

Information Sheet for the Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch Action

February 2026

Introduction

The management of marine fishery resources within federal waters 3 to 200 nautical miles from shore and located in the nation's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is vested in the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) and in eight Regional Fishery Management Councils. In the Alaska Region, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is responsible for preparing Fishery Management Plans, as well as amendments (or changes) to these plans. The Council is not a federal agency but submits its management and conservation recommendations to the Secretary. If the Council's recommendations are approved by the Secretary, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implements them in regulation. The Council does not manage the directed salmon fisheries with the small exception of the Cook Inlet EEZ. It does manage bycatch of salmon in the federal groundfish fisheries that operate in the EEZ.

At its February 2026 meeting, the Council made a final recommendation for new measures to reduce Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch (also referred to as “prohibited species catch” or “PSC”) in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. The primary goal of this action is to reduce the bycatch of Western Alaska chum salmon, which is one of several genetic components in the total bycatch. The recommended changes to existing regulations would apply to the Bering Sea pollock fishery because it accounts for approximately 99% of the chum salmon taken as bycatch by all groundfish fisheries operating in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Island Management Area. The Council's recommendation was informed by the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzing five different management alternatives, a recommendation from its Advisory Panel, and testimony from more than 170 people including Tribal leaders and members, Community Development Quota (CDQ) groups, Alaska communities dependent on pollock, and pollock fishery participants.

Existing Regulations for Chum Salmon Bycatch Management

The existing regulations for chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery include a system of dynamic closures throughout the pollock B season where areas with high chum salmon bycatch encounters on the pollock fishing grounds are closed for approximately one week at a time. This dynamic closure program is referred to as the “rolling hotspot system.” This system relies on every vessel being monitored on every trip and observers counting every salmon (in addition to genetic sampling). The Chum Salmon Savings Area is also in place as a backstop measure, should vessels not participate in the rolling hotspot system, but this has never happened. The Chum Salmon Savings Area is fixed, meaning its location and the timing of the closure do not change inseason. The Council's recommendation for new management measures retains these regulations and adds additional measures.

Recommended Management Changes to Minimize Western Alaska Chum Salmon Bycatch

The Council recommends a 45,000 Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch cap with an inseason corridor closure for the Bering Sea pollock fishery. Establishing a Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch cap was critical to achieving the Council's goal because approximately 80% of the chum salmon in the overall bycatch are not from Western Alaska. The majority of the pollock fishery's chum salmon bycatch are Russian and Asian hatchery chum, as reported in NOAA's annual genetics analyses.

The corridor includes 40 ADF&G groundfish statistical areas (stat areas) north of Unimak Pass. The corridor covers the area where consistently more than 80% of the Western Alaska chum bycatch is caught (Figure 1). The Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch cap is divided among the four pollock fishing sectors. All Western Alaska chum salmon caught as bycatch in the corridor count towards the

bycatch cap during a migration period identified as critical for Western Alaska chum salmon (June 10 – August 31) during the pollock B season. If a sector reaches its share of the Western Alaska bycatch cap, it must close 50% of the corridor for the remainder of the June 10 – August 31 period, and the closure must include stat areas 685530, 675500, 655500, and 645501. Failure to implement a timely inseason closure would result in a closure of the same stat areas in the following year for the entire June 10 – August 31 period.

The Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch cap and inseason corridor respond to information in the draft EIS and public comment highlighting that a bycatch cap on total chum salmon (*i.e.*, including Russian and Asian hatchery chum salmon) may not reduce Western Alaska chum bycatch and risks increasing Chinook salmon bycatch. The Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch cap is intended to change fishing behavior. Vessels will use NOAA genetics data from previous seasons and newly available in-season genetics data from the Bristol Bay Science and Research Institute to try to avoid reaching the limit. By allowing each sector to choose areas to close if its bycatch limit is exceeded, the measures provide some operational flexibility.

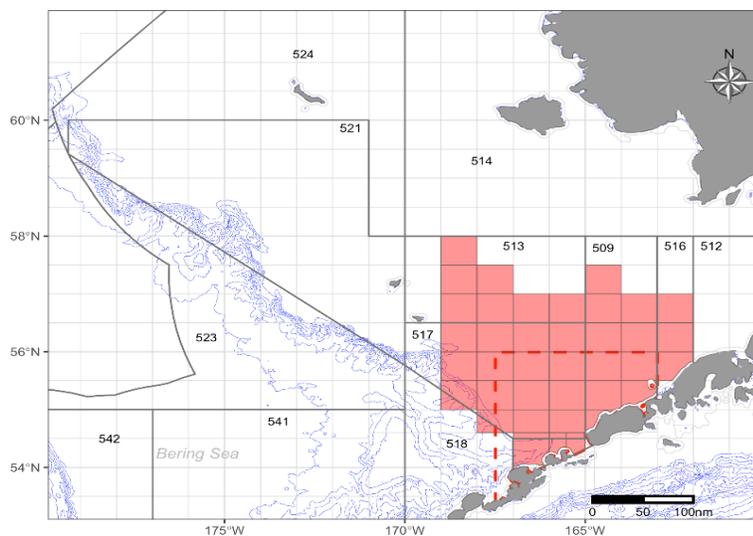


Figure 1. Alternative 5 inseason corridor with the boundary shown in red
Notes: The Chum Salmon Savings Area is shown by the red dashed line inside the inseason corridor.

The Council also recommends changes to the regulations implementing the pollock industry’s Incentive Plan Agreements (IPAs). The IPAs are legal contracts among participants in the pollock fishery that specify different incentives and penalties for vessels to avoid both Chinook salmon and chum salmon while fishing for pollock. The recommended changes focus the fishery on avoidance of Western Alaska chum salmon, incorporating genetics information into inseason avoidance measures, and more transparency in reporting by requiring greater communication among the pollock fishery, salmon users, Alaska Native Tribes, and Tribally-authorized consortia and fish commissions.

Next Steps

Following the February 2026 Council meeting, NMFS will begin preparing regulations based on the Council’s recommendation. After a public comment period and approval by the Secretary, the new regulations would take effect and be enforced. If approved by the Secretary, the new regulations are expected to be in effect during the 2028 pollock B season. The public comment period would coincide with publication of the proposed regulations and Final EIS, which NMFS currently anticipates being available at the end of 2026.

Other Resources

Below are different resources to help get connected with the Council and its process, as well as prior analytical documents and outreach materials related to the Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch action.

Council Website

- North Pacific Fishery Management Council webpage: <https://www.npfmc.org/>
- Materials on how to navigate the Council's process and provide input on issues: <https://www.npfmc.org/how-we-work/navigating-the-council-process/>
- Salmon Bycatch Frequently Asked Questions: <https://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/bycatch/SalmonBycatchFAQ.pdf>

Council Motion

- Council motion on the C2 Agenda Item, Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch at its February 2026 meeting: <https://meetings.npfmc.org/CommentReview/DownloadFile?p=73d64f23-98f0-446d-885c-85f9875c83eb.pdf&fileName=C2%20Motion.pdf>

Resources from NMFS Alaska Region

- DEIS for Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch Management, published on September 12, 2025: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/draft-environmental-impact-statement-and-regulatory-impact-review-proposed>
- Notice of Availability for the DEIS where public comments can be submitted: <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NMFS-2023-0089/document>

Recent Outreach

- Council staff presentation on the Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch action to the Kodiak/Aleutians Regional Advisory Council, March 6 and 7, 2025: <https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-03/npfmc-presentation-karac352025cleanlisa-hutchinson1.pdf>.
 - Note a similar presentation was provided to the Eastern and Western Interior Regional Advisory Councils, as well as the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta RAC in 2025. The Bristol Bay Regional Advisory Council received this presentation in January 2026.