

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM INFORMATION REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS - FINAL ACTION

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed the current Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) boundary lines within the former Cowcod Conservation Areas (CCA) and recommends the following for Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) consideration for 2024.

As part of Amendment 32, which is anticipated to become effective in early 2024, the Council recommended removing CCA restrictions for the non-trawl commercial and recreational sectors. Because CCA restrictions have been in place since 2001, lines that approximate depth contours for use as potential RCA boundaries have never been established around the islands and banks located within the CCA. Therefore, the Council recommended defining new fathom lines around islands and banks that reside inside the current CCA as part of the implementing regulations for Amendment 32. Specifically, the Council recommended that coordinates be defined in the regulations for the 50, 60, 75, 100, 125, and 150 fm lines around Santa Barbara Island, San Nicolas Island, Cortes Bank, and Tanner Bank, and the 150 fm (274 m) line around Osborn Bank and the Eastern CCA (Figure 1). However, Amendment 32 did not identify specific shoreward and seaward RCA boundary lines for use in the 2024 fisheries as part of that action. The consistency with the RCA lines in use along the mainland coast and Channel Islands south of Point Conception (34° 27' N. lat.) will reduce regulatory complexity for stakeholders, and provide a precautionary approach to opening these areas in the former CCA.

The GMT has identified a conservation need for implementing RCAs in the former CCA because (1) recreational fishing may increase fishing pressure in areas, which were historically closed for some or all of the year, and this anticipated increase in anglers may increase catch of constraining species such as copper rockfish, vermilion/sunset rockfish and/ or species with prohibited retention such as bronzespotted rockfish, and cowcod. Similarly (2) commercial fisheries operating in these depths around the listed islands and banks may increase the likelihood of interactions with prohibited species (e.g., cowcod and bronzespotted rockfish). Therefore, a precautionary approach should be taken to maintain some protection for species that are susceptible to commercial and recreational fishing in those depths and areas. Additionally, the consistency in areas formerly closed by the CCA with the RCA lines in use along the mainland coast and Channel Islands south of Point Conception (34° 27' N. lat.) will reduce regulatory complexity for stakeholders.

The GMT recommends implementation of the 100 and 150 fm lines for non-trawl commercial fisheries around Santa Barbara Island, San Nicolas Island, as well as Tanner and Cortes Banks (Figure 2). The GMT recommends implementation of the 50 fm line for recreational fisheries around Santa Barbara Island, San Nicolas Island, as well as Tanner and Cortes Banks when the “offshore only” fishery occurs in the Southern Management Area (i.e., south of Point Conception), meaning fishing would be required seaward of the 50 fm contour line (Figure 3). When the all-depth fishery is in effect, fishing could occur anywhere in the area. As mentioned above, the implementing regulations for Amendment 32 would only define a single 150 fm contour surrounding the Eastern CCA and Osborn Bank. The Eastern CCA will be primarily covered by the 43 fm Spot Groundfish Exclusion Area and therefore

the GMT does not find it necessary to implement an RCA at this time. To reduce regulatory complexity the GMT does not find it necessary to implement the 150 fm RCA around Osborn Bank at this time. The GMT will closely monitor fishing activity around these banks in early 2024 and take necessary inseason action if constraining species are encountered.

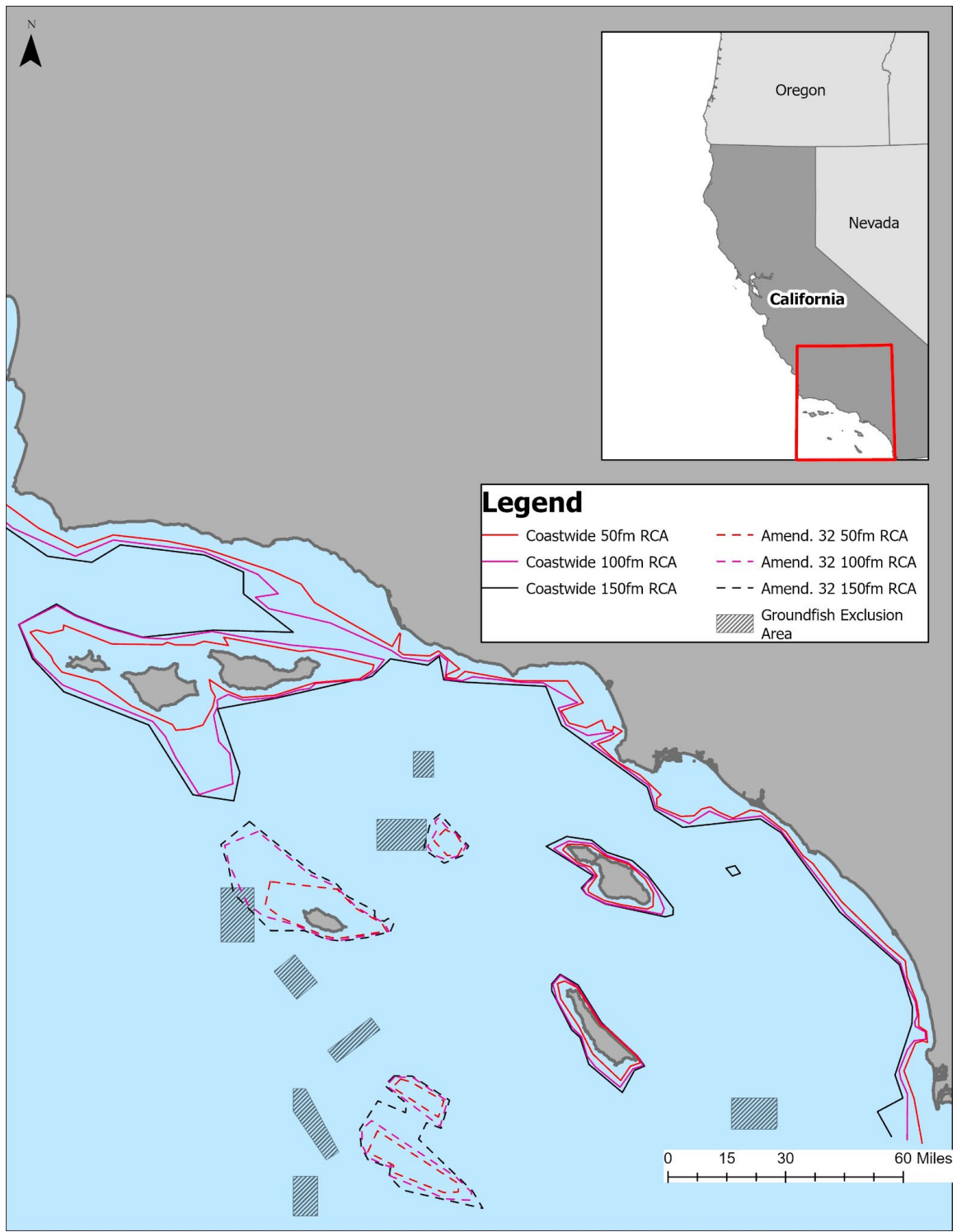


Figure 1. Southern California Bight showing RCA lines currently in regulation (solid lines), new RCA lines (dashed lines) and Groundfish Exclusion Areas (dashed polygons) that will be created as part of Amendment 32.

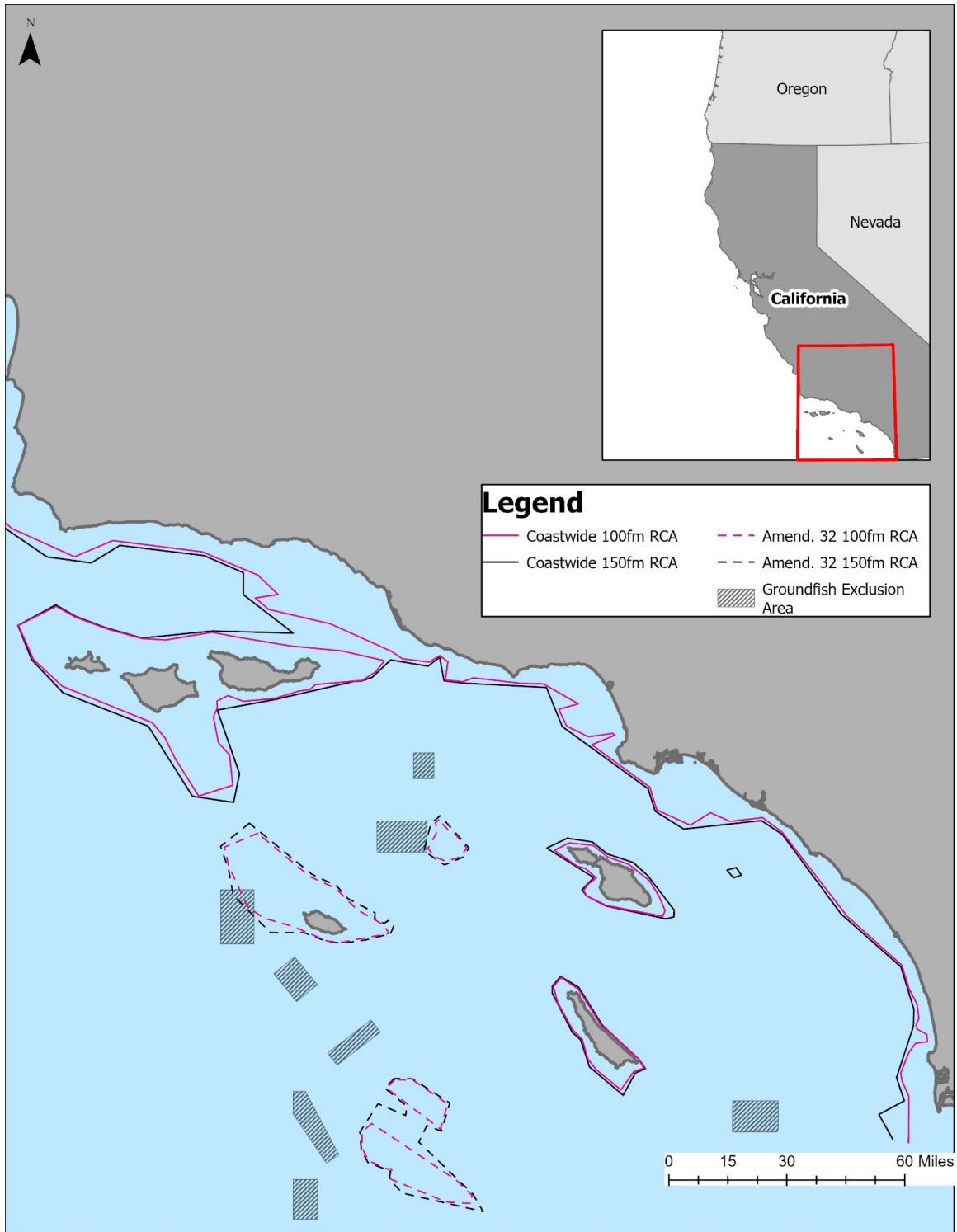


Figure 2. Southern California Bight showing current commercial RCA lines in regulation (solid lines), new commercial RCA lines (dashed lines) and Groundfish Exclusion Areas (dashed polygons) that will be created as part of Amendment 32. The dashed RCA lines will be turned on upon repeal of the CCA if the Council accepts the GMT's recommendations.

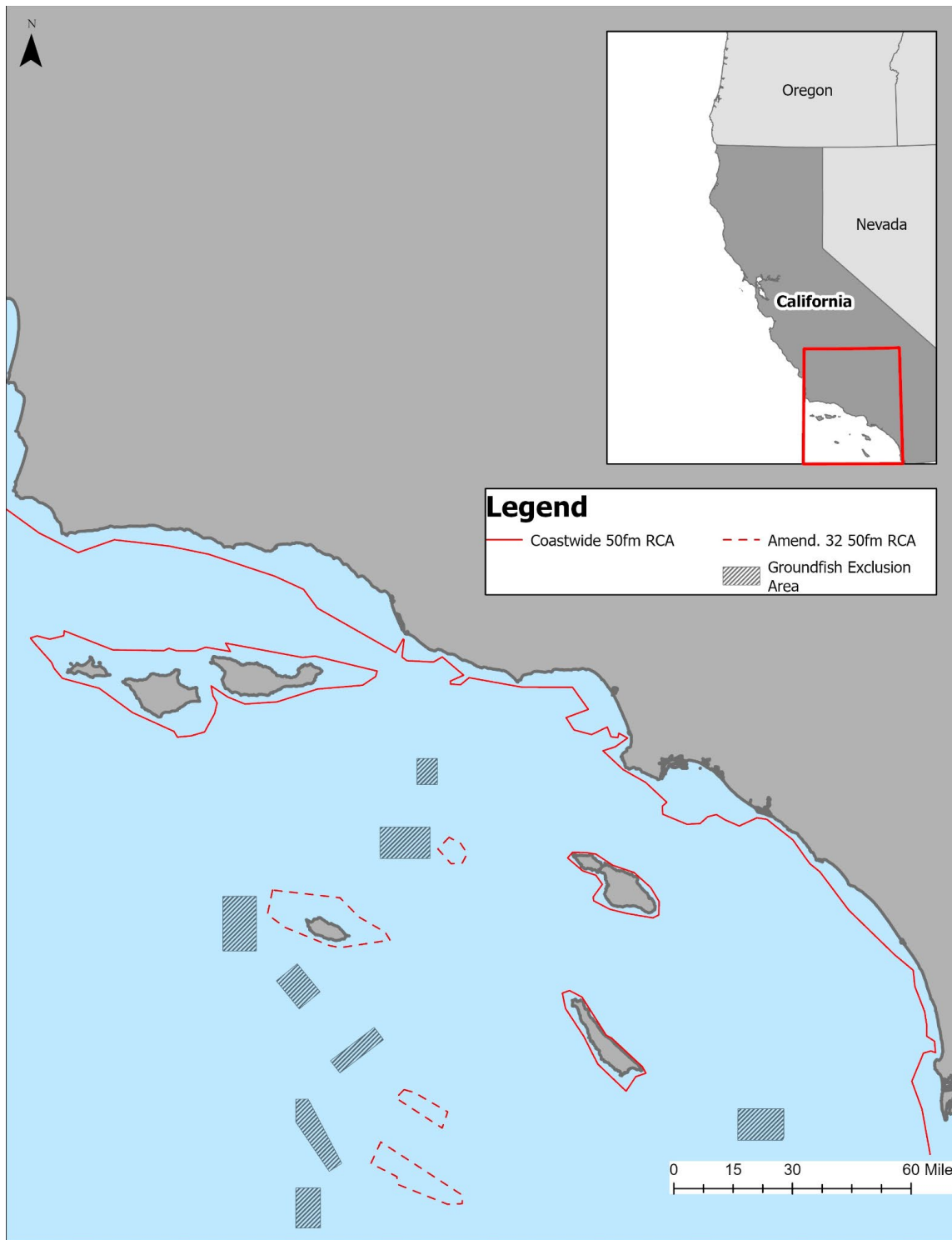


Figure 3. Southern California Bite showing current recreational 50 fm RCA lines in regulation (solid lines), new recreational 50 fm RCA lines (dashed lines) and Groundfish Exclusion Areas (dashed polygons) that will be created as part of Amendment 32. The dashed RCA lines will be turned on upon repeal of the CCA if the Council accepts the GMT's recommendations.

PFMC
11/06/23