NPFMC Approves Charter Moratorium

It has been an eventful winter and spring on the halibut charter management front, and when the dust finally settled in April the North Pacific Fishery Management Council had approved a motion that would impose a moratorium on entry to the fishery in areas 2C and 3A.

The action heated up in February when the International Pacific Halibut Commission approved a motion to limit guided anglers to one halibut per day for half of June in 3A and half of June and all of July in 2C. The ink was barely dry on the announcement when the U.S. Secretary of Commerce announced that the measure would not be implemented.

Subsequently the Council adopted the moratorium and set criteria and conditions, including the following:

• Control date of Dec. 9, 2005. No one who entered the fishery after that date would qualify for a permit.

• Permits would go to business owners, based on the number of trips by boats the business owns.

• To qualify for a moratorium permit the business would have to show on their logbooks that they had run a minimum of five bottomfishing charter trips during 2004 or 2005 and in the year prior to implementation (probably 2007 or 2008).

• To qualify for a transferable permit individual vessels must have run at least 15 trips during the same time periods. (The Council estimates that about 25% of all moratorium permits would be nontransferable.)

• Use cap of five permits per business, unless grandfathered in at a higher level.

• Endorsements that limit the number of halibut clients the vessel can carry, based on the highest number carried in 2004 or 2005, with a minimum of four.

• Stacking of permits on individual vessels permitted up to the use cap.

• “Military hardship” provision to allow certain active duty personnel to qualify for moratorium permits without meeting all the qualifications.

• Provisions for Community Quota Entities in certain rural locations to qualify.

Other measures

Analysis presented at the April meeting suggested that the combination of the moratorium and the ADFG Emergency Order ban on skipper-and-crew retention (see story elsewhere in this issue) would be sufficient to keep Area 3A catches to within the GHL (guide-line harvest level), at least in the short term. However, with a calculated overage of about 47%, the Area 2C fleet would remain out of compliance, so additional measures...
are being developed. Numerous proposals are being considered.

The NMFS-preferred alternative for 2C is a two-fish bag limit with a proviso that one of the two can be no more than 32 inches in length. A final rule is expected to be published in late May.

Other proposals still under consideration include

1. No more than one trip per vessel per day.
2. No harvest by skipper and crew, and line limits.
3. Annual limits of four, five, or six fish per guided angler.
4. One fish daily bag limits during selected time periods.
5. A bag limit of two, of which one must be larger than 45 or 50 inches.
6. A bag limit of two, of which one must be shorter than 32 inches.
7. A bag limit of two, of which one must be less than 32 inches or more than 45 or 50 inches (“slot limit”).

and various combinations of the above. Options considered and rejected include early season closings, one or more days per week closures, and a 32-inch minimum size limit.

The Council will also analyze measures to limit future catches in Area 3A that resemble the 2C proposals, including the following:

• The one trip per day.
• The skipper and crew retention ban and line limits.
• Annual limits or four, five, or six per angler.
• One-fish daily bag limits during selected periods.
• The two-fish daily bag limit with a minimum size for one.
• The two-fish daily bag limit with a maximum size for one.
• The two-fish daily bag limit with slot limit for one.

The analysis is scheduled for review in October for final action in December 2007. The Council is also working on “long term solutions” that may include compensated reallocation (purchase of commercial quota shares to allow for future increases in charter landings. The Halibut Stakeholder Committee will also be meeting to consider potential changes to the limited entry program and two proposed share-based programs.

NMFS Proposes 1-Fish Halibut Size Limit

The National Marine Fisheries Service has proposed a rule that would allow guided halibut anglers in Southeast Alaska to keep only one fish per day over 32 inches in length. If a second fish is retained it must be no more than 32 inches.

The NMFS proposal is intended to address the issue of exceeding the halibut charter guideline harvest level (GHL) in halibut area 2C.

It is by now old news that in January the International Pacific Halibut Commission recommended to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce that guided anglers in 2C be limited to a single fish per day June 15 through July 30, and two weeks in June in Area 3A. Shortly afterward the Secretary announced that the government would not implement that plan. He indicated instead that NMFS would seek appropriate reduction in charter halibut catches through a combination of state and federal regulatory actions.

The state stepped up to the plate and imposed a prohibition of retention by skipper and crew (see story elsewhere in this newsletter), which it is believed will be sufficient to bring 3A into compliance, at least temporarily. However, the overage is much greater in Southeast Alaska and NMFS is considering other mechanisms. (See the update in this issue on the Council’s recent halibut charter management efforts).

If adopted the proposal would not necessarily reduce the number of fish landed by the charter fleet, but would reduce the total poundage.

NPFMC Approves Charter Moratorium (cont.)

Three Alaskans are on the 22-member board of directors of the National Association of Charterboat Operators.

Andy Mezirow of Seward and Tim Evers of Ninilchik retain their seats on the NACO board. Joining the board after the last election is Bryan Bondioli of Homer.

NACO represents the interests of sportfishing charter operators and small tour boats nationwide in congressional and federal administration matters and provides a variety of services to members, including insurance and drug testing programs.

NACO Board Members Named
**Commissioner Issues E.O. Halting Retention**

The Commissioner of Fish and Game has issued an emergency order that prohibits the retention of any species of fish by captains and crewmembers of fishing charter vessels while paying clients are on board.

The E.O. went into effect on May 1 and remains in effect through the end of the year, unless superceded by another order or regulation. It pertains to all sport charter fisheries in Southeast, Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet/Resurrection Bay, Kodiak, and Alaska Peninsula area waters.

The order also limits the number of lines in the water to the number of paying passengers on board.

The E.O. doesn’t prohibit skipper/crew fishing, per se. They may assist clients and may engage in catch-and-release fishing, they simply can’t retain anything they catch, as long as no additional lines are deployed beyond the limit of one per client.

The commissioner issued the order as part of his commitment to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to do whatever is within state management authority to bring charter halibut catches to within the Council-imposed guideline harvest levels. Charter halibut catches have exceeded the GHL in halibut areas 2C and 3A in recent years.

ADFG calculates that the E.O. will result in a reduction in charter landings of about 4% in 2C and 10-11% in 3A. In the latter case that is expected to be enough to bring the charter industry into compliance. In Southeast Alaska, where the overage is greater and the savings from the retention prohibition is less, other measures are being imposed (see story on charter halibut management developments elsewhere in this issue).

Scott Meyer, ADFG sport fish biologist in Homer, says fleet members have indicated that retention prohibition would be their first choice if control measures are needed.

“By taking this action the charter fleet avoided restrictions (in 3A) by NMFS,” Meyer says.

He adds that since the E.O. was announced in January some skippers have indicated confusion about what it means. He says some thought that since they couldn’t retain fish they don’t need a fishing license. Not so, says Meyer, because the requirement that charter operators and sport fishing guides carry a sport fishing license is in statute and not affected by the E.O.

Because the state has no jurisdiction over halibut management the commissioner could not issue an order that pertains only to the halibut fishery, so the E.O. covers all species of sport-caught fish.

Continued on page 4

**ADFG Proposes Fishing Guide Limited Entry**

ADFG’s sport fish division has taken the first steps toward developing a limited entry system that could be applied to all charter operators and sport fishing guides in the state.

ADFG presented a “briefing paper” to the Governor’s office over the winter that proposed, among other things, issuing permits to guide business owners rather than to the guides themselves, area endorsements that limit where permit holders can operate, unit endorsements that would limit the number of angler-days of guiding service the holder could provide, and mandatory use provisions (“use it or lose it”).

Initial issuance would be based on logbook history showing number of client days during qualifying years. Fees would be a percent of the value of the permit under the original proposal.

ADFG also appointed a Limited Entry Task Force made up of existing freshwater and saltwater guides from around the state. At this writing the Task Force has met twice to discuss various questions regarding permit structure, qualifications, terms of issuance, transferability.

Task Force members include Chaco Pearman, Reed Morisky, Reuban Hanke, Andy Mezirow, Stan Malcom, Seth Bone, Nanci Morris, and Greg Befus.

The briefing paper states that ADFG is proposing the program because of increasing allocation conflicts between guided and Unguided sport fisheries, and between commercial and guided sport fisheries.

The briefing paper says that these problems are causing instability in the guide industry. The briefing paper notes a 45% change in halibut charter operators over a seven year period.

The halibut fishery currently is the focus of greatest conflict but because the state has no management authority over halibut, according to one ADFG official. The only way to get some control over sport halibut guide effort is to devise a limited entry program that applies to all sport fisheries and species, he says.

The State of Alaska has said in the past that it has no authority to impose limited entry on guided recreational fisheries, but with the new administration the State’s interpretation of the law apparently has changed.

While the direct affect of a limited entry program is to cap the number of participants in the fishery, data provided in the briefing paper show a steady decrease in the

Continued on page 4
total number of guiding businesses registered with the state since 1999, and a dramatic drop in the number of guides in the last two years. The guide decline and possibly part of the business number decline can be attributed to new regulations that change the way guides and guide businesses are registered.

The process has not been well advertised to date. A discussion of it, including the briefing paper and notes from the first two Task Force meetings, can be found at www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/statewide/Guides/GSpecIssues.cfm. The page is not identified on the Sport Fish Division main home page, so a visitor to that page would have to know to click the button marked “Special Issues.” Your editor checked with ADFG’s public information office and the division director’s office to try to get copies of press releases or media advisories and found that none had been issued.

A line at the end of the briefing paper instructs the reader to contact Kelly Hepler, director of Sport Fish Division, for more information, but your editor’s attempts to do so produced no response. Eventually a special projects official with ADFG returned the calls.

ADFG has said it will send letters to currently registered guides informing them of the project, now nearly five months in process, but as of press time guides indicated they had yet to receive the letter.

The Web page cited above has a link to an online comment page. At this writing the individuals who were aware of the project and took the time to write appear to be deeply divided, with 25% submitting comments that are favorable, 51% unfavorable, and 24% that were general comments and could not easily be interpreted as for or against.

Cook Inlet Beluga Named for ESA Listing

The National Marine Fisheries Service on April 19 proposed listing the Cook Inlet stock of the beluga whale (belulka) as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The little white whale already is listed as “depleted” under the less restrictive Marine Mammal Protection Act. Whale numbers in Cook Inlet have crashed from around 1,300 in the 1980s to fewer than 300 currently. With no clear cause for the decline scientists had assumed that subsistence hunting was largely to blame, but after several years of voluntary near-total suspension of hunting the numbers are not showing a rebound.

NMFS is accepting comments on the proposal until June 19. Some industrial and economic development interests are opposing it on the assumption that it would interrupt or prohibit economic activity. Not so, says Cook InletKeeper, one of the groups that petitioned for the listing. Director Bob Shavelson says the main economic effect will be to bring research money to the region to support badly needed studies on the whales.

NMFS, ADFG Propose to Share Records

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game is soliciting comments on a proposed change to state law that authorizes federal law enforcement agencies to inspect state-mandated logbooks, licenses, permits, tags, stamps, identifications, and harvest records of sport fishing guides and their clients.

The proposed change to the Alaska statute would authorize National Marine Fisheries Service and Coast Guard officers to demand sport fishing guide logbooks and the anglers’ fishing licenses and harvest records.

Detailed language of the proposal is available from the ADFG regulation program coordinator at kerri_tonkin@fishgame.state.ak.us. ADFG is accepting comments through May 25.

USCG Licensing Centralization Coming

The long-anticipated centralization of Coast Guard licensing functions appears to be about to arrive in Alaska.

Several years ago the agency announced that it was beginning a process of transferring all license application processing and license issuance to a central facility in West Virginia. The word on the docks now is that the Regional Exam Center in Juneau will be downsized on May 1, 2008, and in Anchorage shortly after. The local RECs will continue to do the testing of applicants but most document processing will be done on the East Coast. Applicants (initial issue and renewal) still will have to appear in person at the REC for fingerprinting.

A Coast Guard officer has recently advised skippers that if their licenses are up for renewal within the next 12 months they should consider submitting their applications early to get them processed before the changeover, since there is sure to be confusion that leads to delays. He also advised applicants to make copies of all documents they submit with their applications in case anything gets lost as a result of the local downsizing.
TSA Says All Mariners Will Need TWIC Card in 2008

The latest word from the Transportation Security Administration and the Coast Guard is that every mariner soon will need a TWIC card.

TWIC (Transportation Worker Identification Credential) is an ID card mandated under the Maritime Transportation Security Act and will be required by all personnel (including licensed and documented mariners). TSA says mariners must obtain their TWIC cards by Sept. 25, 2008, but the program has been plagued by technical problems and implementation has been delayed, so it is not clear whether that deadline will hold.

TWIC cards initially will be valid for five years. TSA does not plan to notify holders of pending expiration since the expiration date is printed on the card.

The Coast Guard Regional Exam Center in Anchorage says that while TWIC will be required for new issuance and renewal of licenses, currently there is no date set for that requirement to be applied.

Meanwhile, the CG and TSA are trying to integrate the TWIC with the existing license and documentation system to combine the elements of all four current merchant mariner professional credentials (license, merchant mariner’s document, Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping [STCW] and certificate of registry) with the TWIC into a single Merchant Mariner Credential (MMC). If and when this occurs, it may reduce processing time, effort, and cost to mariners. TSA says the Coast Guard would begin issuing MMCs 18 months after the effective date of the TWIC rulemaking and would phase in the MMCs in replacement of current credentials over five years.

The standard fee for a TWIC card is projected at $137.25, but holders of currently valid licenses and documents will be charged only $105.25. The fee for the MMC, which would replace the separate TWIC and license, would be the same as the current license fee.

As explained by the TSA frequently asked questions Web site (www.tsa.gov/what_we_do/layers/twic/twic_faqs.shtm), the main purpose of the TWIC is to ensure that transportation industry workers who have unescorted access to “secure areas of MTSA-regulated facilities and vessels” are cleared for security purposes and identified. By definition, all mariners are considered to have such access. Area captains of the port can designate secure areas and require TWIC cards of anyone wishing to enter those areas.

TWIC cards will be “smart cards” with small integrated circuit chips embedded. When fully implemented, high tech card readers will be used to check for TWIC compliance. The technology, however, has been part of the reason for delay of implementation.

TSA estimates that 750,000 people nationwide will require TWIC certification. U.S. citizens and legally admitted aliens will be eligible. Disqualified are persons determined by TSA to be a security threat, and persons convicted of about 15 categories of criminal offenses.

Applicants will have to provide at least one identifying document each from two lists of documents. A list is available at the Web site above.

Pre-enrollment is not currently available.

TSA uses the term “roll-out” for the sequence of ports in which the implementation is planned to occur. Completion of roll-out is expected to take 15 months. The Coast Guard will give 90-day notice prior to the compliance date in each Captain of the Port zone. The Port of Wilmington (Delaware) was selected for the first trial, and other tests are going on at Long Beach and some ports in Florida.

The Department of Homeland Security maintains a TWIC program help desk at 1-866-347-8942.

Alcohol Test Kits to Be Renewed

Boat operators are reminded that the required alcohol testing kits are valid for only a single year, so if you purchased yours last season it’s time to buy new units.

The Coast Guard requires a testing kit for each skipper and crew member on board, unless they show that they can appear at an approved testing facility within two hours of an incident.

Several companies offer testing kits. The company associated with the National Association of Charterboat Operators, which is called Charterboat Consortium, offers two models, one for $5 and the other for $10. Shipping for individual units adds $4.05 to the bill. You can reach the Charterboat Consortium at 251-943-4717. You can also order kits online at the company Web site, www.charterboatdrugtest.com.

Save a tree!
To get an electronic Charter Log, contact Sue Keller at fnsk@uaf.edu.
**Revised Vessel Guidelines Draft**

If you’re tracking the progress of the federal Access Board to develop standards for small passenger vessels to assist in meeting the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the federal Department of Transportation’s rulemaking on the same issues, read on.

The Access Board issued revised guidelines last year, and the U.S. Department of Transportation issued proposed regulations early this year.

Although the new Access Board vessel draft pertains to “small vessels” most of the standards do not appear to apply to uninspected vessels and small Subchapter T boats. However, since the ADA applies to all, you may want to see where the thinking is going. Draft guidelines and explanatory material can be found at the board’s Web site, www.access-board.gov/pvaac/index.htm. A 60-day comment period has expired, but if you wish to communicate on the current draft you can call Paul Beatty at 202-272-0012 or email pvag@access-board.gov.

The U.S. DOT has proposed new regulations to implement ADA requirements to ensure access to vessels to passengers with disabilities. The regulation, once finalized, will apply to all types and sizes of vessels, including water taxis and other small excursion boats. It bans any practices that discriminate on the basis of disability, such as program restrictions and denial of service. It also covers responsibilities for ensuring access to vessels and their programs.

The proposed rule does not include design requirements for vessels. The Access Board’s future design guidelines are likely to be incorporated into DOT’s final rule. For more information on the DOT proposed rule see dms.dot.gov/reports/fr.htm.

**Anglers Oppose Subsistence Dipnets**

Angling groups are unhappy with a decision by the Federal Subsistence Board to allow subsistence dipnetting and rod-and-reel fishing in the Kenai and Kasilof watersheds.

The decision allows residents of Ninilchik, Hope, and Cooper Landing to catch salmon in the Kenai drainage, and Hope and Cooper Landing residents also to take rainbow trout and Dolly Varden.

Tribal leaders with the Ninilchik Traditional Council earlier dropped their claim to subsistence gillnetting rights on those two rivers. The Traditional Council claimed the village had rights to put two gillnets in each of the rivers, but federal biologists and lawyers argued that since all Ninilchik residents have subsistence rights, not just Natives represented by the Traditional Council, there would be no way to limit who fishes.

A huge outcry arose over the proposal, and eventually the Southcentral Alaska regional advisory council to the Federal Subsistence Board recommended instead that Ninilchik fishermen be allowed to use dipnets and to enjoy expanded rod-and-reel bag limits.

The Federal Subsistence Board in early May reaffirmed its earlier finding that Ninilchik residents are rural residents and entitled to a subsistence fishing priority on federal waters of the Kenai River watershed. ADFG had attempted to block the Kenai River gillnet subsistence fishery, claiming that the federal board did not follow proper procedure in making the determination that Ninilchik residents made traditional use of Kenai River fish.

The state previously indicated it may sue to block the subsistence fishery, but that may not occur if the alternative fishery can be worked out.

The board’s decision allows for a Kenai watershed subsistence take of 1,000 kings, 4,000 sockeye, 3,000 coho, and 2,000 pinks. Limits for trout and char will be one-and-a-half or two times the state bag limit for those species. Locations designated for the subsistence fisheries are in areas little-used by recreational anglers.

**“Sectors” Replace Marine Safety Offices**

Say over-and-out to the Coast Guard’s Marine Safety Offices in Anchorage and Juneau. Say ahoy to Sector Anchorage and Sector Juneau.

Creation of the new sector offices is a reorganization that combines the Marine Safety Office with all prior subordinate units.

That puts the Anchorage MSO together with the cutters Long Island, Mustang, and Roanoke Island, along with Station Valdez, now re-designated Sector Field Office Valdez.

Sector Juneau combines MSO Juneau with the cutters Liberty, Anacapa, Naushon, and Elderberry, Station Juneau, Station Ketchikan, and Aids to Navigation Team Sitka. In addition, Sector Field Office Ketchikan stands as a subordinate office to Sector Juneau, with the responsibility of providing logistics support in Ketchikan.

What this means to boat operators is that if you need assistance on matters such as vessel equipment requirements that you previously would have requested of the nearest Marine Safety Office, you now ask the nearest Sector.
Plan Ahead to Renew Your License

If it’s been more than four years since your current charter license was issued, it’s time to start planning to get it renewed.

The Regional Exam Center in Anchorage says the processing time for both renewals and original issues is four to six weeks. That’s assuming that all your forms are filled out properly and all required documents and fees accompany your application.

The four-to-six week period in Anchorage is brief compared to other parts of the country. The National Association of Charterboat Operators reports that mariners in some areas, such as Long Beach, California, are facing a processing wait of up to one year.

The Coast Guard says you can begin the renewal process up to one year before expiration of your current license.

Remember that unless you’ve logged at least 360 operating days since issuance of your current license, you will have to take an open-book test to qualify for license renewal. This test includes a lot of material not on the original license tests and to pass it you may need supplementary materials or training.

Remember also that in-person fingerprinting is now a requirement for license renewal.

Anch “Security Team”

If you think a SAFE boat sporting a machine gun is a contradiction in terms, consider this: the Coast Guard now has a Maritime Safety and Security Team based in Anchorage.

The MSST deploys to ports around Alaska to provide port security and harbor defense, according to a Coast Guard press release. The team’s outboard-motor-powered SAFE boat can be trailered to road- and ferry-accessible ports.

This may be of concern to charter boat operators if they should want to approach cruise ships, ferries, or other vessels being escorted by the orange, foam-collared 25-foot warship.

The Department of Homeland Security has proclaimed a 100-yard security zone around vessels under Coast Guard escort. Entry to the zone, other than by commercial fishing vessels actively engaged in fishing, is prohibited except with permission of the on-scene representative aboard the gunboat.

Aside from the machine gun mounted forward, the MSST’s pocket battleship looks similar to the SAFE boats used by the Coast Guard Auxiliary and other Coast Guard units for search and rescue.

If in doubt about the identification of a boat or status of a ship you may be approaching, call the Coast Guard on CH. 16 VHF for permission to approach.

The Coast Guard public relations piece says that violation of the security zone could result in civil and/or criminal penalties. Since M-60s rarely are used to deliver subpoenas, however, it appears the result could be more serious.

International Whaling Commission Meets

The International Whaling Commission holds its annual meeting this year in Anchorage. Technical meetings are occurring throughout the month of May, with voting on regulatory proposal schedules for May 28-31.

No public input will be taken on the proposals.

The meeting is expected to be controversial because of Japan’s desire to overturn the ban on commercial whaling. Japan and Iceland currently take some whales under provisions for “scientific” whaling, and Norway openly defies the international ban. While the United States opposes any commercial whaling, it does support continued subsistence bowhead hunts by Alaska Native whalers.

More Boater Ed for Women Needed

Most women who run recreational boats say they were taught boating skills by their parents, but they also say more boating education is needed for women. This is according to a survey conducted by BoatUS.

Nearly half of respondents to the survey said it was a parent they first remember teaching them about boating, and almost half also said they had first gone boating by age 10. Two-thirds said they had taken some kind of formal classroom boater training and 73% had hands-on training. But more than 40% said there aren’t enough opportunities for girls and women to learn how to operate a boat.

Three times as many said that women-only training is effective, than said it is not effective. BoatUS says this indicates women prefer to learn in an environment that doesn’t have the pressures associated with classes that also have men.
Charter Boat Sinks

Eleven passengers and two crew-members survived the sinking of the charter vessel *Halibut Endeavor*, April 24 in Kachemak Bay near Seldovia.

At this writing the cause of the sinking of the 38-foot Modutech was unknown. However, a Coast Guard investigator says that the boat started sinking by the stern. Because there was no watertight bulkhead between the lazarette and the engine room in the inspected vessel, there was no requirement for a high water alarm aft. The skipper reportedly noticed the vessel stern was settling and activated all the pumps, but they could not get ahead of the ingress of water.

The 11 passengers were members of the Homer Chamber of Commerce participating in the annual halibut tagging trip. Chamber members who sponsor a tagged fish for the local halibut derby are treated to a day on the water catching and tagging the fish.

According to press reports, the boat was off Seldovia and headed to Homer around 4 pm when it began taking on water. The captain made a call to Homer police, and a Coast Guard Auxiliary vessel on a training mission nearby responded to the call and took the 11 passengers from the foundering vessel.

After passengers were evacuated, the skipper attempted to proceed to Seldovia and after some minutes the vessel suddenly rolled over. The mate reportedly clung to the overturned hull and the skipper struggled to escape the cabin. The boat sank within five minutes.

Passengers were transferred to the cutter *Roanoke Island* and delivered to Homer, where some were examined by EMTs before going home. A witness of the incident reported that the auxiliary vessel crew did a “super job” of rescuing the passengers and crew, according to a report in the *Anchorage Daily News*.  

Dude Fishing OKd for Nushagak

Bristol Bay commercial fisherman are looking to a new tourism opportunity in Nushagak Bay this year with creation of a new special harvest area approved by the Board of Fisheries to permit development of a small “dude fishing” industry.

Under provisions of the proposal the Board of Fisheries approved, tourists can experience a day of gillnetting in the special harvest area on board a CFEC-licensed commercial fishing vessel after purchasing a short-term crew license (the so-called called “dude license”) for $30.

The special harvest area begins approximately two miles above the current upper marker of the Nushagak commercial fishing district to a line downstream of the confluence of the Nushagak and Wood rivers. Dude fishing is permitted only during daylight hours from July 1 through the end of September. Gillnets are limited to 25 fathoms of .55 inch or smaller gear, and daily catches cannot exceed 90 salmon, no more of 15 of which may be kings.

The Board action does not address Coast Guard licensing, drug and alcohol testing, passenger safety equipment, insurance, and other tourism and passenger carrying related issues.

Wilderness First Aid/First Responder Taught

Are you operating where a hospital is more than an hour away? Are you trained to deal with injuries in a remote location? You may be interested in becoming certified in Wilderness First Aid or Wilderness First Responder.

Trainer Lora Colten teaches those courses through Alaska Wilderness Medicine and Stonehearth Open Learning Opportunities (SOLO). She is based in Homer and will offer classes at that location again next winter. She is also available to take the courses to any location where there is a demand.

Board of Fisheries Actions

The Alaska Board of Fisheries passed several proposals at its March meeting that may have an effect on how sportfishing guides conduct business.

Proposal 238 is intended to limit the abuse of the proxy system by restricting a proxy to fishing for only one person at a time and no more than two in one year.

Proposal 239 allows the commissioner to raise or lower annual bag limits in response to changes in fish abundance.

Proposal 255 allows noncommercial harvest of aquatic plants without a harvest permit and establishes a year-round season.

Proposal 256 addresses issues surrounding shipment of live fish out of the state.

Proposal 258 creates a new regulation permitting the use of pink and chum salmon for bait.

Proposal 261 establishes reporting requirements for harvesting finfish with annual limits.

Proposal 262 prohibits movement of certain invasive species within the state.
Two New Interest Groups Promote Halibut Issues

Two statewide interest groups have come into existence, both focused on influencing the outcome of efforts to manage the halibut charter industry.

The Alaska Sport Fishing Alliance has formed to protect the interests of the halibut sport fishing public, according to spokesman Bruce Warner.

Halibut Charter Coalition of Alaska is composed mainly of long-term charter operators who support rights-based management, and an immediate end to the 14-year struggle over charter halibut management, according to Bob Ward of Anchor Point, who is one of the founders.

Alliance
The ASFA is headquartered in Homer, as are two other organizations that have been vocal in the sport halibut management issues—the Alaska Charter Association and the Homer Charter Association.

The Alliance is using contributions to retain a Washington, D.C., law firm to develop a strategy aimed at preventing any restrictions to the angling public’s access to halibut via charter boats. Warner says the ASFA has no formal membership and no board of directors. He says policy is made by the attorney retained by the group.

The group’s Web site www.alaskasportfishingalliance.org details positions on halibut management, including opposition to the (now defunct) proposed one-fish daily bag limit, the halibut charter moratorium, the proposed halibut charter IFQ plan, and attempts by ADFG to “enter the realm of Halibut Allocation Regulations.”

The group favors maintaining the two fish daily bag limit, a set recreational fishery halibut allocation, and development of a halibut Fishery Management Plan by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

USCG Wants Small Boat Security Measures

Are you ready for an electronic tracking device on your boat, increasing random intercepts, and mandatory training and licensing for recreational boaters?

Senior Coast Guard officers have been telling the media and public that the government is developing new anti-terrorism measures that pertain to small boats.

Rear Admiral Joseph Nimmich told the recent Boating Writers International annual meeting that the nation’s ports and waterways are “soft targets” highly vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The Coast Guard now tracks vessels of 300 tons and greater, but the goal is eventually to have detailed information on every craft on the water.

The admiral says the Coast Guard wants a “long-term conversation” with the small boat community, but warns that if there is a terrorist strike involving a small boat, Congress may take immediate action.

Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Thad Allen echoed the same theme at a recent speech to the National Conference of State Legislatures. He said the government believes that boater licensing is necessary—not to improve boaters’ skills, but to improve waterway security by giving the Coast Guard a mechanism for verifying boaters’ identities. He says the service want to have a “dialogue with the country” about what measures the government can use to monitor citizens in the name of security.

Meanwhile, RADM Nimmich asks boat operators to participate in America’s Waterway Watch program by reporting suspicious activities to 1-877-24-WATCH.

Now It’s 406 Only

If you still have an EPIRB that broadcasts on 121.5/243 MHz, it’s time to get rid of the thing. As of the first of this year the only legal EPIRB is one that broadcasts on 406 MHz. The satellites no longer process the old frequency signal. The change applies only to Class A, B, and S EPIRBs, not to 121.5/243 MHz man overboard devices, which work only with a base alerting unit and not with a satellite.

The Coast Guard says that only one in 50 alerts on the old system was a real emergency. The advent of the 406 MHz units the number of false alerts has decreased, in part because they are registered to an owner.

If your 406 EPIRB or PLB isn’t yet registered, you can do so at the Beacon Registration Database at www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov or by calling 1-888-212-SAVE.
Support the Troops Fishing Tourney

While politicians and patriots of various sorts talk about supporting the troops, charter operator Bob Candopoulos and his friend Keith Manternach, an Anchorage businessman owner, are actually doing something.

The two have organized the first Support Our Troops Fishing Tournament, scheduled for May 23 and 24 in Seward.

Lest it appear a marketing come-on, get this: Candopoulos, owner of Saltwater Safari, is taking some 60 service men and women fishing on his two boats at no charge. And Manternach, owner of Specialty Truck & Auto, has lined up financial support, prizes, and other activities worth about $60,000 to go along with the fishing trips. Each day will end with a barbeque at the American Legion hall in Seward. Top prize is a new four-wheeler.

Manternach has received support from the Alaska Railroad, the Alaska SeaLife Center, the Armed Services YMCA, and other companies. He told the Anchorage Daily News that it’s turning out to be a much bigger job to organize a fishing tournament than he originally thought.

Candopoulos says that “virtually every” Seward charter operator offered to assist the effort but there is so much work involved in providing the additional activities that in the first-year program they couldn’t handle any more than the originally-planned-for 60 soldiers.

But he says they’re already planning for the 2008 tournament, and it appears that charter operators in many ports on the Alaska coast will participate.

“This year it’s 60 soldiers,” Candopoulos says, “but next year it will be several hundred.”

Changes for 5-Star Program Announced

You’ll be seeing a new decal on uninspected passenger vessels (6-pack boats) this year, and you can get one for yours if you tune in to changes to the Coast Guard’s 5 Star Safety program.

Boats that submit to a voluntary safety examination by a trained Coast Guard Auxiliary member and are found to meet all the basic requirements will receive a decal that reads UPV Uninspected Passenger Vessel (Maximum 6 Passengers) Safety Equipment Examination. If the vessel meets higher standards of safety equipment the decal will carry stars, to a maximum of five. The star system is essentially the same as under the previous five-star program. The new decal is good for two years.

Why go to the trouble to get the decal? Here are two reasons:

1. The Coast Guard is saying, informally of course, that boarding teams will not be randomly boarding boats that display the sticker. The decal won’t prevent a boarding if the patrol boat crew has cause to board, but they wouldn’t board just to check for safety equipment.

2. The Coast Guard has purchased half-page ads in visitor guides for several tourist ports drawing attention to the decal program and recommending that consumers consider them in their selection of the boat to go out on.

The Coast Guard has announced an additional change to the five-star program. Previously to meet the standard of the fifth star, the boat needed to carry a Coast Guard–approved life raft or inflatable buoyant apparatus (IBA), but the agency now is saying that boats that operate entirely inside the Boundary Line (including most of Southeast Alaska, Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, and some other locations) can substitute an inflatable skiff or raft if it has rated capacity sufficient for all passengers on board and is kept inflated.

The Coast Guard is distributing a 19-page document called Dockside Examination Forms that provides detailed information about the UPV decal, the five-star program, and the legal requirements for UPVs.

GPS Vulnerable to Solar Radio Bursts

Powerful solar radio bursts in early December 2006 have alerted scientists to the vulnerability of the GPS satellite navigation system to disruption by “space weather” events.

The bursts came from solar flares that sent high-energy electrons into the upper solar atmosphere. They created radio noise that interfered with all kinds of radio waves and seriously degraded GPS signals. The events occurred on Dec. 5 and 6 and affected the entire sunlit side of the earth, causing large numbers of receivers to stop tracking GPS signals.

Scientists say such bursts are unpredictable, and they were amazed by the intensity of the December events, which produced ten times more radio noise than any previously recorded events. Solar activity rises and falls on 11-year cycles and the next peak is expected in 2011.

They say there is no way to shield the system, except to modify all GPS antennas to screen out solar signals or to replace all existing GPS satellites with ones that transmit a more powerful signal.

However, it appears that the Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS) receivers were able to continue working although their accuracy was somewhat diminished during the bursts.
Measures Proposed to Reduce Kenai River Water Pollution

The Kenai Peninsula Borough and the two cities on the lower Kenai River have submitted a proposal to the Board of Fisheries intended to reduce hydrocarbon pollution on the river.

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation says that for several years there have been many days in July when the hydrocarbon load in the river, mainly unburned gasoline from outboard motors, has exceeded state water quality standards. DEC has recommended to the federal Environmental Protection Agency that the river be listed as Category 5 Impaired due to the pollution.

ADFG, DEC, and DNR all have indicated they are aware of the problem but all claim they have no jurisdiction.

Instructor Offers River Rescue Course

Guides who operate on Alaska’s rivers may be interested in a course on river rescue offered by a Haines-based trainer.

Dick Rice teaches river rescue courses for Rescue 3 International, a skills training school based in California with worldwide operations. Rescue 3 specializes in swift-water rescue training and also offers a variety of other rescue and emergency response courses. Rice provides swift-water training to agencies including the National Park Service and ADFG, and is willing to provide it to other groups and individuals in the state.

Rice also teaches license prep courses through the Ketchikan branch of University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). The Maritime Training program at the Ketchikan campus offers a four-day Western Rivers OUPV course, as well as a two-week OUPV and Master license prep course.

For more information on these offerings, contact Dick Rice at 541-322-9332 or 907-209-4781, or email dick_rice@hotmail.com.

For information on the UAS courses, check the UAS Ketchikan Web site or contact marine program coordinator Dale Miller at 228-4575 or dale.miller@uas.alaska.edu.

NOAA Surveys Halibut Fishing Demand

To assess the impacts of potential regulatory changes to charter halibut management on sport anglers, NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) is designing a survey to produce estimates of baseline demand for halibut fishing trips and an understanding of the factors that affect demand.

The survey is designed to collect information about saltwater recreational fishing trips in Alaska. Development and pre-testing of the survey for was completed last year. The survey instrument is being revised and will be distributed by mail.
New publication from Alaska Sea Grant

Field Guide to Sharks, Skates, and Ratfish of Alaska

This book is ideal for charter boat operators. It has an identification key to 10 sharks, 15 skates, and one ratfish, as well as color photos and illustrations and distribution maps.

For more information go to: seagrant.uaf.edu/bookstore/pubs/SG-ED-57.html

Also available are these great publications designed to help you bone up on Alaska’s ocean critters and better inform your customers.

- Marine Mammals of the Eastern North Pacific
- Ocean Treasure: Commercial Fishing in Alaska
- Alaska’s Ocean Bounty Poster
- Guide to Marine Mammals of Alaska
- Flat Out Facts about Halibut
- Angler’s Guide to the Rockfishes of Alaska
- Preventing and Treating Seasickness
- Guide to Northeast Pacific Flatfishes
- Guide to Northeast Pacific Rockfishes

Visit our online bookstore at www.alaskaseagrant.org