

Bering Sea Habitat Conservation Alternatives
DRAFT Revisions based on October 2006 Council motion

Alternative 1: Status quo. No additional measures would be taken to conserve benthic habitat.

Alternative 2: Open area approach. This alternative would prohibit trawling with bottom trawl gear outside of a designated 'open area'. The open area would be designated by utilizing fishing effort data through 2005 to define the open area. The designated open area would include the areas north of Bogoslof and south of Nunivak Island. The 10 minute strip in the Red King Crab Savings Area would remain open pursuant to current regulations. The Northward boundary of the open area would be configured such that the area south and west of St. Matthew Island is excluded from the open area to conserve blue king crab habitat (see attached map). There are three options for establishing the northward boundary of the open area, based on bottom trawl effort distribution. There is also one option that would require an Exempted Fishing Permit to fish outside of the designated open area.

Option 1: Smallest open area. Northern open boundary based on high effort intensity.

Option 2: Slightly larger open area. Northern boundary based on medium effort intensity.

Option 3: Larger open area. Northern boundary based on low effort intensity.

Option 4: Require Exempted Fishing Permit. Bottom trawling in the closed areas north of the open area boundary would only be authorized under an Exempted Fishing Permit.

Alternative 3: Gear modifications. This alternative would require gear modifications for all bottom trawl gear used in flatfish target fisheries. Specifically, this alternative would require discs on bottom trawl sweeps to reduce seafloor contact and/or increase clearance between the gear and substrate.

Option 1: Gear modification and research closures. Areas would be closed to bottom trawling in the northern Bering Sea to research the impact of bottom trawling on benthic habitat and organisms, particularly *C. opilio*. The research areas would be located in areas that have not had much fishing effort between St. Matthew and St. Lawrence Islands. The research areas shall be established across bottom contours so as to include representative habitats and should focus on assessing habitat impacts of trawling by adopting a statistical design of open and closed areas.

Alternative 4: Open area approach and gear modifications. This alternative would prohibit trawling with bottom trawl gear outside of a designated 'open area' (described in Alternative 2) and require gear modifications on all bottom flatfish trawl gear. The open area options are identical to Alternative 2. There is also one option that would require an Exempted Fishing Permit to fish outside of the designated open area, and one option that establishes special open areas for research.

Option 1: Smallest open area. Northern open boundary based on high effort intensity.

Option 2: Slightly larger open area. Northern boundary based on medium effort intensity.

Option 3: Larger open area. Northern boundary based on low effort intensity.

Option 4: Require Exempted Fishing Permit. Bottom trawling in the closed areas north of the open area boundary would only be authorized under an Exempted Fishing Permit.

Option 5: Special Open Areas for Research. Special open areas to the north of the Northern open area boundary will be established for the purpose of conducting research to assess the impact of bottom trawling on benthic habitat and organisms, particularly *C. opilio*. The research areas shall be established across bottom contours so as to include representative habitat types.