



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA

January 2, 2018

The Honorable Kevin Van De Wege
Washington State Senator
212 John A. Cherberg Building
Post Office Box 40424
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Brian Blake
Washington State Representative
314 John L. O'Brien Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Senator Van De Wege and Representative Blake:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife is required to submit a report to the legislature regarding the removal and disposal of derelict shellfish gear, including the allocation of funds for this purpose received through the sale of Dungeness Crab endorsements. Requirements for the report to the legislature are outlined in RCW 77.32.430, Section 5(a):

“(5)(a) The funds received from the sale of catch record cards, catch card penalty fees, and the Dungeness crab endorsement must be deposited into the state wildlife account created in RCW 77.12.170. One dollar of the funds received from the sale of each Dungeness crab endorsement must be used for the removal and disposal of derelict shellfish gear either directly by the department or under contract with a third party. The department is required to maintain a separate accounting of these funds and provide an annual report to the commission and the legislature by January 1st of every year. The remaining portion of the funds received from the sale of each Dungeness crab endorsement must be used for education, sampling, monitoring, and management of catch associated with the Dungeness crab recreational fisheries.”

Please find (attached) a report including background on the issue and a summary of the Department's activities and expenditures. If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Raquel Crosier, WDFW's Legislative Liaison, at (360) 902-2226.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Unsworth".

James Unsworth, Ph.D.
Director



Derelict Shellfish Gear Annual Report

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

January 3, 2018



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

Background:

Abandoned, lost, or discarded crab fishing pots in the waters of Puget Sound pose a threat to sea life and can degrade marine habitat. These lost crab pots – estimated at about 12,000 a year – can continue to catch and kill crab and other marine life, depleting key resources important to the ecosystem of Puget Sound and the region's economy.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), tribal co-managers and other organizations are working to help remove this derelict shellfish gear from Puget Sound. A portion of the funds WDFW receives from the sale of Puget Sound Dungeness Crab Endorsements – necessary to recreationally fish for crab in the Sound – go directly to this effort.

This work will not only improve the marine environment, but also help ensure crab populations remain sustainable, providing for commercial, tribal and recreational fishing opportunities that are economically important to the Puget Sound region.

To fulfill requirements of RCW 77.32.430

Dedicated derelict shellfish gear recovery funds expended in 2017: \$42,228



Activities and expenditures in 2017:

- **WDFW contracts with the Northwest Straits Foundation to find and remove derelict shellfish gear** while the crab fishing season is closed. Using funds dedicated for this effort (\$1 from each endorsement sold), a total of \$11,055 was expended on the Northwest Straits Foundation contract and \$31,173 was spent on vessel support. In 2017, the Northwest Straits Foundation focused on outreach and education, but plans to increase efforts to detect and remove derelict shellfish gear this year.
- **WDFW enforcement officers and biologists, in coordination with treaty tribal co-managers, conducted “crab pot sweeps”** during the popular summer recreational crab fishery. The sweeps, funded by additional revenue from the sale of crab endorsements, took place on Tuesdays and Wednesdays when the recreational fishery was closed each week during the season. In 2017, this effort removed 2,392 crab pots from Puget Sound, including 600 pots fishing illegally in U.S. waters. A total of 33 WDFW enforcement officers and six shellfish staff worked 30 days on the water, and additional days returning pots or disposing of the gear. Overall, WDFW biological staff in 2017 spent 1,622 hours on gear sweeps, documentation, outreach, and pot disposal.

Recovered crab pots:

WDFW tries to return crab pots that are marked with contact information to the owners, along with helpful information on how to prevent the loss of gear. Crab pots that cannot be returned or lack contact information are sold at auction or disassembled and disposed of as scrap iron.

