NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Information Sheet for the Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch Action

September 2025

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.

The Council is considering additional management measures to minimize chum salmon bycatch (also referred to as "prohibited species catch" or "PSC") in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. The proposed regulatory changes 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. **This document provides information on the proposed regulatory changes and how to provide input to the Council as it considers making a final recommendation to the Secretary in February 2026.** The primary goal of the management measures being considered is to reduce the bycatch of Western Alaska chum salmon, which is one of several genetic components of chum salmon bycatch. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the pollock fishery's total chum salmon bycatch (all fish regardless of their origin), the percentage of the total bycatch originating from Western Alaska, and the number of bycaught Western Alaska chum salmon, for the most recent five years.

Table 1. Overview of the Bering Sea pollock fishery's chum salmon bycatch and Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch in each year from 2020 through 2024

Year	Total Chum Salmon Bycatch (Number of Fish)	Percentage of Total Chum Salmon Bycatch of Western Alaska Origin	Western Alaska Chum Salmon Bycatch (Number of Fish)
2020	343,094	9.1%	31,222
2021	545,901	9.4%	51,512
2022	242,309	23.0%	55,724
2023	111,852	10.6%	11,491
2024	32,081	8.3%	2,658

Source: Total chum salmon bycatch numbers provided by the NMFS Alaska Region Catch Accounting System. Chum salmon genetics estimates provided by the Alaska Fisheries Science Center's Auke Bay Labs using biological samples collected by NMFS-certified observers.

Range of Alternatives Being Considered

The Council is considering five different management alternatives, which represent either maintaining the existing regulations (Alternative 1) or different ways to modify the current chum salmon bycatch regulations in the Bering Sea (Alternatives 2–5). **In February 2026, the Council will make a final decision on whether to recommend a preferred alternative to the Secretary, and the substance of that preferred alternative.** Some of the alternatives can work together, so note that most can be selected in combination with each other. All of the alternatives would apply to the pollock B season (June 10 – November 1) which is when chum salmon are encountered.

Alternative 1, No Action

The Council is required by law to consider a "No Action" alternative. If Alternative 1 is selected, the existing regulations for chum salmon bycatch management would remain in place. Alternative 1 cannot be selected alongside any other alternative described below. The existing regulations 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. While the "No Action" alternative includes these existing bycatch avoidance measures, the action alternatives described below also retain these existing regulations plus additional measures.

Alternative 2, Overall Chum Salmon PSC Limit (Cap)

If Alternative 2 is selected, an overall chum salmon cap that functions as a hard cap would be in place each B season. If the overall cap is met, pollock fishing must cease even if the fishery has not caught its full quota. Alternative 2 cannot be selected alongside Alternative 3, but it may be selected in combination with Alternative 4 or 5. The cap would be on overall chum salmon, regardless of whether they are Alaska or non-Alaska origin.

If the Council were to recommend Alternative 2, it would need to select a cap limit in numbers of chum salmon and how to divide the cap among the four different pollock fishing sectors. The chum salmon cap could be set at any amount between 100,000 and 550,000 chum salmon, and it could be apportioned to the four pollock sectors using one of four different approaches that are based on either a sector's historical bycatch, its pollock allocation, or a combination of both.

Alternative 3, Overall Chum Salmon Cap Triggered by Low Western Alaska Chum Salmon Abundance

If Alternative 3 is selected, an overall chum salmon cap that functions as a hard cap would be in place during the B season fishery, but only when Western Alaska chum salmon are at low abundance. Alternative 3 is otherwise the same as Alternative 2. Alternative 3 cannot be selected alongside Alternative 2. If the Council were to recommend Alternative 3, it would also need to select a cap limit in numbers of chum salmon and how to apportion the limit among the four different pollock fishing sectors just as with Alternative 2. The Council would also need to select a way to use consistent ADF&G data to determine whether Western Alaska chum salmon is at low abundance, which would trigger the chum salmon cap being in effect. The Council is considering two different indices that would be used to measure abundance, and only one index may be selected.

Option 1 is a three-system index that would measure chum salmon abundance in the Yukon River (summer and fall chum salmon based on run reconstructions provided by ADF&G), the Kuskokwim River (based on the Bethel Sonar with data provided by ADF&G), and the Norton Sound Area (based on a standardized index of five rivers in the region with data provided by ADF&G). Abundance in each area would be independently assessed. If 3/3 areas are above their threshold, a cap would not be in effect. If 2/3 areas are above their threshold, a cap set at an amount between 100,000 and 550,000 chum salmon would be in effect. If 1/3 or 0/3 areas are above their threshold, a cap set at 75% of the amount selected when 2/3 areas are above their threshold would be in effect.

Option 2 for an index would use the Yukon River summer and fall chum salmon runs (based on run reconstructions provided by ADF&G). Each stock would be independently assessed. If 2/2 runs are above their threshold, a cap would not be in effect. If 1/2 or 0/2 stocks are above their threshold, a cap would be in effect.

Alternative 4, Modifications to Regulations Implementing the Salmon Bycatch Incentive Plan Agreements

If Alternative 4 is selected, six provisions would be added to current 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, as described in the salmon avoidance regulations under Alternative 1. In general, the provisions being considered under Alternative 4 would require the pollock industry to modify the IPAs so the contracts include more stringent measures to avoid total chum salmon and Western Alaska chum salmon. Alternative 4 may be selected alongside Alternative 2, 3, and 5.

Alternative 5, Inseason Corridor Closures Triggered by a Chum Salmon Cap

If Alternative 5 is selected, an inseason corridor would be in effect to target avoidance efforts to western Alaska chum salmon. Figure 1 shows the inseason corridor in red. The location of the inseason corridor is based on historical chum salmon bycatch genetics data that show a greater percentage of Western Alaska chum salmon have been taken as bycatch in this area compared to outside of it, and during the timeframe the corridor could close. From June 10 – August 31, all chum salmon caught as bycatch inside the inseason corridor would count towards a chum salmon cap. If the corridor chum salmon cap is met at any point during that timeframe, either all or part of the corridor would close through August 31. Fishing may continue in all areas unaffected by the closure. Alternative 5 may be selected alongside Alternative 2, 3, and 4.

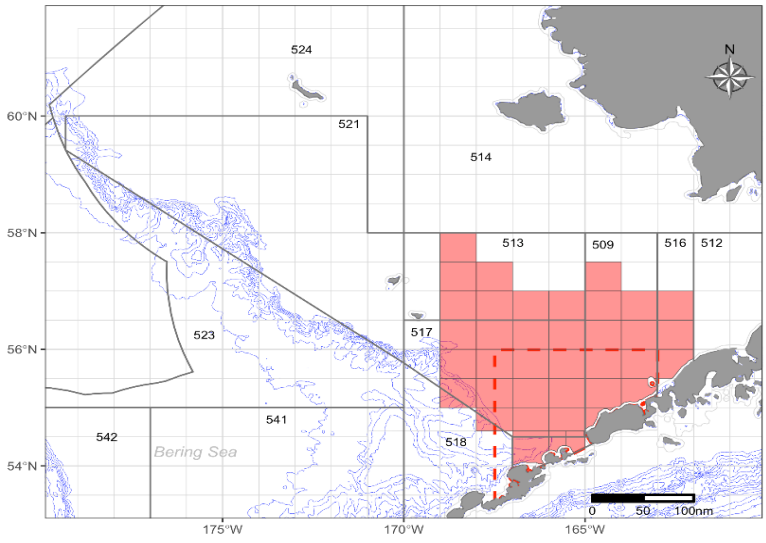

Figure 1. Alternative 5 inseason corridor with the boundary shown in red
Notes: The Chum Salmon Savings Area is shown by the red dashed line inside the inseason corridor.

Recommending Alternative 5 would require the Council to also select a cap amount in numbers of chum salmon and how to divide the cap among the four different fishing sectors. The corridor cap could be set at any amount between 50,000 and 350,000 chum salmon, and it could be divided using one of

four different approaches based on either a sector's historical bycatch, its pollock allocation, or a combination of both.

The Council would also need to select one of three options which would determine the area inside the corridor that would close. The corridor area is the same among all three options (see Figure 1), and so is the closure window, the range of chum salmon caps, and the ways to divide the cap among the fishing sectors. If the corridor chum salmon cap is met, Option 1 would close the entire area through August 31, Suboption 1 would close approximately 75% of the corridor area, and Option 2 would close approximately 50% to 75% of the corridor. The area inside the corridor that would close would be specified in federal regulations under Option 1 and Suboption 1. Option 2 would allow the IPAs to select the area inside the corridor that would close using specific criteria, and the criteria would be specified in regulation. The IPAs selections would be required to be reviewed and approved by NMFS.

Next Steps

The Council is scheduled to take final action on the Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch action in February 2026 and make a final decision on whether to recommend a preferred alternative to the Secretary, and the substance of that preferred alternative based on one or more of the options described above. NMFS would then prepare regulations based on the Council's recommendation, and after a public comment period and approval by the Secretary, new regulations would take effect and be enforced. At final action, the Council's decision will be informed by the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), and recommendations from its Advisory Panel as well as the public.

Opportunities to Provide Public Comment

There are three opportunities to provide comment on this issue. These comment opportunities have different timeframes, which are discussed below, and your comments can be the same.

1. **Written comment to NMFS on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)**

Any member of the public (or any organization) may provide written comments to NMFS on the DEIS prepared for this action. The DEIS is the revised analysis prepared by staff based on the input and recommendations from the Council's February 2025 meeting. The DEIS was published and available for comment on September 12, 2025. The agency will accept public comment on the DEIS until January 5, 2026, when the comment period closes. All public comments submitted to the agency on the DEIS will be available to the Council at final action, as will a comment summary report prepared by agency staff. Note that NMFS is required to respond to the public comments it receives in the Final EIS.

2. **Written comment letter to the Council prior to the February 2026 meeting**

The Council accepts and considers written comments for each agenda item prior to every meeting. For the chum salmon bycatch issue, written comment letters may be provided directly to the Council on the eAgenda for its February 2026 meeting. While the February 2026 eAgenda is not currently listed on the Council's meeting page (https://meetings.npfmc.org/), it will be available in December 2025.

3. **Oral comment to the Council during the February 2026 Council meeting**

Public comment can be provided to the Council on this issue during its February meeting by calling in or in person. The 2026 meeting will be held from February 2–11 at the Egan Center in Anchorage, AK. To sign up for oral testimony during the meeting, there will be a link on the February 2026 eAgenda, which will be active when the meeting begins.

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

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 Materials

- Executive Summary for the Preliminary DEIS for Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch Management, published on December 20, 2024: https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-01/10npfmc-chum-salmon-bycatch-prelim-deis-executive-summary.pdf
    - Note this Executive Summary is published on the Meeting Materials Archives for the Eastern Interior RAC's February 2025 meeting, the Western Interior's February 2025 meeting, and the Yukon-Delta RAC's March 2025 meeting.
- 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.