

**PROPOSAL 268 - 5 AAC 35.310. Fishing seasons for Registration Area E; 5 AAC 35.31X. Registration Area E Tanner crab harvest strategy; 5 AAC 35.325. Lawful gear for Registrations Area E; 5 AAC 35.35X. Reporting requirements for Registration Area E; and 5 AAC 55.022. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area.** Create a harvest strategy and amend regulations for Tanner crab in Prince William Sound specifying conditions under which the commercial fishery may occur and establish a sport fishery for Tanner Crab in Prince William Sound, as follows:

The harvest strategy and fishery regulations should be as follows:

**5 AAC 35.310. Fishing Seasons for Registration Area E.** (a) In the Northern and Hinchinbrook Districts, pots may be operated to take Tanner crab only from 8:00 a.m. to 5:59 p.m., with a soak time of 14 hours, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:59 a.m., from 12:00 noon January 15 until 12:00 noon March 31, unless closed earlier by emergency order.

(b) For the purposes of this section, "soak time" means the period of time that Tanner crab pot gear is submerged in the water in fishing condition and not being operated.

**5 AAC 35.31x. Registration Area E Tanner crab harvest strategy.** (a) In the Northern and Hinchinbrook Districts, a commercial Tanner crab fishery may only open if analysis of preseason survey data indicates that the subject population meets or exceeds the threshold level of mature male abundance specified in (b) of this section, which is one-half the long-term average of mature male abundance (1991-2001).

(b) The threshold level of mature male abundance in numbers of crab for the Northern and Hinchinbrook Districts combined is 95,000.

(c) In the Northern and Hinchinbrook Districts, the registration deadline is 5:00 p.m. January 5.

(d) If the commercial Tanner crab fishery is opened under (a) of this section and the threshold level of mature male abundance

(1) is equal to or less than the long-term average of mature male abundance, the guideline harvest level will be no more than 10 percent of the molting mature male abundance and no more than 30 percent of the legal size male abundance;

(2) exceeds the long-term average of mature male abundance, the guideline harvest level will be no more than 20 percent of the molting mature male abundance and no more than 30 percent of the legal size male abundance.

(e) In implementing the harvest strategy under this section, the board understands that the department will consider the reliability of the estimates of abundance on Tanner crab, the manageability of the fishery, and other factors deemed necessary to be consistent with sustained yield principles and to use the best scientific information available.

(f) Tanner crab in the Western and Eastern Districts may only be taken under the authority and conditions of a permit issued by the commissioner.

(g) The long-term average of mature male abundance in numbers of crab for the Northern and Hinchinbrook Districts combined is 190,000.

(h) For the purposes of this section,

(1) “long-term average of mature male abundance” means the long-term average of the estimated abundance of male Tanner crab greater than 113 mm in carapace width;

(2) “molting mature male abundance” means the estimated abundance of 100 percent of newshell, and 15 percent of oldshell Tanner crab that are more than 113 mm in carapace width.

**5 AAC 35.325. Lawful gear for Registration Area K.** (a) Tanner crab may only be taken with Tanner crab pots. Tanner crab taken by other means must be returned to the water without further harm.

(b) Each tanner crab pot must have no less than four escape rings of no less than four and three-quarters inches (121 mm) inside diameter installed on the vertical plane to permit escapement of undersized Tanner crab.

(c) In the Northern and Hinchinbrook Districts, the total number of pots allowed in the fishery is 300; the department will establish the individual vessel pot limit by dividing the 300 total pot limit by the number of vessels that register before the season opens; no more than 30 pots per vessel is allowed.

**5 AAC 35.35x. Reporting requirements for Registration Area E.** In the Prince William Sound Area, a validly registered Tanner crab vessel must report each day to the department

(1) The number of pot lifts;

(2) The number of crab retained for the 24-hour fishing period preceding the report; and

(3) Any other information that the commissioner determines is necessary for the management and conservation of the fishery, as specified in the vessel registration certificate issued under 5 AAC 35.306.

**5AAC 55.022. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area.** (b) (3) Tanner crab may be taken as follows:

(A) Tanner crab may be taken only from October 1 through March 31;

(B) only male Tanner crab 5 and one-half inches or greater in width of shell may be taken or possessed:

(C) the daily bag and possession limit is five male Tanner crab.

(D) Tanner crab may be taken only under a permit issued by the department; a harvest recording form under 5 AAC 75.016 is required;

(E) no more than two pots per person with no more than two pots per vessel may be used to take Tanner crab

(F) each Tanner crab pot must have no less than two escape rings of no less than four and three-eighths inches inside diameter

(G) a Tanner crab pot may not have any portion of the line attaching to pot to a buoy floating on the surface of the water at any time, except that portion of the line connecting the main buoy to any auxiliary buoy or buoys.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Cordova District Fishermen United (CDFU) is a non-profit membership organization representing over 300 family fishermen who participate in the commercial fisheries in the Prince William Sound and Copper River region. It is our mission is to preserve, promote and perpetuate the commercial fishing industry in Area E in the state of Alaska; to further promote legislation, conservation, management and the general welfare for the mutual benefit of not just our members, but all commercial fishing families in Area E. It has been 27 years since the last tanner crab fishery in PWS. The CDFU Board of Directors

finds that adoption of a commercial harvest strategy in PWS is warranted and implores the BOF serious consideration of the provisions contained herein.

A harvest strategy should be formulated from the trawl survey data. Thresholds above which a commercial fishery could occur and guideline harvest levels (GHLs) can be determined conservatively using the same format and formulas used for the Eastern Aleutians District Tanner crab harvest strategy in the Westward Area (5 AAC 35.509), which supports a small commercial Tanner crab fishery in most years.

The department trawl survey occurs in two commercial districts, the Northern and Hinchinbrook Districts, and threshold levels of abundance as well as guideline harvest levels (GHL) can be determined based on population estimates for these districts combined (threshold = 95,000 mature crab; one-half the long-term average of mature male abundance 1991-2001). Because the department does not survey in the Western and Eastern Districts, a threshold level of abundance cannot be determined; these districts should have the opportunity for a commissioner's permit fishery if conditions warrant. Season dates should be consistent with other commercial Tanner crab fisheries (January 15 - March 31). Gear limits should be set conservatively with a maximum overall number allowed in order to prevent a commercial fishery from overwhelming the available resource (maximum 300 in the fishery and maximum 30 per vessel). A registration deadline of January 5 will allow ADF&G to establish and announce vessel pot limits before the beginning of the fishery each year. Reporting requirements should be set for once each day from fishing vessels and should include at a minimum the number of pots lifted and the number of crab retained. The fishery should remain superexclusive, which is currently in regulation. The Tanner crab size limit for the commercial fishery should remain at 5.3 inches, which is currently in regulation. A sport fishery for Tanner crab in PWS should be established in regulation consistent with the subsistence fishery regulations and limits.

The department has been conducting a trawl survey and producing abundance estimates for Tanner crab in PWS since 1991 but has failed to produce a harvest strategy. Currently, regulation 5 AAC 35.310, which was adopted in 1999, states that the commercial harvest of Tanner crab in the Prince William Sound Area (PWS) is closed until the Board of Fisheries (BOF) adopts a harvest strategy. ***PWS is the only area in the state that has a stock assessment for Tanner crab and no harvest strategy in regulation.*** At the 2014 statewide king and Tanner BOF meeting, ADF&G promised that they would prepare a harvest strategy for consideration at the 2017 statewide king and Tanner meeting, and furthermore, the BOF encouraged submission of an agenda change request for consideration of a harvest strategy for PWS Tanner crab in advance of the next scheduled meeting. ADF&G asserted at this meeting that they already had enough information to create a harvest strategy. Tanner crab abundance has been increasing in PWS as documented through ADF&G trawl surveys and subsistence harvests since 2008. With a properly crafted Tanner crab harvest strategy a commercial fishery in PWS could provide economic opportunity to local fishermen and communities.

ADF&G has endured severe budget cuts in fiscal year 16 and given the current fiscal situation in the state of Alaska they are expected to endure equally severe cuts next year. Fishery surveys are being eliminated, and surveys conducted by the Commercial Fisheries Division that have no commercial fishery associated with them are most likely to be cut. ***If a harvest strategy is not***

*adopted now, we risk the loss of the survey and with it any hope for a commercial Tanner crab fishery in PWS; it is imperative that we use the data from the trawl survey to create a harvest strategy now.*

**PROPOSED BY:** Cordova District Fishermen United (CDFU)

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