



# NOAA FISHERIES

Alaska Region Sustainable Fisheries

## Guided Angler Fish Program 2017 Annual Report

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October 27, 2017

In 2014, NMFS implemented the Guided Angler Fish (GAF) Program as part of the Catch Sharing Plan for International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Regulatory Areas 2C (Southeast Alaska) and 3A (South Central Alaska). The GAF Program authorizes limited annual transfers of commercial halibut individual fishing quota (IFQ) as GAF to qualified charter halibut permit holders for harvest by charter vessel anglers in Area 2C and Area 3A. Using GAF, qualified charter halibut permit holders may offer charter vessel anglers the opportunity to retain halibut of any size up to the limit for unguided anglers when the charter management measure in place limits charter vessel anglers to more restrictive size or harvest limits.

For 2017, charter vessel anglers in Area 2C were limited to one halibut per day that was less than or equal to 44 inches or greater than or equal to 80 inches in total length. In Area 3A, charter vessel anglers were allowed to keep two halibut per day. If two fish were kept, one had to be no more than 28 inches total length. Additionally, charter anglers in Area 3A had a 4-fish annual limit. Charter vessels in Area 3A were limited to one trip per day, and no charter fishing for halibut was allowed in Area 3A on Wednesdays for the entire season, and on three consecutive Tuesdays from mid-July to August 1. Using GAF, charter vessel anglers in Area 2C and Area 3A could harvest up to two halibut of any size per day, and GAF were not subject to the annual limit or daily closures in Area 3A.

NMFS issues GAF in numbers of halibut based on a conversion factor from the average weight of GAF harvested in the area in the previous year. The conversion factors for GAF leases in 2017 were 74 lb. IFQ per GAF in Area 2C and 42 lb. IFQ per GAF in Area 3A (Table 1). For 2018, the conversion factors will be 71 lbs. IFQ per GAF in Area 2C and 44 lbs. IFQ per GAF in Area 3A (Table 1).

Table 2 indicates that in 2017, NMFS processed 229 GAF transfers totaling 62,992 lbs. of IFQ to 47 different charter halibut permit holders. These transfers authorized the potential harvest of up to 952 additional halibut as GAF by charter vessel anglers. Table 2 also indicates the number of transfers and the pounds of IFQ transferred has increased each year from 2014 through 2017, although the number of fish that could be harvested has varied from year to year, depending upon the conversion factors mentioned above. The number of charter halibut permit holders who obtained GAF permits has ranged from 40 to 47 persons each year over the 2014-2017 period.

Eleven percent of the total GAF transfers in 2017 were “self-transfers;” that is, the same person held both the IFQ and the charter halibut permit and transferred the IFQ to themselves (Table 2). The percentage of self-transfers has consistently been higher in Area 3A than 2C: over the 2014-2017 period in Area 3A, self-transfers ranged from 38% to 47% of the total, whereas in Area 2C 7% to 14% were self-transfers.

GAF participants are given the option of self-reporting cost information for GAF transfers. Of the transfers for which price information was reported, and excluding self-reported prices for self-transfers, lease prices in 2017 averaged \$5.32/lb. in Area 2C and \$4.59/lb. in Area 3A (weighted averages). The overall weighted average price per pound of IFQ leased as GAF in 2017 was \$5.27, which is comparable to prices reported in earlier years (Table 2).

Charter vessel anglers harvested 733 GAF from the combined IPHC areas in 2017, which is similar to the GAF harvested in 2016 (Table 3). The result is that in 2017, 77% of available GAF were harvested, which is comparable to the last three years. The increased cost of GAF in recent years (owing to the larger conversion factors) and increased familiarity with the program likely increased the percentage of GAF that was used, compared to the first year of the program. As the program developed, it is likely that charter halibut permit holders were better able to predict how many GAF they would need.

Unused GAF are returned to the commercial IFQ holders either voluntarily in September, or automatically 15 days before the end of the commercial halibut season, which ended on November 7, 2017. Forty-five voluntary returns of GAF to IFQ totaling 5,184 lbs. were processed at the end of August. Automatic returns of GAF to the original IFQ account occurred in late October 2017; 8,812 total lbs. were returned under 46 individual, automatic transfers: 6,586 lbs. of IFQ was returned in Area 2C, and 2,226 lbs. of Area 3A IFQ were returned.

Guides are required to electronically report the length of each GAF harvested. The average length of GAF harvested in 2017 was 55 inches in Area 2C (Table 3) and 48 inches in Area 3A (Table 3). Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the frequency distribution of the lengths of GAF harvested over the 2014-2017 period. In all years, the majority of GAF in Area 2C falls between 45 and 64 inches, whereas in Area 3A, the length of GAF are somewhat smaller and more widely distributed, with the majority of fish taken in the categories of 30 to 59 inches.

As mentioned above, using the IPHC halibut length/weight conversion table, the average net weight of GAF harvested in 2017 was 70.9 lb. in Area 2C and 44.1 lb. in Area 3A. These weights are converted to the nearest whole pound for the 2018 conversion factor. The 2018 Area 2C conversion factor is three pounds less than it was in 2017, and increased in Area 3A by 2 pounds from 2017.

The actual number of pounds harvested annually as GAF is calculated by summing the weights for individual fish, which are determined from the IPHC halibut length conversion table. Table 4 summarizes the estimated pounds of halibut harvested as GAF for each year since the program was implemented.

NMFS' costs associated with management, data collection, and enforcement of the GAF Program are recoverable through IFQ Program cost recovery fees. NMFS does not track fees associated with GAF separately from other IFQ Program fees.

**Table 1. IFQ to GAF conversion factors**

Year	Conversion Factor (IFQ lb. / GAF)	
	Area 2C	Area 3A
2014	26.4	12.8
2015	67.3	38.4
2016	65.1	36.1
2017	74	42
2018	71	44

Note: Starting in 2017, the conversion factor is rounded to the nearest whole number to more accurately reflect regulatory requirements of 50 CFR 300.65(c)(5)(E).

**Table 2. Summary of IFQ to GAF transfers**

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	IFQ Pounds Transferred	Number of GAF Transferred	Number of GAF Permits Issued	Number of GAF Permit Holders	Weighted Avg. price per pound	Percentage of self-transfers
2014	2C	29,498	1,117	92	30	\$ 5.62	14%
	3A	11,654	910	19	13	\$ 5.01	47%
	Total	41,152	2,027	111	43	\$ 5.46	20%
2015	2C	36,934	548	119	27	\$ 5.62	7%
	3A	10,337	269	25	13	\$ 4.66	40%
	Total	47,271	817	144	40	\$ 5.48	12%
2016	2C	47,064	723	132	32	\$ 5.43	10%
	3A	10,442	289	26	11	\$ 5.46	38%
	Total	57,506	1,012	158	43	\$ 5.43	21%
2017	2C	53,206	719	207	34	\$ 5.32	7%
	3A	9,786	233	22	13	\$ 4.59	41%
	Total	62,992	952	229	47	\$ 5.27	11%

**Table 3. Summary of GAF landings**

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	Number of GAF Harvested (% of amount transferred)	Average Length in Inches (range)
2014	2C	800 (72%)	55 (18-77)
	3A	269 (30%)	45 (30-75)
	Total	1,069 (53%)	
2015	2C	428 (78%)	53 (27-83)
	3A	143 (53%)	45 (31-84)
	Total	571 (70%)	
2016	2C	529 (73%)	56 (32-82)
	3A	220 (76%)	47 (24-74)
	Total	749 (74%)	
2017	2C	576 (80%)	55 (18-79)
	3A	157 (67%)	48 (29-72)
	Total	733 (77%)	

Table 4. Actual pounds of IFQ harvested as GAF, as estimated from reported lengths.

Year	Area	Actual Pounds Harvested as GAF, Determined From Reported Lengths and IPHC conversion
2014	2C	53,864
2015	2C	27,849
2016	2C	38,968
2017	2C	40,860
2014	3A	10,336
2015	3A	5,158
2016	3A	9,332
2017	3A	6,920

IPHC length/weight conversions can be found at:  
[www.iphc.int/publications/bulletins/lenwtimp.pdf](http://www.iphc.int/publications/bulletins/lenwtimp.pdf)

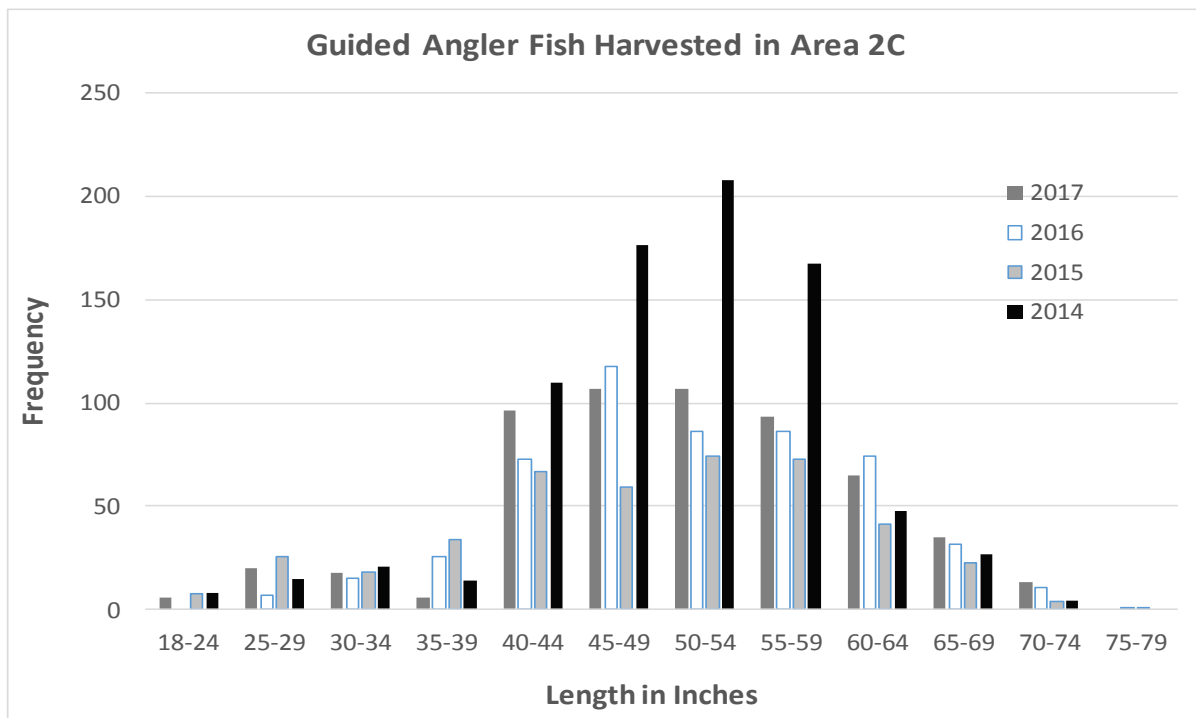


Figure 1. 2014 through 2017 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 2C.

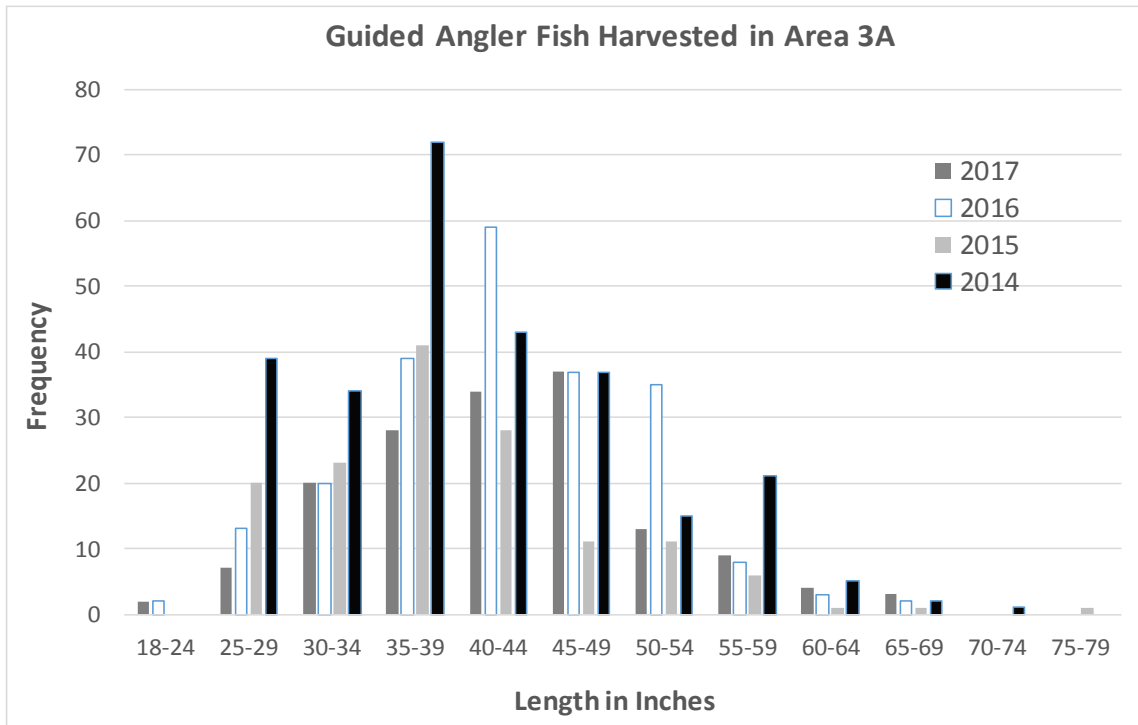


Figure 2. 2014 through 2017 GAF length frequency distribution in IPHC Regulatory Area 3A.