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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 140918791-4999-02]

RIN 0648-XE493

**Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Other Hook-and-Line Fishery by
Catcher Vessels in the Gulf of Alaska**

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for groundfish, other than demersal shelf rockfish, by catcher vessels (C/Vs) using hook-and-line gear in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary because the first seasonal apportionment of the Pacific halibut bycatch allowance specified for the other hook-and-line fishery by C/Vs in the GOA has been reached.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 11, 2016, until 1200 hours A.l.t., June 10, 2016.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations

governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The first seasonal apportionment of the Pacific halibut bycatch allowance specified for the other hook-and-line fishery by C/Vs in the GOA is 120 metric tons as established by the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish of the GOA (80 FR 10250, February 25, 2015), for the period from 0001 hours, A.l.t., January 1, 2016 through 1200 hours, A.l.t., June 10, 2016.

In accordance with § 679.21(d)(6)(ii), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has determined that the first seasonal apportionment of the Pacific halibut bycatch allowance specified for the other hook-and-line fishery by C/Vs in the GOA has been reached.

Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for groundfish, other than demersal shelf rockfish, by C/Vs using hook-and-line gear in the GOA. After the effective date of this closure the maximum retainable amounts at § 679.20(e) and (f) apply at any time during a trip.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the closure of other hook-and-line fishery by C/Vs in the GOA. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of March 7, 2016.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by §§ 679.20 and 679.21 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: March 8, 2016.

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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