THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE FISHERIES FOR CHIONOE CETES
SPP. (DECAPODA, OREGONI IDAE) IN ALASKAN WATERS

BY

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ABSTRACT

An overview of commercial fisheries for Chionoceetes crabs in Alaskan waters is provided, including stock assessment, harvest strategies, and trends in harvest and population size. Although a sum of peak harvests for individual Chionoeetes fisheries total more than 200,000 metric tons (t), the harvest from these fisheries during the 2008/09 season was less than 30,000 t. Most Alaskan Chionoceetes fisheries have stock assessment surveys that provide high quality data, although the data for some stocks is available for only short time periods. There is a need for improvements to habitat mapping and estimation of stock assessment model parameters, as well as a review of the effectiveness of proxy thresholds.

INTRODUCTION

Alaskan Chionoceetes fisheries are prosecuted in 11 major management areas (fig. 1). Tanner crab (Chionoeetes bairdi (Rathbun, 1924)) are harvested from the eastern Bering Sea (EBS) to Southeast Alaska, snow crab (Chionoeetes opilio (Fabricius, 1788)) from the EBS, and grooved (Chionoeetes tanneri (Rathbun, 1893)) and triangle (Chionoeetes angulatus (Rathbun, 1893)) Tanner crab from the EBS and Aleutian Islands to Southeast Alaska.

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The State of Alaska has jurisdiction over all fisheries inside territorial waters up to three miles offshore. These fisheries are managed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), according to regulations promulgated by the Alaska Board of Fisheries. Federal water jurisdiction extends from three to 200 miles offshore. In general, fisheries in Federal waters are managed by NOAA Fisheries according to regulations put in place by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC). However, the State has sole management responsibility for Chionoecetes stocks, except for Tanner and snow crab in the EBS, where joint management occurs.

The base harvest strategy for Chionoecetes fisheries includes a closure during the male molt period, a male-only fishery, and a minimum size limit. The size limit for Tanner crab is 140 mm carapace width (CW) including spines, except in Prince William Sound, where it is 135 mm CW; for snow crab it is 78 mm CW, although industry preference is at least 102 mm CW.

The Alaskan Tanner crab fishery was pioneered by the Japanese and Russian fleets in the Bering Sea in 1965. Harvest methods were rapidly exported to the rest of the state, with domestic fisheries in the Kodiak area beginning in 1967, Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound in 1968, Southeast Alaska in