

Commercial Dungeness Crab Newsletter

September 2, 2008

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Contents	Page
Season summary	1
Rule changes	2
Key events calendar	3
Tri-state committee.....	3
Marine mammal interactions.....	3
Dept. of Agriculture agreement.....	4
Buoy Tags.....	4
Derelict gear recovery.....	4

2007 - 08 Season Summary

Crab condition during pre-season testing met the standards to open the season on December 1, 2007. Pick-out percentages must be, or projected to be, 23% or greater north of Cascade Head and 25% or greater south of there by December 1. A price agreement was reached and the fishery got underway on time.

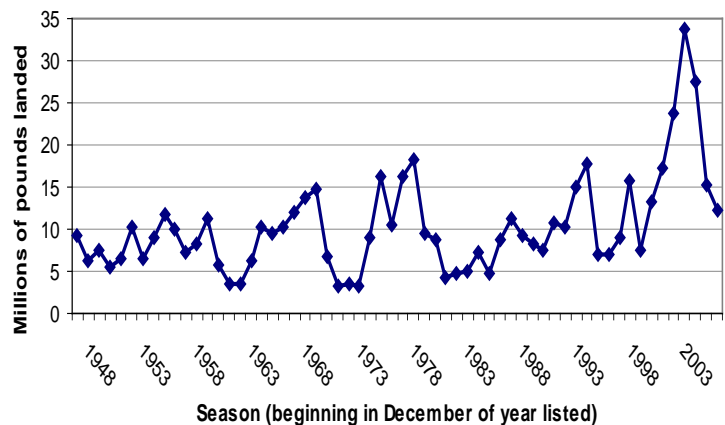
Table 1. Oregon pre-season crab testing results (pick-out percentages), 2007:

PORT	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
Astoria	23.17	Criteria Met
Garibaldi	24.11	Not Retested
Newport	22.89	25.97
Coos Bay	24.51	Criteria Met
Port Orford	23.78	23.72
Brookings	22.34	23.24

Unfortunately, the fishery opening was quickly followed by a huge storm that affected crabbers and processors all along the coast. Although crabbers responded well to the storm warnings, many reported large amounts of lost gear, especially along the north coast. To make it easier to recover lost gear, ODFW adopted temporary rules to allow crabbers to bring in some gear belonging to others and to get replacement buoy tags (up to 10%) about two weeks earlier than normal. During the 2007-08 season, 4,202 buoy tags were replaced, compared to 2,636 during 2006-07.

Figure 1: Landings (millions of lbs) per Dungeness crab season.

Commercial ocean Dungeness crab landings into Oregon ports (preliminary as of August 18) continued their decline following the peak in 2004-05. Landings during 2007-08 reached 12.3 million pounds, still about 20% above the long-term average of 10.3 million pounds.



Pot declarations totaled about 115,000 for the 312 Oregon permitted vessels that made landings in Oregon during 2007-08. The number of pots is slightly lower than the 120,000 pots declared the previous season and substantially lower than the 200,000 estimated pots declared before pot limits were implemented.

Newport led all ports with over 5 million pounds, followed by the Astoria area at nearly 3 million pounds. The Charleston area came in third with nearly 2 million pounds. Ex-vessel value of landings in Oregon during the 2007-08 season totaled about \$29 million.

Tables 2 and 3: Landings in pounds, by port area and by month, for the 2007-08 season.

PORT AREA	LANDINGS
Astoria	2,904,011
Garibaldi	795,278
Newport	5,111,446
Florence	365,837
Charleston	1,995,603
Port Orford	430,684
Brookings	697,562
ALL PORTS	12,300,421

MONTH	LANDINGS	AVG. PRICE/ LB
December	7,471,895	2.06
January	2,768,190	2.61
February	997,253	3.00
March	407,344	3.08
April	311,322	3.76
May	179,653	3.95
June	90,975	3.35
July	64,848	3.12
August	8,941	3.29
ALL SEASON	12,300,421	\$ 2.38

Rule Changes

Permanent rules requiring a Dungeness crab permit and a developmental fishery permit to fish for box crab:

- Permanent rules adopted by OFWC on January 11, 2008
- Only fishermen holding both permits may fish for or retain box crab
- Same seasons for ocean Dungeness crab and box crab fisheries
- Same gear and amount (pot limits) required for ocean Dungeness and box crab fisheries

Temporary rules related to lost and derelict gear:

- Allow crab vessels to retrieve derelict crab gear:
 - In effect from 12/11/07 – 6/11/08
 - Up to six Dungeness crab pots not belonging to their vessel each fishing trip, provided:
 - These pots are un-baited
 - No crab from these pots is retained, and
 - The activity is documented in their logbook
- Allow early replacement of up to 10% of buoy tags:
 - Replacement buoy tags available by December 14, 2007, about two weeks earlier than allowed by permanent rule
- Allow a limited experiment to retrieve derelict ocean Dungeness crab gear inseason:
 - Allow crab gear retrieval under a federally sponsored contract to develop methods for derelict and lost gear recovery during 3/26/08 through 5/1/08

- Expand derelict crab gear retrieval during the summer fishery:
 - In effect from 6/11/08 – 8/28/08
 - Up to 50 Dungeness crab pots not belonging to their crab vessel each fishing trip
 - These pots are un-baited
 - No crab from these pots is retained, and
 - The activity is documented in their logbook

- Allow any commercial fishing vessel to retrieve crab gear after the season:
 - In effect from 8/29/08 – 10/31/08
 - Any commercial fishing vessel may retrieve lost and derelict commercial crab gear from the ocean and return it to shore

Upcoming Events Calendar

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting: Staff is currently scheduled to brief the Commission on Dungeness crab fishery activities and issues at the November 14, 2008 meeting in Salem. About ten days before the meeting, briefing materials will be posted on our website at: <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/minutes/>

Tri-State Dungeness Crab Management Committee

The Tri-state Dungeness Crab Management Committee met in Portland on August 14, 2008. Each state gave a summary of the 2007-08 fishery. Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission will post the state summaries on their website at: <http://www.psmfc.org/crab/>. Minutes of the meeting are not yet available.

The primary change under the Tri-state agreement is Washington’s addition of a softshell testing location off central Washington. Other agenda topics included potential changes to the season start date, summer fishery management, cross-boundary issues, an update on Washington’s crab permit buyback program, a California legislative update, and an enforcement update. No decisions were reached and the states will continue to work on these issues. More information is given below on two additional agenda topics: marine mammal interactions and an expanded role for Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) in the season-setting process.

Marine Mammal Interactions

Changes affecting Oregon ocean Dungeness crabbers are likely coming January 1, 2009, as a result of known entanglements of endangered humpback whales with commercial crab pots off the west coast, including Oregon. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has proposed to list the Oregon Dungeness crab pot fishery as a category II fishery on its 2009 List of Fisheries with marine mammal impacts. A final decision is expected in November, 2008.

For a category II fishery, permit holders are required to get a Marine Mammal Take Permit and to take observers if requested. Other requirements may be imposed. At this time, requests to take observers and other requirements for the Oregon fleet are not anticipated. ODFW staff is working with NMFS to minimize potential disruptions to the fishery. In addition, a consultation under the Endangered Species Act will likely be required.

Oregon Department of Agriculture Agreement

For the past few seasons, ODFW and ODA have been discussing how decisions about the season start can be improved when the crab condition (softshell) test results don't allow for a December 1 opener coastwide. Through their experiences in the price negotiation process, ODA staff learns critical information about market conditions and industry views, which we believe can benefit the decisions made through the Tri-state process. Therefore, ODFW, ODA, and OSP are considering approval of a joint agreement to expand their role in this process. Discussions are still underway, but it is anticipated that the agreement will be in place for the upcoming 2008-09 season-setting decisions.

Buoy Tags

RECYCLE YOUR OLD BUOY TAGS! WATCH FOR A RECYCLING CONTAINER NEAR YOU.

Buoy tags cannot be recycled through your local recycling programs. However, ODFW located one company near Salem that can do so and they will do it for free. This company primarily uses plastics from the agricultural industry and produces plastic railroad ties and other items.

As a pilot effort, ODFW will be setting out recycling containers in major ports, pending port approvals, for you to drop off your old buoy tags. ODFW will occasionally collect the tags and take them to the recycler. Once the recycling containers are set up in the ports, we will mail you the details on where and how you can drop your tags off.



For the upcoming season (2008-09), buoy tag colors are:
Tier 200 – Light Green Tier 500 – Gray
Tier 300 – Brown Replacements -- White

Derelict Gear Recovery

The amount of lost and derelict crab gear is a growing concern and ODFW continues to work with many in and outside the industry to find ways to prevent gear loss and recover gear that is lost, abandoned or derelict.

In addition to the temporary rules to make it easier to retrieve such gear, two pilot projects on derelict crab gear recovery in Oregon are nearing completion. These two projects involved several organizations and were funded through a federal Marine Debris Program grant, matched with funds from the ODFW Restoration and Enhancement Program (R&E), the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission (ODCC) and the Oregon Salmon Commission (OSC). Other major partners in these projects included the Oregon Fishermen's Cable Committee (OFCC), Oregon Sea Grant, Oregon State

Police, US Coast Guard and Tyco International. Much of the success of these projects is also due to the efforts of fishermen and volunteers who participated.

During 2006 and 2007, crab vessels were chartered to pull and pump buoyed crab pots and the results are summarized below. (For cut-off pots, additional work is underway, involving trawl vessels chartered to tow specially designed grapples.)

1. Locating lost and derelict crab gear

The ODCC set up a hotline (1-800-707-CRAB) to allow fishermen and ocean users to report locations of stray or derelict gear. In 2007, one or more pots were reported at 65 locations. The vast majority of these were obtained by the Coast Guard during their flyovers. Seven fishermen also used the hotline to report lost gear. All the hotline information was used to help guide vessels chartered for the project.

To be most effective, operators of chartered vessels need very recent information on locations of lost gear. Using information voluntarily gathered by vessels conducting pre-season testing during October proved invaluable in recovering large numbers of pots.

2. Recovery of buoyed crab pots

The ODCC surveyed the fleet in 2006 to obtain bids from crabbers interested in chartering their vessels to retrieve derelict gear. Eleven chartered trips were completed during the fall of 2006 and 2007. These trips spread gear recovery efforts all along the coast and some tested both pulling and pumping pots:

Table 4. Chartered trips for buoyed crab pot recovery:

Port	Date	No. Pots Retrieved	No. Pots Unsuccessful
Garibaldi	9/3-4/2006	42	Not recorded
Garibaldi	11/1/2006	36	2
Florence	9/21/2007	0	10
Astoria	9/25/2007	20	5
Astoria	9/27/2007	18	8
Brookings	10/4/2007	17	Not recorded
Newport	10/29/2007	50	6
Newport	10/30/2007	61	1
Florence	10/30/2007	22	3
Brookings	11/1/2007	2	2
TOTAL		268	37



In total, chartered crabbers retrieved 265 pots by pulling and 3 by pumping. At least 37 additional pots were attempted, but couldn't be retrieved. Most of these broke off, and a few were cut off when too many were tangled together to safely bring aboard. Six of the retrieved pots were sport crab pots.

These trips averaged \$75 in vessel charter costs per recovered pot. A lot was learned during this project and costs for similar efforts should be much lower in the future. Most pots were in good condition when retrieved and ownership could be determined for nearly all of them. Owners were contacted to pick up their gear, without charge.

3. Catches of Dungeness crab and other marine life

Information about the recovered pots and catches of Dungeness crab and other species were recorded for 221 of the commercial pots recovered. Nearly 2/3 of these pots (62%) contained crab and half (52%) held legal-sized males. A dozen pots (5%) did not have a destruct mechanism, were zip-tied shut, or the destruct mechanism was still intact and so were still “fishing”, months after the season ended. Dungeness crab catches, especially of legal males, were much higher in these pots.

Table 5. Dungeness crab catches observed:

Crab	Number of Crab Observed	Average Number of Crab Per Pot		
		In Pots Not “Fishing”	In Pots Still “Fishing”	In All Pots
Legal Males	609	2.4	9.5	2.8
Females	316	1.3	2.8	1.4
Sublegal Males	238	1.0	2.3	1.1
TOTAL	1,163	4.7	14.7	5.3

Red rock crab, starfish and anemones were often observed. Fish, including cabezon, sculpins, one yellowtail rockfish and one copper rockfish were captured in six pots.

4. Voluntary retrieval of lost and derelict gear post-season

In 2007, ODFW adopted a temporary rule to allow any commercial fishing vessel to bring in lost or derelict crab gear during September and October. A similar rule is in effect from August 29 through October 31, 2008 (see notice enclosed with this newsletter).

To get an idea whether this rule was useful last year, ODFW monitored, on a nearly weekly basis, the pots left at the dock in Newport. Staff recorded any identifying information for each pot and its general condition (poor, fair, or good). This information was also given to the port manager to help alert owners to pick up their gear.

Table 6. Observed changes in numbers of pots left on the Newport dock:

Date	Daily Total	Number New	Number Gone
9/17/2007	153	--	--
9/24/2007	115	6	44
10/1/2007	116	10	9
10/12/2007	103	4	17
10/23/2007	114	22	11
TOTAL	--	42	81



Pots from at least 96 different vessels were identifiable and several vessels had 5 to 10 pots in the pile. Roughly half the pots were in fair condition, a quarter in good condition, and a quarter in poor condition.

Please Provide Comments and Suggestions on this Newsletter to:
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