

No new protection for Atlantic bluefin tuna

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The Atlantic bluefin tuna, a fabled sport fish that has sustained a sharp decline to serve the sushi restaurants of Osaka and Tokyo, was rejected Friday for a place on the endangered species list.

Once sought after by Ernest Hemingway, Zane Grey and other anglers in the Florida Straits, the tuna has become such an expensive delicacy that fishing fleets hunt them down with spotter planes and haul them from the ocean on longlines. A single high-quality tuna can fetch up to \$150,000 at Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market, where top restaurants bid against each other for tunas with the highest fat content.

From 1970 to 2007 the western Atlantic tuna population's spawning stock declined by 82 percent, according to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas. From 1955 to 2007, the eastern stock declined by 72 percent. About three-quarters of the world catch goes to Japan.

The National Marine Fisheries Service announced Friday it would deny a petition by the environmental group Center for Biological Diversity to extend endangered

species protection to the species. The U.S. said that the tuna is unlikely to go extinct, provided that fishing countries abide by quotas set by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

"Based on careful scientific review, we have decided the best way to ensure the long-term sustainability of bluefin tuna is through international cooperation and strong domestic fishery management," said Eric Schwaab, assistant National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration administrator for fisheries. "The United States will continue to be a leader in advocating science-based quotas at ICCAT, full compliance with these quotas and other management measures to ensure the long-term viability of this and other important fish stocks."

There remains concern about the impact of the BP oil spill, which took place in its spawning grounds, and the agency said it would revisit the decision in early 2013.