

How Low Can You Go?

RCC Jan 2007 - 73, Don NX7J

Prior to 1968, amateur class licensees of General (Conditional) and higher had full amateur radio spectrum privileges below 30 MHz. In the fall of 1968, the first phase of the incentive licensing program was introduced and certain band segments were restricted to Advanced and Extra class licensees. That change produced a major controversy for which many blamed the ARRL as being responsible for the loss of privileges that most hams experienced. While those wounds may seem to have healed, you will still hear an occasional discussion on the air about that reassignment, and are again reminded that some are still angry with the ARRL even after nearly 40 years have passed.

In the meantime, numerous changes to the allocation of band segments by class of license have been made. In most cases, these reallocations have been an expansion of the phone band into what was exclusively CW (or other narrow modes) segments. Most of these expansions have been relatively minor involving a 25 KHz segment at a time expansion of the phone band at the expense of CW. However a recent notice of rule making from the FCC has made an extensive change which is shown on the band plan chart accompanying this news letter (used with ARRL permission). Of the changes being implemented, the 75/ 80 meter band plan is the most extensive:

80 Meters Freq in KHz Phone Current Revised		
General	3850-4000	3800-4000
Advanced	3775-4000	3700-4000
Extra	3750-4000	3600-4000

These changes leave only 3500 to 3600 KHz for narrow band modes including CW, RTTY, Packtor and other digital modes. When the FCC initially proposed the bandwidth for the CW portion of the spectrum, it was limited to 500 Hz or less. This restriction effectively eliminated some of the newer digital modes from the HF bands. The ARRL petitioned for reconsideration and the FCC has now issued an addendum to restore the digital modes inadvertently eliminated in the initial proposed rule making. However, the new allocation will still require a significant shift of operation of digital modes to below 3600 KHz. ARRL has stated that a new band plan defining suggested areas of operations for different modes and activities is pending.

The changes represented on the chart become effective December 15, 2006. You should consult them for all HF operations since there are changes in many of those bands.

Hopefully these changes will enhance your enjoyment of the hobby if you are a SSB enthusiast. Unfortunately they are not as beneficial for the CW and digital mode folks. However it is the narrow bandwidth modes that have lost band space and they can generally get by with more QSOs per KHz. Hopefully that will work for them. In any case, it will likely take a few months to sort out and we will likely hear opinions and complaints just as we did 38 years ago when the first incentive licensing program began adjusting band/mode segments.