

fishery. The EFP required vessels to use EM systems on 100 percent of groundfish sector trips to verify regulated groundfish discards. EM was used in lieu of human observers to meet their sector ASM requirements. Thirteen vessels using a variety of gear types (e.g., hook, benthic longline, sink gillnet, bottom trawl) participated in the project. A total of 81 trips were completed in fishing year 2017. The EFP was renewed in fishing year 2018, adding exemptions to allow participating vessels to fish in closed areas during certain times of the year. A total of 258 trips suitable for quota monitoring were completed during fishing year 2018.

The project partners have submitted a renewal request for fishing year 2019. The proposed participant list includes 18 vessels, 16 of which participated in this EFP in fishing year 2018. Together, these vessels are expected to take an estimated 425 trips. The project partners expect that additional vessels may join the project in fishing year 2019.

Vessels participating in this EFP would be exempt from the regulations requiring them to adhere to their sector's ASM program, and instead would be required to use EM on 100 percent of groundfish trips. Camera systems would be used in lieu of human at-sea monitors, and in addition to Northeast Fishery Observer Program (NEFOP) observers. Vessels would adhere to a vessel-specific monitoring plan detailing at-sea catch handling protocols. Vessels would submit haul-level electronic vessel trip reports (eVTR) with count and weight estimates for all groundfish discards. Vessels would not be exempt from any other standard reporting and monitoring regulations.

The discard estimates provided in the eVTR would be used for catch accounting, and all catch of allocated groundfish would be deducted from the appropriate sector's allocation. The EM service provider would review the video footage and produce an EM summary report identifying, counting, and generating weight estimates for all groundfish discards. The provider would submit this report to NMFS. NMFS would compare the eVTR and EM summary file to ensure the submissions match within an established tolerance. If the trips do not match, the eVTR would not be used for catch accounting for that trip. For trips that carry a NEFOP observer, the NEFOP data would be used for catch accounting.

In previous years, the EM service provider reviewed 100 percent of the video footage at the outset of the fishing

year with the option to reduce this percentage mid-year as part of audit-model testing, with our approval. This option was never used. In fishing year 2019, based on statistical analysis of EFP trips from 2017 and 2018, the EM service provider would use a 50 percent audit target as part of audit model testing. Audit percentage may fluctuate as part of this testing, with our approval. Following the EM service provider's review, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center would conduct a secondary review of the EM summary reports for a subset of trips.

Because participating vessels would be fully monitored, project partners requested exemptions to access to closed areas, to incentivize participation and create additional fishing opportunities for healthy stocks. Vessels would be allowed to use hook gear and sink gillnets in Closed Area II from May 1 through February 15, hook gear in Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area, and jig gear in Cashes Ledge Closure Area.

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 9, 2019.

Jennifer M. Wallace,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 2019-07280 Filed 4-11-19; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XG927

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Acting Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries,

Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that an exempted fishing permit application submitted by The Nature Conservancy contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration. This exempted fishing permit would allow participants to use electronic monitoring systems in lieu of at-sea monitors in support of a study to develop electronic monitoring for catch monitoring in the Northeast multispecies fishery. Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on applications for proposed exempted fishing permits.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before April 29, 2019.

ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments by either of the following methods:

- **Email:** nmfs.gar.efp@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line "TNC EM EFP RENEWAL."
- **Mail:** Michael Pentony, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "TNC EM EFP RENEWAL."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Maria Vasta, Fishery Management Specialist; 978-281-9196; maria.vasta@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Northeast multispecies sectors are required to implement and fund an at-sea monitoring (ASM) program. Sectors may use electronic monitoring (EM) to satisfy this monitoring requirement, provided NMFS deems the technology sufficient for catch monitoring. NMFS has yet to approve EM as a suitable alternative to ASM. However, we are working with industry and other stakeholders to test the operational feasibility of EM and resolve outstanding issues that are barriers to implementation.

In fishing year 2016, The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance, the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, and fishermen enrolled in various groundfish sectors, obtained an exempted fishing permit (EFP) authorizing participant vessels to use EM in lieu of human observers to meet their ASM requirements. Project partners applied to renew this EFP in fishing years 2017 and 2018, and the EFP was reissued in both years.

TABLE 1—PARTICIPATION IN PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE PARTIAL AUDIT-MODEL EM EFP

Fishing year	Number of participant vessels	ASM coverage level (percent)
2016	14	14
2017	5	16
2018	5	15

On February 15, 2019, The Nature Conservancy, along with project partners, submitted a request to renew this EFP for the 2019 fishing year, as part of an ongoing effort to pilot EM in the fishery. Work conducted under the proposed EFP would help refine proposed standards for a comprehensive EM program in the groundfish fishery. The proposed participant list includes five vessels, all of which participated in this EFP in fishing year 2018. Together, they are expected to take an estimated 235 trips in fishing year 2019. At 31 percent observer coverage, this would equate to roughly 75 EFP trips.

Vessels participating in this EFP would use EM in lieu of human ASMs, and in addition to Northeast Fishery Observer Program (NEFOP) observers, on groundfish trips selected for observer coverage. Vessels would adhere to a vessel-specific Vessel Monitoring Plan (VMP) detailing at-sea catch handling protocols. An EM service provider would review 100 percent of the video footage. The provider would also produce an EM summary report identifying, counting, and generating weight estimates for all groundfish discards, which it would submit to the NMFS Greater Atlantic Fisheries Regional Office. These data would be used for catch accounting purposes on trips selected for ASM coverage. EM data would not be used for catch accounting in place of observer data on NEFOP trips. However, the information generated through this EM project could facilitate comparisons between cameras and human observers in the future. Following the EM service provider's review, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center would conduct a secondary review of the EM summary reports for all or a subset of EFP trips.

Under this EFP, participating vessels would be exempt from minimum fish size requirements (§ 648.83(a)) for Northeast multispecies, for sampling purposes only; and ocean pout, windowpane flounder, and Atlantic wolffish possession prohibitions (§ 648.86(l)), for sampling purposes only. Vessels would also be exempt from their sector's third-party monitoring program requirements (§ 648.87(b)(1)(v)(B)) only; all other

standard sector reporting and monitoring requirements, such as using dealer-reported landings and vessel trip reports, would still apply. Vessels would be assigned observer coverage at the fishing year 2019 ASM coverage level of 31 percent, which is a combination of NEFOP and ASM coverage. All catch of allocated groundfish stocks would be deducted from the appropriate sector's allocation. Legal-sized regulated groundfish would be retained and landed as required by the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Undersized groundfish would be handled according to the VMP guidelines in view of cameras and returned to the sea as quickly as possible. All other species would be handled per normal commercial fishing operations. No legal-size regulated groundfish would be discarded, unless otherwise permitted through regulatory exemptions granted to the participating vessel's sector.

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 9, 2019.

Jennifer M. Wallace,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XG946

Meeting of the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of open public meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice sets forth the proposed schedule and agenda of a forthcoming meeting of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee's (MAFAC's) Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force (CBP Task Force). The CBP

Task Force will discuss the issues outlined in the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** below.

DATES: The meeting will be held April 23, 2019 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. PT and on April 24, 2019 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. PT.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront, 1401 SW Naito Pkwy., Portland, OR 97201; 503-226-7600.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Katherine Cheney; NFMS West Coast Region; 503-231-6730; email: Katherine.Cheney@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Notice is hereby given of a meeting of MAFAC's CBP Task Force. The MAFAC was established by the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) and, since 1971, advises the Secretary on all living marine resource matters that are the responsibility of the Department of Commerce. The MAFAC charter and meeting information are located online at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/partners#marine-fisheries-advisory-committee>. The CBP Task Force reports to MAFAC and is being convened to develop recommendations for long-term goals to meet Columbia Basin salmon recovery, conservation needs, and harvest opportunities, in the context of habitat capacity and other factors that affect salmon mortality. More information is available at the CBP Task Force web page: http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/columbia_river/index.html.

Matters To Be Considered

The meeting time and agenda are subject to change. Meeting topics include beginning phase II work to explore options and strategies for achieving the provisional quantitative goals and the qualitative goals recommended through the phase I work.

Special Accommodations

The meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Katherine Cheney, 503-231-6730, by April 17, 2019.

Dated: April 9, 2019.

Jennifer L. Lukens,
Federal Program Officer, Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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