

Mixed Results for State of Fish Stocks in Alaska

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The National Marine Fisheries Service released its report to Congress last week on the state of U.S. Fisheries, noting that many stocks have rebounded, though some remain overfished - especially in New England waters.

The report showed six more U.S. fish species once considered overfished rebounded to healthy levels in 2011. That brings the number of rebuilt fish stocks in the past 11 years to 27.

The report also said 45 of 219 fish populations, or 21 percent, are considered overfished. Thirteen of those are in New England, the most of any geographic region.

Here in Alaska, two species of crab, Pribilof Blue Kings and Southern Bering Sea Tanners, are considered overfished, while Walleye Pollock are on the upswing and Bering Sea Snow Crab are declared rebuilt.

Bob Foy, director of the Kodiak Laboratory of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, regularly leads stock surveys into the Bering Sea. He said "rebuilt" means a stock has achieved enough biomass to sustain a commercial fishery.

The snow crab, which are now considered rebuilt, were declared overfished in 1999 and declared rebuilt in 2011.

It's a different story for Pribilof Blue King Crab, which was declared overfished in 2002. Foy said the 10-year rebuilding plan put in place in 2002 did not accomplish its goal and a new one is being developed by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

Southern

Tanner Crab were declared overfished in 2010 and the directed fishery for them was closed last year.

Jim Ianelli

is lead stock assessment scientist at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center in Seattle. He says the Walleye Pollock biomass in the Eastern Bering Sea is greater than 80 percent of the maximum sustained yield biomass of 2-million tons of spawning females. He said there will be two surveys of pollock this summer, including further up in the water column, where younger pollock are often found.