



# **C4 Gulf of Alaska and Joint Groundfish Harvest Specifications**

December 2025 Council Meeting

## **Action Memo**

- Council Staff: Sara Cleaver
- Other Presenters: Dr. Ebett Siddon (AFSC - ESR); Gretchen Harrington, Krista Milani (NMFS)
- Action Required: Recommend final Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Groundfish and Alaska sablefish harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027, including:
- Overfishing level (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for all stocks.
  - Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for all stocks, taking into account the State waters pollock, Pacific cod, and octopus fisheries.
  - Pacific halibut Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits and apportionments.
  - Pacific halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs).

## **Background**

At the December meeting, the Council will review available information and make recommendations for final harvest specifications, PSC limits and apportionments, and halibut DMRs to manage the 2026 and 2027 GOA groundfish fisheries. Once published in the Federal Register, the 2026 and 2027 harvest specifications will replace the 2026 harvest specifications implemented in March 2025 ([90 FR 12468](#)), and the 2027 specifications will be superseded in 2027 when the final 2027 and 2028 harvest specifications are published. The 2026 harvest specifications are set to expire March 17, 2026. The final 2026 and 2027 harvest specifications must publish before March 17, 2026 to prevent a lapse in specifications. The proposed rule which adopts the [harvest specifications recommended by the Council in October](#) had not been published as of November 20, 2025, and is behind schedule due to the recent government shutdown.

## **OFLs, ABCs, TACs, and Apportionments**

The lapse in Federal appropriations from October 1 - November 12, 2025, has impacted the information available for the Council's typical process, in that Federal stock assessment authors did not have the time to complete new groundfish assessments as planned, and the Council's Groundfish Plan Teams did not convene to review stock assessments and provide recommendations on harvest specifications. As a result, the GOA Groundfish SAFE Report was not compiled this year. Instead, staff have identified in the [December 2025 process document](#) the information that is available to support final 2026-2027 specifications this year, so that decisions remain consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), including National Standard 2, as well as the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) and other federal requirements.

[Catch reports](#) were prepared in November 2025 for all stocks except GOA deepwater flatfish, which was scheduled for a harvest projection and completed and reviewed by the SSC in October 2025. The Council’s most recent complete peer review process for groundfish assessments occurred in September-December 2024, with assessment products coming out of that process documented in the [2024 Groundfish SAFE Report](#).

At this meeting, available information will inform recommendations for OFLs, ABCs, and TACs for final groundfish harvest specifications. The [December 2025 process document](#) describes the materials that are available. In lieu of the ESRs for the Eastern Bering Sea, the Aleutian Islands and the Gulf of Alaska which have historically been presented during BSAI and GOA groundfish harvest specifications in December, AFSC staff will provide an Ecosystem Status Report preview / climate update. This presentation will be similar to that provided to the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams in September 2025, which included an overview of climate and oceanography sections of the ESR. Prior year ESRs can be found [here](#).

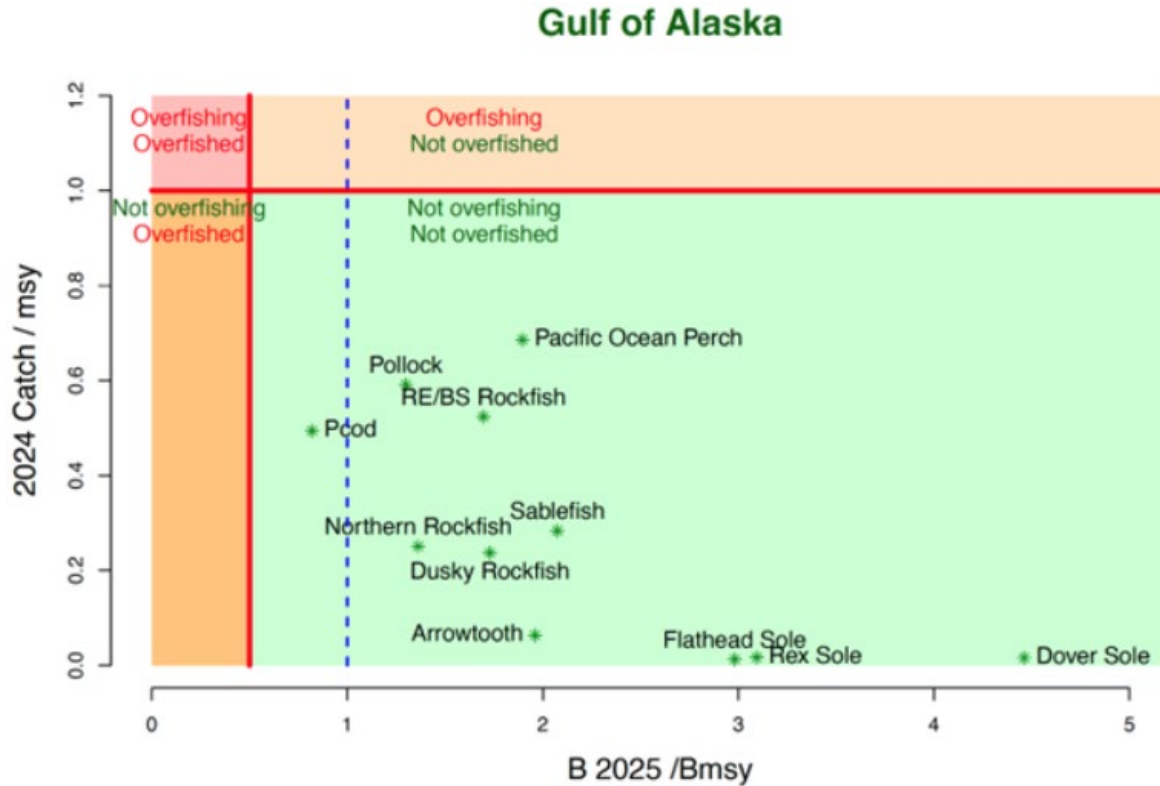
The SSC’s recommendations for OFLs and ABCs for *proposed* harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027 were based on the 2024 SAFE Report, and were adopted by the Council in October 2025. [Table 1](#) on the eAgenda includes the OFLs, ABCs, TACs, and area apportionments from those recommendations.<sup>1</sup> The sum of the 2026 and 2027 ABCs are compared to the final sums of 2025 and 2024 ABCs below. These sums include the Alaska-wide sablefish ABC. The 2027 OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are a rollover of the 2026 values.

2024	2025	2026	2027
599,784	590,762 mt	539,295 mt	539,295 mt

The decrease from the 2025 specifications to 2026/2027<sup>2</sup> is primarily driven by a ~25% decrease in the Western GOA/Central GOA/Western Yakutat pollock ABC. The proposed specifications reflect maximum permissible ABC (maxABC)s for all stocks in the GOA in 2026 and 2027, except for Alaska sablefish and rougheye/blackspotted rockfish.

As illustrated in Figure 2 of the 2024 GOA SAFE introduction (shown below), no stocks for which status determination criteria are available were overfished in 2024.<sup>3</sup> All stocks except for GOA Pacific cod ( $B_{28.7\%}$ ) are above  $B_{MSY}$  or the  $B_{MSY}$  proxy ( $B_{35\%}$ ), which is indicated by the blue dotted line in the figure below. GOA Pacific cod is determined to not be overfished because it is above its minimum stock size threshold (MSST).<sup>4</sup> The determination of overfishing is assessed for the previous year (e.g., in 2025 the determination for overfishing in 2024 will be made). This is documented using the official catch estimate for the most recent complete year of catch (2024) in conjunction with the OFL for that year. Considering the 2024 information contained in Table 1, no stocks were subject to overfishing in 2024.

<sup>1</sup> With an adjustment to WGOA Pacific cod, per Alaska Board of Fish action, described below.  
<sup>2</sup> For December 2025, projections for 2027 are not available except for GOA deepwater flatfish.  
<sup>3</sup> All stocks with age-structured stock assessments (Tiers 1-3)  
<sup>4</sup> As described in the GOA Groundfish FMP, per National Standard 1 guidance



In October 2025, the Council made a motion regarding [spatial apportionment of groundfish stocks](#). At that time, staff had indicated that resulting changes to harvest specifications tables and nomenclature (using the term “Biologically-informed Recommended Distribution, “BRD” to reflect spatial apportionments of a stock’s ABC) would be implemented in December 2025. Due to the shutdown of the federal government, these changes are delayed and will be implemented beginning in the fall 2026 harvest specifications cycle. Tables for December 2025 do not reflect the new nomenclature or format.

## TAC considerations for State waters fisheries

### State waters pollock fishery

The ABC available for area-specific Federal GOA pollock TACs is first reduced by 2.5% to provide for the Prince William Sound (PWS) State Guideline Harvest Level (GHL). The ABC, TAC, and GHL in Table 1, the [harvest specifications recommended by the Council in October](#), reflect this accommodation.

### State waters Pacific cod fishery

The Council will need to recommend Pacific cod TACs for the GOA that are a 25% to 35% reduction from ABC to account for State GHL fisheries. **The Board of Fisheries took action in October 2025 to increase the state-waters South Alaska Peninsula Pacific cod fishery GHL from 30% to 35% of the WGOA ABC.** The modified regulations, found in record copy (RC) 17, will be in place for the 2026 fishing year. Established area apportionments for 2026 and 2027 adjust the amount of Pacific cod ABC available for the Federal TAC in each area and reflect this change. The ABCs and TACs are listed in Table 1 and the adjustments are listed in Table 2 attached under the [C4 Additional Tables GOA Groundfish 2026 and 2027](#) document.

### State waters octopus fisheries

NMFS advises that the Council recommend octopus TACs for the GOA are a 16 mt reduction from the ABC to account for the State Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) (35,000 lbs/16 mt) octopus fishery in Prince William Sound that was established by the Board of Fisheries in December 2024. NMFS is currently evaluating if such adjustments to TACs to account for the GHL are required and will clarify this in the publication of the final rule for GOA groundfish harvest specifications.

## **Prohibited Species Catch Limits**

In the GOA groundfish fisheries, PSC limits for halibut are specified annually by fishery, gear, and season. The 2026 and 2027 PSC limits are listed in Tables 3-5 attached under the [C4 Additional Tables GOA Groundfish 2026 and 2027](#) document.

### Halibut PSC limits by gear type- Table 3

The Pacific halibut PSC limits apply only to trawl vessels and vessels fishing with hook-and-line gear for species other than Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) sablefish. The GOA Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) authorizes the Council to exempt specific gear from the halibut PSC limits. Pot gear, jig gear, and the sablefish IFQ hook-and-line gear fishery categories have been exempted from the halibut PSC limit since 1995. The Council recommended the exemptions because: 1. Pot gear fisheries have low halibut bycatch mortality; 2. NMFS estimates negligible halibut mortality for the jig gear fisheries; and 3. IFQ regulations prohibit halibut discards if any halibut IFQ permit holder on board a catcher vessel holds unused halibut IFQ (§ 679.7(f)(11)).

### Halibut PSC Trawl Apportionments- Table 4

Trawl halibut PSC (from Table 3) is further apportioned among shallow-water and deep-water species complex fisheries. The shallow-water species fishery is composed of pollock, Pacific cod, shallow-water flatfish, flathead sole, Atka mackerel, and “other species” (sharks and octopuses). The deep-water species fishery is composed of sablefish, rockfish, deep-water flatfish, rex sole, and arrowtooth flounder. The purpose of these apportionments is to maintain groundfish harvest while minimizing halibut bycatch in the trawl fisheries. Regulations at 679.21(d)(3) describe the apportionment of trawl halibut PSC limits to the shallow-water and deep-water fishery categories.

### Halibut PSC limit CV-CP hook-and-line split- Table 5

The hook-and-line halibut PSC limit is divided between the catcher vessel (CV) and catcher processor (CP) sectors according to the “GOA Pacific cod split formula” that is prescribed in regulation at § 679.21(d)(2). Based on this formula (and if TAC were set equal to the [October 2025 recommendations](#)), the hook-and-line CV sector would fish under a 149 mt halibut PSC limit and the hook-and-line CP sector PSC limit would fish under a 107 mt PSC limit in 2025 and 2026. The demersal shelf rockfish fishery halibut PSC limit would be 9 mt.

### Procedure for changing Pacific halibut PSC limit apportionments

The GOA Groundfish FMP (Section 3.6.2.1) sets out the procedure for modifying halibut PSC limits during the annual harvest specifications process. To adjust the PSC limit, the Council and NMFS must consider biological and socioeconomic factors about the halibut stock and groundfish fisheries that

intercept halibut as bycatch.<sup>5</sup> To accommodate these considerations, the FMP identifies a time-specific procedure for adjusting PSC apportionments to target fishery categories in the GOA, and seasonal allocations thereof, which requires this information to be provided for Council review in October, so the Council can set different apportionments in December. No additional information pertaining to GOA halibut PSC apportionments was requested by the Council for review.

#### Halibut Discard Mortality Rates- Table 6

Halibut DMRs were reviewed by the SSC and Council at the October 2025 Council meeting for adoption into the 2026 and 2027 proposed specifications. There have been no changes to these halibut DMRs since October 2025. Table 6 in the [C4 Additional Tables GOA Groundfish 2026 and 2027 document](#) provides the DMRs by gear and operation type for final specifications in 2026 and 2027.

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<sup>5</sup> Types of information the Council will consider relevant to seasonal allocation of PSC limits include: a) Seasonal distribution of prohibited species; b) Seasonal distribution of target groundfish species relative to prohibited species distribution; c) Expected prohibited species bycatch needs on a seasonal basis relevant to change in prohibited species biomass and expected catches of target groundfish species; d) Expected variations in bycatch rates throughout the fishing year; e) Expected changes in directed groundfish fishing seasons; f) expected start of fishing efforts; and g) Economic effects of establishing seasonal prohibited species apportionments on segments of the target groundfish industry.