



NOAA FISHERIES

Alaska Region Sustainable Fisheries

Guided Angler Fish Program 2020 Annual Report

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The Guided Angler Fish (GAF) Program authorizes limited annual transfers of commercial halibut individual fishing quota (IFQ) as GAF to qualified charter halibut permit holders for harvest by charter vessel anglers. When charter management measures place size or harvest restrictions on charter anglers, qualified charter halibut permit holders may offer GAF to charter anglers as a means for the angler to retain halibut of any size, and up to the limits allowed for unguided anglers. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implemented the GAF Program in 2014 as part of the Catch Sharing Plan for International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Regulatory Areas 2C (Southeast Alaska) and 3A (South Central Alaska) (78 FR 75843, December 12, 2013).

This report summarizes the most recent year of GAF activity and provides historical details of the GAF Program since its inception. Among the information presented are the conversion factors that will be used to calculate IFQ to GAF for the 2021 fishing season. Regulations for the GAF Program are found at 50 CFR 300.65(c)(5).

In 2020, charter operations followed two distinct periods for charter fishing regulations in Areas 2C and 3A: the initial period was from March 13 through June 14; the second period began on June 15 and lasted through the end of 2020. The second period was the result of regulatory changes recommended by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and IPHC to address an unexpected decline in charter fishing effort in the 2020 season. Halibut size limits, daily and annual bag limits, and day of the week closures were relaxed during the second period.

During the first regulatory period, charter vessel anglers in Area 2C were allowed to retain one halibut per day, with size limits of less than or equal to 38 inches, or greater than or equal to 80 inches in total length. In the second regulatory period, the lower maximum size limit in Area 2C was relaxed to 45 inches or less. In Area 3A, charter vessel anglers were initially allowed to keep two halibut per day; however, if two fish were kept, one fish had to be no more than 28 inches in total length. Initially, charter anglers in Area 3A were also subject to a 4-fish annual limit, and provisions that did not allow halibut to be retained on charter vessels on Wednesdays for the entire season, and on five consecutive Tuesdays from July 16 through August 13. In the second regulatory period in Area 3A when regulations were relaxed, the 4-fish annual limit was rescinded, charter anglers were allowed to retain halibut on all days of the week, and the upper size limit for one of the daily retained halibut was increased to 32 inches.

In each of the two 2020 regulatory periods, the size and harvest restrictions could be reduced by GAF, where charter vessel anglers in Areas 2C and 3A could harvest up to two halibut of any size per day. Additionally, during the first regulatory period in Area 3A, GAF were not subject to the annual limit or to daily closures.

NMFS issues GAF in numbers of halibut, based on a conversion factor from the average weight of GAF harvested in the respective area in the previous year. The conversion factors for GAF leases in 2020 were 61 lb of IFQ per GAF in Area 2C and 40 lb of IFQ per GAF in Area 3A (Table 1). For 2021, the conversion factors will be 72 lbs. of IFQ per GAF in Area 2C and 56 lbs. of IFQ per GAF in Area 3A. (Table 1).

Table 2 indicates that in 2020, NMFS processed 250 GAF transfers totaling 62,885 lbs. of IFQ to 55 different charter halibut permit holders. These transfers authorized the potential harvest of up to 893 additional halibut as GAF by charter vessel anglers. Table 2 also indicates the number of transfers and the pounds of IFQ transferred has increased each year from 2014 through 2019, then dropped significantly in the atypical 2020 season. Note the number of fish that could be harvested has varied from year to year, depending upon the conversion factors mentioned above. The number of charter halibut permit holders who obtained GAF permits in 2020 also dropped compared to recent years.

Eleven percent of the total GAF transfers in 2020 were “self-transfers;” that is, the same person held both the IFQ and the charter halibut permit and transferred the IFQ to themselves (Table 2). The percentage of self-transfers has been consistently higher in Area 3A than 2C: over the 2014-2020 period in Area 3A, self-transfers ranged from 35% to 67% of the total, whereas in Area 2C only 5% to 14% have been self-transfers.

If GAF transfers involve a monetary transaction (as opposed to self-transfers or gifts of GAF) then GAF participants are required to report the value of the transaction. Of the transfers for which price information was reported, and excluding prices associated with self-transfers, lease prices in 2020 averaged \$4.99/lb in Area 2C and \$4.00/lb in Area 3A (weighted averages). For both areas combined, the overall weighted average price per pound of IFQ leased as GAF in 2020 was \$4.97, which is somewhat lower than previous years (Table 2).

The actual number of pounds harvested annually as GAF is calculated by summing the weights for individual fish, which are determined from the IPHC halibut length conversion table. Table 3 summarizes the estimated pounds of halibut harvested as GAF for each year since the program was implemented. Charter vessel anglers harvested 802 GAF from the combined IPHC areas in 2020, which represents 90% of the available 2020 GAF. However, this amount is also a 47% decrease in the number of GAF harvested in 2019. Leading up to 2020, the use of GAF had been steadily increasing.

Unused GAF are returned to the commercial IFQ holders, either voluntarily in August/September or automatically 15 days before the end of the commercial halibut season, which ends on November 14, 2020. Twenty-nine voluntary returns of GAF to IFQ totaling 2,070 lbs. were processed by the end of August. Automatic returns of GAF to the original IFQ account occurred in late October 2020; 12,813 total lbs. were returned under 74 individual, automatic transfers: 9,333 lbs. of IFQ was returned in Area 2C, and 3,480 lbs. of Area 3A IFQ were returned.

Guides are required to electronically report the length of each GAF harvested. The average length of GAF harvested in 2020 was 56 inches in Area 2C and 52 inches in Area 3A (Table 3). Tables 4 and 5 provide the frequency distribution of the lengths of GAF harvested over the 2014-2020 period. In all years, the majority of GAF in Area 2C falls between 50 and 60 inches, whereas in Area 3A, the length of GAF are somewhat smaller and more widely distributed, with the majority of fish taken in the categories of 30 to 59 inches.

NMFS’ costs associated with management, data collection, and enforcement of the GAF Program are recoverable through IFQ Program cost recovery fees. NMFS does not track fees associated with GAF separately from other IFQ Program fees.

Table 1. IFQ to GAF conversion factors

Year	Conversion Factor (IFQ lb / GAF)	
	Area 2C	Area 3A
2014	26.4	12.8
2015	67.3	38.4
2016	65.1	36.1
2017	74	42
2018	71	44
2019	66	42
2020	61	40
2021	72	57

Note: Starting in 2017, the conversion factor is rounded to the nearest whole number to more accurately reflect regulatory requirements of 50 CFR 300.65(c)(5)(E).

Table 2. Summary of IFQ to GAF transfers

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	IFQ Pounds Transferred	Number of GAF Transferred	Number of GAF Permits Issued	Number of GAF Permit Holders	Weighted Avg. price per pound	Percentage of self- transfers
2014	2C	29,498	1,117	92	30	\$ 5.62	14%
	3A	11,654	910	19	13	\$ 5.01	47%
	Total	41,152	2,027	111	43	\$ 5.46	20%
2015	2C	36,934	548	119	27	\$ 5.62	7%
	3A	10,337	269	25	13	\$ 4.66	40%
	Total	47,271	817	144	40	\$ 5.48	12%
2016	2C	47,064	723	132	32	\$ 5.43	10%
	3A	10,442	289	26	11	\$ 5.46	38%
	Total	57,506	1,012	158	43	\$ 5.43	21%
2017	2C	53,206	719	207	34	\$ 5.32	7%
	3A	9,786	233	22	13	\$ 4.59	41%
	Total	62,992	952	229	47	\$ 5.27	11%
2018	2C	80,656	1,222	332	46	\$ 5.17	6%
	3A	12,760	304	31	17	\$ 5.11	35%
	Total	93,416	1,526	363	63	\$ 5.17	9%

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Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	IFQ Pounds Transferred	Number of GAF Transferred	Number of GAF Permits Issued	Number of GAF Permit Holders	Weighted Avg. price per pound	Percentage of self-transfers
2019	2C	97,680	1,601	341	56	\$ 5.33	5%
	3A	13,524	338	29	13	\$ 5.28	45%
	Total	111,204	1,939	370	69	\$ 5.32	8%
2020	2C	57,645	801	235	48	\$ 4.99	8%
	3A	5,240	92	15	7	\$ 4.00	67%
	Total	62,885	893	250	55	\$ 4.97	11%

Table 3. Summary of GAF landings

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	Number of GAF Transferred	Number of GAF Harvested (% of amount transferred)	Actual Net Pounds of IFQ Harvested as GAF	Average Length in Inches (range)
2014	2C	1,117	800 (72%)	53,864	55 (18-77)
	3A	910	269 (30%)	10,336	45 (30-75)
	Total	2,027	1,069 (53%)	64,200	
2015	2C	548	428 (78%)	27,849	53 (27-83)
	3A	269	143 (53%)	5,158	45 (31-84)
	Total	817	571 (70%)	33,007	
2016	2C	723	529 (73%)	38,968	56 (32-82)
	3A	289	220 (76%)	9,332	47 (24-74)
	Total	1,012	749 (74%)	48,300	
2017	2C	719	576 (80%)	40,860	55 (18-79)
	3A	233	157 (67%)	6,920	48 (29-72)
	Total	952	733 (77%)	47,780	
2018	2C	1,222	972 (80%)	64,365	54 (22-79)
	3A	304	215 (71%)	9,052	47 (25-89)
	Total	1,526	1,187 (78%)	73,417	
2019	2C	1,601	1,237 (77%)	75,039	53 (22-83)
	3A	338	266 (79%)	10,652	46 (25-66)
	Total	1,939	1,503 (78%)	85,691	
2020	2C	801	764 (95%)	55,061	56 (23-85)
	3A	92	38 (41%)	2,147	52 (34-64)
	Total	893	802 (90%)	57,208	

Note: IPHC length/weight conversions can be found at: www.iphc.int/publications/bulletins/lenwtimp.pdf

Table 4. 2014 through 2020 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 2C.

Length in Inches	2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
18-24	1	0.1%	1	0.1%	5	0.5%	10	1.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.3%
25-29	1	0.1%	2	0.2%	11	1.1%	6	1.0%	0	0.0%	8	1.9%	8	1.0%
30-34	10	1.3%	13	1.1%	23	2.4%	20	3.5%	7	1.3%	26	6.1%	15	1.9%
35-39	30	3.9%	50	4.0%	21	2.2%	18	3.1%	15	2.8%	18	4.2%	21	2.6%
40-44	13	1.7%	164	13.3%	95	9.8%	6	1.0%	26	4.9%	34	7.9%	14	1.8%
45-49	98	12.8	164	13.3%	122	12.6%	96	16.7%	73	13.8%	67	15.7%	110	13.8%
50-54	139	18.2	253	20.5%	199	20.5%	107	18.6%	118	22.3%	59	13.8%	176	22.0%
55-59	174	22.8	308	24.9%	202	20.8%	107	18.6%	86	16.3%	74	17.3%	208	26.0%
60-64	194	25.4	184	14.9%	158	16.3%	93	16.1%	86	16.3%	73	17.1%	167	20.9%
65-69	69	9.0%	61	4.9%	68	7.0%	65	11.3%	74	14.0%	41	9.6%	48	6.0%
70-74	19	2.5%	23	1.9%	53	5.5%	35	6.1%	32	6.0%	23	5.4%	27	3.4%
75-79	13	1.7%	13	1.1%	15	1.5%	13	2.3%	11	2.1%	4	0.9%	4	0.5%
>80	3	0.4%	1	0.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Total	764		1,237		972		576		529		428		800	

Table 5. 2014 through 2020 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 3A.

Length in Inches	2020		2019		2018		2017		2016		2015		2014	
	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.	Number	Pct.
18-24	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
25-29	0	0.0%	8	3.0%	14	6.5%	2	1.3%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
30-34	2	5.3%	31	11.7%	14	6.5%	7	4.5%	13	5.9%	20	14.0%	39	14.5%
35-39	0	0.0%	37	13.9%	23	10.7%	20	12.7%	20	9.1%	23	16.1%	34	12.6%
40-44	5	13.2%	34	12.8%	31	14.4%	28	17.8%	39	17.7%	41	28.7%	72	26.8%
45-49	3	7.9%	42	15.8%	43	20.0%	34	21.7%	59	26.8%	28	19.6%	43	16.0%
50-54	8	21.1%	54	20.3%	43	20.0%	37	23.6%	37	16.8%	11	7.7%	37	13.8%
55-59	14	36.8%	44	16.5%	37	17.2%	13	8.3%	35	15.9%	11	7.7%	15	5.6%
60-64	6	15.8%	12	4.5%	7	3.3%	9	5.7%	8	3.6%	6	4.2%	21	7.8%
65-69	0	0.0%	4	1.5%	1	0.5%	4	2.5%	3	1.4%	1	0.7%	5	1.9%
70-74	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	1.9%	2	0.9%	1	0.7%	2	0.7%
75-79	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
>80	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.7%	0	0.0%
Total	38		266		215		157		220		143		269	