

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

POLICY DECISION

POLICY TITLE: Puget Sound Crab Fishery

POLICY NUMBER: C-3609

Supersedes: C-3609 effective 2/5/2000

Effective Date: October 1, 2010

See Also: WAC 220-16-260

Termination Date: N/A

Approved: 
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife policy direction in meeting the dual mission of preserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats while providing fish and wildlife related recreational and commercial opportunities as it relates to the Puget Sound Dungeness crab resource.

Definition and Intent

This policy provides guidance for state managed fisheries of Dungeness crab (*Cancer magister*) in Washington State waters east of the Bonilla-Tatoosh line (crab management regions 1-6). In establishing this policy direction for Puget Sound, the Fish and Wildlife Commission considered the state-wide harvest of Dungeness crab from the perspective of meeting the needs of the consumer, the commercial harvesters, and the recreational fishers of Washington.

General Policy Statement

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) shall promote a healthy and sustainable population of Dungeness crab in Puget Sound and work cooperatively with the Tribal Co-Managers in structuring management measures to ensure a healthy and sustainable resource and achieves a fair sharing of the harvestable resource.

The management intent is to provide for meaningful and stable recreational and commercial fisheries and to focus the commercial fishery in the areas where the crab abundance is the greatest. In recognition of the small boat nature of the recreational fishery, the protected waters that Puget Sound provides small boats, and the growing interest in the Puget Sound Dungeness crab fishery, the following season structure is established as the base recreational season for Puget Sound.

- July – Labor Day
- 5 days per week, including weekends
- October – December Winter Season (7 days/week)
- 5 crab daily bag limit

The Department shall provide an annual summary report and briefing describing for each management region the performance and harvest of both commercial and recreational fisheries. In addition, the Department will report on regulation compliance data collected by enforcement and fishery management staff

Policy Guidelines

- Continue to follow the scientifically recognized best practice known as the “3-S” system for crab management. The 3-S system includes a “sex” restriction that allows only male crabs to be retained that are over the minimum “size” to protect the reproductive ability of the population, and “seasons” that protect sensitive molting periods.
- Minimize, as practical, bycatch mortalities of Dungeness crab that occur in other fisheries
- Continue to refine the methods to provide accurate and timely estimates of the recreational and commercial catch of Dungeness crab harvests.
- Develop and implement enhanced enforcement strategies to improve compliance with fishing regulations and ensure orderly fisheries.
- Pursue communication, education, and enforcement strategies to enhance compliance with regulations pertaining to sex and size limits and the recording and reporting of catches.
- Develop and implement cooperative education and outreach programs with the sport fishing community and organized fishing groups to assist the Department in improving sport fishing rule compliance.
- Provide easily accessible information to the public regarding the fishery rules including website information to educate the public on fishery rules, a shellfish rules hotline, and pages in the sport pamphlet devoted to information regarding the rules that govern this fishery.
- Working with stakeholders, develop and implement strategies to reduce and remove derelict crab pots and associated fishing gear.
- Recognizing the significant differences relative to the abundance of crab in each of the Department’s six crab management regions, the following policies are established for the sharing of the Dungeness crab resource within the state share of the harvestable resource pursuant to the applicable annual state-tribal management plan and U.S. v. Washington.

- Region 1 – In priority order, provide for the recreational seasons prescribed in the General Policy. Provide the commercial fishery harvest opportunities beginning in the early fall time-frame and manage it in a manner that maximizes the ex-vessel value, avoids conflict with the tribal fishery, and results in a high quality product for the consumer.
 - Region 2 – In priority order, provide for the recreational seasons prescribed in the General Policy. Provide the commercial fishery harvest opportunities beginning in the early fall time-frame and manage it in a manner that maximizes the ex-vessel value, avoids conflict with the tribal fishery, and results in a high quality product for the consumer. State fisheries in Port Townsend Bay will be managed for the primary benefit of the recreational fishery.
 - Region 3 - In priority order, provide for the recreational seasons prescribed in the General Policy. Provide the commercial fishery harvest opportunities beginning in the early fall time-frame and manage it in a manner that maximizes the ex-vessel value, avoids conflict with the tribal fishery, and results in a high quality product for the consumer. State fisheries in Discovery Bay, Sequim Bay, Port Angeles Harbor, and Dungeness Bay will be managed for the primary benefit of the recreational fishery.
 - Regions 4, 5, and 6 - The state fishery in these areas will be managed for the exclusive benefit of the recreational fishery. Seasons will be structured consistent with the recreational season described in the General Policy and managed to stay within the state share of the harvestable resource.
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Approved October 1, 2010
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission
October 1-2, 2010, meeting in Olympia