NOAA FISHERIES

National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy

Alaska Regional Implementation Plan

2016-2017

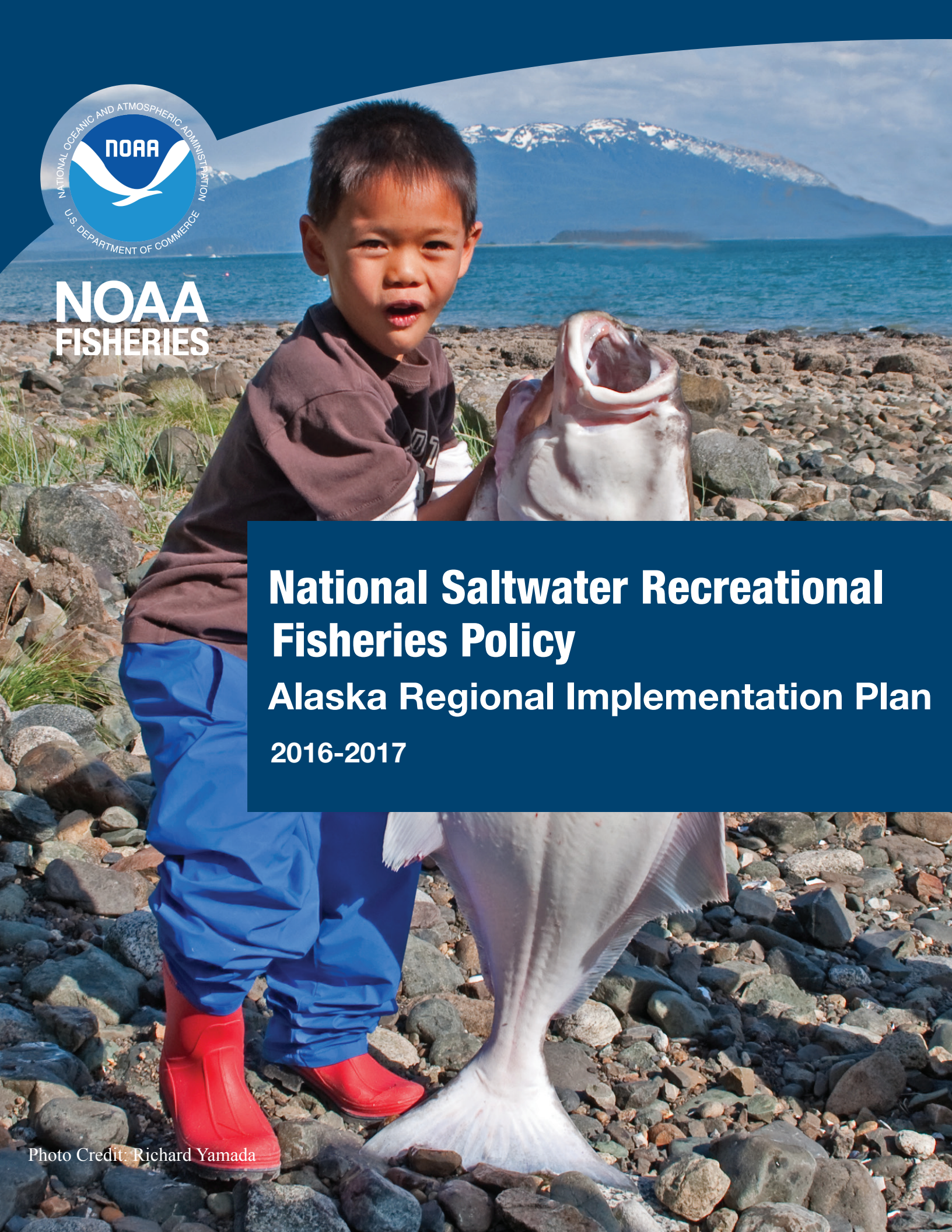

Photo Credit: Richard Yamada

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service

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Photo Credit: Richard Yamada

Foreward

We are pleased to share with you the 2016-2017 Alaska Region Recreational Fisheries Implementation Plan. On a national level, NOAA Fisheries has made substantial commitments since 2010 to help develop an internal culture that supports recreational fisheries. In 2015, a formal National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy was established which set forth goals and guiding principles for NOAA Fisheries activities to ensure saltwater recreational fisheries issues are fully considered in deliberations.

In 2012 the Alaska Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda was first introduced. This implementation plan builds on the directives outlined in the Action Agenda and focuses on our responsibilities for managing Alaska's Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) resources within the North Pacific Fishery Management Council process and improving communications with the recreational fishing community in Alaska.

The Alaska Regional Office and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center are responsible for science-based stewardship of our nation's living marine resources in Alaska. This implementation plan, a joint effort by the Alaska Regional Office and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, builds on the guiding principles found in the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy.

Jim Balsiger, Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries Alaska Regional Office

Doug Demaster, Director
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ALASKA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Alaska's 40,544 miles of coastline make up 40 percent of the total U.S. coastline and provide endless recreational fishing opportunities in both fresh and marine waters. In 2013, 312,000 recreational anglers took nearly 595,000 trips and caught a total of 2.5 million fish in marine waters off Alaska.[1] Commonly caught sport fish species include Pacific halibut, rockfishes (*Sebastes* spp.), Pacific cod (*Gadus macrocephalus*), lingcod (*Ophiodon elongatus*), and five species of Pacific salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.): Chinook, chum, coho, pink, and sockeye. In marine waters, Pacific halibut is the most common sport-caught species, averaging more than 790,000 fish caught annually by recreational anglers between 2005 and 2014.[2] A 2011 study estimated that anglers spent more than $387 million on marine recreational fishing expenditures in Alaska and supported 4,200 jobs to the state's economy.[3]

The State of Alaska manages most of Alaska's recreational fisheries including in federal waters out to 200 nautical miles. The state's role in the management of recreational fisheries encompasses issuing angler fishing licenses, licensing fishing guides, licensing charter vessels, administering the charter vessel logbook program, estimating recreational harvest and effort, and managing species other than Pacific halibut.

NOAA Fisheries' regulatory authority for recreational fishing off Alaska is generally focused on Pacific salmon and Pacific halibut. NOAA Fisheries supports the mission of the Pacific Salmon Commission to implement the Pacific Salmon Treaty, which includes management of salmon stocks in Alaska. Sport fishing regulations for Pacific halibut in Alaska are developed on the international, federal, and state levels by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), NOAA Fisheries, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (State).

The IPHC annually surveys and assesses the Pacific halibut stock to determine the stock size and catch limit of Pacific halibut for Alaska, Canada, and the Pacific Northwest (Washington, Oregon, and California). The catch limits are divided among regulatory areas, and the Council allocates the catch limit among user groups in regulatory areas within Alaska. The Pacific halibut resource is fully utilized among several user groups: guided and unguided recreational anglers, the directed commercial fishery, bycatch in groundfish fisheries, and subsistence fishermen. In recent years, the total biomass of Pacific halibut has stabilized, but the preceding decline resulted in reduced allocations to the directed commercial and guided recreational (charter) sectors. This has led to large regulatory changes in how Pacific halibut is allocated between the commercial and charter sectors. NOAA Fisheries, the State, the IPHC, and the Council have worked to facilitate engagement and participation of the recreational fishing sector in the rulemaking and policy decision process.

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[1] Fisheries Economics of the U.S. 2014. Current Fishery Statistics No. 2014. National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Science and Technology, Fisheries Statistics Division. US Dept. of Commerce, Silver Spring, MD. Available at: www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/fus/fus14/index

[2] Alaska Sport Fishing Survey. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Available at: https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/sportfishingsurvey/index.cfm?ADFG=region.home

[3] Lovell, Sabrina, Scott Steinback, and James Hilger. 2013. The Economic Contribution of Marine Angler Expenditures in the United States, 2011. U.S. Dep. Commerce, NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-134, 188 p.

The Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan in southeast and southcentral Alaska was adopted by the Council and implemented by NOAA Fisheries in January 2014.[4] The catch sharing plan was developed to address the ongoing Pacific halibut allocation conflict. It defines an annual process for allocating Pacific halibut between the charter and commercial Pacific halibut fisheries in Alaska and establishes sector allocations that vary in proportion to changing levels of annual Pacific halibut abundance. A public process was also established using a committee of charter operators recommending annual management measures to the Council to ensure charter Pacific halibut catches remain below annual catch limits.

Management of the Pacific halibut resource requires catch data and economic information to inform managers, biologists, and recreational fishery constituents about the impacts associated with their decisions. NOAA Fisheries collects economic information on the recreational fisheries in Alaska to help inform management decisions regarding Pacific halibut resources. The State collects recreational catch data through a combination of mail surveys, creel sampling, and charter logbooks. Funded in part through grants by NOAA's Marine Recreational Information Program, the State will launch a pilot program in 2016 to test electronic logbooks in charter fisheries. NOAA Fisheries, the IPHC, and the State work cooperatively to coordinate data collection to ensure State-managed and federally managed programs use the best available information to help guide management of Pacific halibut resources in Alaska.

In addition to managing Pacific halibut, NOAA Fisheries supports habitat restoration and salmon management. Habitat restoration projects occur throughout Alaska, and include projects in both marine and anadromous fish habitats. These projects are not necessarily focused on recreational fisheries, but have obvious benefits for species important to recreational anglers. NOAA Fisheries delegates authority of salmon management in federal waters to the State but does administer funds in support of the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund.[5] NOAA staff also participate in Pacific Salmon Commission panels and technical committees in addition to conducting research in support of the Pacific Salmon Commission's mission.

NOAA Fisheries has increased its involvement in recreational fisheries in recent years in response to several ongoing management issues. Recreational anglers rely on species that are fully allocated with limiting catch quotas divided across multiple sectors. These species will continue to be fully allocated and managers face a number of challenges that will require diligence by NOAA Fisheries to monitor stock status and ensure constituents remain engaged in the public process. The Pacific halibut resource is currently in a state of low abundance, and allocation among sectors continues to be a Council priority. Chinook salmon population estimates are at low levels, and marine survival and salmon bycatch in groundfish fisheries are receiving increased attention in response to low salmon returns. In addition, warming trends in the marine environment coupled with climate change effects are especially important in Alaska and may have profound effects on the abundant marine resources found in the state. NOAA Fisheries recognizes that these issues directly impact recreational fisheries in Alaska. As suggested in survey responses from the 2014 National Saltwater Summit, NOAA Fisheries has dedicated additional resources in the Alaska region to engage in these issues and improve communication with the recreational fishing community on issues of concern. Despite the current fishery management challenges facing the region, NOAA Fisheries is committed to supporting and maintaining sustainable saltwater recreational fisheries resources in Alaska.

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[4] 78 *Federal Register* 75844, December 12, 2013

[5] http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/publications/recovery_planning/salmon_steelhead/pcsrf/pcsrf-rpt-2011.pdf

SETTING THE STAGE

This implementation plan is designed to complement the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy[6] and help guide NOAA Fisheries' role in the research and management of recreational fisheries in the Alaska region. The goal of this implementation plan is to focus on tangible efforts in the region that will help advance the six guiding principles introduced in the NOAA National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy; these principles are detailed below.

This implementation plan is consistent with the new NOAA Fisheries Alaska Regional Office Strategic Plan[7] for fiscal years 2016-2020. The Alaska Regional Office Strategic Plan identifies four broad goals:

1. Sustainable fisheries: Ensure productive and sustainable North Pacific fisheries and fishing communities through science-based management.
2. Protected resources: Conserve and recover protected marine resources in the North Pacific.
3. Habitat conservation: Sustain healthy North Pacific marine habitats that support vital ecosystem functions and resilient coastal communities.
4. Organizational excellence: Internally align people, information, communications, work processes, and strategies leading to the optimization of mission value to stakeholders.

Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan commits the Alaska Region to advancing and supporting NOAA Fisheries' Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy and preparation of this regional recreational fisheries implementation plan.

This implementation plan builds upon the Alaska Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda for 2014-2015.[8] The Alaska Region has completed many of the projects set forth in the Action Agenda, and continues to support ongoing outreach and research efforts to maintain sustainable saltwater recreational fisheries resources in Alaska. Notable among those accomplishments is increasing the size of the mailing list for outreach efforts to the recreational fishing community from fewer than 100 to more than 700 individuals, publication of a NOAA Technical Memorandum describing the results of a charter business cost and earnings survey,[9] collaboration with the recreational fishing community to secure NOAA Cooperative Research Program funding in 2015 to study ecological interactions between arrowtooth flounder (*Atheresthes stomias*) and Pacific halibut, and funding for a pilot project to test new electronic reporting methods for the charter Pacific halibut fishery. A complete update

[6] http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/management/recreational/policy/
[7] https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/omi/NmfsAKRStrategicPlan2015.pdf
[8] http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/management/recreational/documents/noaa_rfaa_ar.pdf
[9] Lew, D. K., et al. 2015. Cost, earnings, and employment in the Alaska saltwater sport fishing charter sector, 2011-2013. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-AFSC-299, U. S. Dept. of Commerce. doi: 10.7289/V5KP803N

on the status of projects listed in the 2014-2015 Action Agenda is provided in Appendix A of this plan. NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Region and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center remain committed to furthering the goals and objectives outlined in prior Action Agendas, the Region's Strategic Plan, the National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Policy, and this plan.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Support ecosystem conservation and enhancement

NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Region and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center are committed to protecting Alaska's living marine resources. Protecting and restoring anadromous fish habitats is essential for ensuring healthy salmon populations thrive in Alaska. Ecosystem-based fishery management represents the future for ensuring sustainable fisheries continue and is especially important in Alaska, where the loss of sea ice and effects of climate change are impacting our marine resources. Ensuring the recreational fisheries community is included in conservation efforts represents a step toward fulfilling NOAA's commitment to successful ecosystem-based fishery management.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Support angler habitat and ecosystem conservation efforts by increasing awareness of potential federal funding and partnership opportunities.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Identify important habitat areas for anadromous fish species and partner with other agencies and communities to restore and preserve anadromous fish habitat in Alaska through the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
Support angler habitat and ecosystem conservation efforts by increasing awareness of potential federal funding and partnership opportunities.	NOAA Fisheries will continue to provide funding opportunities and the Alaska Region will increase its outreach efforts to inform constituents of funding sources such as the Saltonstall-Kennedy Act, NOAA Cooperative Research Program, NOAA Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program, Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Marine Recreational Information Program grant programs, among others.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
Identify important habitat areas for anadromous fish species and partner with other agencies and communities to restore and preserve anadromous fish habitat in Alaska through the National Fish Habitat Partnership.	NOAA Restoration Center will work with partners to continue large-scale restoration efforts of fish passage on the Kenai Peninsula on four major projects from 2016-2018. NOAA is providing support for removal of marine debris generated by the Tōhoku earthquake of 2011. Removal of debris is expected to benefit more than 35 species, including many that are recreationally important.

Promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities

Access to quality fishing opportunities in Alaska includes allocation of Pacific halibut resources among users. The Alaska Region will continue to support Pacific halibut management activities in Alaska by participating in the Council process and Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan activities.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Coordinate with the Council to ensure fishery management is achieving goals set forth in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act.

- Continue to provide services that promote management objectives associated with the recreational Pacific halibut fisheries, including the collection of economic information and disseminating that information to the Council audience.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Work with the Council and constituents to implement and manage the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan.
- Work with the Council and constituents to develop a market-based mechanism to allow the charter sector to purchase commercial Pacific halibut quota share to supplement the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan allocations and reduce harvest restrictions.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
Coordinate with the Council to ensure fishery management is achieving goals set forth in the MSA and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act.	NOAA Fisheries will continue to participate in the Council process and work collaboratively with the Council and IPHC to manage Pacific halibut under the requirements of the MSA and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act.
Continue to provide services that promote management objectives associated with the recreational Pacific halibut fisheries, including the collection of economic information and disseminating that information to the Council audience.	NOAA Fisheries will continue to support research, collection of economic information, and data analyses pertinent to recreational fisheries in Alaska to help inform management decisions regarding Pacific halibut and salmon resources.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
Work with the Council and constituents to implement and manage the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan.	Support the public process by which the Council develops recommendations to the International Pacific Halibut Commission for charter angler harvest. Participate in the Council's Charter Halibut Management Implementation Committee process. Continue to support and collaborate in the collection of recreational Pacific halibut catch data to help inform management.
Work with the Council and constituents to develop a market-based mechanism to allow the charter sector to purchase commercial Pacific halibut quota share to supplement the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan allocations and reduce harvest restrictions.	Contribute to the Council's development of an action to authorize a Recreational Quota Entity to purchase and hold commercial Pacific halibut quota share.

Coordinate with state and federal management entities

The Alaska Region works closely with the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the International Pacific Halibut Commission through the Council process to manage and monitor the recreational Pacific halibut fishery. Additionally, NOAA Fisheries supports the Pacific Salmon Commission through grants administered by the Alaska Region and scientific expertise through the Alaska Fisheries Science Center.

Ongoing responsibilities:

- Support the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Develop outreach materials addressing important fisheries science and management issues for recreational fisheries to support improved understanding by Council members and the public.
- Improve agency awareness of recreational fishing issues and projects in Alaska and share knowledge with partnering agencies and management bodies.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
Support the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund.	Provide grant funding and scientific expertise to the State of Alaska and Pacific Salmon Commission in support of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
Develop outreach materials addressing important fisheries science and management issues for recreational fisheries to support improved understanding by Council members and the public.	The Alaska Region annually develops and distributes a concise, plain-language summary of regulations affecting charter Pacific halibut anglers, as well as small entity compliance guides, frequently asked questions (FAQs), news releases, and other outreach documents to educate the public about fisheries science and management issues.
Improve agency awareness of recreational fishing issues and projects in Alaska and share knowledge with partnering agencies and management bodies.	Internal briefings with NOAA Fisheries regional and national leadership will provide updates on recreational fishery issues important to constituents, cooperative research, regulatory projects, and progress on this plan.

Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges

NOAA Fisheries is committed to supporting scientifically sound research that will benefit the management of fisheries resources in Alaska. Accurate accounting of Pacific halibut catch information is a multi-agency priority and is critical for making informed management decisions. Promoting and funding research that addresses reducing discard mortality and improved data collection in recreational fisheries is a national and regional priority.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Provide scientific advice to the Pacific Salmon Commission and State of Alaska and conduct research on Pacific salmon in the marine environment.
- Foster partnerships with constituents to conduct cooperative research relevant to recreational fisheries in Alaska.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Work in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to collect more timely recreational fishing data from the charter Pacific halibut fleet to support annual management measures.
- Support scientifically rigorous projects to improve data collection and investigate bycatch and release mortality reduction tools that can be implemented in the recreational fishery.

Photo Credit: Richard Yamada

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
Provide scientific advice to the Pacific Salmon Commission and conduct research on Pacific salmon in the marine environment.	NOAA researchers support Pacific Salmon Treaty missions for coast-wide salmon management, research, and enhancement programs. NOAA activities support accurate and timely forecasting, catch, effort, escapement, stock identification, and migratory timing assessment. The Alaska Fisheries Science Center in partnership with the State of Alaska and University of Alaska conducts scientific research on the impacts of climate change on the productivity of salmon in both nearshore and offshore habitats and evaluates the potential fitness impacts of stock enhancement on wild salmon populations.
Foster partnerships with constituents to conduct cooperative research relevant to recreational fisheries in Alaska.	Collaborate and partner with the Alaska recreational charter fleet to conduct a NOAA Cooperative Research Program funded project (2015) to tag arrowtooth flounder and investigate interactions between arrowtooth flounder and Pacific halibut.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
Work in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to collect more timely recreational fishing data from the charter Pacific halibut fleet to support annual management measures.	An electronic Saltwater Charter Logbook pilot project partially funded by NOAA will be expanded in 2016 to select ports used by the Pacific halibut charter fishery.
Support scientifically rigorous projects to improve data collection and investigate bycatch and release mortality reduction tools, such as barotrauma research, that can be implemented in the recreational fishery.	NOAA Fisheries is supporting research through Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program funding to develop a mobile phone application to measure large Pacific halibut while they are still in the water to minimize harm and release mortality. Alaska Fisheries Science Center researchers will continue to participate in, publish, and keep abreast of rockfish barotrauma research and convey the best practices for releasing Pacific rockfish using rapid recompression techniques.

Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information

Informed management decisions rely on scientifically sound advice. NOAA Fisheries is committed to continuing socio-economic analyses and providing accurate data that will help managers make informed decisions and effectively manage Pacific halibut resources in Alaska.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Support socio-economic research on recreational fisheries.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Conduct socio-economic projects and analyses that help inform Council management decisions relevant to Pacific halibut management and the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan.
- Improve coordination with International Pacific Halibut Commission staff to make catch statistics consistent with stock assessment and management needs.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
Support socio-economic research on recreational fisheries.	The Alaska Fisheries Science Center is analyzing data to estimate the demand for recreational fishing trips in Alaska; estimating the costs, earnings, and employment potential of recreational fishing in select Alaska fishing communities; addressing existing gaps in the Recreational Fishing Economic Assessment Index; and developing decision support tools to help improve available economic data.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
Conduct socio-economic projects and analyses that help inform Council management decisions relevant to Pacific halibut management and the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan.	NOAA Fisheries is supporting and conducting socio-economic research for the charter Pacific halibut fleet in Alaska including analysis of a 2012 angler survey and 2012-2014 charter business survey; examining the economic values associated with both charter and private boat fishing for saltwater species in Alaska; summarizing the results of a survey of participants in the Guided Angler Fish Leasing Program; and exploring the stated preferences and values that charter Pacific halibut permit holders placed on relaxing Guided Angler leasing rules and options to fund the Recreational Quota Entity proposal.
Improve coordination with International Pacific Halibut Commission staff to make catch statistics consistent with stock assessment and management needs.	Agencies will work closely to provide estimates of Pacific halibut bycatch in the groundfish fisheries by the Commission's reporting area level rather than the less accurate federal reporting areas.

Photo Credit: Richard Yamada

Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public

One of NOAA Fisheries' most important responsibilities is to involve interested members of the public in our fact-finding, evaluation, and decision-making processes. NOAA Fisheries is committed to including the recreational fishing community in Council decisions regarding Pacific halibut resources in Alaska. Charter fishery representatives on the Council's Charter Pacific Halibut Management Implementation Committee have been directly involved in the management process to recommend their preferred management measures for the fishery to the Council and IPHC and participate the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan process. Continued outreach and interactions with the recreational fishing community will help inform, educate, and explain management decisions that will ultimately result in a better engaged and informed constituency.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Inform and engage the recreational fishing community in Alaska with ongoing efforts in the region.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Increase the visibility of NOAA Fisheries in the recreational fishing community in Alaska and improve awareness and understanding of relevant issues occurring at Council management levels regarding Pacific halibut management.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
Inform and engage the recreational fishing community in Alaska with ongoing efforts in the region.	Continue to expand the existing Alaska recreational fishing list-serv, provide monthly newsletters, increase the content relevant to recreational anglers, and use multimedia tools to help distribute information. Provide relevant NOAA information in an efficient and consistent manner and follow up with anglers about resulting agency actions or decisions. Maintain strong working relationships and open lines of communication with community leaders to ensure regular dialogue and a policy of "no surprises."
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
Increase the visibility of NOAA Fisheries in the recreational fishing community in Alaska and improve awareness and understanding of relevant issues occurring at Council management levels regarding Pacific halibut management.	Identify opportunities for angler engagement in major NOAA Fisheries actions and decision-making that affect recreational fishing, such as the selection of annual management measures for the Pacific halibut charter fishery. Work with interested stakeholder groups to strengthen relationships and share information. Recreational Fishing Coordinators will increase collaborative efforts with the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement to improve outreach efforts in charter communities, and other public forums such as state fairs and maritime festivals.

SUMMARY

NOAA Fisheries' involvement in recreational fishing in Alaska is limited to Pacific halibut and Pacific salmon, as the State has been delegated the regulatory authority over the majority of recreationally caught species. Recent Council actions regarding Pacific halibut allocation have elevated the recreational fishing community's interests in Pacific halibut management in Alaska. This implementation plan builds on the previous Action Plan and highlights NOAA Fisheries' commitment to participating in the Council and International Pacific Halibut Commission processes to effectively manage Pacific halibut resources. Additionally, this plan highlights our responsibilities to the State of Alaska and the Pacific Salmon Commission to support salmon management and describes ongoing habitat restoration work. Finally, the Alaska Region is committed to improving communication with recreational constituents and increasing awareness and understanding of pertinent recreational fishing topics.

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