



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 43200, Olympia, WA 98504-3200 • (360) 902-2200 • TDD (360) 902-2207
Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA

December 30, 2020

The Honorable Kevin Van De Wege
Chair, Senate Agriculture, Water,
Natural Resources, and Parks
212 John A. Cherberg Building
Post Office Box 40424
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Mike Chapman
Chair, House Rural Development,
Natural Resources, and Parks
132B Legislative Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chairpersons Van De Wege and Chapman:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) 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 Tom McBride, WDFW Legislative Director, at (360) 480-1472.

Sincerely,

Kelly Sussewind
Director

Derelict Shellfish Gear

Report to the Legislature



December 30, 2020



Table of Contents

Background 2

2020 Activities and Expenditures 3

2020 Crab Gear Whale Entanglement Efforts..... 5

2020 Electronic Harvest Reporting.....6



Background

Abandoned, lost, or discarded crab fishing pots in the waters of Puget Sound pose a threat to sea life and can degrade marine habitats. 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 received from the sale of Puget Sound Dungeness Crab Endorsements, a supplemental catch accounting license necessary to recreationally fish for crab in the Sound, go directly to this effort.

This work continues to improve the marine environment and helps to ensure crab populations remain sustainable; providing 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 2020: \$175,136





2020 Activities and Expenditures

WDFW contracts with the Northwest Straits Foundation to find and remove derelict shellfish gear while the crab fishing season is closed. Using funds dedicated to this effort (\$1 from each crab endorsement sold), a total of \$95,486 was expended on the Northwest Straits Foundation contract to detect derelict pots using side-scan sonar. Through these efforts, a total of 138 derelict pots were recovered which included 50 commercial pots and 88 recreational pots. Trapped inside the recovered pots were 89 live and 12 dead Dungeness crab, illustrating the need to remove derelict pots that continue to fish.

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 2020, this effort removed 1,410 crab pots from Puget Sound, including recreational, State commercial and Treaty commercial pots. A total of 1,893 legal size male crabs were released from these traps when they were recovered. A total of 31 WDFW enforcement officers and 6 shellfish staff worked 53 days on the water, and additional days returning pots or disposing of the gear.

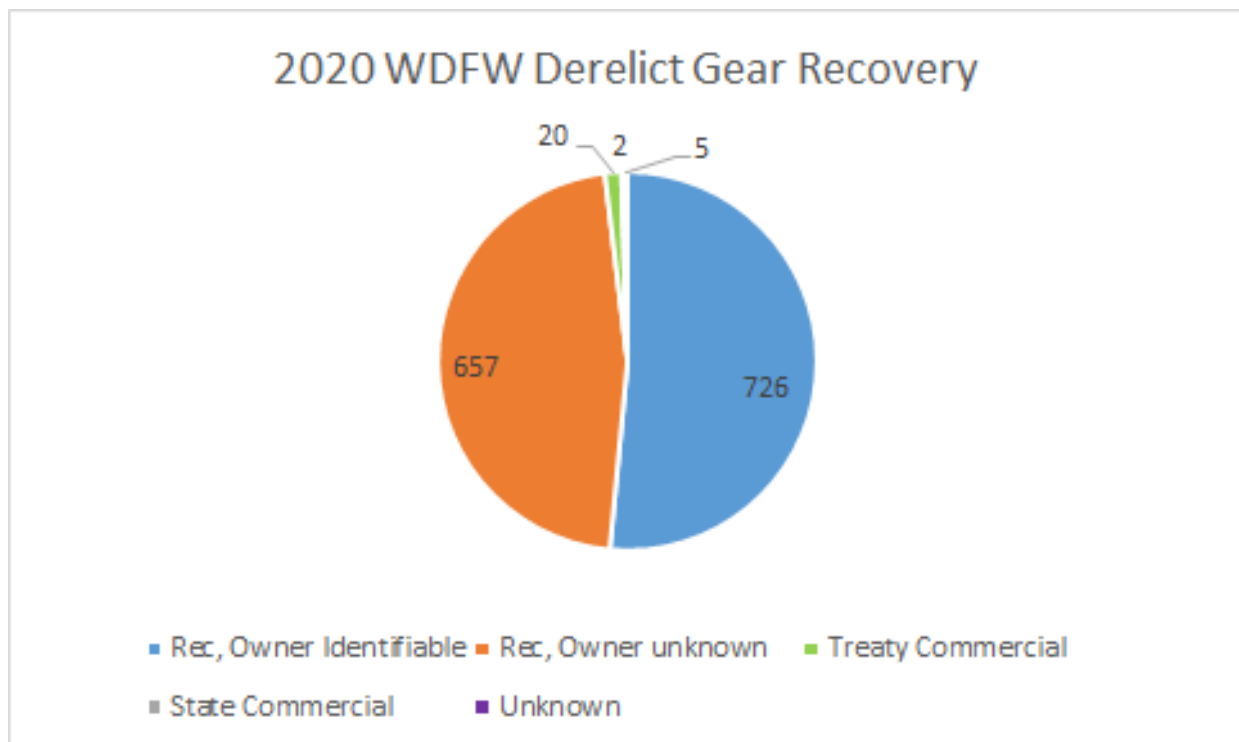
The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to conducting this work safely in 2020. WDFW staff had to attest to a COVID-19 screening and did not ride in the same vehicles on the roads. Officers and staff were masked and distanced when aboard vessels recovering traps,



Persons who had properly marked their buoys with full name and mailing address as required by law were contacted by mail to arrange a time for retrieving their trap. Crabbers were required to bring their notice, wear a mask, and maintain distance when picking up their trap. In some cases, warnings or citations were issued. WDFW staff would relay suggestions to each crabber about steps that could be done to prevent gear loss in the future.

Overall, WDFW biological staff in 2020 spent \$79,650 on gear sweeps, documentation, outreach, gear return, and pot disposal.

In addition, WDFW Enforcement officers spent a total of 2,347 hours conducting recreational crab shellfish patrols ensuring regulatory compliance on both open and closed days.

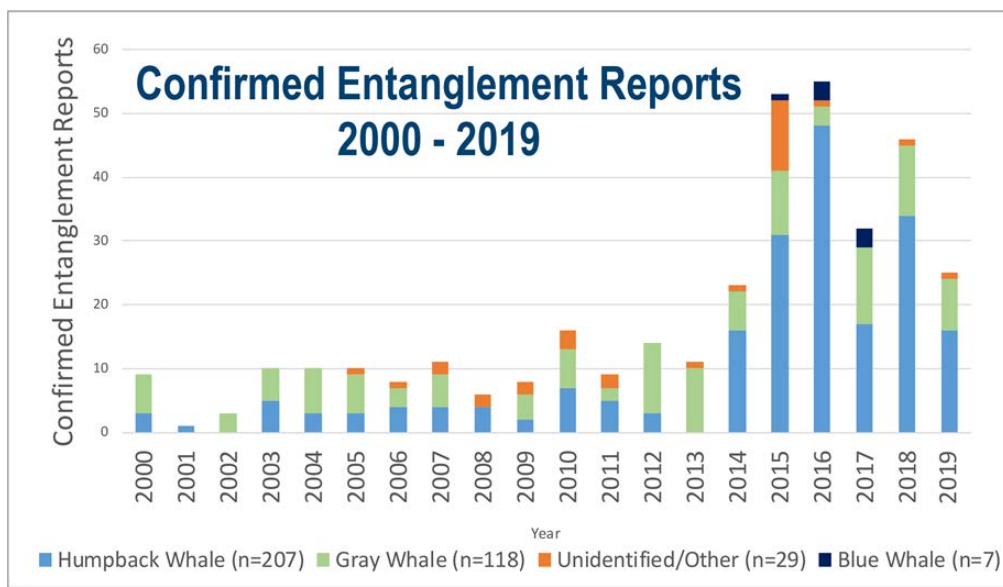


2020 Crab Gear Whale Entanglement Risk Reduction

Coexisting Whales and Crab Fisheries

The coastal Dungeness crab fishery has had interactions with gray whales and humpback whales, which have increased in recent years. In addition to gray whales, which are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, two Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed distinct population segments of humpback whales feed in Washington's summertime coastal waters that overlaps with the crab fishery. Coastal Dungeness crab is the state's highest-value fishery, and also one of its most sustainably managed. In 2020, WDFW requested and received funding for a dedicated position to develop and submit a federal permit application, to work with the Washington Whale Working Group and crab fishery participants on conservation measures and entanglement reduction, and to ensure ongoing compliance with ESA requirements. WDFW staff worked with stakeholders to develop regulatory measures, including a reduced summer pot limit and an expanded coastal derelict gear recovery program, to immediately reduce the risk of entanglements. These measures, along with continued management and monitoring, will allow WDFW to effectively manage the coastal Dungeness crab resource in a way that provides Washington with a robust Dungeness crab fishery operating alongside healthy populations of marine mammals, including recovering threatened humpback whales.

The Department is requesting \$172,000 ongoing to meet the needs of the coastal commercial crab fishery, as well as the needs of humpback whales. The Governor's proposed supplemental budget provides full funding from a mix of state general fund and the Washington Coast Crab Pot Buoy Tag Account to achieve this goal.



NOAA: Confirmed US west coast whale entanglements by year and species, 2000 to 2019



2020 Electronic Harvest Reporting

Washington Electronic Harvest Reporting (WA-TIX)

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's development team are currently working on an electronic reporting and monitoring software system (WA-TIX) for non-tribal commercial and tribal fishers in Washington State Coastal and Puget Sound waters. With few exceptions, Washington State coastal and Puget Sound commercial fisheries catch reporting remains largely a paper-based process unchanged since 1970. The WA-TIX web and mobile apps will aid in effort toward a digital process and will build on previous successful but incomplete pilot efforts already put in place by the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC), the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). In late November 2020, WDFW internal stakeholders tested the WA-TIX iOS (Apple) mobile and web app with early access for shellfish species. The testers were able to provide helpful feedback in sharing their user experiences. On December 16, 2020, the development team provided a demo of their progress in incorporating the tester feedback in a meeting with WDFW internal stakeholders and public volunteer testers. Volunteer non-tribal users will begin alpha testing in late December 2020 and their feedback will be incorporated into the final version of the apps, estimated to be available to the public and in the AppStore in late January 2021.