

Groundfishers seek to restrict herring trawlers

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SACO — Two Maine-based commercial fishing groups said Thursday they are filing a petition with federal regulators asking that herring trawlers be banned from certain fishing grounds in New England.

Earthjustice, a national law firm based in California, filed the petition with the secretary of commerce on behalf of the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance and the Midcoast Fishermen's Association, said Roger Fleming, an Earthjustice attorney in Maine.

At a press conference, the groups said the trawlers use massive nets with small holes to catch herring in areas that are closed to boats fishing for cod, haddock and other groundfish. The petition seeks to have herring fishermen banned from the same areas that are closed to other fishermen.

"If our fishing industry is going to survive, we need to stop overfishing and protect spawning grounds, not leave them open to giant midwater trawlers that wipe out everything in their path," said Craig Pendleton of the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance.

The secretary of commerce could grant the petition, reject it or refer it to the New England Fishery Management Council, Fleming said.

Herring fishermen say efforts to restrict their activities are based more on politics than on science.

Critics are exaggerating the amount of groundfish inadvertently caught in herring nets, said Peter Moore of Freeport, who represents herring and mackerel fishermen who sell to shore-side processors. But conservation groups have made herring fishermen their latest political target, he said.

"It's the campaign of the

moment," he said.

