

the Charter Log

A Quarterly Newsletter for Fishing Guides and Charterboat Operators

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Coast Guard Radio Coverage Upgraded

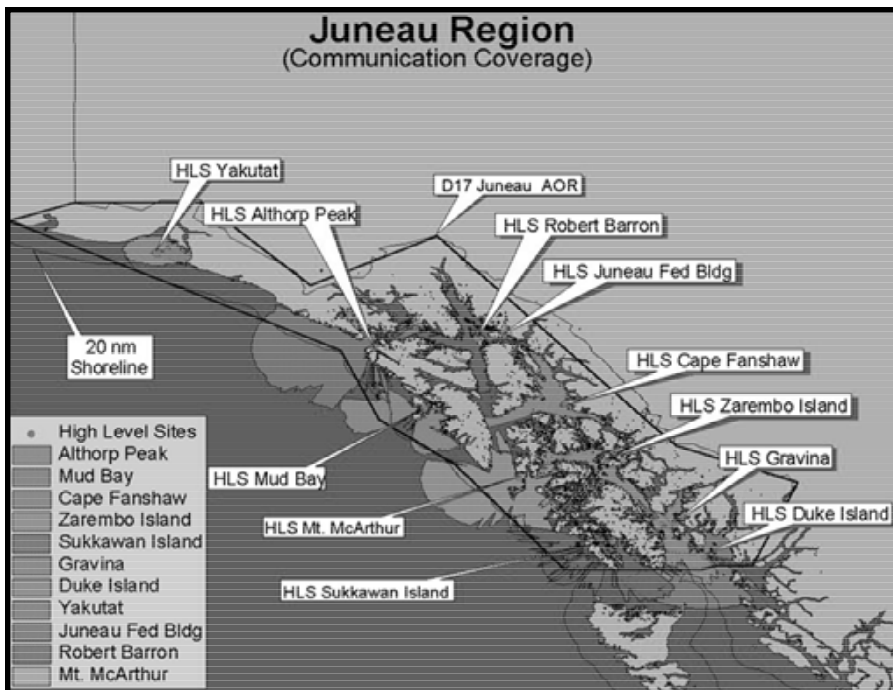
The Coast Guard is upgrading and refining VHF radio coverage in the high-use areas of Alaska, including Southeast, Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet. Better transmitters and new antennas allow better reception of weak vessel signals, and experimental low-power continuous weather transmitters are bringing greater access to updated weather information.

New Coast Guard radio standards are intended to ensure that coast stations can receive signals the equivalent of a one-watt hand held radio transmitting from a height of six feet at a distance of 20 miles. New analytical programs allow Coast Guard

technologists to plot radio reception "footprint" maps (see accompanying illustration) that indicate the geographical areas from which transmissions will be heard. Since the standard of one-watt at six feet is considered the "lowest common denominator" of user transmission capabilities, ranges for typical marine radio sets in good working condition are much greater.

Experimental 5-watt continuous weather transmitters are in place at Pt. Piggott near Whittier and Mt. Robert Barron near Juneau, and eventually a total of 28 will be installed around the coast. Most will be in high-use areas, but Chief Warrant Officer Bill Benning, who is heading up the project, says he expects to put two sites on Shelikof Strait to cover Kodiak and the Katmai Coast as well. The transmitters are being placed on existing Coast Guard transmitter towers and carry continuous weather information from the nearest National Weather Service office, including hourly weather and sea observations from local remote weather sites. Continuous weather broadcasts are becoming available on one of the WX channels, depending on location. The weather transmitters are expected to have essentially the same coverage footprint as the VHF repeater transmitter on which they are located.

Mr. Benning says that early results from the two existing sites have been excellent, with boaters reporting good weather broadcast reception at distances greater than originally expected.



Outboard Motor Problems Continue

More problems are surfacing with large outboard motors, and although products made by the former OMC continue to be the focus of reports, Mercury is now reporting problems of its own.

In May, Mercury Marine stopped production of two OtiMax models, the three-liter 200 and 225 h.p. engines. According to the company, some of the engines have a spark plug problem that causes the engine to run roughly after long periods of idle. A Mercury spokesman says it is a "minor problem" and is not a recall or safety issue. The company will supply parts for correcting the problem, and at the time of the notice was planning to begin construction of the new model year engines.

Evinrude's woes are not so benign, however. Bombardier, new owner of

the assets of now-defunct OMC has announced a recall of thousands of 200- and 225-h.p. engines due to fuel leaks found in 1999 and 2000 model year Ficht Ram Injection engines that have caused fires and explosions. Over 11,000 engines are involved.

The Coast Guard has issued a public safety advisory concerning the hazard.

According to an article in BOAT/US Magazine, OMC was aware of the problem a year and a half ago, and sent its dealers a service bulletin in December, but did not alert owners, and the bulletin did not convey the seriousness of the problem. The magazine says the Coast Guard has more than 60 reports of fires and explosions from OMC owners and service technicians.

Several causes are linked to the problem, including inadequate fuel lines, weak injector mounting flanges, and leaky fuel separators.

It appears that OMC withheld information about the dangerous condition while in negotiations over the company's bankruptcy and sale of Evinrude to Bombardier. The new Canadian owner announced the recall shortly after taking over the beleaguered engine-maker.

More information about the recall is available from the Coast Guard InfoLine at (800) 368-5647 or from Bombardier at (847) 689-7090. The Coast Guard also provides information at their web site, www.uscgboating.org.

NMFS Backs Off on Humpbacks

The National Marine Fisheries Service has reviewed its previously-announced plan to prohibit vessels from approaching any closer than 200 yards from humpback whales in Alaska. After receiving considerable industry opposition, the agency agreed to implement a regulation that includes 100 yards as the minimum approach distance. That is that same as the voluntary guideline that has been in effect since 1966. The new regulation goes into effect July 2.

The new rule also requires a "slow, safe speed" when near humpbacks, and prohibits disruption of the whale's activity prior to approach of the vessel. The regulation pertains to charter fishing vessels as well as dedicated whale watching and recreational vessels. Vessels actively engaged in commercial fishing, government vessels on duty, and vessels limited in their ability to maneuver are exempted.

NMFS' Voluntary Marine Mammal Viewing Guidelines remain in effect and pertain to all marine mammals, not just humpback whales. The guidelines contain more suggested protective measures to minimize disturbance, including:

- Limit time spent observing to a half hour or less
- If necessary to move around a whale, do it from behind the whale
- Do not follow or pursue marine mammals
- Do not encircle marine mammals or entrap them between your boat and another boat or the shore
- When approached by a whale, put your engine in neutral and allow the whale to pass.

You can get copies of the four-fold brochure Alaska Marine Mammal Viewing Guidelines, and a laminated poster with the guidelines listed above by calling the Protected Resources Management Division in Juneau at (907) 586-7235 or by e-mailing Kaja Brix and requesting them at kaja.brix@noaa.gov.

The Federal Register text of the new regulation is available at www.fakr.noaa.gov/frules/humpbackapproachfr.pdf and a summary of the regulations is on the last page.



Safety Considerations for Elderly

Elderly passengers require special safety consideration, says Charter Lakes, the insurance company affiliated with the National Association of Charterboat Operators (NACO).

Elderly people are a big part of the revenue base for many boat operators, but they pose special safety problems due to weaker musculature, poor balance, and brittle bones. Elderly people often are injured aboard boat under conditions in which no other passengers are harmed. Accidents that are of little consequence to younger people can cause more serious harm to seniors, and broken bones and hospitalization are common.

In a recent news release, NACO offers several suggestions for preventing elders

injuries and for minimizing the harm when they do occur, including:

- Require all passengers to remain seated in the cabin or cockpit when the vessel is underway, and ensure that all seating is secure and capable of absorbing boat motion.
- Keep decks and activity areas free of obstructions that could trip passengers.
- Ensure board is a stable and easy process.
- Be prepared to respond in an emergency. Establish an emergency plan for dealing with injuries. Offer immediate first aid, even if it means delaying or interrupting a fishing trip.

- Always treat an injured person with concern and care. Lawsuits often occur when an injured person feels he or she didn't receive enough attention.
- Employ liability releases to reduce the chance of lawsuits.

Be sure to file an accident report with the Coast Guard if a significant injury occurs. Provide only the required facts and don't offer opinions on the cause of the incident until you have consulted your lawyer or insurance company.

Make a list of witnesses to the accident, and note all pertinent details of the situation. If possible, determine the cause and verify it with the witnesses.

Opposition to IFQ Plan Arises

Now that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council has completed its eight-year analysis of options for managing the halibut charter industry and has voted to recommend an IFQ plan to the Secretary of Commerce, opponents of the quota system have emerged to try and kill it.

Most visible of those opponents is Gov. Tony Knowles, who wrote a letter to Sec. Donald Evans on April 25, more than ten days after the Council's April 14 vote. In it he described the plan as "unnecessary" because the newly-implemented guideline harvest level (GHL) plan is "working well." He also expressed the opinion that the charter IFQ violates a Congressional moratorium on new quota share management plans pending a review. Lawyers with the federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have stated that the charter IFQ is not a new plan but an extension of the existing North Pacific halibut IFQ management system.

Knowles was not alone in this 13th hour opposition. Several charter operators have written letters to editors, contacted national sport fishing groups, and written the

Secretary directly to express their opposition. The Recreational Fishing Alliance, a national lobbying group representing anglers and equipment manufacturers, is targeting the plan for a lobbying campaign. Rhetoric has been heated, and sometimes personal, on the e-mail lists between pro- and anti-IFQ advocates.

Charterboat operator Don Johnson has started a lively new e-mail listserv forum for anti-IFQ communication and other

industry information, called Dear Sportfish. If you're not on the list already you can ask him to add your name by contacting him at ccpwow@gci.net.

Charter operators who wish to add their names to the growing list of those for or against the plan who have expressed their views to Secretary Evans can follow Don Johnson's advice and e-mail him at devans@doc.gov or call (202) 482-2000.

Zodiac Liferrafts Recalled

A few units of the six-person Coaster model of liferaft are involved in a safety recall issued by Zodiac of North America. The rafts are believed to have defective trigger-pin cables.

Serial numbers of the SY6 valise units are: AAX70m AAZ70, AAZ56, AAZ59, AAZ63, AAZ71, and AAZ72.

Numbers of SY6 cannister units are: AAU28, AAS76, AAS81, AAS87, AAS89, AAS28, AAT17 and AAT19.

If you have one of these rafts, contact Zodiac immediately at (800) 766-5869.

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EPIRB Use to End

The International Cospas-Sarsat Program has announced that as of Feb. 1, 2009 it will cease to monitor the 121.5/243 MHz frequencies of emergency beacons (EPIRB, personal locator beacon—PLB— and ELT). After that date mariners will have to use a 406 MHz signal if they wish to be received by search and rescue authorities.

Russian satellites (Cospas) will no longer carry receiving instruments starting in 2006, but American satellites (Sarsat) will continue monitoring until 2009.

The International Maritime Organization and International Civil Aviation Organization recommended the change.

Authorities have found that 121.5/243 transmitters produce less precise homing signals, and are prone to a high number of false alarms.

Although that type of transmitter was superseded by the 406 MHz EPIRB years ago, dealers still sell Class B and Mini B 121.5/243 EPIRBs as low price alternatives to the 406.

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