



Meeting Summary Oregon Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery May 2026 Public Meetings

Overview

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) held three public meetings, all with webinar and call-in options, to discuss the Oregon commercial Dungeness crab fishery. Meetings were held on May 7th at the North Bend Public Library, May 12th at the Oregon Coast Community College's Newport Campus, and May 14th at the Astoria Public Library. At each meeting, ODFW provided updates related to marine life entanglement and an opportunity for industry and other interested parties to provide input on planned agenda items for the August 2026 Oregon and Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting, which includes the five-year evaluation of Oregon's existing risk reduction measures, proposed electronic vessel monitoring requirements, and a proposal to establish a popup and longline experimental fishing gear permit program.

Attendance

- **Thursday, May 7th – North Bend**
Attendance: 15 members of the public in person and 12 online.
- **Tuesday, May 12th – Newport**
Attendance: 9 members of the public in person and 18 online.
- **Thursday, May 14th – Astoria**
Attendance: 17 members of the public in person and 14 online.

ODFW Updates: Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Petition (slide 4 of [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW provided an update on a petition submitted by representatives from the Center for Biological Diversity, Oceana, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the American Cetacean Society. The petition proposed a range of regulatory changes related to popup gear, late-season vertical line restrictions, public notification of entanglements, and emergency closures following entanglement events. At the February 20th Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) meeting, ODFW presented a review of the current entanglement record, existing risk reduction measures, ongoing Conservation Plan (CP) work, and planned rulemaking efforts. The petition generated substantial written comments and public testimony. After deliberation, the Commission voted to deny the petition and directed ODFW staff to continue with their planned rulemaking processes and ongoing coordination with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to secure Endangered Species Act (ESA) coverage.

ODFW Updates: Planned Future Rulemaking (slide 5 of [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW provided an overview of the rulemaking efforts it plans to bring to the Commission at their August 2026 meeting. This package will include the five-year evaluation of Oregon's existing risk reduction measures, proposed electronic vessel monitoring requirements, and a proposal to establish a popup and longline experimental fishing gear permit program. In addition to these items, ODFW is also considering bringing forward a proposal to permanently move the implementation date for late-season measures from May 1 to April 1. Beyond the August meeting, ODFW anticipates additional rulemaking may be needed, depending on the results of ongoing gear testing, continued engagement with stakeholders, and federal review of the CP.

Questions about rulemaking focused mostly on the shift from May 1 to April 1 for late-season risk reduction measures. Fishermen described how the difficult ocean conditions in March and early April limit hauling opportunities and increase the likelihood of derelict gear. Some said they received warnings in past seasons when weather prevented timely gear retrieval. Many asked why the change was made mid-season and why it was not brought forward earlier for discussion.

ODFW explained that the temporary rule was implemented quickly due to rising entanglement numbers and new science showing that exposure to entanglement risk peaks in April. Clarification was also provided that these measures were discussed in previous advisory meetings as well as included in fleet advisories. ODFW acknowledged that safety concerns are important to consider and emphasized that future rulemaking should include more lead time and stakeholder involvement.

Participants also raised broader questions about the frequency of regulatory changes, expressing concern that rapid adjustments create uncertainty for the fleet. They asked ODFW to balance risk reduction goals with operational realities and to consider whether additional or more stringent restrictions could unintentionally accelerate pressure toward high-cost gear transitions.

ODFW Updates: Conservation Plan Development (slides 6-9 of [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW provided an update on the status of its draft CP, which covers the Central America (CAM) and Mexico (MX) distinct population segments (DPSs) of humpback whales, as well as blue and fin whales. Staff shared their current understanding of the key remaining steps in both the CP development process and the associated Incidental Take Permit (ITP) application.

Fishermen and other participants sought clarity on several foundational parts of the CP. Questions were raised on which species are covered and why; ODFW explained that the agency is seeking coverage for the CAM and MX DPSs of humpback whales, as well as blue and fin whales. Based on National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) guidance, leatherback sea turtles,

which were considered for coverage in earlier iterations of the CP, are not included. There were also questions about how long the CP and associated ITP would operate and how flexible it would be. ODFW described that the agency is seeking a 15-year permit term, which will authorize a specific level of incidental take. As part of the CP, ODFW will monitor its effectiveness and implement adaptive management, if warranted, in response to entanglement or entanglement risk triggers. The plan includes a mechanism for seeking an amendment to the permit to incorporate or align with new information, if needed over time.

Much of the discussion focused on how entanglements are counted and attributed. Participants wanted to understand how Oregon crab gear attributed cases are identified, how many have been confirmed, and how unobserved or unreported entanglements factor into the federal assessments. ODFW explained the NMFS attribution and assessment process that occurs under ESA and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). ODFW also noted that NMFS is developing improved methods to estimate unobserved cases. Others asked about whales that die from illness or other incidents, expressing concern that these could be misclassified and attributed to the crab fishery. ODFW explained that each case is reviewed for context and that, if no gear is present, documentation helps ensure those cases are not counted as fishery related. Reporting through stranding hotlines was encouraged even for deceased whales found at sea.

Participants also asked whether environmental indicators, such as habitat compression, could be incorporated into Oregon's CP. ODFW said they are evaluating environmental metrics but need to identify ones that accurately reflect Oregon conditions and, for which, meaningful management thresholds can be determined. Questions about the ITP surfaced repeatedly, with fishermen seeking reassurance about timelines and feasibility. ODFW acknowledged the uncertainty and noted that much of this uncertainty comes from the fact that an ITP under Section 10 of the ESA has never been issued to cover incidental take of a marine mammal.

Derelict gear recovery was highlighted as an important and practical management tool. Fishermen discussed the need for simpler recovery rules, potential incentives and technologies that could help locate lost gear. Many felt this should be a central part of risk reduction. ODFW agreed that derelict gear recovery is an important component of entanglement risk reduction and shared that the agency is currently evaluating options for expanding or improving derelict gear recovery provisions.

Five-year Risk Reduction Measures Evaluation (slides 10-17 of [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW shared plans to bring a five-year evaluation of key entanglement risk reduction measures to the Commission in August 2026. The evaluation will assess confirmed entanglements, entanglement risk reduction, fishery impacts, and compliance information. ODFW emphasized that this is a partial snapshot and invited public input on additional metrics to include. Preliminary findings show that confirmed entanglements attributed to Oregon crab gear increased from seven cases before implementation (2013–2020) to thirteen cases afterward (2021–2025), with most involving humpback whales. ODFW noted that improved reporting, a

growing population of humpback whales, shifting ocean conditions, and derelict gear likely contribute to the increase. At the same time, late-season line days, which is a proxy for entanglement risk, have declined by nearly 25 percent on average, with most seasons showing substantial reductions except 2022–23, when unusually high crab abundance increased effort. Fishery participation and overall landings remain largely unchanged, with most variability tied to season structure, abundance, and price rather than regulatory measures.

ODFW's initial assessment suggests that entanglement rates have risen even as late-season risk has decreased, and that most recent entanglements likely originated outside the May–August period targeted by late-season measures. Compliance has generally been strong, although tag enforcement challenges persist and noncompliance increased during the temporary change to the 2025–26 late-season opening date.

The presentation closed with request for feedback on what additional metrics should be included in the 5-year evaluation and what long- or short-term regulatory changes should be considered. ODFW also welcomed ideas for nonregulatory approaches, such as voluntary measures or research needs, while noting that the immediate focus is on what may be brought to the Commission in August.

Discussions focused on how whale entanglement numbers are interpreted under ESA and MMPA requirements. Fishermen asked whether the 13 documented entanglements equate to 13 dead whales and how many whales an 8 percent growth rate represents. Staff explained that under the ESA, any entanglement is considered a take, while the MMPA evaluates severity. Permit decisions rely on negligible-impact findings that incorporate information on injury severity from individual cases and how impacts relate to overall population numbers. Participants also asked how managers determine the DPS of an entangled whale; ODFW noted that most cases cannot be assigned to a DPS directly so proportions of stocks off Oregon's coast at different times of year are typically used. Any individual that can be identified is assigned accordingly.

Fishermen described derelict gear as the most actionable issue and suggested an app showing buoy locations so gear can be retrieved quickly. Staff said they have received similar feedback and are exploring options. Additional discussion touched on sightings of the same whale across all breeding grounds (Mexico and Central America) and concerns about differences in growth rates based on breeding ground observations.

Participants asked how adjusting the late-season date to April 1 would measurably reduce entanglement risk and how risk reduction benefits are being evaluated. Staff said they are relying on the best available co-occurrence information to guide management decisions and assess entanglement risk reduction. Fishermen from the north coast emphasized that April 1 is too early given local start-date shifts and expressed concern that continued pressure could push the fleet toward unaffordable ropeless gear. Several noted that March conditions offshore create severe weather and limited days on the ocean, raising safety concerns if the late-season measures shift earlier. Staff described ongoing work to track whale distribution and better understand co-occurrence with fishing effort, while clarifying that this information would not serve as a direct trigger but would be used to evaluate potential management responses. Vessel

monitoring was cited as a tool that could increase resolution to near real-time, though fishermen reiterated strong reservations about an April 1 date because currents and weather can prevent gear removal. ODFW reiterated that a backstop exists for season openings.

Vessel Monitoring and electronic logbooks (slides 19-22 of [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW presented an overview of the proposed electronic vessel monitoring (EM) system for the Oregon commercial Dungeness crab fishery, clarifying that this system tracks vessel location and hydraulic pressure to document pot setting and hauling, rather than using cameras. Data would be routed through a service provider to Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and ODFW, aligning Oregon with similar systems already required in Washington and California. The agency plans to propose mandatory electronic monitoring by December 1, 2026, while electronic logbooks would remain voluntary until 2030. Oregon's system would require faster ping rates than federal Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) units can support and would instead transmit data when vessels return to cellular range, lowering costs. ODFW explained that EM will improve data quality, ease paper logbook workloads, and address compliance gaps. Since 2022, ODFW has piloted an integrated logbook and tracking system with 20 vessels; two tested units—Boat Command and FishVue LIME—currently meet proposed specifications. ODFW also summarized expected equipment and subscription costs and noted that reimbursement funding is available for initial equipment purchase. Benefits include better derelict gear tracking, timelier entanglement risk data, allowance for more targeted conservation options, and stronger enforcement of pot theft, crab theft, closed areas, fair start rules, and pot limits. Discussions of vessel monitoring centered on whether the proposed system is necessary, practical, and compatible with existing equipment. Fishermen asked how hydraulic sensors function, how they integrate with VMS units, and whether Oregon's approach duplicates systems already used in other states or fisheries. ODFW said sensors track haul activity and that some existing VMS units may meet Oregon's requirements if they achieve the expected reporting frequency.

Participants described challenges with e-logbook apps, such as the need to press buttons for every string. They also asked how the agency would handle sensor malfunctions during active fishing and whether Oregon would create a grace period or notification process to address equipment failures, especially during the season opening. ODFW agreed that a clear protocol is needed and welcomed input on designing it.

Privacy and enforcement were recurring concerns. Fishermen questioned why OSP needs access to location data and shared past experiences where VMS failures triggered immediate enforcement calls. ODFW explained that access would mirror current logbook and fish ticket processes but understood the discomfort around real time oversight.

Cost and availability were major points of discussion. Fishermen asked about airtime fees, subscription charges, installation capacity, and whether equipment would be affordable for small vessels. ODFW noted that airtime costs are similar to Washington's and said

reimbursement funds would be available for initial equipment purchases. Many participants encouraged a voluntary adoption period, suggesting that demonstrating value such as reducing pot theft or improving data quality would improve buy in.

A number of fishermen questioned whether e-logbooks are needed at all, pointing out that vessels will be required to use GPS linked systems. ODFW said that current data is inconsistent or delayed and that a standardized EM system combined with e-logbooks would provide near- real- -time information needed for whale entanglement risk assessments and federal compliance.

Pop-up and Longline Experimental Fishing Gear Permit Program Development

(slides 23-24 of [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW gave an update on its planned experimental fishing gear permit program to test pop-up and longline gear in Oregon waters, aiming to evaluate these systems individually and in combination to determine whether broader authorization might be appropriate in specific times and areas. The program, targeted for rulemaking in August 2026 and permit issuance in spring 2027, would require participants to use virtual gear marking and complete whale entanglement response and gear tracking training. Trials would collect data on gear efficiency, reliability, movement, and performance across different configurations, helping inform future management decisions. ODFW also outlined proposed eligibility criteria, such as a clean record of fishery law compliance, and asked for feedback on incentives to encourage participation, ranging from access to otherwise closed areas to restoration of pot limits or a gear-library concept, though funding for the latter is not yet identified.

Participants discussed how pop-up gear and longline systems might perform under Oregon conditions. They asked about depth limitations, acoustic reliability, and whether acoustic signals could interfere across vessels and pots. ODFW said the acoustic triggers can function to roughly 150–160 fathoms but that line storage capacity is the limiting factor. They added that coded acoustic signals should prevent cross activation, and upcoming results from broader use in California will add clarity.

Fishermen questioned whether testing only outside 40 fathoms in the late season would provide useful data. They noted that deeper water (often over 100 fathoms) and early season conditions are where much of the interaction risk occurs. ODFW was asked about the potential for testing during the pre-season period but said that would be difficult because crab retention is tied to testing incentives; however, testing areas may expand over time or through research projects.

Safety and practicality were major themes. Fishermen noted that longline systems require stacking every pot on deck, which may not be feasible for smaller vessels. They also recalled that longline gear had previously caused substantial gear conflicts when some boats used it and others did not. Some suggested limiting longline strings to 10–25 pots to reduce risk. ODFW agreed that participant feedback will shape safety protocols and permit conditions.

Other questions addressed permit numbers and timelines. Fishermen wanted to ensure representation across vessel sizes and ports and asked how long testing would continue before decisions are made about broader use. ODFW said they anticipate at least one to two years of testing and emphasized that any move toward authorization or requirement would involve a separate rulemaking process.

Participants also discussed whether pop-up gear could help reduce conflicts in high traffic shipping areas and whether conventional longline configurations should be tested first because they reduce vertical lines without the cost of new technology.

Economic concerns surfaced as well, with questions about the impacts of closures or gear changes on processors and coastal communities. ODFW said economic effects are always analyzed during management decision making, but that obtaining an ITP and maintaining low entanglement rates remains a core priority that may require line reduction in the future.