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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 151211999–6343–02]

RIN 0648-XG318

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Multispecies Fishery; Gulf of Maine Haddock Trimester Total Allowable Catch Area Closure for the Common Pool Fishery

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; area closure.

SUMMARY: This action closes the Gulf of Maine Haddock Trimester Total Allowable Catch Area to Northeast multispecies common pool vessels fishing with trawl gear, sink gillnet gear, and longline/hook gear. The closure is required because the common pool fishery is projected to have caught over 90 percent of its Trimester 1 quota for Gulf of Maine haddock. This closure is intended to prevent an overage of the common pool's quota for this stock.

DATES: This action is effective [*insert date of filing for public inspection with the Office of the Federal Register*], through August 31, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Spencer Talmage, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281-9232.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Federal regulations at § 648.82(n)(2)(ii) require the

Regional Administrator to close a common pool Trimester Total Allowable Catch (TAC) Area for a stock when 90 percent of the Trimester TAC is projected to be caught. The closure applies to all common pool vessels fishing with gear capable of catching that stock, and remains in effect for the remainder of the trimester. During the closure, common pool vessels fishing with trawl gear, sink gillnet gear, and longline/hook gear may not fish for, harvest, possess, or land regulated multispecies or ocean pout in or from the Trimester TAC Area for the stock.

The Trimester 1 TAC for Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock is 26.3 mt (57,982 lb). Based on catch data through June 17, 2018, the common pool fishery is projected to have caught 29.4 mt (64,792 lb) of GOM haddock, or 112 percent of the Trimester 1 TAC. Effective [*insert date of filing for public inspection with the Office of the Federal Register*], the GOM Haddock Trimester TAC Area is closed for the remainder of Trimester 1, through August 31, 2018. The GOM Haddock Trimester TAC Area consists of statistical areas 513, 514, and 515. During the closure, common pool vessels fishing with trawl gear, sink gillnet gear, and longline/hook gear may not fish for, harvest, possess, or land regulated multispecies or ocean pout in or from this area. The area reopens at the beginning of Trimester 2 on September 1, 2018.

If a vessel declared its trip through the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) or the interactive voice response system, and crossed the VMS demarcation line prior to [*insert date of filing for public inspection with the Office of the Federal Register*], it may complete its trip within the GOM Haddock Trimester TAC Area. A vessel that has set its sink gillnet gear prior to [*insert date of filing for public inspection with the Office of the Federal Register*], may complete its trip by hauling such gear.

If the common pool fishery exceeds its total quota for a stock in the 2018 fishing year, the

overage must be deducted from the common pool's quota for that stock for fishing year 2019.

Weekly quota monitoring reports for the common pool fishery are on our website at:

<http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/ro/fso/MultiMonReports.htm>. We will continue to

monitor common pool catch through vessel trip reports, dealer-reported landings, VMS catch reports, and other available information and, if necessary, will make additional adjustments to common pool management measures.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) and 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment and the 30-day delayed effectiveness period because it would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest.

The regulations require the Regional Administrator to close a trimester TAC area to the common pool fishery when 90 percent of the Trimester TAC for a stock has been caught. Updated catch information through June 17, 2018, only recently became available indicating that the common pool fishery is projected to have caught 112 percent of its Trimester 1 TAC for GOM haddock. The time necessary to provide for prior notice and comment, and a 30-day delay in effectiveness, would prevent the immediate closure of the GOM Haddock Trimester TAC Area. This would be contrary to the regulatory requirement and would increase the magnitude of the Trimester 1 closure and the likelihood that the common pool fishery would exceed its annual quota of GOM haddock. Any overage of the Trimester 1 or Trimester 2 TACs are deducted from the Trimester 3 TAC, and any overage of the annual quota would be deducted from common

pool's quota for the next fishing year, to the detriment of this stock. This could undermine conservation and management objectives of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Fishermen expect these closures to occur in a timely way to prevent overages and their payback requirements. Overages of the trimester or annual common pool quota could cause negative economic impacts to the common pool fishery as a result of overage paybacks deducted from a future trimester or fishing year.

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

Dated: June 27, 2018.

Margo B. Schulze-Haugen,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2018-14185 Filed: 6/29/2018 8:45 am; Publication Date: 7/2/2018]