

Excerpt from Chum Salmon Bycatch DEIS, September 2025

Herring PSC Management in the Bering Sea

During B reports at the October Council meeting, the Council requested that staff post the following excerpt from the Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)¹, for reference during E staff tasking discussions. The request originated in the Council's discussion about priority actions, consistent with Executive Order 14276, which reduce burdens on domestic fishing and increase U.S. production via regulations under the Council's purview. An evaluation of changes in herring PSC management in the Bering Sea is included in the list of actions, and the Council indicated its intent to circle back to initiate action on this topic under staff tasking. Section 3.5.1.1 of the DEIS, excerpted here, describes the status quo framework for herring PSC management in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

3.5.1.1 Alternative 1

Herring that spawn along the eastern shore of the Bering Sea migrate to wintering areas near the western edge of the Bering Sea continent shelf, north and west of the Pribilof Islands (Tojo et al., 2007). During their annual migration, herring pass through areas in which groundfish trawl fisheries operate. As described previously, Pacific herring PSC in the BSAI groundfish trawl fisheries is managed by an annual PSC limit set at 1% of the spawning stock biomass. The herring PSC limit is published in the annual harvest specifications and apportioned to the trawl directed fishing categories (see 50 CFR 679.21(e)(3)(iv)(B) through (F)), and a fishery is accountable for its herring PSC on the basis of a fishing year (January 1 to December 31). Attainment of any apportionment triggers the HSA to close to that fishery based upon the timing of each area closure (Figure 3-52).

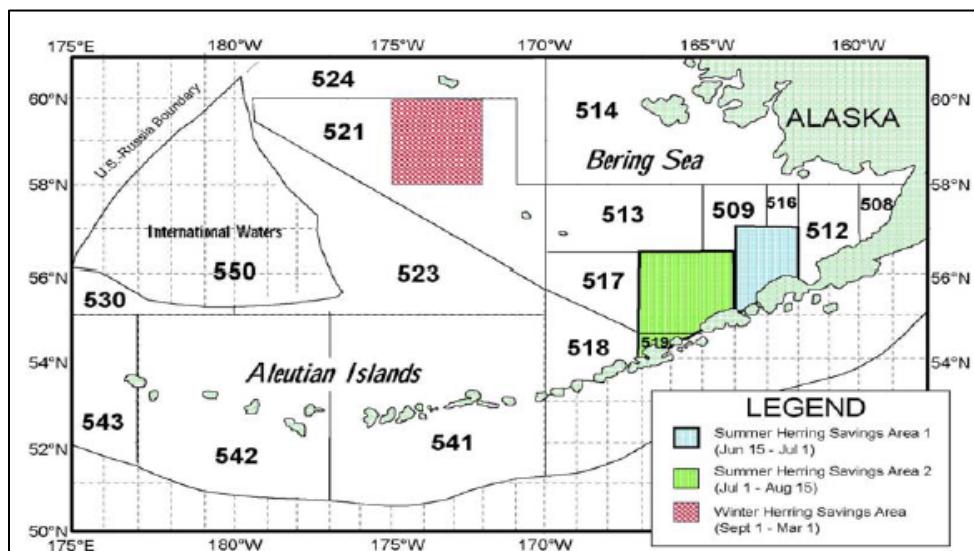


Figure 3-1 Herring Savings Areas

Note: The locations of the HSAs were based upon available herring migration data in the 1980s.

¹ The Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch DEIS is available here: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/draft-environmental-impact-statement-and-regulatory-impact-review-proposed>. The National Marine Fisheries Service is accepting public comment on the DEIS until January 5, 2026, when the comment period will close. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this issue at its February 2026 meeting, and this DEIS will be presented by analytical staff to inform its decision-making.

Table 3-68 compares the pollock fishery's herring PSC (mt) to the fishery's apportionment of the annual herring PSC limit in each year of the analyzed time series. As shown, the pollock fishery's annual herring PSC ranged from 151 mt in 2014 to 3,720 mt in 2020 from 2011–2023. During the analyzed period, the fishery met its herring PSC limit in 2012 and 2020.² While herring are encountered in both the A and B seasons, the bycatch tends to be higher during the B season although the 2020 A season was a notable exception.

The Togiak herring biomass has increased in recent years due to strong 2016- and 2017-year classes which has contributed to higher PSC in the pollock fishery in recent years (Joy et al., 2023). The 2017-year class is now approaching full size and maturity and should begin to age out of the population as natural mortality accrues in coming years. However, changing spatial distributions of herring biomass and/or changes in the distributions of directed pollock and flatfish fisheries could result in exceeding PSC limits when and if exceptionally large year classes occur in the future (Joy et al., 2023).

Table 3-1 Pollock fishery herring PSC (mt) compared to the fishery's apportionment of the limit (mt) and percent of the limit the fishery attained, 2011–2023

Year	Herring PSC (mt)	Pollock Fishery's Limit (mt)	% of Limit Attained
2011	346	1,737	19.9%
2012	2,167	1,600	135.4%
2013	959	2,165	44.3%
2014	151	1,776	8.5%
2015	1,386	2,242	61.8%
2016	1,425	2,151	66.2%
2017	956	1,800	53.1%
2018	307	1,662	18.5%
2019	1,080	2,313	46.7%
2020	3,720	2,299	161.8%
2021	1,698	2,472	69.0%
2022	1,678	3,400	49.0%
2023	3,059	3,066	99.7%

Source: NMFS Inseason. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/commercial-fishing/fisheries-catch-and-landings-reports-alaska>

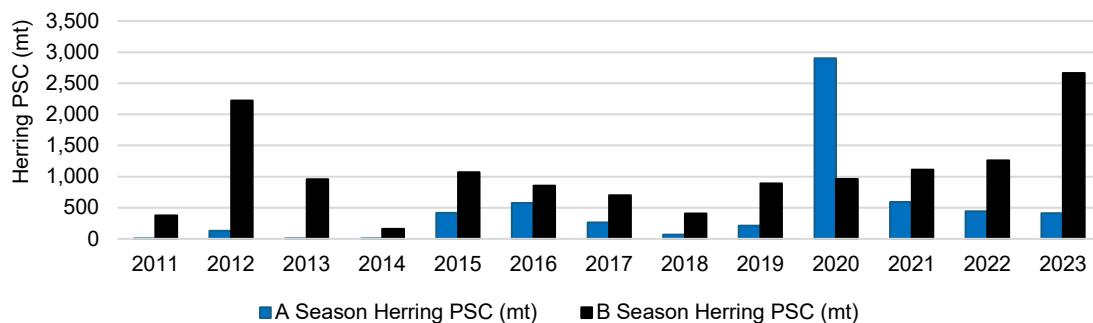


Figure 3-2 Comparison of the pollock fishery's Herring PSC (mt) during the A and B season, 2011–2023
Source: NMFS Alaska Region CAS, data compiled by AKFIN.

² A request for emergency action was submitted in 2020 to suspend the closure of the Winter HSA in order to allow the fishery to operate and achieve Optimum Yield rather than be pushed into areas of less productive fishing and potentially higher herring bycatch areas. The [Summer HSA2 was re-opened by NMFS in 2020](#) as well to prevent the underharvest of the 2020 pollock TAC.