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NOAA doubles Gulf of Maine winter flounder catch limits
New science shows overfishing has ended

NOAA announced today that it is doubling the amount of Gulf of Maine winter flounder commercial fishermen can catch from almost 510,000 pounds to more than 1.1 million pounds for the current fishing season, which ends April 30. New scientific information shows that overfishing is no longer occurring on this important fish stock.

This past year, NOAA scientists completed a new Gulf of Maine winter flounder stock assessment using three years of additional catch data and a more sophisticated stock assessment model. The assessment shows that fishing effort was well within the sustainable level, allowing catch limits to be increased.

“Raising catch limits for Gulf of Maine winter flounder is good news for fishermen and fishing communities,” said Sam Rauch, acting assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “Increased catch levels will provide important economic benefits at a time when there is significant concern about the status of the Gulf of Maine cod stock.”

The potential revenue increase from the new catch limit using recent average prices from fishing years 2007-2010 could be as high as \$1.2 million if the entire catch limit is actually landed by fishing vessels. Also, since fishermen are no longer constrained by the currently low Gulf of Maine winter flounder catch limit, they can target other groundfish stocks which may lead to another source of increased revenues.

Catch limits for this fishing season had been set by the New England Fishery Management Council based on the 2008 Gulf of Maine winter flounder stock assessment, which contained catch and survey information compiled through 2007.

In June 2011, NOAA scientists completed a new assessment of the Gulf of Maine winter flounder stock. With three years of additional catch data, which enabled the use of a more sophisticated stock assessment model, NOAA was able to determine that fishing effort was well below what can sustainably be taken from this fish stock, so the catch limit increases are warranted.

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