3)) fisheries in those areas. Annual commercial fishery guideline harvest levels are 6.4% of the lower boundary of the confidence interval of the total sea cucumber biomass, taken on a three-year rotational basis (i.e., 19.2% once every three years). Rotational fisheries have the advantage of lowering overall departmental assessment survey and management costs.

Initially, the *Sea Cucumber Management Plan* provided for a season that began October 1 in 1990 with two 48-hour openings per week. The season was changed to a November opening in 1993, and in order to extend the season, weekly fishing periods were reduced to seven daylight hours on Mondays in November, plus an additional four daylight hours on Tuesdays from December through March. The *Sea Cucumber Management Plan* was amended by the Alaska Board of Fisheries for the 1997 season and provided for an October 1 opening date with weekly fishing periods of seven daylight hours on Mondays in October, plus an additional four daylight hours on Tuesdays from November through March. There are also provisions for limiting the numbers of divers per vessel to two, providing fishing period trip limits of 2,000 lb per person, and limiting gear to scuba, surface-supplied systems, or snorkels. During the January 2000 board meeting, the open weekly fishing period was amended, providing for a Monday, 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and Tuesday 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. opening in October (i.e., opening an additional half-day in October). The board also allowed the use of enhanced air nitrox of  $\leq 40\%$  oxygen with the balance consisting of nitrogen. Time series of stock assessment data was used to evaluate sea cucumber population response to harvest under the current management plan (Clark et al. 2009). This analysis revealed highly diverse responses among management units. Although changes in mean density, mean weight, and biomass were apparent in many areas, variability made detection of statistically significant differences difficult. In general, more areas open to commercial harvest have decreased in mean density, increased in mean weight, and decreased in biomass. In several surveyed areas that are closed to commercial harvest, decreases have been observed in density, weight, and biomass, indicating that populations respond to environmental variables in addition to exploitation.

## **2013/14 SEA CUCUMBER COMMERCIAL HARVEST SEASON**

The 2013/14 season opened by regulation on Monday, October 7, 2013 with a GHV of 1,472,600 pounds of sea cucumbers. A total of 198 permit holders reported landings with a fish ticket exvessel value of \$6,181,223 (Table 1).

## **2014/15 OUTLOOK**

Biomass estimates made during the summer of 2014 indicated a harvestable surplus of 1,084,800 pounds of sea cucumbers available for the 2014/15 season. The 2014/15 sea cucumber fishery opened by regulation at 0800, October 6, 2014. Weekly fishery openings are expected to occur through at least November 2014.

## **GEODUCK CLAM**

### **BACKGROUND**

Geoduck clam *Panopea generosa* beds have a patchy, habitat-specific distribution in the central and southern portions of Southeast Alaska, primarily in protected waters near the outside coast. Highest densities are found in fine-to-course sand substrates with minimal surge energy. Highest densities of geoducks within Southeast, Alaska have been observed in the large island groups just west of Craig, including shoreline adjacent to Suemez Island, Baker Island, Lulu Island, and Noyes Island. Studies conducted in the state of Washington, in British Columbia, and in Southeast Alaska indicate this clam can live to be over 100 years old (Bureau et al. 2003). Southeast Alaska is the extreme northern limit of the geographic range of this species, and recruitment is sporadic or very low seasonally. Research from British Columbia and Washington indicates geoducks have sporadic recruitment, low growth rates, and high maximum age, making this species susceptible to overharvest.

A troubling problem for consumption of the clams is the tendency for geoduck clams to bioaccumulate undesirable microorganisms or compounds. In particular, high levels of the toxin that causes paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) have been found in geoducks in Southeast Alaska, most strongly associated with the viscera. The mantle and necks are the usual body parts consumed, and PSP toxin concentrations are lower in these parts. Although the sale of processed clams with viscera removed is permitted, exvessel value for processed clams is substantially less than that for whole, live product.

In order to protect consumers, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) requires that geoducks be sampled from each individual commercial fishery area and tested for PSP toxin level. Before a commercial fishery may be opened, PSP toxin levels from sampled geoducks must test below the  $80 \mu\text{g } 100^{-1}$  grams of tissue. In addition, the ADEC samples water quality in commercial fishery areas to test for human pathogenic microorganisms. Because of the time required for transport and testing of samples, and the relatively short shelf life of the fresh harvested product, a close working relationship is required between department fishery managers, the ADEC, and SARDFa for a successful fishery opening. The current PSP protocol was adopted prior to the 2003/04 season. Using PSP data collected since the inception of this program, the ADEC modified the PSP testing protocol prior to the 2006/07 season. These modifications allow an additional day of harvest before test results expire, and require fewer test samples prior to allowing the harvest and marketing of live product. These changes have reduced cost to industry and increased marketing opportunities.

## **FISHERY DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORY**

The development and expansion of the geoduck fishery in Southeast Alaska has been a direct result of the working relationship between the industry (SARDF), the department, and ADEC. Additional fishery areas have been identified by the industry and surveyed by the department. The approval by ADEC of pre-fishery PSP sampling has allowed live marketing of all geoducks, which has substantially increased the value of the fishery. Although the value of the fishery is high now, it began with small fisheries in a few locations.

Starting in 1978 with the Noyes Island survey, state grants were used to find and qualitatively assess commercial beds in the Ketchikan, Craig, Petersburg, Wrangell, and Sitka areas. A number of potential commercial beds were located near Ketchikan, Craig, and Sitka. Procedures for testing and certifying the product for human consumption were established by the ADEC. Population assessment surveys were conducted on 3 beds around Noyes Island near Craig, a harvestable biomass estimated, and the ADEC completed sanitation surveys on these areas. Two processors conducted the required modifications to their facilities and procedures to handle batch processing, lot testing, and product quarantine, and were consequently certified to process geoducks.

In late 1985, the first permit was issued for the commercial harvest of geoduck clams. During the 1985/86 season 143,868 lb of the 300,000 lb, five-year quota (Table 2) was harvested by 8 divers in the Noyes Island area. During the 1986/87 season, only 28,191 lb were harvested by only 3 divers. The decline was mainly due to poor marketing conditions and high operational costs. Increased interest in this fishery began after the department completed a population estimate on the west side of Gravina Island in 1987. Biorka Island, near Sitka, was included in the geoduck fishery during the 1989/90 season, and Kah Shakes was included in the 1990/91 season.

In the 1991/92 geoduck fishery, participation of divers from the state of Washington caused increased effort and harvest. Prior to this, nonresident participation was minimal. Participation fluctuated in the late 1990s due to decreasing exvessel value with sales of processed product. However, changes in PSP testing protocol by the ADEC prior to the 2003/04 season, which allowed over 90% percent of the harvested product to be sold live, generated increased effort in the fishery. During the last nine seasons all of the harvest has been sold as live product. The exvessel value of the fishery for the 2013/14 season was estimated at \$4.1 million.

The geoduck fishery's unprecedented expansion between the 2004/05 and 2009/10 seasons was because of the following:

- 1) Federal funding for surveys (the *Nearshore Marine Grant*),
- 2) Industry reconnaissance to identify new commercially harvestable areas, and
- 3) Commercial fisheries logbook program provided the department with additional information about location of geoduck beds.

As of the 2014/15 season, a total of 38 distinct commercial fisheries (Figures 2 and 3) have been identified and surveyed in Southeast Alaska.

## **MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND REGULATION DEVELOPMENT**

An objective of the department's geoduck fishery management is to be conservative to protect stocks by restricting the rate of exploitation to a very low sustainable level. The species is long-lived and recruitment is sporadic and low both spatially and temporally, making this species

particularly vulnerable to overharvest. Fisheries do not occur during the summer to avoid the summer spawning and recruitment period and to minimize PSP toxin levels.

Fisheries are restricted to areas for which biomass estimates are available. Only four locations had been surveyed prior to 1997: Symonds Bay on Biorka Island in the Sitka Management Area, West Gravina Island (Vallenar Bay, South Vallenar Point, Middle Gravina and Nehenta Bay areas), Kah Shakes (Kirk Point/Bullhead Cove), and northern Noyes Island (Ulitka Bay, Little Steamboat Bay, and Steamboat Bay areas) in the Ketchikan Management Area. The GHL for each area is calculated as 2% of the lower bound confidence interval of the harvestable adult population, multiplied by the number of years in the fishery rotation (e.g., 2 if fished every other year). Following reassessment dive surveys during the summer of 1997, it became apparent that the abundance of geoducks in some areas was much lower than expected, and the distribution of geoduck clams was less than previous surveys had indicated. These preliminary results suggested that previous GHLS established for the geoduck clam fishery were not sustainable. As a result, the department delayed the opening, originally scheduled for October 1, 1997, until further analysis and review of the survey results were completed.

During the fall of 1997, the department held public meetings to discuss possible management options for the fishery including a season opening date. Representatives of CFEC, Fish and Wildlife Protection (FWP), and the ADEC attended. An opening date and daily open hours were agreed on as well as a GHL for each area. Generally, the 2% per year harvest rate was maintained for all areas but the number of years an area would remain closed or “fallow” was increased to four years in Symonds Bay and west Gravina Island with Steamboat Bay and Kah Shakes remaining on a two-year rotation. This expanded rotational cycle in Symonds Bay and west Gravina Island produced a GHL that was high enough to accurately target during the fishery.

As a result of the meeting held prior to the 1997/98 season, the Southeast Alaska Geoduck Task Force was formed. On January 7, 1998 the task force voted to assess themselves \$0.25 on the pound for the February 1998 commercial opening. Through a cooperative agreement between ADF&G and SARDF, portions of funds generated through the voluntary self-tax were used to conduct surveys to estimate the geoduck clam biomass in Port Alice (summer 1998), Turn Point, Cone Bay, and Nakat Inlet (Cape Fox and Lord/Sitklan Islands, summer 1999). The opening of Port Alice was delayed until 1999/2000 season because of the need for water quality testing.

A cooperative agreement was also formed between ADF&G and the Sitka Harvest Divers Association (SHDA). Using funds provided by SHDA, the department conducted a survey of the geoduck clam populations on the west coast of Baranof Island and nearby islands in portions of Subdistricts 113-31 and 113-41. This area has since become known as the Goddard area due to the proximity of the Goddard Hot Springs and includes three present day fisheries (Biorka/Legma Islands, Taigud/Kolosh Islands, Elovoi/Golf/Gornoi Islands, Figure 2).

As previously stated, reconnaissance surveys were integral to the expansion and development of the geoduck fisheries in Southeast Alaska. The purpose of the reconnaissance surveys was for the industry to identify the most likely sites capable of supporting commercial geoduck fisheries. These data were given to the department to aid in the development of biomass assessment

surveys. Many of these industry reconnaissance surveys were funded using contracts with Federal Nearshore Funds<sup>1</sup>.

Between 2001 and 2003 reconnaissance surveys were done by SHDA and SARDFa in a substantial portion of Southeast Alaska which resulted in the department conducting stock assessment surveys in Sea Otter Sound (Port Alice/Cone Bay, Turn Point), Nakat Inlet (Cape Fox, Lord/Sitklan Island) and the Goddard area. Additional funds from Federal Nearshore grants were used to conduct surveys from 2005 through 2008. Five of these reconnaissance surveys were done in existing areas, better defining beds and increasing survey precision and subsequently GHs. The 2005 reconnaissance work was conducted in Cone Island North, Cone Island South/Paloma Pass, Port Real Marina, Portillo Channel, and Bucareli Bay fisheries.

At the 2000 Board of Fisheries meeting, the geoduck management plan was adopted (5 AAC 38.142); prior to that there were only general regulations about clams (5 AAC 38.110), and no regulations that specifically addressed the Southeast Alaska geoduck clam fishery. The department, in cooperation with the SARDFa Geoduck Committee, developed these regulations for the Southeast Alaska commercial fishery that were adopted by the board. The core elements are:

1. There are no size limits for geoducks and all geoducks harvested must be retained.
2. Annual guideline harvest levels must be established for an area before it is open to commercial harvest. The GH must be based on biomass estimates where biomass surveys have been conducted within the previous 12 years.
3. Commercial harvest gear is limited to dive gear while using a hand-held, manually operated, water jet device.

Prior to the 2003/04 season, the department opened commercial geoduck fisheries in Southeast Alaska without knowledge of the PSP level in the area. Instead, geoducks were harvested and then tested for PSP in "lots" to determine if shipped geoducks should be recalled. This post-harvest testing procedure only allowed for sale of geoducks that were already processed (dressed and packaged), which prevented access to the lucrative market of live geoducks. Due to requests by SARDFa for changes to ADEC's program, ADEC held a geoduck conference in Anchorage on August 5 and 6, 2002. A result of this conference was the implementation of an enhanced live shipment program for geoducks. This required changes in the department's fishery management in order to target live geoduck sales. This PSP testing program was enacted prior to the 2003/04 fishery. During the 2003/04 through 2006/07 seasons a significant amount of PSP data were collected by ADEC and changes to the testing protocol were adopted. Because of this change in protocol, more than 90% of the GH was shipped live, which significantly increased the value of the fishery.

Because fishery area openings are based on PSP testing within a small time window, short notice of openings occurs. Permit holders are required to closely monitor PSP test results which are posted on ADEC's and SARDFa's web sites. In past years, if a fishery area did not pass PSP standards, permit holders chose to wait until the area had passed because the value of live

---

<sup>1</sup> The reconnaissance and biomass surveys were funded, in part, by grants NA06FN0385 and NA16FN1560 from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of NOAA or any of its sub-agencies.

product is much greater than processed product. This approach causes the overall geoduck fishery to extend over a longer period.

During the January 2003 Board of Fisheries meeting the geoduck management plan was amended with the establishment of a control site (Port Mayoral) within Subdistrict 103-50. The board also amended regulations that the department “may” consider PSP levels in geoduck management (5 AAC 38.142 (a)). During the February 2006 Board of Fisheries meeting the geoduck management plan was amended to allow the department to require a harvest logbook from commercial divers. A second geoduck clam control site was also established within Subdistrict 101-27 (Blank Inlet).

## **2013/2014 GEODUCK COMMERCIAL HARVEST SEASON**

The 2013/14 season GHL was 601,400 lbs (Table 2). A total of 69 divers harvested 514,037 pounds of geoducks. The fishery was opened on October 3, 2013 and closed September 26, 2014. All of the geoducks from this season were sold live, resulting in the second highest average price per pound in the history of the fishery.

This season openings in fishing areas around Sitka were intentionally delayed, as requested by SARDFa, to take advantage of markets at the end of the season. These areas were opened in September 2014.

## **2014/2015 OUTLOOK**

A total of 750,600 pounds of whole geoduck clams will be available for harvest during the 2014/15 season (Figure 2 and Table 2). Anecdotal conversations with processors and divers indicate a potential price of approximately \$4.00 to \$6.00 per pound delivering to the live market during this season.

By the time this report was published in early November, there had been landings from 6 fishery areas. Ten other areas had not yet undergone PSP testing.

# **RED SEA URCHIN**

## **BACKGROUND**

Two commercial species, red sea urchins *Strongylocentrotus franciscanus* and green sea urchins *S. droebachiensis*, are common in Southeast Alaska. The red sea urchin occurs primarily on rocky shorelines of the outside coast with largest concentrations in southern Southeast Alaska. Green sea urchins are most common in protected waters of Southeast Alaska in a wider variety of habitats. The red sea urchin population is kept at very low levels by sea otters in many areas of the outside coasts, including the Barrier Islands, Baker Island, Chichagof Island, Dall Island, Kuiu Island, Lulu Island, Maurelle Islands, Noyes Island, Sumez Island, southern Prince of Wales Island, and nearby areas. The only commercial fishery for urchins in recent years in Southeast Alaska has been for red sea urchins. Urchins are harvested for their gonads, commonly called roe or uni, with no distinction made between males or females. The product is most valuable fresh and is marketed primarily in Japan.

## **FISHERY DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORY**

Harvests of red sea urchins in Southeast Alaska began in 1981 near Ketchikan, primarily around Gravina Island. Both red and green sea urchins were harvested, with the vast majority of the



harvest comprised of red urchins. Participation and harvest built through the mid-1980s (Table 3), expanding to include Districts 1, 2, 3, and 4. Harvest grew to 890,092 lbs in 1986/87 and then tapered off due to difficulties in marketing. In 1988, harvests were restricted to District 1, Gravina Island, District 3 and the West Coast of Prince of Wales Island due to lack of staff time and budgetary support the fishery.

Interest in establishing a commercial urchin fishery in Southeast Alaska resurged in 1990 due to the success of urchin fisheries in California, Washington, and British Columbia. This interest was directed towards the Sitka area; however, lacking basic stock information, further commercial harvest was postponed until completion of a test fishery in late 1990 and early 1991 to estimate population size and to gather size frequency data. A limited commercial fishery opened in southern Sitka Sound in January 1991 with a harvest of 174,233 lbs before it was closed in April. Subsequent fisheries were opened in 1992 and 1993, and then closed indefinitely due to extreme predation by sea otters. All other areas of Southeast Alaska remained closed pending development of a management plan, stock assessments, harvest quotas, and a means of monitoring and managing the fishery.

The department initiated a test fishery in District 1 near Ketchikan in the spring 1995 as a method to pay for population assessment surveys. The test fishing contract was awarded to Ocean Fresh Seafoods of Fort Bragg, California, the sole bidder. Under the contract, Ocean Fresh paid the department \$139,567 in exchange for the opportunity to harvest 3,000,000 lbs of red sea urchins. The test fishery spanned 14 months from March 1995 through April 1996, and harvested 2,965,607 lbs of red sea urchins (Table 3). Monthly roe recovery averaged between 5.5% and 12.2%. The average price per pound ranged from \$0.29 to \$0.81. The test fishery provided considerable employment and revenues to Southeast Alaska, with an estimated exvessel value of approximately \$1,402,837 for dive harvesters.

Fully developed red sea urchin fisheries have occurred since the 1996/97 fishing season. The overall quota has ranged between 4.4 and 6.8 million pounds, however, selected areas have seen reductions in biomass, likely due to sea otter predation. Most areas in Southeast Alaska supporting red sea urchin populations are threatened by the rapidly sea otter population. The numbers of participating divers and landings have decreased during recent years.

## **MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND REGULATION DEVELOPMENT**

Prior to 1996 permits to fish for sea urchins were given under authority of 5 AAC 38.062. In 1984, the first year with significant landings of red urchins, there was a size limit of 3–5 inches test diameter to protect small urchins for recruitment, to provide large urchins as a protective spine canopy for small urchins, and to give processors the desired size urchin. An interim management plan was in place in 1987 for the Ketchikan area with a three-year area rotation and size limits modified slightly to 3–4.5 inches. A second interim plan was developed for 1991 through 1993 for the Sitka area. The Sitka area plan included a 3.2% annual harvest rate on the estimated biomass, three-year area rotations, weekly fishing periods of noon, Saturday through noon, Thursday, and no size limits.

In 1996, the department and the sea urchin industry developed interim regulations and a management plan for the commercial urchin fishery in Southeast Alaska. This plan was implemented during the 1996/1997 season. The regulations were adopted by the commissioner under authority of 5 AAC 39.210 for *High Impact Emerging Fisheries* and became effective in

December 1996. The Alaska Board of Fisheries formally adopted the red sea urchin management plan during their regular meeting in January 1997. The core elements are:

1. Annual guideline harvest levels are 6% of the biomass estimate. Fisheries will only be opened where biomass surveys have been conducted in the previous 3 years.
2. Harvest opportunities are to be distributed to each week of every month that the fishery is open. The fishery is to be managed to span approximately 4 months, subject to needs for conservation, law enforcement, reducing waste, and promoting fishery development. Size limits and trip limits may be imposed if needed to slow the pace of the fishery.
3. Processing vessels must carry observers, and vessels transporting unprocessed product out of Registration Area A must first obtain a transport permit.
4. In addition to fish ticket requirements, processors must submit records of the roe recovery within 30 days of landing.

The board made a modification to the regulation requiring onboard observers during the 2003 board meeting. New regulations with a three-year sunset clause allowed a catcher-seller to catch and process his own product onboard the harvest vessel (5 AAC 38.145 (n)). This regulation was permanently adopted during the January 2006 board meeting.

During the 2006 meeting, the board extended the interval between assessment surveys from 3 to 6 years but no more than the equivalent of the combined 3 year annual guideline harvest levels could be harvested within those 6 years. This reduced the number of surveys required to maintain red sea urchin areas open to commercial harvest when those area's GHL were not entirely taken; the GHL not taken in any one year can be forwarded into subsequent year's GHL. This regulation allowed the more efficient and cost effective surveying of areas whose GHL is not taken each year, without increasing the overall harvest between surveys.

## **2013/14 RED SEA URCHIN COMMERCIAL HARVEST**

The 2013/14 season opened by regulation on October 1, 2013 with a GHL of 3,275,300 pounds. In 2013, no new stock assessment surveys were conducted by the department. Ten divers participated in the fishery and the landings fell far short of the GHL, due to low fishing effort. The pounds landed and exvessel value are confidential due to fewer than three processors operating in the fishery.

## **2014/15 OUTLOOK**

Stock assessment surveys were conducted in one urchin fishery areas in District 1 (Subdistrict 101-21; Figure 4). The department also conducted stock assessment surveys in one urchin control area, in Subdistrict 101-27. The GHL for the 2014/15 season in Southeast Alaska is 3,310,700 lb. The fishery opened by regulation October 1, 2014.

# **ABALONE**

## **BACKGROUND**

The Alaskan abalone fishery targeted the pinto abalone *Haliotis kamschatkana*, which inhabits the rocky substrate of the lower intertidal and subtidal surge zones of the outer coasts of Southeast Alaska. Commercially harvestable quantities of abalone occurred in parts of Districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 13. Life history information for this species in Alaska is very limited and relies

on information from other North Pacific locations to understand the basic biology of this species. Tagging studies indicate it is a slow growing, long-lived species. Spawning occurs during the summer through early autumn. Size frequency information indicates that in at least some areas, a climax population may have existed prior to recent commercial exploitation. Recruitment levels appear to be low and sporadic and fecundity increases greatly with increasing shell length. Known predators include rockfish, starfish, octopus, sea otter, and man. Throughout the range of this and various other abalone species, exploitation has usually resulted in stock depletion and restrictive management (Sloan and Breen 1988; Woodby et al. 2000).

Abalone may be picked by hand from the shoreline during extreme low tides. However, until recently, most of the subsistence and personal use and the entire commercial fishery utilized scuba or hookah umbilical diving gear and most of the harvest occurred subtidally. Current subsistence and personal use regulations prohibit the use of compressed gas systems (e.g. scuba or hookah) to harvest abalone.

## **FISHERY DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORY**

The abalone fishery was marked by a boom in harvests and effort in the late 1970s and early 1980s followed by declining harvests and even higher amount of effort (Table 4). The decline in harvest may be attributed to a combination of excessive fishing, predation by a growing sea otter population, and apparent low productivity of abalone stocks when heavily harvested. The increase in fishing effort was partially due to an increase in value from one dollar per pound in the early 1970s to more than ten dollars a pound during the last four seasons (1992-1996).

The marked increase in harvests and effort occurred in the 1978/79 season, when effort increased more than three-fold and harvests increased to 180,000 lb from a long-term average of about 6,000 lb. Harvests peaked at 378,685 lb the next season (Table 4). This peak exceeded the quota of 250,000 lb adopted by the board in the spring of 1980 and the fishery was closed by emergency order for the first time.

High harvests continued through the 1981/82 season when almost 371,000 lb were landed, despite a reduction in the Guideline Harvest Range (GHR) to a maximum of 125,000 lb and a reduction in the fishing season. By the 1984/85 season, there was concern for the population when the lower end of the GHR was not reached despite 151 days of fishing.

The 1990/91 through 1995/96 seasons opened on October 1 and with the exception of District 13, which was managed separately and closed by emergency order, the length of the season for the rest of Southeast Alaska was set prior to the opening to avoid overharvest. A harvest of 68,400 lb during the 1990/91 season was the beginning of a second downward trend that was to continue through the remainder of the fishery.

As the 1994/95 season progressed, harvest levels were much lower than anticipated, and dramatically lower than historic levels. Fish ticket data indicated that 15,055 lb had been harvested during the 8-day opening. Despite requests from harvesters to reopen the fishery, the southern Southeast fishery was not reopened. The District 13 fishery was open for a total of 8 days for 7,824 lb of abalone (GHL of 8,000 lb). For all areas, anecdotal information from harvesters indicated that good harvest areas were difficult to find. Harvest per unit effort for the fishery ( $\text{lb diver}^{-1} \text{ day}^{-1}$ ) declined to 64% of the 1993 level.

The 1995/96 southern southeast abalone fishery was open for six days with an upper GHR of 10,000 lb. A total of 8,524 lb was taken by 44 divers with 48 landings in six days. The average

price per pound was \$8.99 giving the fishery an exvessel value of \$74,074. Due to poor harvest rates and a concern by some harvesters that abalone populations were greatly reduced from historic levels, the fishery was not reopened despite not reaching the upper end of the GHR. The District 13 fishery lasted 6 days with an upper GHR of 6,000 lb. Harvests of 3,833 lb and 1,995 lb occurred, respectively, during the 2 openings (5,828 lb total). A total of 56 divers made 73 landings with an approximate exvessel value of \$52,452 in the District 13 fishery.

In response to a decrease in harvest rates observed during the 1990s, the apparent lack of abalone in many of the traditional harvest areas, and numerous comments from subsistence users and commercial divers regarding the diminishing numbers of abalone, the fishery has been closed by emergency order since October 16, 1995 to protect the remaining, reduced population (Woodby et al. 2000). The emergency closure is consistent with 5 AAC 38.035. *AREA CLOSURES*. (b) which states “When the commissioner finds that continued fishing would jeopardize the health of a shellfish species described in this chapter in a registration area or portion of a registration area, the commissioner, by emergency order, shall close fishing for that shellfish species in the registration area or portion of the registration area.” The closure applied to all of Southeast Alaska including both the Sitka area and southern Southeast fisheries. Anecdotal information from department staff and harvest divers suggest a continuing decline in abalone populations. This continued reduction may be in part to sea otter predation.

## **MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND REGULATION DEVELOPMENT**

Prior to the boom in harvest and effort in the late 1970s, abalone harvests were regulated primarily by response to local market conditions. Quotas, season limitations, and guideline harvest ranges were not imposed until 1980 after harvests were rising dramatically.

The major fisheries were divided into District 13 (northern outer coast) and Districts 3, 4, and 5 (southern outer coast) fisheries. This division was established historically by early fishing and landing patterns that generally persisted throughout the fishery’s history. Closed waters around Craig, Klawock, Ketchikan, Sitka, and Coronation Island were implemented to protect stocks used for subsistence and personal use from commercial exploitation.

Size limits have undergone several increases prior to reaching the present 4-inch minimum. The size limit was raised from 3 inches to 4 inches for Districts 1 through 6 in 1968 and from 3 inches to 3½ inches for Districts 9 through 14 in 1976. A change for all districts to 3½ inches occurred in 1977. The board adopted an increase in minimum size to 3¾ inches in the spring of 1979. In November 1993, the board again increased the legal size limit to 4.0 inches due to concerns about declining abalone stocks. The intent of the larger size limit was to reduce the harvest rate on mature abalone thereby encouraging reproduction and rebuilding populations.

Guideline harvest ranges and season length both decreased in several steps. In 1980 the harvest limit was set at 250,000 lb and the year round season was reduced to September 1 through May 31. In the spring of 1981, the GHR was reduced from 100,000 to 125,000 lbs, and the season was shortened even more to September 15 through May 15. In 1982 the board split the existing GHR, allocating 86,000–107,500 lb to the Ketchikan area and 14,000–17,500 lb to the Sitka area. In 1983 the board split the season into autumn and spring segments each getting 50% of the allowable harvest. The board restricted the 1985/1986 harvest to a range of 25,000–50,000 lb in the Ketchikan area and a maximum of 8,000 lb in the Sitka area. The District 13 season was reduced to November 1 through May 15 and all other areas were changed to October 1 to May 15. In 1986 the season was changed to October 1 through May 15 for all areas. The upper GHR

was further reduced to 10,000 lb. for the 1995/1996 season for southern Southeast and to 6,000 lb for the Sitka area. These lower GHRs were intended to provide a limited commercial fishery while increasing the potential for recruitment.

## **FISHERY OUTLOOK**

The population is far below its historical level because of overfishing and probable high predation by sea otters. This low level likely does not promote significant recruitment and the department is unsure when, or if, the population will rebuild to a level capable of supporting a commercial fishery. A fishery will not be opened until a management plan is developed that addresses the issues and information identified in 5 AAC 39.210, *Management Plan for High Impact Emerging Fisheries*. As part of that process the department would require a plan for determining productivity and abundance of abalone, and a harvest strategy that would ensure a sustained fishery.

These elements would be difficult to achieve and the department would be very concerned about local and serial depletion under either an open access or limited entry fishery. The department believes that it is highly unlikely stocks will recover sufficiently to allow commercial fishing to resume.

Subsistence and Personal Use fisheries for abalone remain open in Southeast Alaska. A reduction in bag limit from 50 abalone (20 in the Sitka area) to 5 was approved for both fisheries at the 2013 Board of Fisheries meeting due to concerns about the low and declining abundance observed during department dive surveys.

## **SEA OTTERS**

### **BACKGROUND**

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sea otters *Enhydra lutris* were not present in the Alexander Archipelago due to their near extermination roughly 100 years ago (Kenyon 1969) as a result of the fur trade. It is likely that, as a result of this absence, prey species of sea otters expanded in abundance due to less predation. Population responses have been documented in sea urchin populations *Strongylocentrotus spp* (Estes and Palmisano 1974). In 1965 sea otters were first captured near Amchitka Island and in Prince William Sound and transferred to various locations in southeast Alaska where it was thought they would subsequently establish new populations (Jameson et al. 1982). On the outer coast of Southeast Alaska 412 otters were successfully released. The population remained low until 1987 when it began a period of rapid growth (Pitcher and Imamura 1990).

The annual rate of increase for the Southeast Alaska sea otter stock ranged from 15.7% to 23.3% between 1966 and 1988. A 1994 survey conducted for the entire Alexander Archipelago from Cape Spencer to Dixon Entrance estimated 11,697 individual otters (Agler et al. 1995). In 2002 there were an estimated 3,188 sea otters in the northern half of Southeast Alaska with 1,266 of those occurring in Glacier Bay and an additional estimated 6,008 in the remaining portions of the Alexander Archipelago (Bodkin 2004, personal communication). This data should be interpreted carefully for the estimates have large error components. The most recent population estimate for Southeast Alaska is over 25,000 sea otters, as estimated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2013.

Observations made by department divers on the outer coast of Southeast Alaska suggest that primary prey targets for sea otters are red sea urchins and pinto abalone when foraging on rock habitat, and geoduck clams when foraging on soft sand and mud substrate. Sea otters appear to be capable of remaining in areas for many years by sustaining themselves on prey that may be targeted secondarily, such as sea cucumbers, small clams, snails, and barnacles.

## **COMMERCIAL FISHERY INTERACTION**

The increasing population of sea otters in coastal waters of Southeast Alaska continues to have a substantial and detrimental impact on the economy of the region's dive fisheries, by reducing standing stock biomass, which results in lower GHGs. The sea urchin fishery was the first dive fishery in the region to be affected, with the closure of Sitka Sound because of severe population declines. Sea otters moved into the southern Sitka Sound red sea urchin fishing area in 1992 and, over the next year, removed an estimated 16,000,000 urchins or the majority of the standing stock (Davidson et al. 1993).

Many sea urchin and sea cucumber fishery areas have been greatly impacted by sea otter predation (Figures 1,4,5 and 7) and several have been closed due to low abundance in an attempt to protect the remaining spawning biomass. In an effort to determine if benthic invertebrate populations can recover from high levels of sea otter predation, the department has re-surveyed some areas that have been re-colonized by sea otters and closed to commercial fishing for several years. An example of this is Tebenkof Bay, on the west side of Kuiu Island, which was closed to commercial fishing in 2004 because of the virtual elimination of sea cucumbers by sea otters. In 2011 the department conducted another survey in the area and found that no recovery of the sea cucumber populations had occurred and that sea otters were still abundant. Similar results were found in 2013 for Subdistricts 105-41,42 (Shakan Bay on northwest Prince of Wales Island), and in 2014 for Subdistrict 103-70 (near San Fernando Island west of Craig), where sea cucumbers were nearly absent from these areas after over a decade since the last survey.

Sea otters have also impacted many geoduck commercial fishery areas. Many of these areas are on the outer coast, where sea otters are concentrated. About 66% of the commercial geoduck fishery areas have been negatively impacted by sea otters, although to date none have been closed to fishery (Figure 6). Since 2006, during geoduck surveys, the department has recorded sea otter observations and signs of their predation. Sea otter impacts are evident by deep craters created by sea otter digging, and empty or broken clam shells. Of the 25 geoduck fishery areas that have been affected by sea otters, the percentage of survey transects within an area for which sea otter impacts or presence have been observed ranged from 4 to 100%.

Although sea otter predation on abalone is believed to be relatively high, it is not considered the major factor in the decline of abalone in the 1980s because sea otter expansion occurred after high harvests by commercial fishing (Woodby et al. 2000). However, the increase and expansion of the sea otter population and resulting predation on abalone will very likely greatly reduce the potential for recovery of the abalone population in Southeast and any future commercial fishery for the species.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Agler, B. A., S. J. Kendall, P. E. Seiser, and D. B. Irons. 1995. Estimates of marine bird and sea otter abundance in Lower Cook Inlet, Alaska during Summer 1993 and winter 1994. Migratory Bird Management, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska.
- Bureau, D., W. Hajas, C.M. Hand, and G. Dovey. 2003. Age, size structure and growth parameters of geoducks (*Panopea abrupta*, Conrad 1849) from seven locations in British Columbia sampled in 2001 and 2002. Canadian Technical Report of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 2494.
- Clark, J. E., M. Pritchett, and K. Hebert. 2009. Status of sea cucumber stocks in Southeast Alaska and evaluation of the stock assessment program. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Data Series No. 09-12, Anchorage.
- Davidson, B., D. Woody, and B. DeJong. 1993. Interim management measures for the red sea urchin in Southeast Alaska for the 1993 season. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Regional Information Report 1J93-01, Juneau.
- Estes, J. A. and J. F. Palmisano. 1974. Sea otters: their role in structuring nearshore communities. *Science* 185:1058–1060.
- Jameson, R. J., K. W. Kenyon, A. M. Johnson, and H. M. Wight, 1982. History and status of translocated sea otter populations in North America. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 10:100–107.
- Kenyon, K.W. 1969. The sea otter in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. North American Fauna No.68, Bureau of Sport and Fisheries Wildlife, Washington, D.C.
- Lambert, P. 1997. Sea cucumbers of British Columbia, Southeast Alaska and Puget Sound. The Royal British Columbia Museum Handbook, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, British Columbia.
- O’Clair, R. and C. O’Clair. 1998. Southeast Alaska’s rocky shores: animals. Plant Press. Auke Bay. Alaska.
- Pitcher, K.W. and K.K. Imamura. 1990. Impacts of sea otter predation on Dungeness crab abundance in Cross Sound–Icy Strait Area, southeastern Alaska. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Cooperative Agreement No. 14-16-0009-954 Final Report – Part III, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Juneau.
- Sloan, NA. and P.A. Breen. 1988. Northern abalone, *Haliotis kamtschatkana* in British Columbia: Fisheries and synopsis of life history information. Canadian Special Publication in Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 103 (46).
- Woodby, D., Larson, R. and Rumble, J. 2000. The decline of the Alaskan abalone fishery in Alaska. Canadian Special Publication in Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 130: 25–31.





## **TABLES AND FIGURES**

Table 1.—Registration Area A (Southeast Alaska) commercial sea cucumber harvest, effort, and value, 1986/87 through 2013/14. Dashes indicate that values are unavailable.

Season <sup>a</sup>	Guideline Harvest Level (lb)	Total Harvest (lb)	Average Price / lb <sup>b</sup>	Estimated Exvessel Value <sup>b</sup>	Number of Divers	Number of Landings	Average lb / Diver	Average Earnings / Diver <sup>b</sup>
Data prior to 1986/1987 season is confidential.								
1986/87	34,043	34,043	\$0.21	\$7,149	7	44	4,863	\$1,021
1987/88	65,056	65,056	\$0.21	\$13,662	11	143	5,914	\$1,242
1988/89	801,405	801,405	\$0.21	\$169,096	57	922	14,060	\$2,967
1989/90	2,318,305	2,318,305	\$0.42	\$969,142	205	2,263	11,309	\$4,728
1990/91	704,491 <sup>c</sup>	804,184	\$0.59	\$472,386	143	890	5,624	\$3,303
1991/92	839,160 <sup>c</sup>	869,988	\$0.80	\$697,970	187	704	4,652	\$3,732
1992/93	1,100,440	1,249,621	\$0.79	\$988,628	240	1,003	5,207	\$4,119
1993/94	799,235	964,343	\$1.03	\$995,783	320	949	3,014	\$3,112
1994/95	1,351,000	1,322,219	\$1.79	\$2,361,541	261	1,379	5,066	\$9,048
1995/96	1,157,500	1,332,095	\$1.39	\$1,846,556	424	1,582	3,142	\$4,355
1996/97	939,300	909,789	\$1.29	\$1,169,612	294	1,234	3,095	\$3,978
1997/98	892,410	894,739	\$1.63	\$1,458,425	226	976	3,959	\$6,453
1998/99	1,026,345	1,055,572	\$1.55	\$1,636,137	219	971	4,820	\$7,471
1999/00	1,580,000	1,569,626	\$1.95	\$3,060,771	200	1,378	7,848	\$15,304
2000/01	1,122,500	1,158,385	\$2.23	\$2,583,199	220	913	5,265	\$11,742
2001/02	1,425,200	1,438,451	\$1.75	\$2,517,289	235	1,201	6,121	\$10,712
2002/03	1,576,700	1,639,440	\$1.26	\$2,042,882	201	1,313	8,156	\$10,164
2003/04	1,637,700	1,698,650	\$1.42	\$2,472,456	195	1,296	8,711	\$12,679
2004/05	1,381,200	1,374,532	\$2.12	\$2,769,116	194	1,139	7,085	\$14,274
2005/06	1,475,800	1,437,731	\$2.00	\$2,875,462	198	1,418	14,523	\$14,523
2006/07	1,598,700	1,597,457	\$1.97	\$3,146,990	175	1,237	17,983	\$17,983
2007/08 <sup>d</sup>	1,384,300	1,449,301	\$2.43	\$3,774,428	181	1,290	7,923	\$21,086
2008/09	1,122,100	1,102,637	\$2.30	\$2,536,065	176	1,072	6,301	\$13,078
2009/10	1,574,700	1,610,826	\$2.34	\$3,769,333	169	1,240	9,532	\$22,304
2010/11	1,262,800	1,274,541	\$2.52	\$3,211,843	180	1,109	7,081	\$17,841
2011/12	999,000	1,023,834	\$5.06	\$5,180,600	189	1,043	5,417	\$27,411
2012/13	1,476,000	1,512,895	\$4.05	\$6,127,225	199	1,369	7,602	\$30,790
2013/14	1,472,600	1,556,983	\$3.97	\$6,181,223	198	1,396	7,864	\$31,218
2014/15	1,084,800	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

<sup>a</sup> Season = October 1 thru September 30. Experimental fishing program prior to 1990/1991 season.

<sup>b</sup> Based on CFEC (annual) data prior to the 1998/1999 season, then based on ADF&G fish ticket data.

<sup>c</sup> Quota originally calculated in numbers of sea cucumbers.

<sup>d</sup> Does not include data for the Yakutat sea cucumber fishery.

Table 2.—Registration Area A (Southeast Alaska) commercial geoduck clam harvest, effort, and value, 1985/86 through 2013/14. Dashes indicate that values are not available.

Season <sup>a</sup>	Guideline Harvest Level (lb)	Total Pounds Landed	Average Price per Pound <sup>b</sup>	Estimated Exvessel Value <sup>b</sup>	Number of Divers	Number of Landings	Total Days Open	Average Pounds per Diver	Average Earnings per Diver <sup>b</sup>
1985–86	c	143,868	\$0.21	\$30,212	8	40	240	17,984	\$3,777
1986–87	c	28,191	\$0.25	\$7,048	3	9	240	9,397	\$2,349
1987–88	125,000	185,674	\$0.30	\$55,702	6	156	240	30,946	\$9,284
1988–89	189,232	143,188	\$0.49	\$70,162	9	127	240	15,910	\$7,796
1989–90	199,000	207,083	\$0.51	\$105,612	18	165	240	11,505	\$5,867
1990–91	196,000	189,585	\$0.51	\$96,688	15	130	176	12,639	\$6,446
1991–92	219,000	193,074	\$0.66	\$127,429	20	131	33	9,654	\$6,371
1992–93	196,000	189,379	\$1.11	\$210,211	22	109	19	8,608	\$9,555
1993–94	219,000	209,322	\$1.50	\$313,983	40	115	11	5,233	\$7,850
1994–95	195,000	197,246	\$1.85	\$364,905	64	190	14	3,082	\$5,702
1995–96	209,000	229,681	\$2.02	\$463,956	109	401	10	2,107	\$4,256
1996–97	196,000	203,017	\$2.57	\$521,754	97	359	6	2,093	\$5,379
1997–98	196,000	180,443	\$3.89	\$701,923	110	312	3	1,640	\$6,381
1998–99	112,500	111,311	\$2.13	\$237,092	98	206	66	1,136	\$2,419
1999–00	250,400	603,100	\$1.60	\$323,616	61	240	50	3,316	\$5,305
2000–01	391,100	438,334	\$1.06	\$464,634	74	543	148	5,923	\$6,279
2001–02	285,322	283,405	\$0.72	\$204,052	37	324	78	7,660	\$5,515
2002–03	382,100	392,406	\$1.69	\$663,166	50	537	35	7,848	\$13,263
2003–04	341,000	377,584	\$2.87	\$1,083,666	49	482	25	7,706	\$22,116
2004–05 <sup>d</sup>	477,000	535,516	\$3.93	\$2,104,578	60	710	24	8,925	\$35,076
2005–06 <sup>d</sup>	403,800	436,040	\$2.04	\$889,522	64	545	51	6,813	\$13,899
2006–07 <sup>d</sup>	687,100	726,866	\$3.88	\$2,820,240	66	812	42	11,013	\$42,731
2007–08 <sup>d</sup>	590,800	610,807	\$3.12	\$1,905,718	59	675	42	10,353	\$32,300
2008–09 <sup>d</sup>	868,700	906,685	\$3.66	\$3,318,467	56	920	39	16,191	\$59,258
2009–10 <sup>d</sup>	630,900	658,714	\$6.74	\$4,439,732	60	694	28	10,979	\$73,996
2010–11 <sup>d</sup>	824,800	845,582	\$6.61	\$5,589,297	69	953	25	12,255	\$81,004
2011–12 <sup>d</sup>	557,300	556,210	\$10.31	\$5,734,525	69	777	25	8,061	\$83,109
2012–13 <sup>d</sup>	763,200	800,783	\$6.88	\$5,509,387	68	974	30	11,776	\$81,020
2013–14 <sup>d</sup>	601,400	514,037	\$7.92	\$4,071,173	69	763	34	7,450	\$59,003
2014–15	750,600	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

<sup>a</sup> Season = October 1 through September 30.

<sup>b</sup> Average price data is based entirely on ADF&G fish ticket data. Note: 1985-2000 prices were reported for 90% of total pounds landed, however from 2001-2009 and for the 2010–11 season prices were reported for only 35% of total pounds landed and for the 2009–10 season, prices were reported for 50% of the total pounds harvested.

<sup>c</sup> Five-year, 300,000 pound GHL in three areas.

<sup>d</sup> Mariculture site fisheries are not included.

Table 3.—Registration Area A (Southeast Alaska) commercial red sea urchin harvest, effort, and value, 1980/81 through 2013/14. Dashes indicate that values are not available.

Season	Guideline Harvest Level (lb)	Total Landed (lb)	Average Price Per lb <sup>a</sup>	Estimated Exvessel Value <sup>b</sup>	Number of Divers	Number of Landings	Average lb per Diver	Average Earnings per Diver <sup>a</sup>
1980/81 <sup>b</sup>				Confidential				
1981/82 <sup>b</sup>				Confidential				
1982/83 <sup>b</sup>				Confidential				
1983/84	—	23,303	\$0.12	\$2,796	4	9	5,826	\$699
1984/85	—	188,023	\$0.17	\$31,906	16	84	11,751	\$1,994
1985/86	—	58,303	\$0.13	\$7,288	8	32	7,288	\$911
1986/87	—	890,092	\$0.14	\$125,335	26	459	34,234	\$4,821
1987/88 <sup>b</sup>				Confidential				
1988/89	—	223,883	\$0.41	\$91,106	11	128	20,353	\$8,282
1989/90	—	23,617	\$0.25	\$5,833	9	33	2,624	\$648
1990/91	—	174,233	\$0.26	\$45,823	6	91	29,039	\$7,637
1991/92	—	428,220	\$0.30	\$128,894	37	256	11,574	\$3,484
1992/93	—	143,485	\$0.29	\$41,467	17	108	8,440	\$2,439
1993/94	—	0	—	0	0	0	—	—
1994/95 <sup>b</sup>	3,000,000	2,088,395	\$0.45	\$944,329	1	1,391	2,088,395	\$944,329
1995/96 <sup>b</sup>	—	877,212	\$0.52	\$458,508	1	705	877,212	\$458,508
1996/97	6,093,579	4,929,280	\$0.38	\$1,878,056	150	3,483	32,862	\$12,520
1997/98	4,255,364	4,083,877	\$0.34	\$1,408,397	129	2,465	31,658	\$10,918
1998/99	4,822,700	3,075,095	\$0.40	\$1,230,038	62	1,524	49,598	\$19,839
1999/00	5,748,700	2,676,456	\$0.38	\$1,017,053	47	1,094	56,946	\$21,639
2000/01	6,806,700	2,373,993	\$0.36	\$854,637	56	842	42,393	\$15,261
2001/02	5,689,300	2,720,241	\$0.34	\$924,882	32	995	85,008	\$28,903
2002/03	5,309,900	3,578,493	\$0.32	\$1,133,706	36	1,265	99,403	\$31,492
2003/04	5,095,100	2,834,872	\$0.33	\$895,369	40	1,019	70,872	\$22,384
2004/05	5,518,300	1,801,893	\$0.32	\$576,605	31	651	58,125	\$18,600
2005/06	5,753,100	1,024,282	\$0.31	\$317,527	17	354	60,252	\$18,678
2006/07	5,599,500	622,501	\$0.33	\$205,425	11	209	56,591	\$18,675
2007/08	5,599,500	710,718	\$0.36	\$283,030	10	266	71,072	\$23,303
2008/09	5,440,100	354,697	\$0.34	\$125,403	9	121	39,411	\$13,934
2009/10	5,059,800	506,959	\$0.29	\$147,150	11	201	46,087	\$13,377
2010/11	4,950,000	276,745	\$0.34	\$93,913	3	103	92,248	\$31,304
2011/12	3,274,500	160,540	0.41	\$65,821	3	58	53513	21940
2012/13	3,275,300	357,679	\$0.37	\$133,082	8	125	44,710	\$16,635
2013/14	3,275,300	540,463	\$0.45	\$243,208	10	186	54,046	\$24,321
2014/15	3,310,700	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

<sup>a</sup> Based on CFEC (annual) data prior to the 1998/1999 season, then based on ADF&G seasonal fish ticket data.

<sup>b</sup> Department test fishery. GHL is the agreed test fishery maximum poundage taken during spring 1995–spring 1996, in exchange for research funds.

Table 4.—Registration Area A (Southeast Alaska) commercial abalone harvest, effort, value, and season length, 1970/71 through 1996/97. Dashes indicate that values are not available.

Season	Guideline Harvest Range (lb x 1,000)	Southern Southeast Harvest (lb)	District 13 Harvest (lb)	Total Southeast Harvest (lb)	Number of Divers	Exvessel Value	Season Length (days)
1970/71	—	—	—	—	—	—	365
1971/72	Confidential Data—Less than 3 divers reporting landings						365
1972/73	—	65	2,610	2,675	6	\$2,675	365
1973/74	—	—	3,000	3,000	3	\$4,500	365
1974/75	—	—	13,826	13,826	3	\$20,739	365
1975/76	—	55	8,497	8,552	8	\$17,104	365
1976/77	Confidential Data—Less than 3 divers reporting landings						365
1977/78	—	805	10,861	11,666	10	\$14,816	365
1978/79	—	130,607	49,320	179,927	35	\$253,697	365
1979/80	—	316,952	61,733	378,685	43	\$408,980	287
1980/81	250	233,589	18,382	251,971	40	\$420,792	273
1981/82	100–125	338,305	32,589	370,894	54	\$445,073	59
1982/83	100–125	100,458	12,826	113,284	41	\$240,162	36
1983/84	100–125	99,294	8,735	108,029	31	\$302,481	126
1984/85	100–125	59,237	8,379	67,616	25	\$165,659	151
1985/86	25–58	32,817	7,720	40,537	18	\$117,963	71
1986/87	25–58	47,404	13,820	61,224	24	\$168,366	146
1987/88	25–58	57,209	10,406	67,615	42	\$208,930	36
1988/89	25–58	65,928	10,172	76,100	45	\$307,444	33
1989/90	25–58	57,784	4,020	61,804	67	\$330,651	40
1990/91	25–58	62,779	5,607	68,386	97	\$374,071	9
1991/92	25–58	35,987	8,095	44,082	96	\$267,578	35
1992/93	25–58	26,905	9,083	35,988	100	\$386,151	19
1993/94	25–58	27,680	7,172	34,852	86	\$487,928	7
1994/95	25–58	15,055	7,824	22,879	102	\$330,373	8
1995/96	0–16	8,524	5,828	14,352	100	\$126,526	7
1996/97	closed						

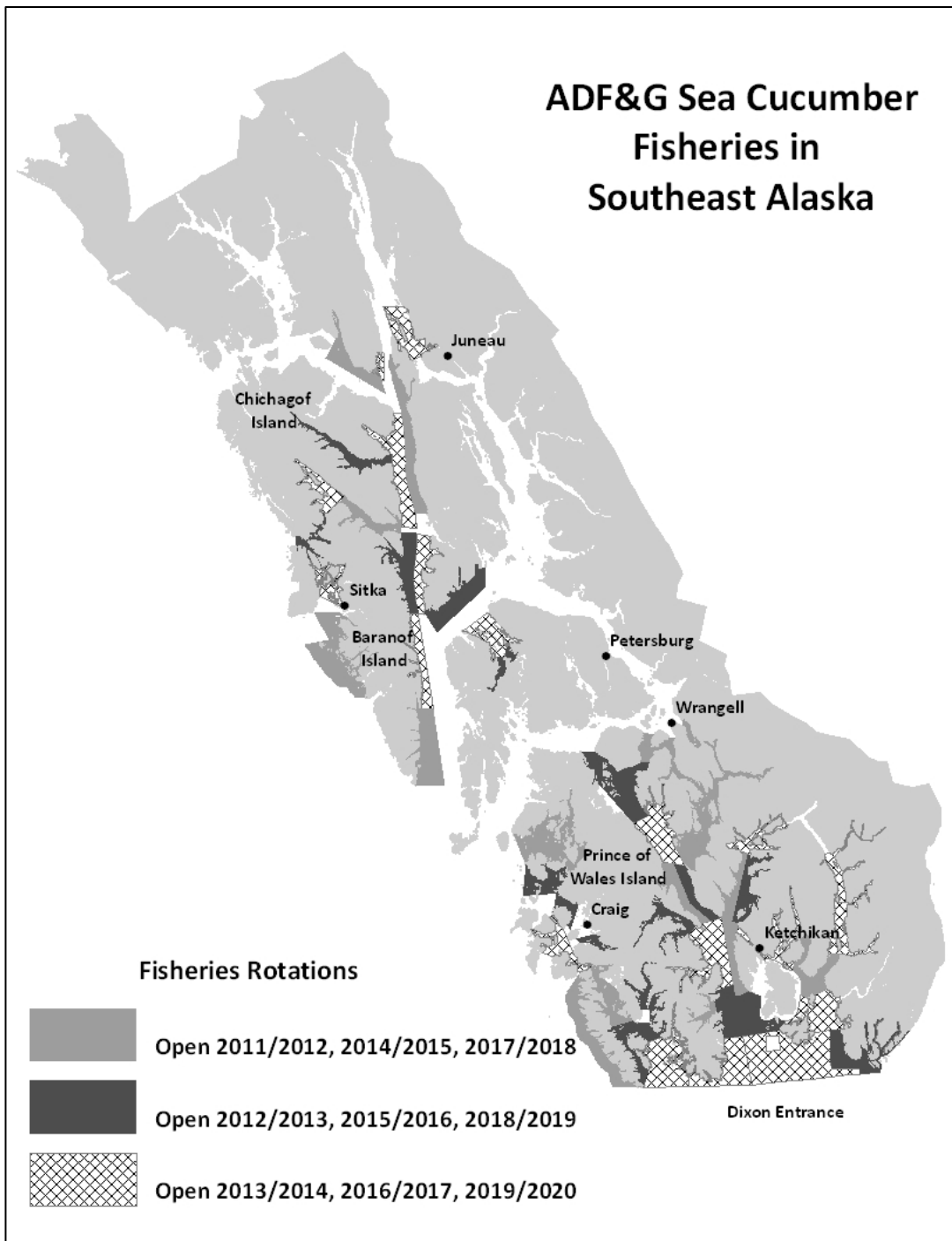


Figure 1.—Sea cucumber commercial harvest areas and rotational seasons.

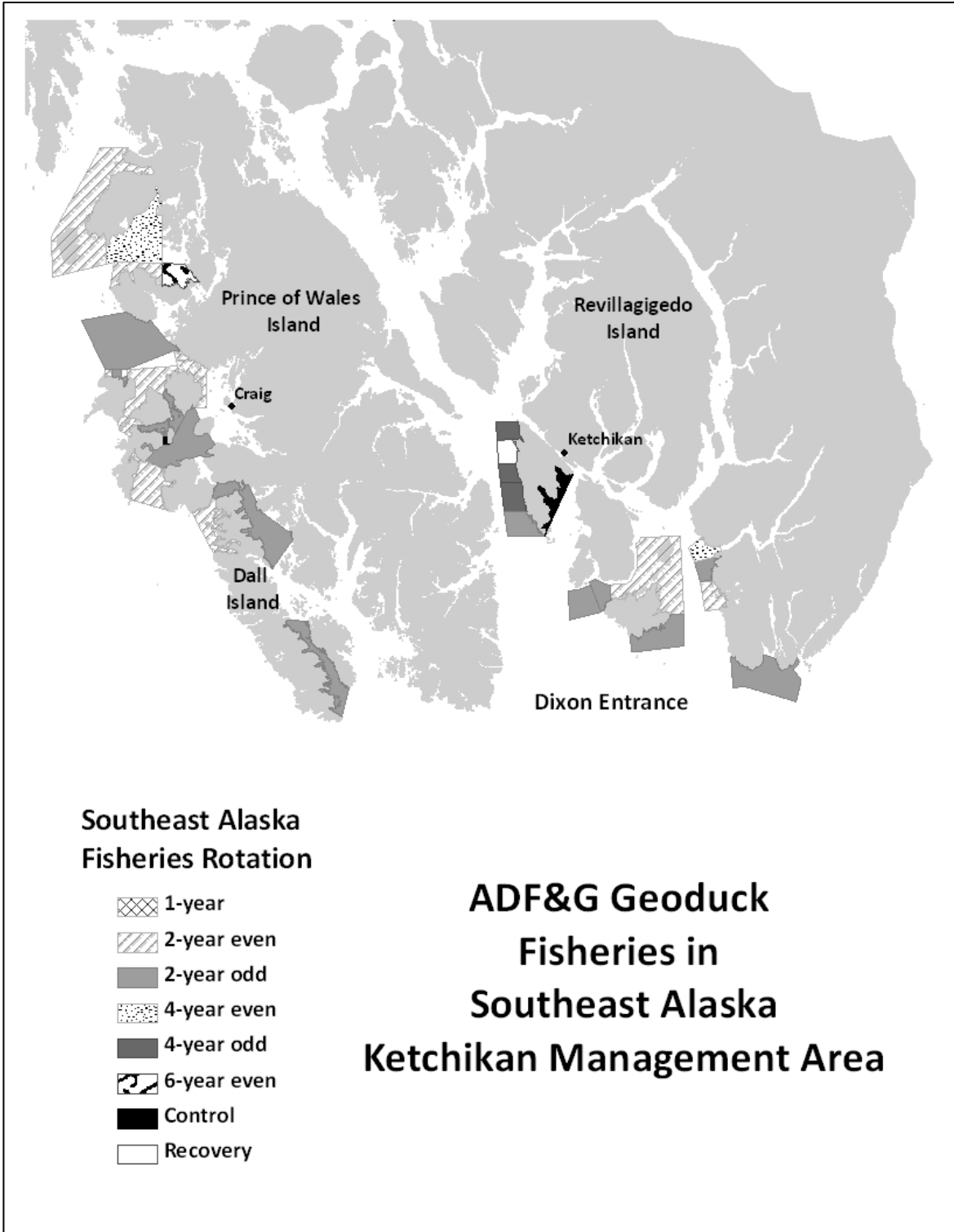


Figure 2.—Geoduck clam commercial harvest and rotation cycles and control areas in the Ketchikan Management Area.

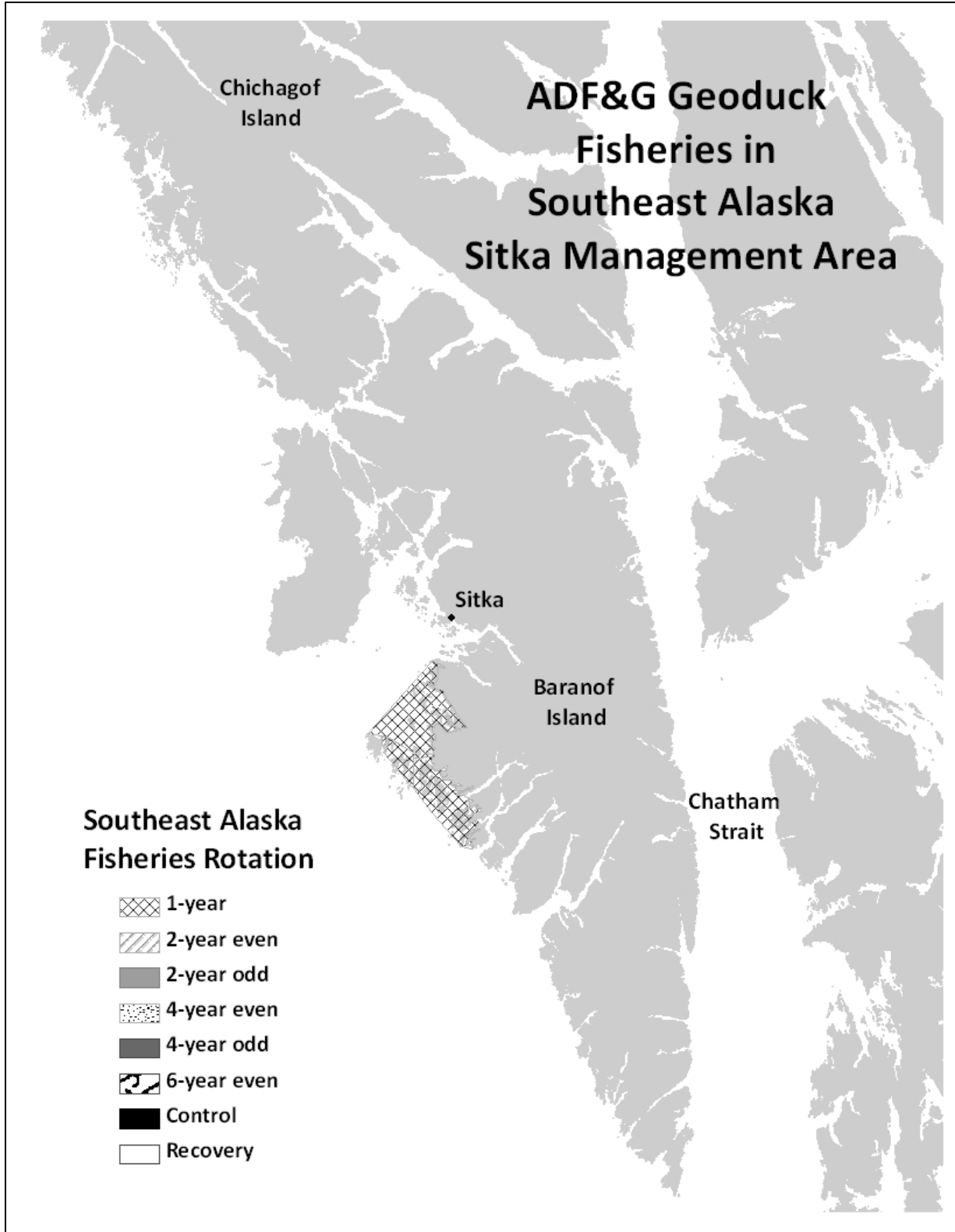


Figure 3.—Geoduck clam commercial harvest and rotation cycles in the Sitka Management Area.



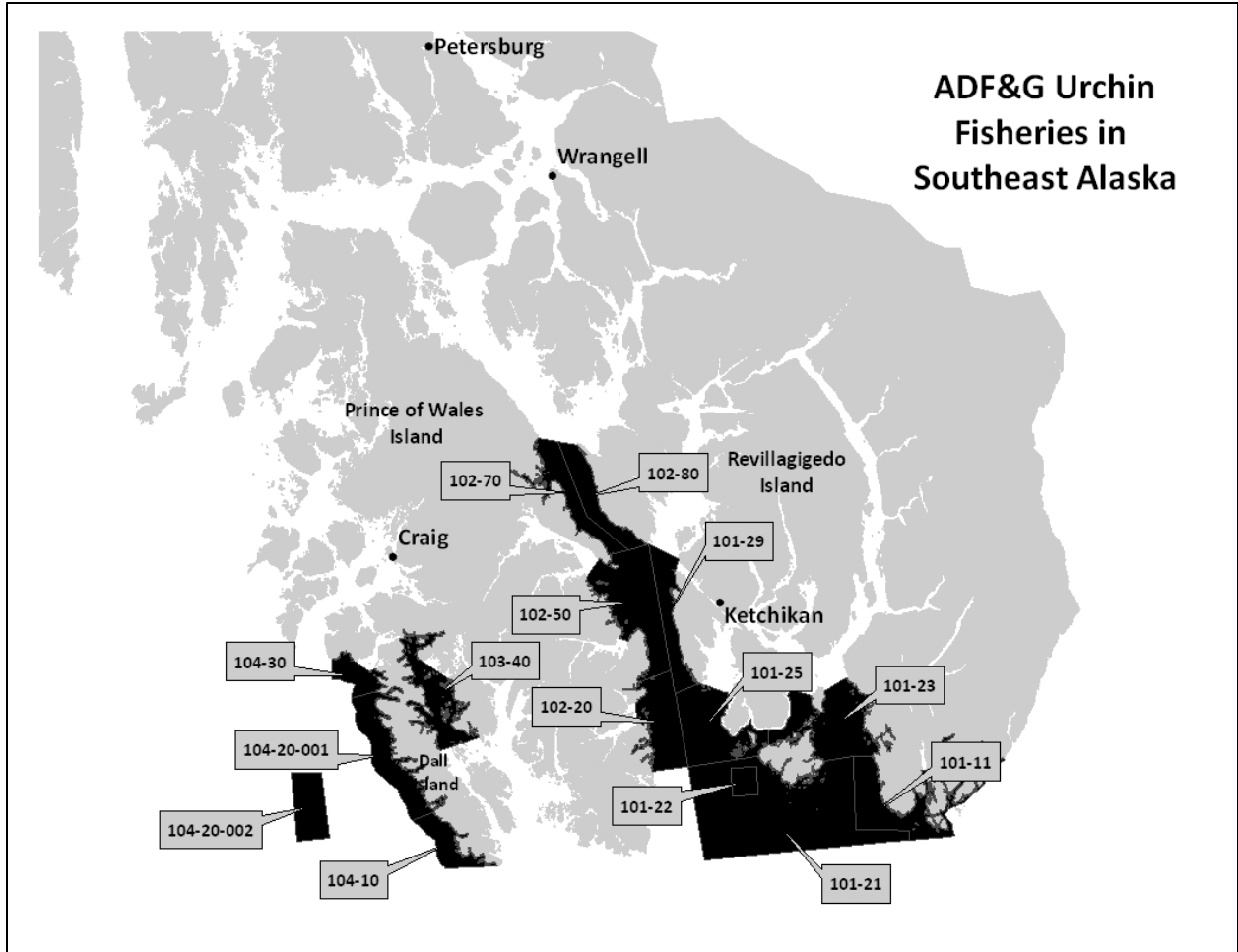


Figure 4.—Red sea urchin commercial harvest areas.

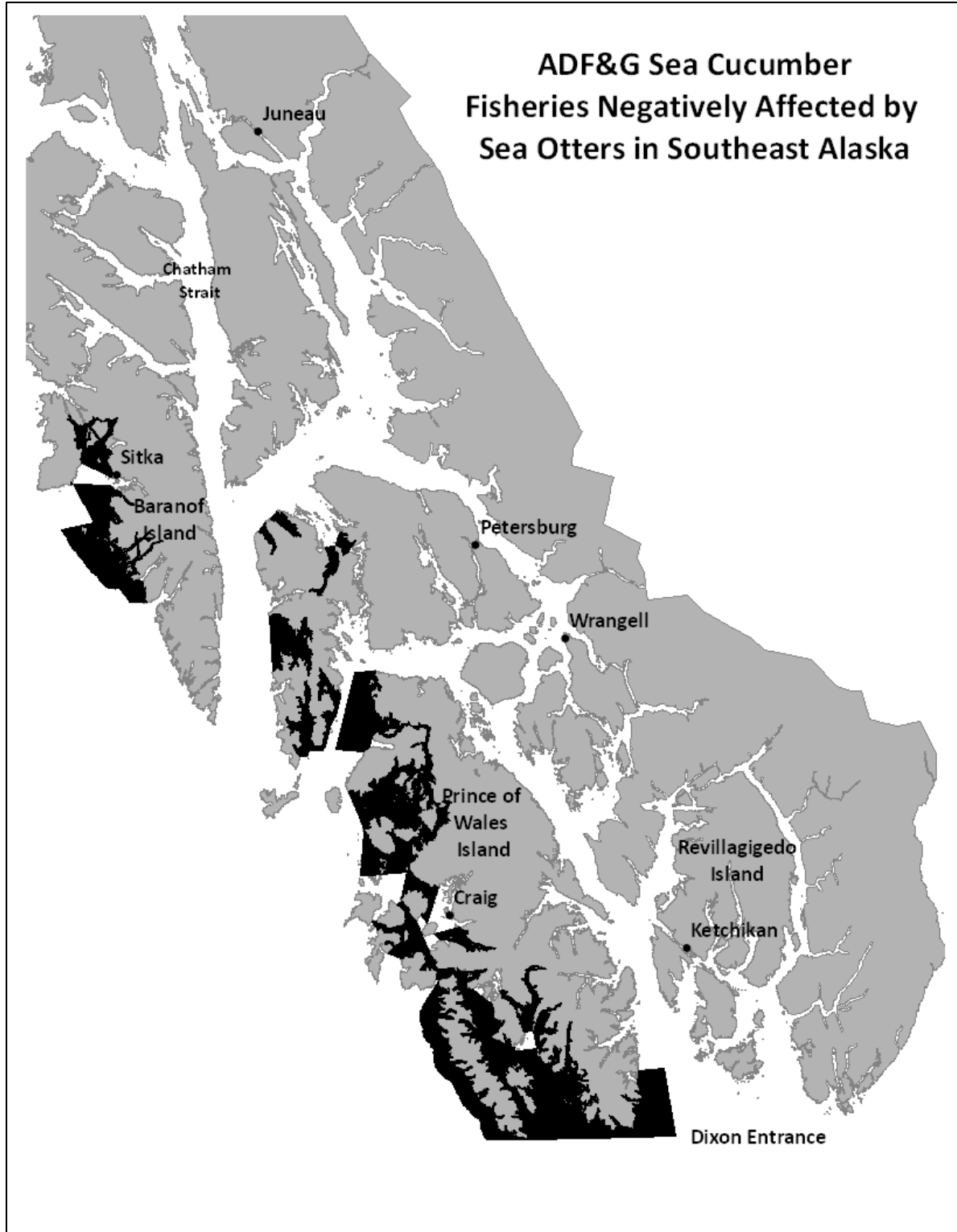


Figure 5.—Sea cucumber commercial harvest areas negatively affected by sea otters.



Figure 6.—Geoduck commercial harvest areas negatively affected by sea otters.

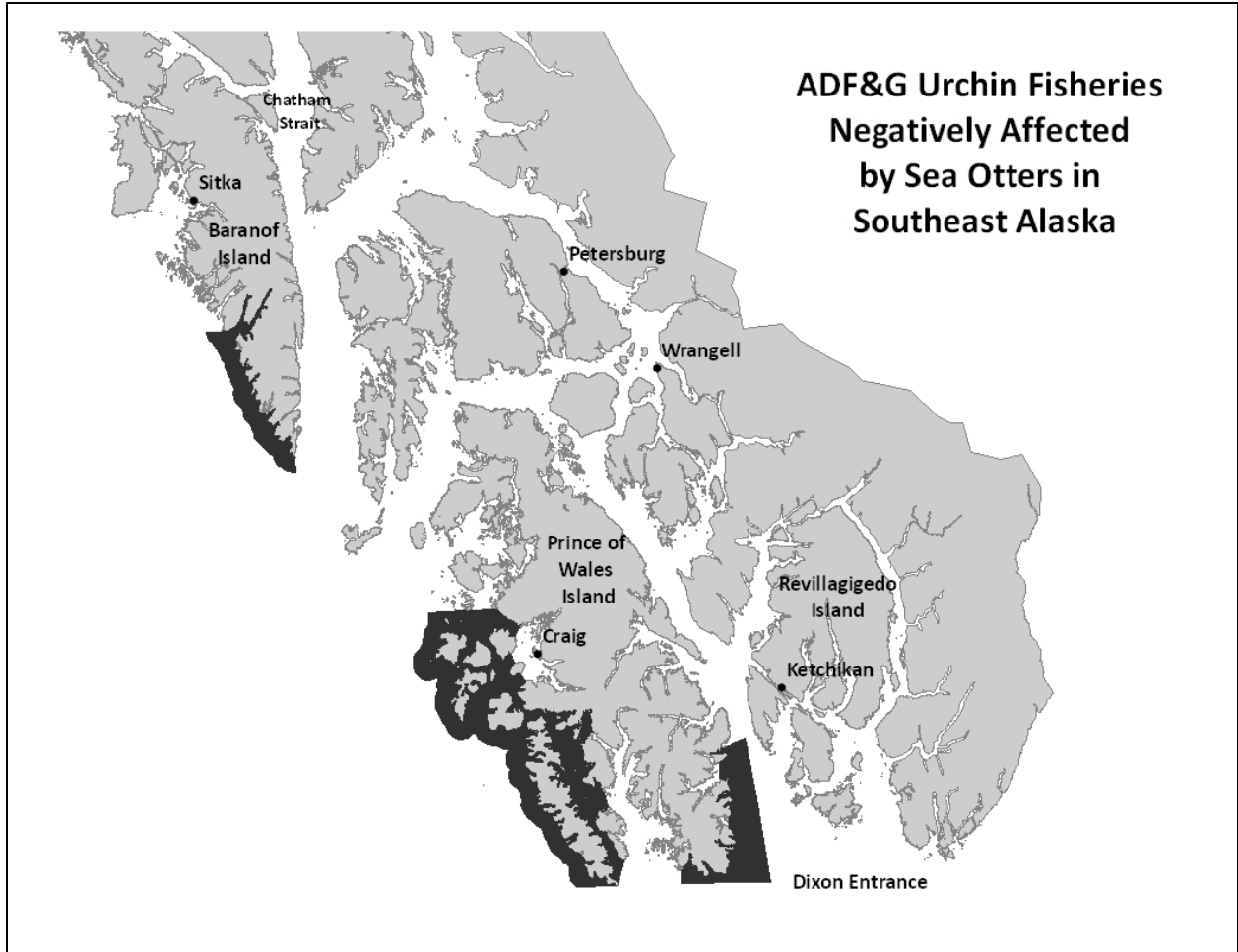


Figure 7.—Red urchin commercial harvest areas negatively affected by sea otters.