
3.12 Socioeconomics

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3.12.1 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

For purposes of this Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas EIS (Supplemental EIS/OEIS), the Region of Influence (ROI) for socioeconomics remains the same as that identified in the March 2011 Gulf of Alaska Navy Training Activities Final EIS/OEIS and includes the Temporary Maritime Activities Area (TMAA) (the Study Area).

3.12.1.1 Existing Conditions

Socioeconomics concerns remain the same as those issues previously identified in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS. Further, the United States (U.S.) Department of the Navy's (Navy's) operating procedures to prevent or lessen impacts on the local socioeconomic community—as described in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS—remain applicable in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

As discussed in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS, military, commercial, institutional, and recreational activities take place in the TMAA; there are no continuously restricted zones in this area. However, as noted in the 2013 Special Local Notice to Mariners (NTMs), Navy operating areas are in “use on a continuing basis by Navy ships and aircraft,” and because of the “frequency and variety of exercises conducted in the [operating areas] and the difficulty in scheduling them far in advance due to uncertainties of weather, it is not possible to issue individual NTM each time an exercise is scheduled” (U.S. Coast Guard 2013). The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) does utilize a broadcast NTM system, which is used to let mariners, pilots, fisherman and other commercial users of the area know when Navy training is scheduled or occurring.

Section 3.14 (Public Safety) of this Supplemental EIS/OEIS has a discussion of the availability of the TMAA to civilian vessels and safety procedures for the areas of cooperative use between the Navy and the public. This section will focus on commercial shipping, commercial fishing, and recreation and tourism.

3.12.1.1.1 Commercial Shipping

As discussed in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS, the Study Area is traversed by large and small marine vessels, with several commercial ports occurring near the TMAA. Two of these ports were ranked in the top 150 U.S. ports by tonnage in 2011, Anchorage (90th) and Valdez (25th) (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 2011). Commercially used waterways are controlled by the use of directional shipping lanes for large vessels (cargo, container ships, and tankers). In 2011, the latest year in which summary statistics are available, there were over 3,423 commercial ship transits (both inbound and outbound) from the ports and harbors of Valdez, Anchorage, Homer, Seward, Kodiak, and Cordova (Waterborne Commerce Statistics Center 2011). Ships that travel from major ports to the lower 48 states and Hawaii, as well as marine traffic between coastal ports, enter the TMAA briefly; however, according to USCG District 17, Juneau, Alaska, no incidents have occurred between commercial shipping and Navy activities (Fields 2013). While the Navy does not publish daily NTMs, USCG District 17, Juneau, Alaska communicates any active Navy training or testing activity to shipping vessels through broadcast NTMs on VHF-FM Channel 16 and 22A (U.S. Coast Guard 2013).

3.12.1.1.2 Commercial Fishing

Commercial fishing was discussed in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS. Following a review of recent literature, as well as discussions with the Alaskan Ocean Observing System, Alaska Region of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, and the Anchorage office of the

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), commercial fishing in the Study Area has not significantly changed since the Final EIS/OEIS. According to the Alaska Region of NOAA Fisheries, the region still produces about half the fish caught in U.S. waters. The Navy is aware of the different fishing seasons that are open during the exercise timeframes and does its best to not interfere with the fishing seasons nor impact fish habitat. To date, the Navy has not been told of interference nor is there any scientific evidence that Navy training is accelerating any fluctuations or declines or otherwise, even in the most recent exercise in 2015, despite claims there would be prior to the event starting. The Navy is also aware of catch density and which areas are most utilized by fishermen in the GOA. Figure 3.12-1 illustrates the areas of highest catch density for Groundfish and Halibut, overlaid with the TMAA.

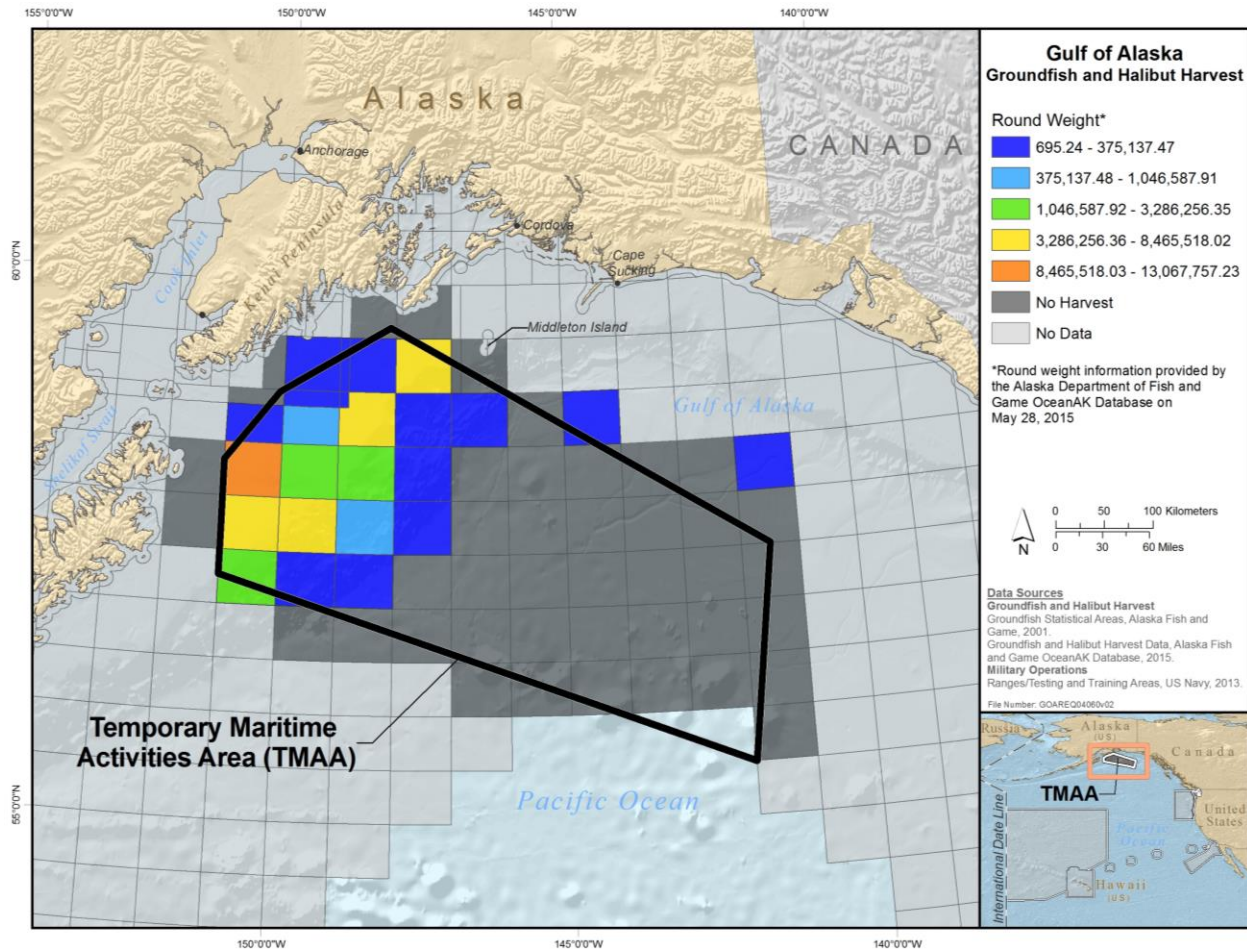


Figure 3.12-1: Gulf of Alaska Groundfish and Halibut Harvest in Relation to the TMAA

While there has been less overall yearly catch (by poundage) of Tanner and Dungeness crab since 2007 (as described in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS), the percent of total crab catch in Alaska coming from the Study Area remains at 2 percent—the same as in 2007 (Alaska Department of Fish and Game 2010). According to the ADFG, the reason for similar percentages in catch between 2007 and now can be explained by the fact that 2007 was an unusually high year for almost all Alaska’s fisheries, including those in the Study Area, and all fisheries have since seen catch levels return to normal levels. Other commercial catch numbers in the Study Area (specifically those for weathervane scallops) remain statistically the same as those percentages analyzed in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS.

3.12.1.1.3 Tourism and Recreation

Recreation and tourism was described and analyzed in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS. Recreation and tourist areas around the TMAA include the Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak Island, Prince William Sound, and Resurrection Bay. According to the Alaska Department of Commerce, there has been no quantifiable decrease in tourism as a result of Navy training and testing. The tourism rates in 2008 and 2009 did drop significantly; however, a March 2010 report for the Alaska Department of Commerce opined that the flat tourism economy occurred because of an overall national economic downturn—there was no implication of Navy impact. Tourism numbers have since improved, and in 2012, the levels of tourism had almost returned to 2006–2007 levels.

Recreationally, the number of registered boats in Alaska has dropped since the release of the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS by approximately 2,100 fewer registered boats in 2012. While this represents less than 10 percent of recreational boats in Alaska, according to the Alaska Department of Vehicles, it is unlikely this decline is attributable to current Navy activities (Ruby 2013). There are a myriad of reasons that could cause such a drop: (1) registration fees are slightly higher; (2) the national economic downturn has caused people to sell personal boats; (3) non-powered boats, under certain new conditions in Alaska, no longer require registration; and (4) boat registration is on a 3-year cycle, which has caused many individuals to simply forget to renew (Ruby 2013).

In sum, there has not been a significant change to overall recreation and tourism in the Study Area since the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS. As such, the information and analysis presented in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS remains valid.

3.12.1.2 Current Requirements and Practices

Standard Operating Procedures and best management practices to assure access and safety to shipping, fishing, and recreation are discussed in detail in Chapter 5 (Standard Operating Procedures, Mitigation, and Monitoring) of this Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

3.12.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

All three alternatives (No Action Alternative, Alternative 1, and Alternative 2), as discussed in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS, remain the same for this Supplemental EIS/OEIS. The Navy conducted a review of existing federal and state regulations and standards relevant to socioeconomics, as well as a review of new literature, to include laws, regulations, and publications pertaining to socioeconomics. Although additional information relating to existing environmental conditions was found, the new information does not indicate an appreciable change to the existing environmental conditions as described in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS. Because the existing conditions have not changed appreciably, and no new Navy training activities are being proposed to occur in the TMAA in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS, re-analysis of the alternatives with respect to socioeconomics is not warranted. Subsequently, the conclusions made for the alternatives analyzed in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS remain unchanged in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

3.12.3 CONCLUSION

As described above, there is new information on existing environmental conditions with regard to socioeconomics. However, this new information does not change the affected environment, which forms the environmental baseline of the socioeconomics analysis in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS. Additionally, no new Navy training activities are being proposed in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS that would affect socioeconomics in the TMAA. Therefore, conclusions for socioeconomic impacts made for

the alternatives analyzed in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS remain unchanged in this Supplemental EIS/OEIS. For a summary of effects of the No Action Alternative, Alternative 1, and Alternative 2 on socioeconomics under both the National Environmental Policy Act and Executive Order 12114, please refer to Table 3.12-1 (Summary Effects by Alternative) in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS.

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