

Draft Council Motion, NPFMC
Agenda Items D-4(a)(b)
February 12, 2007
2:15pm

D-4 (a) Aleutian Island Habitat Conservation Area

Move to adopt the SSC and AP recommendation to approve the Initial Review of the AI Habitat Conservation Area analysis, and proceed with the next draft, but incorporating the SSC recommendations.

D-4 (b) Bering Sea Habitat Conservation Area

Adopt the SSC recommendation to restructure the alternatives in a manner to improve comparisons of the alternatives and options, and a clarification of the northern research area that develops a well-designed experiment as follows:

Both the AP and SSC recommended reorganizing the alternatives and options, so that different combinations of options could be chosen, and the effects clearly analyzed in the document. The following set of revised alternatives and options address these recommendations. Note that the major components are considered as alternatives, and the minor components are provided as options. These Options can be chosen in any combination with any of the alternatives.

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

Alternative 2: Open area approach. This alternative would prohibit non-pelagic trawling outside of a designated 'open area'. Non-pelagic trawling would be prohibited in the northernmost shelf area and the deepwater basin area of the Bering Sea. There is only one open area analyzed, which is based on the EFH EIS area, modified using non-pelagic trawl effort distribution data through 2005, as refined from Alternative 2 in the preliminary review draft.

The open area approach will contain the boundaries as negotiated by representatives of the coastal communities and the flatfish industry and represented in the open area approach.

Alternative 3: Gear modifications. This alternative would require gear modifications for all non-pelagic trawl gear used in flatfish target fisheries. Specifically, this alternative would require discs on non-pelagic trawl sweeps to reduce seafloor contact and/or increase clearance between the sweep and substrate. A performance standard of at least 2.5 inches elevation of the sweep from the bottom would be required

The below options could be selected with any Alternative (s).

Option 1. Close the area around Saint Matthew to non-pelagic trawling. This area would be configured such that the area near St. Matthew Island is closed to conserve blue king crab habitat

Option 2. Close the area to non-pelagic trawling around Nunivak Island and Etolin Strait as in Option 3. This area would be configured such that the area around Nunivak Island and Etolin Strait is closed to conserve nearshore habitats.

Suboption 1: Close the area to non-pelagic trawling around St. Lawrence Island. This area would be configured such that the area around St. Lawrence Island is closed to non-pelagic gear to conserve nearshore habitats.

Option 3. Close an area to non-pelagic trawling around around Nunivak Island with the southern border extending along the nearshore portion of Etolin Strait and Kuskokwim Bay. This area would be configured such that the area in southern Etolin Strait and Kuskokwim Bay is closed to conserve nearshore habitat and minimize potential interactions with community use and subsistence fisheries taking place in the nearshore areas. The boundaries of this closure area are the result of negotiations by representatives of the flatfish industry and coastal communities.

Suboption 1: Close the area to non-pelagic trawling around St. Lawrence Island. This area would be configured such that the area around St. Lawrence Island is closed to non-pelagic gear to conserve nearshore habitats.

Option 4: Northern Bering Sea Experimental Fishing Area is the northern boundary line of the open area under Alternative 2, stretching from the Russian border around the southern Blue king crab protection area of St. Matthew Island to and around the southern portion of Nunivak Island and across Kuskokwim Bay to Cape Newenham. The area would be closed to fishing with non-pelagic trawl gear. The Council requests the NOAA/NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center design an adaptive management experiment in the closed northern area described under this option to study the effects of non-pelagic trawling in previously untrawled areas. The study should include open and closed areas and appropriate monitoring to study fishing impacts on benthic communities and ecological process, particularly as this relates to juvenile snow crab. The adaptive management experiment design will include review by the SSC. NMFS will provide the draft adaptive management experiment design to the Council for review within 18 months following the Federal Register publication of the final rule for this action.

The intent of option 4 is to set aside a relatively untrawled area that may be used for non-pelagic trawl effects research.