

Washington Coastal Dungeness Crab Fishery Newsletter

In this newsletter you will find important information on the upcoming 2025-26 Washington coastal commercial crab season and a recap of the 2024-25 season.



16 million pounds caught
ranked 5th
 within the last decade



78%
of harvest
 in first two months



\$6.84
 average price
 per pound



3% fewer crabs
 caught than previous
 10-season average



Where to find it

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2024-25 season summary

A season of modest harvest and high prices

The 2024-25 Washington coastal Dungeness crab fishery produced a total catch of more than 16 million pounds, falling just short of the previous 10-season average by 485,090 pounds. Included in this total were more than 3.99 million pounds in tribal landings and 12.18 million pounds in landings by state-licensed crabbers. The season's total represented a 23% decline from the 21 million pounds landed in 2023-24, a 44% decrease from the record 28.7 million pounds landed during the 2022-23 season, and a 3% decrease from the previous 10-season average.

Although annual landings fluctuate widely due to environmental and stock-driven variability, the landings trend over the past 30 years remains upward (Figure 1). Combined tribal and state harvest during the 2024-25 season ranked 20th overall in the fishery's history and was the fifth-highest total in the past decade, underscoring that even below-average years now exceed many historical benchmarks.

Despite a decrease in landings from the prior two seasons, strong market demand and high dockside prices made 2024-25 one of the most valuable seasons in the fishery's history. The 2024-25 Washington coastal Dungeness crab season had the second-highest ex-vessel value on record (Figure 2A). The total ex-vessel value of state landings during the 2024-25 season exceeded \$83.3 million, surpassed only by a record \$88.2 million set during the 2021-22 season (equivalent to \$97.1 million in 2025 dollars).

High value helped offset reduced catch, as Dungeness crab fetched strong prices across nearly every month of the season.

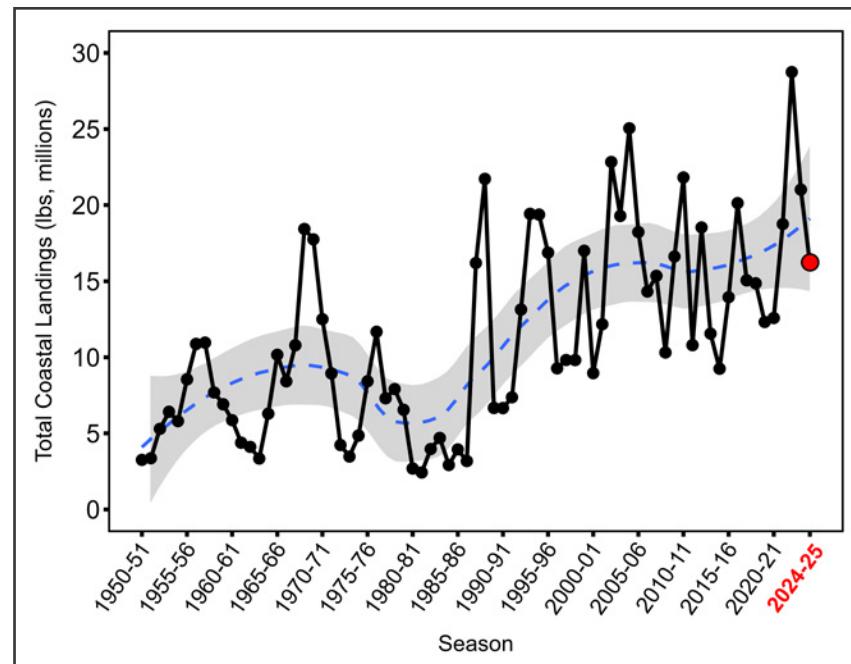


Figure 1: Historical Dungeness crab landings for the Washington Coast by season (tribal and state fisheries; millions of pounds), 1950-51 to 2024-25.

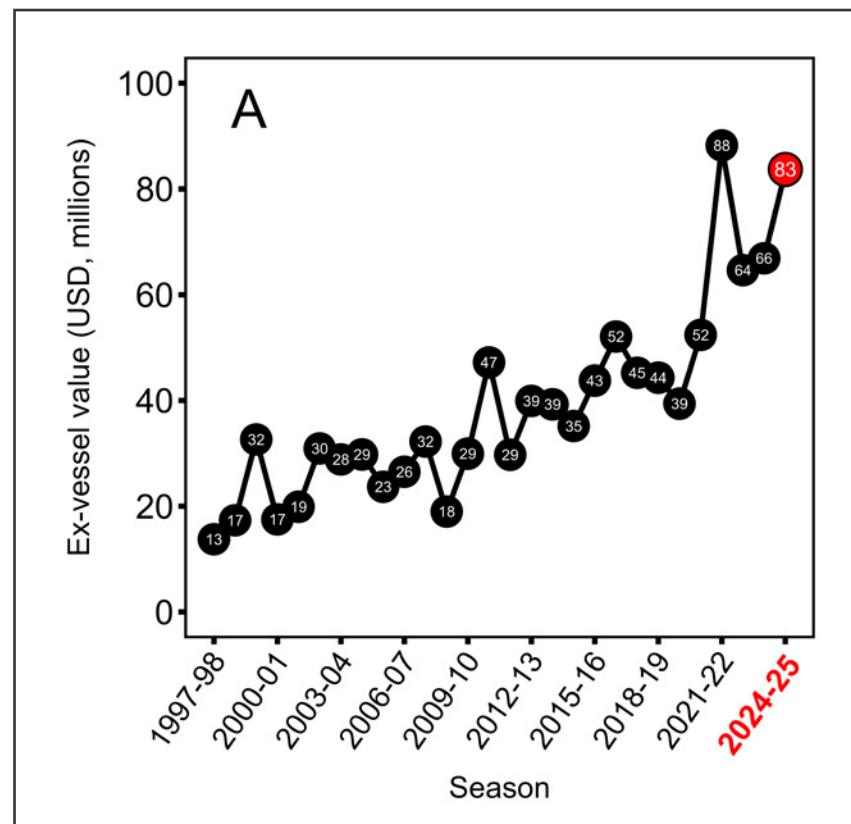


Figure 2A: Historical total state ex-vessel value for the Washington coastal Dungeness crab fishery.



The 2024-25 whole season average price per pound was \$6.85, with the highest within-month average of \$7.12 observed in March (Figure 2B). The 2024-25 season average price was the highest ever reported in the fishery's history, exceeding the previous 10-season average by \$2.59. The average per-pound price during the summer fishery (defined as May 1 – Sept. 15) remained above \$5.02, making it the fifth-highest value summer fishery within the past 10 seasons and ranking seventh within the fishery's history (Figure 2B).

Fisher participation and overall fishing effort remained steady, reflecting the fishery's continued resilience despite reduced harvest. During the 2024-25 season, 200 coastal license holders made 4,458 landings in Washington ports (Vessels – Figure 3A; Landings – Figure 3B), nearly identical to the 201 vessels and 4,432 landings recorded the previous year. The estimated peak simultaneous deployment of 86,600 crab pots also closely matched the 10-season average of 84,020 (Crab Pots – Figure 3A), indicating consistent effort levels even as catch totals declined.

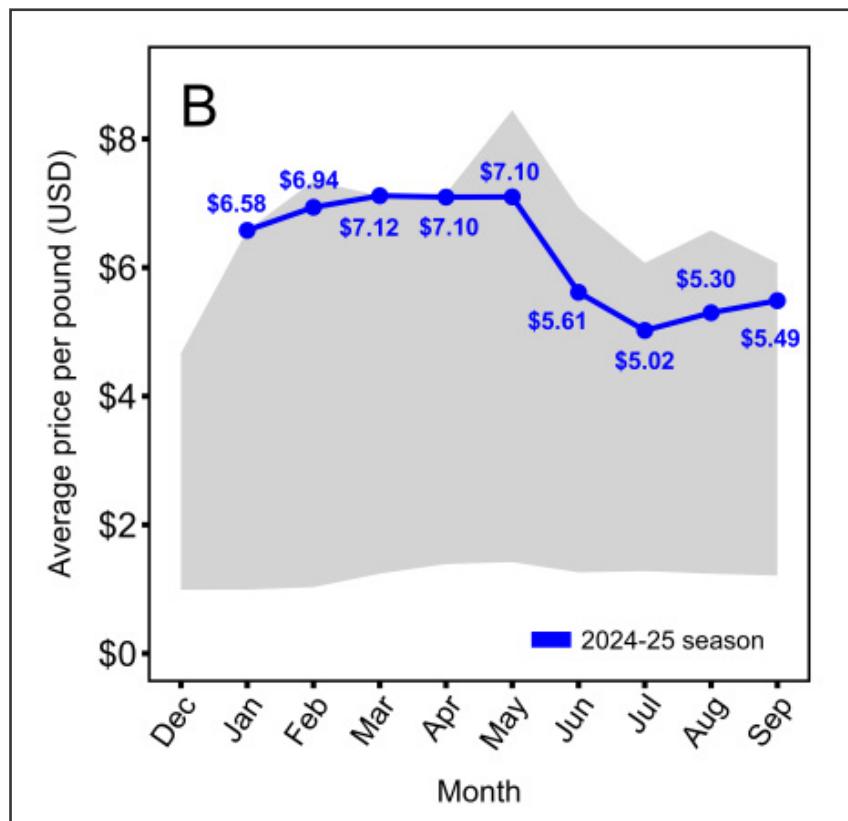


Figure 2B: The monthly average per-pound price received for Dungeness crab, as reported on fish receiving tickets. Gray shading represents the minimum and maximum average monthly price paid in past seasons (1997-98 to 2023-24). The blue line indicates the average monthly price received within the 2024-25 season.

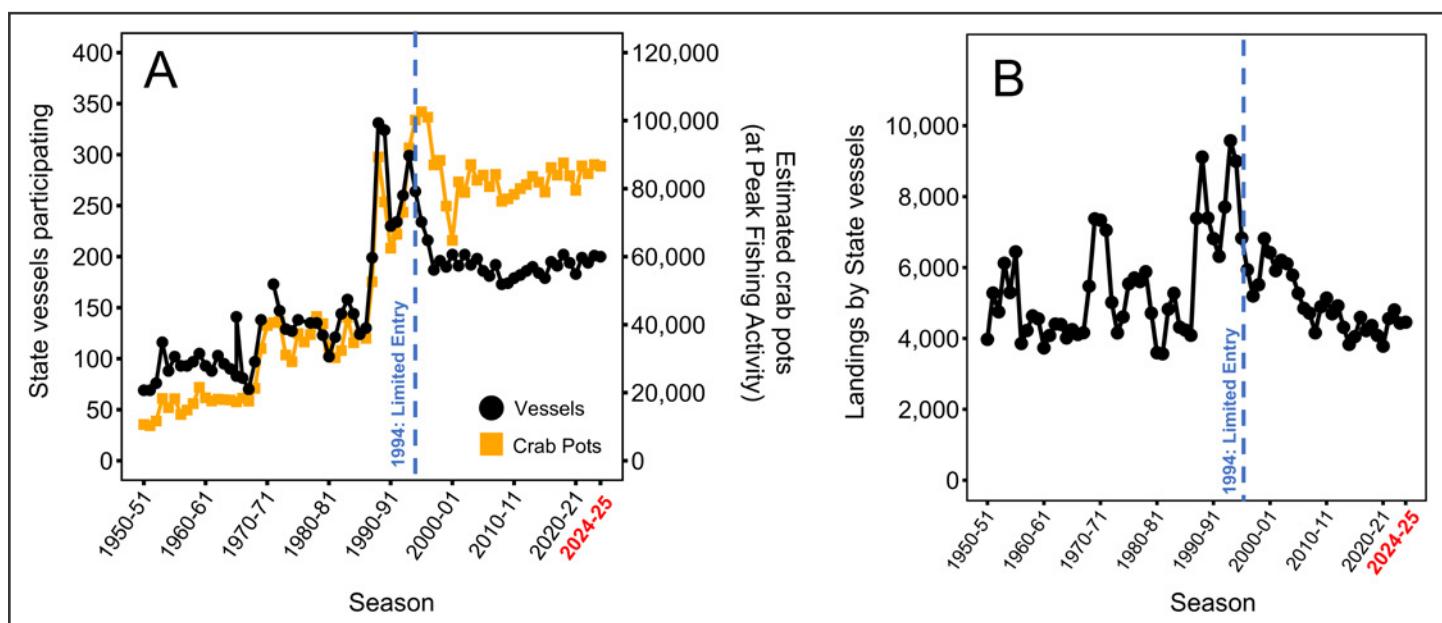


Figure 3: (A) The total number of state vessels that made landings (black circles) and the estimated number of crab pots deployed during peak fishing activity (orange squares). (B) Historical landings by state vessels within the Washington coastal Dungeness crab fishery by season. Totals are provided for the 1950-51 to 2024-25 seasons. The blue vertical dashed line indicates the year that a limited-entry license program was implemented within the fishery.



Season timing and catch distribution

The Washington coastal Dungeness crab fishery opens as early as Dec. 1 but can be delayed for various reasons. The 2024–25 season opened to the state fleet south of Klipsan Beach, Wash., on Jan. 15, 2025, and north of Klipsan Beach on Feb. 11, 2025. Tri-state fishery managers from Washington, Oregon, and California decided to delay the season in the area between Cape Falcon, Ore., and Klipsan Beach, including the Columbia River and Willapa Bay, based on low meat recovery during preseason testing. The area north of Klipsan Beach to the U.S.-Canada border, including Grays Harbor, opened later following consultation with tribal co-managers, resulting in a split coastwide opening date. Fair-start provisions delayed the movement of vessels that fished south of Cape Falcon before the southern opener for 30 days and of vessels that fished south of Klipsan Beach before the northern opener for 35 days.

The 2024–25 season opened south of Klipsan Beach with a pot limit; licensed vessels with permanent pot

limits of 500 or 300 were allowed to use 400 or 250 pots, respectively. The pot limit south of Klipsan Beach was lifted on Feb. 8, 2025. Fishers that participated in the north of Klipsan opener were not subject to a pot limit. The coastal Dungeness crab season closed on Sept. 15, 2025.

Table 1 summarizes state landings by month and catch reporting area for the 2024–25 season. The spatial distribution of crab harvest remained generally consistent with patterns observed over the past decade, with most of the landings by the state fleet (53.7%) harvested between Point Chehalis and the Washington–Oregon border (Figure 4B; catch area 60A-2). The second-highest crab catch was observed between Point Chehalis and Point Grenville (18.9%; area 60A-1), followed by catch south of the Washington–Oregon border (9.9%; area 61). This result represents a reversal of the pattern observed in the 2023–24 season, in which catch in areas 61 and 60A-1 constituted 16.2% and 12.2% of the state's total catch, respectively.

Washington Catch Reporting Area								
Month	59A-1	59A-2	60A-1	60A-2*	60B	60C	61	Total
January	Closed			1,288,114	Closed	639,416	949,514	2,877,044
February	23,795	95,320	677,148	3,772,030	55,063	277,478	131,252	5,032,086
March	103,237	265,982	1,186,656	1,124,246	38,042	93,281	86,052	2,897,496
April	46,698	68,708	264,369	276,392	24,798	24,895	31,264	737,124
May	24,607	26,568	56,277	39,642	58,478	8,049	5,239	218,678
June	5,556	6,064	31,296	9,415	71,198	126,299		
July	3,175	2,096	34,336	13,111	56,341	7,474	0	111,209
August	0		34,907	36,023	59,134		0	131,566
September	0	0	14,920	29,489	12,348		0	57,991
Total	207,068	464,738	2,299,909	6,588,462	375,402	1,050,593	1,203,321	12,189,493

Table 1: State catch within each WDFW catch reporting area during the 2024–25 coastal Dungeness crab season. *Landings from catch area 60D (Columbia River) were combined with the total from area 60A-2 to protect the privacy of vessels participating in this area. Refer to Figure 4A for the locations of catch reporting areas.



Harvest north of Point Grenville to the U.S.-Canada border remained low, with catch from areas 59A-1 and 59A-2 together contributing roughly 5% of the coastal total. Landings in these northern areas have declined substantially in recent years compared to the late 1990s and early 2000s, when they regularly produced 19-36% of the coastwide total (1997-98 to 2007-08 seasons; Figure 4B).

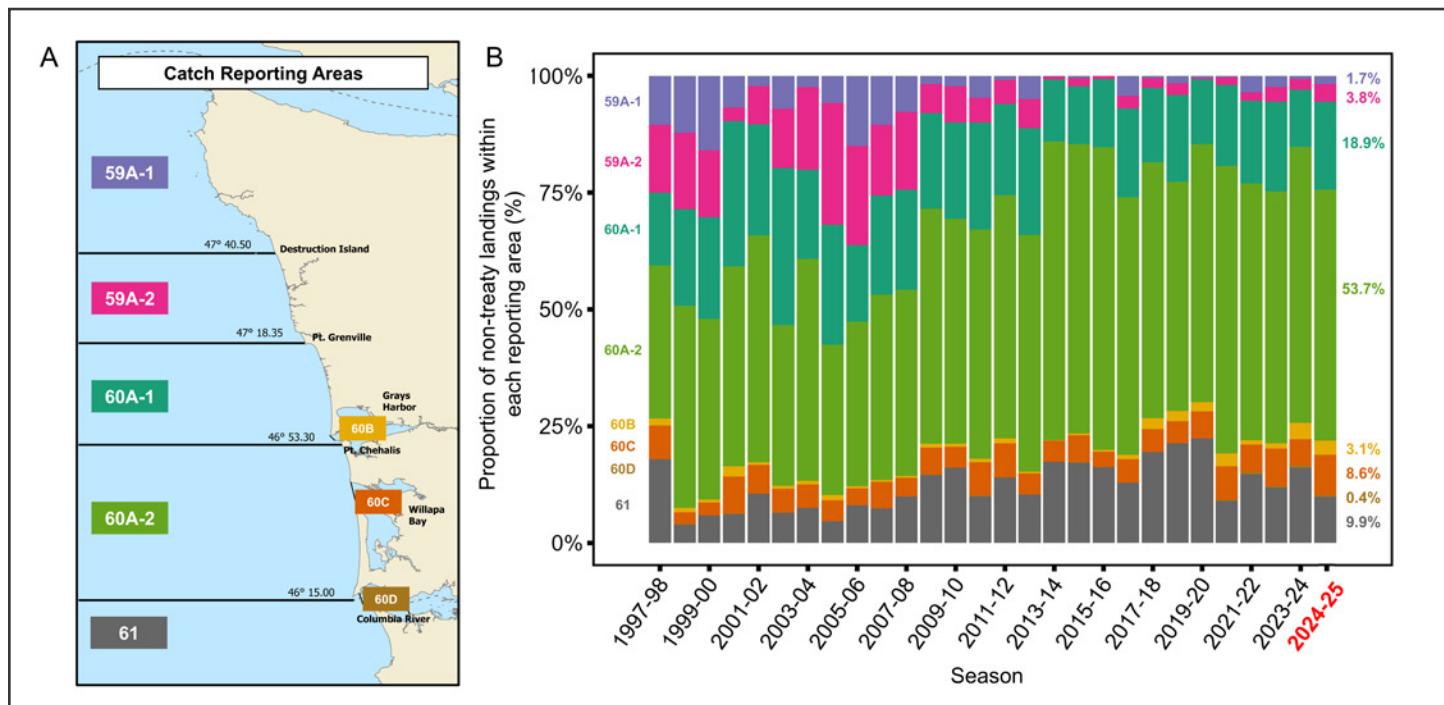


Figure 4: (A) WDFW catch reporting areas. (B) Proportion of state Dungeness crab landings for the 2024-25 season by catch reporting area (colors correspond to those indicated in panel A).

Catch area reporting

Fish receiving tickets are official landing records that document every commercial delivery of Dungeness crab in Washington. Each ticket records details such as the vessel name, buyer, date, port of landing, gear type, and catch area, and serves as the primary source of harvest information used by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and tribal co-managers. These records are essential for tracking total catch, enforcing regulations, and determining harvest shares between state and tribal fisheries.

Accurate reporting on state fish tickets is fundamental to effective co-management of the coastal Dungeness crab fishery. These data form the foundation for harvest sharing between state and tribal fisheries, ensuring that catch is correctly attributed to each management area. During the 2024-25 season, 10.7% of fish tickets were found to contain reporting

errors, representing 678,342 pounds of misreported catch. WDFW staff worked closely with crabbers and buyers to identify and correct these errors, and to reduce future inaccuracies through targeted outreach.

Buyers and vessel operators who sign fish tickets are legally responsible for the accuracy of all reported information, including the correct designation of catch areas. When crab is landed from multiple reporting areas during a single trip, crabbers must provide a breakdown of catch by area to the buyer at the time of landing. Accurate fish ticket reporting not only ensures compliance but also supports equitable harvest sharing, reliable stock assessment, and transparent management decisions. A map of WDFW commercial crab catch reporting areas is provided in Figure 5.



WDFW Coastal Dungeness Crab Fish Ticket Catch Areas

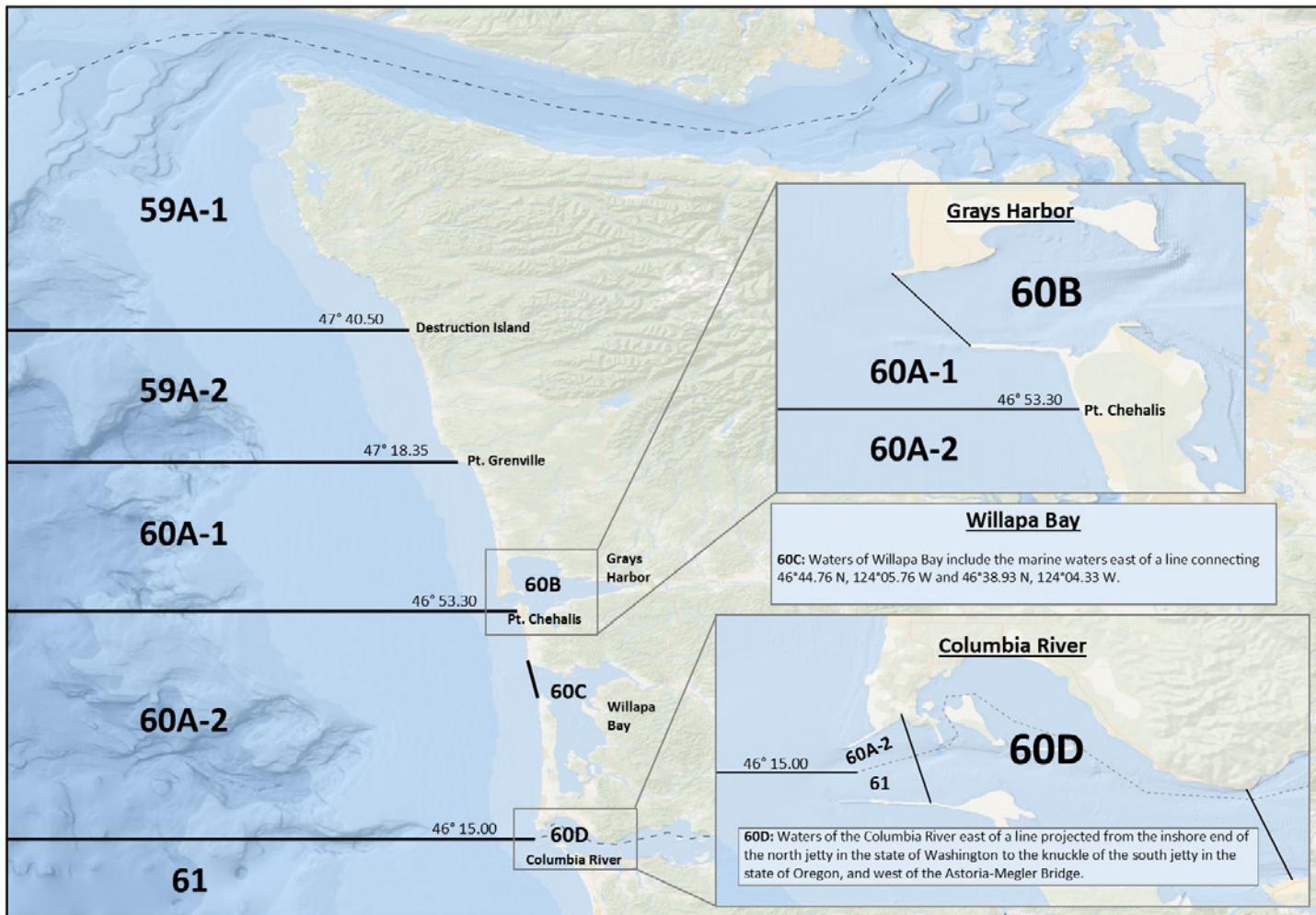


Figure 5: Washington coastal Dungeness crab fish ticket catch reporting areas.



Co-management

Each year, WDFW collaborates with the four federally recognized coastal treaty tribes – the Hoh Tribe, Makah Tribe, Quileute Tribe, and Quinault Indian Nation (QIN) – to develop harvest management plans for the upcoming Dungeness crab season. Harvest management plans establish a mutually agreed-upon framework for sharing harvest opportunities and achieving equitable harvest goals across tribal and state-managed areas.

Harvest management plans outline key provisions such as head starts, which provide tribes with an early fishing period before the state season opens, and special management areas (SMAs), which are closed to non-treaty crabbers for a period following the state fishery opener. SMAs are located within each tribe's usual and accustomed (U&A) fishing areas (Figure 6). Together, these measures ensure that harvest is managed cooperatively, consistent with treaty rights and conservation objectives among all participants in the Washington coastal crab fishery.

Harvest management plans have been largely successful in equalizing harvest opportunity for tribal and state crabbers, with total harvest distribution over the past 10 seasons reaching a split of 50.9% for the state and 49.1% for the coastal treaty tribes within areas north of Point Chehalis (Figure 7). The final harvest sharing split for the 2024-25 season was 45.6% for the state and 54.4% for the coastal treaty tribes.

WDFW fishery managers met with representatives of each coastal tribe prior to the 2024-25 state fishery opener to finalize harvest management plans. Outlined below are a summary of provisions included within those agreements and in-season management actions undertaken by the tribal and state co-managers.

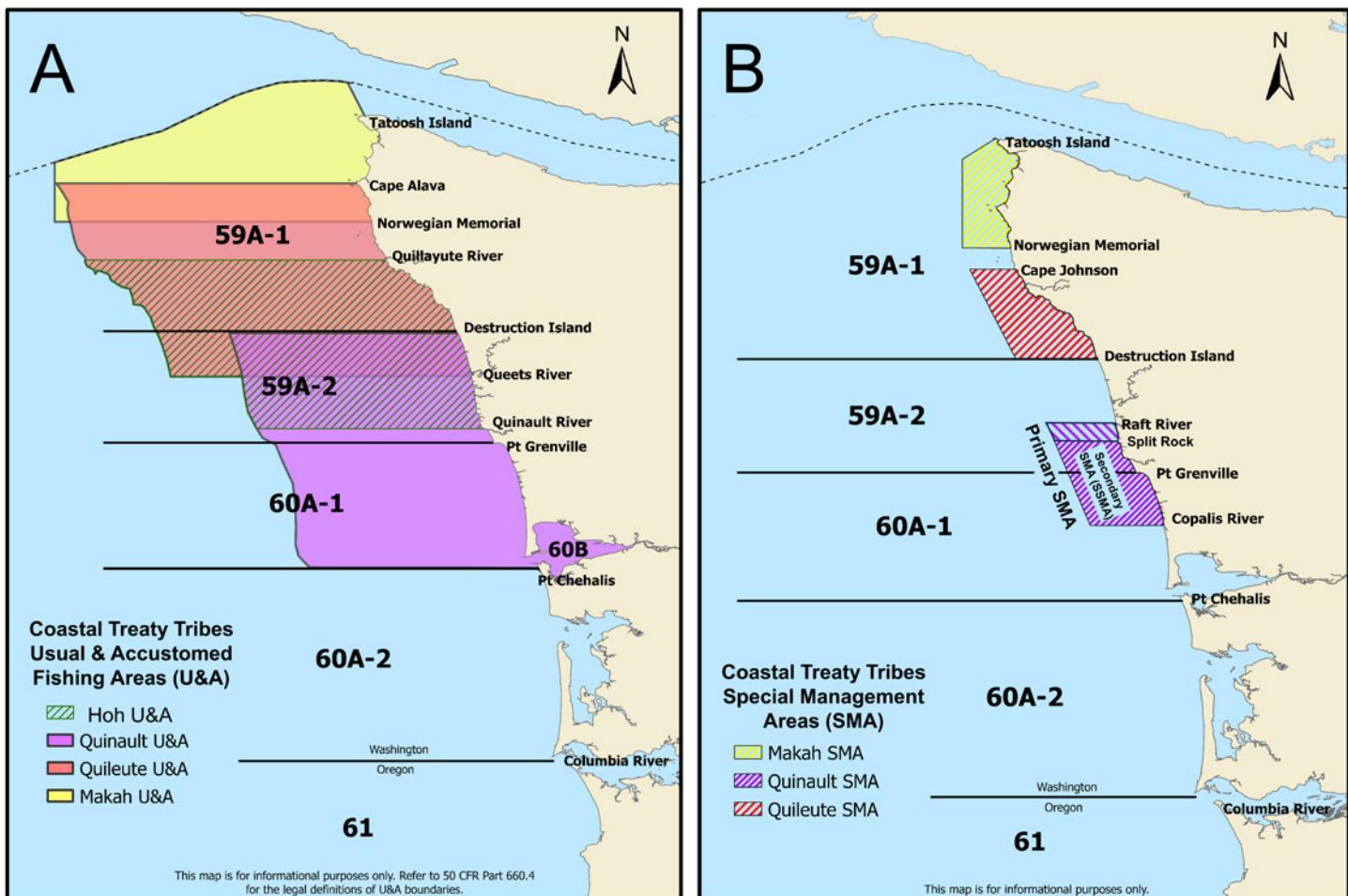


Figure 6: Location of tribal U&As and SMAs. (A) U&A fishing areas for each coastal treaty tribe. (B) SMAs closed to state crabbers following the opener of the 2024-25 Dungeness crab season.



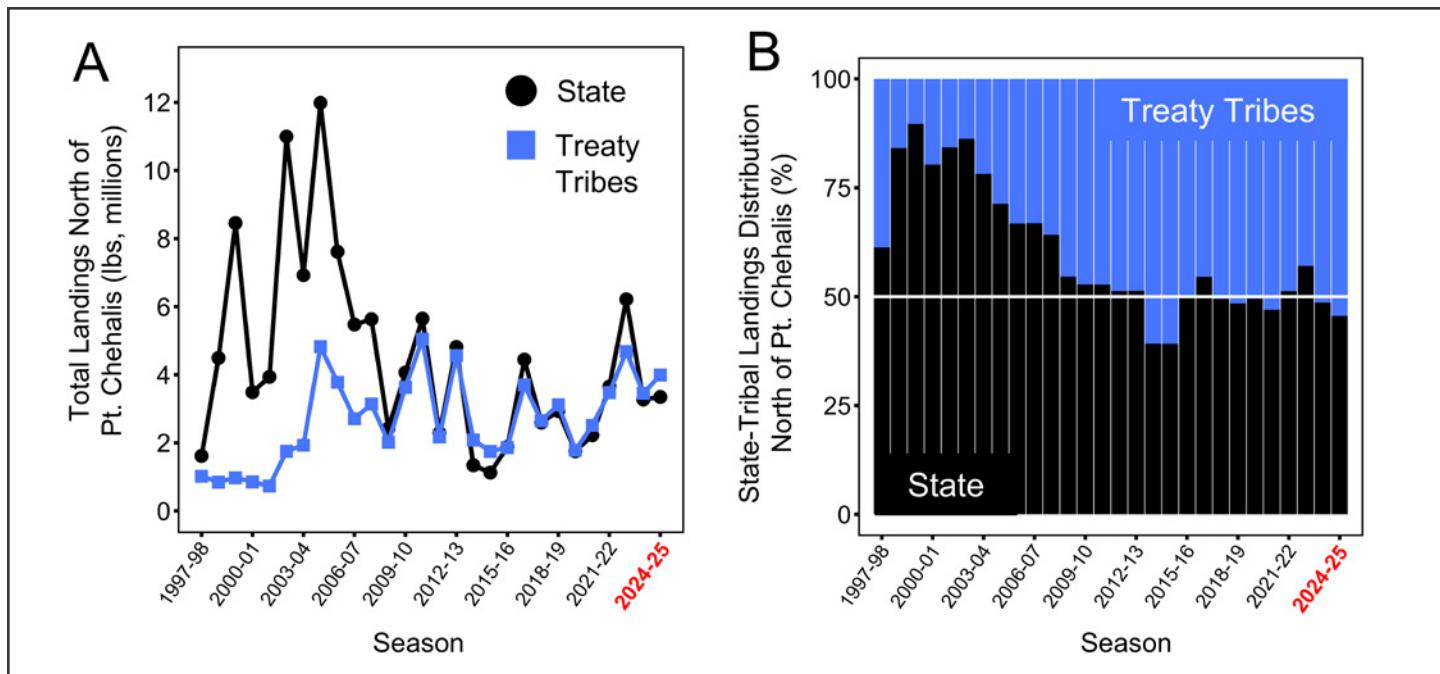


Figure 7: (A) Total tribal and state landings by season within tribal U&A fishing areas north of Point Chehalis, Wash., (1997-98 through 2024-25 seasons). (B) The percentage of state and treaty tribe landings within tribal U&As (1997-98 through 2024-25 seasons).

Hoh Tribe

The 2024-25 season marked the third time WDFW entered into a management agreement with the Hoh Tribe. However, the Hoh tribe did not have any fishers land crab this season.

Makah Tribe

The 2024-25 Makah-state agreement included an SMA from Tatoosh Island to Norwegian Memorial. The Makah SMA remained closed to state crabbers until March 13, after which fishing was allowed with a 200-pot limit, for the first 30 days following the opening. Crab abundance has been sporadic in the Makah U&A fishing areas in recent years, affecting Makah participation.

Quileute Tribe

The 2024-25 Quileute-state harvest management plan included an SMA from Cape Johnson to Destruction Island shoreward of a line approximating 30 fathoms. Per the agreement, the area north of Destruction Island can open to state crabbers on Jan. 15. Opening of this area can be delayed if the Quileute fleet does not have 20 fishable days between Dec. 1

and Jan. 15. The Quileute Tribe and state managers evaluated fishable days and found the target was met prior to Jan. 15. However, to avoid imposing a fair start and to distribute fishing effort, WDFW managers decided to align the opening north of Destruction Island with the rest of catch areas north of Klipsan on Feb. 11, 2025. The Quileute SMA opened to state crabbers on May 1, 2025, with a 100-pot limit through May 31, 2025.

Quinault Indian Nation (QIN)

Quinault catch within the first 30 days of their fishery indicated crab abundance was projected to be high for the 2024-25 season, albeit lower than the 2022-23 season. Per the sliding scale provisions in the state-QIN harvest management agreement, this resulted in a 49-day head start for QIN crabbers within the area between Point Chehalis and Destruction Island. Further provisions outlined within the agreement included the designation of the primary special management area (PSMA), initially closed to non-treaty fishers following the state opener. The PSMA is defined shoreward of a line approximating the 27-fathom depth curve between Raft River and Copalis River (Figure 6B).



QIN and WDFW fishery managers met throughout the 2024-25 season to monitor tribal and state catch rates and make adjustments as necessary. As the season progressed and crab abundance decreased, WDFW implemented management actions to provide additional opportunity to state crabbers within the QIN U&A, including opening of areas within the PSMA on March 21, 2025, and the opening of the secondary special management area (SSMA) on May 1, 2025, to increase opportunity for non-treaty fishers. A list of management actions taken by the state and Quinault within the QIN U&A during the 2024-25 season is provided in Table 2.

Date	Change
Dec. 29, 2024	QIN fishery opener.
Feb. 1, 2025	450-pot limit imposed on treaty fishers within the PSMA.
Feb. 11, 2025	State fishery opened north of Klipsan Beach; PSMA closed to non-treaty fishers.
March 21, 2025	SSMA established shoreward of a line approximating the 17-fathom depth curve between Split Rock and Joe Creek; 100-pot limit instated within newly opened portion of PSMA.
April 21, 2025	Pot limit lifted in PSMA.
April 29, 2025	QIN fishery closed for the season.
May 1, 2025	SSMA opened to non-treaty fishers; 200-pot limit instated within newly opened SSMA.
May 9, 2025	Pot limit lifted within SSMA.

Table 2: Management actions employed by QIN and WDFW to equalize harvest opportunity within the QIN U&A during the 2024-25 coastal Dungeness crab season.

2024-25 test fishery summary

WDFW conducts a preseason test fishery starting in late October to determine the percentage of meat recovered from Dungeness crab. WDFW follows tri-state preseason testing protocols and hires contracted coastal commercial crab vessels to complete tests. Westport and Long Beach stations are repeatedly sampled until a meat pick-out percentage of 23% is obtained (Figure 8).

During the 2024-25 season, WDFW conducted three rounds of test fishing within the Westport test area and four rounds of testing within the Long Beach test area. The meat pick-out threshold of 23% as outlined within the tri-state preseason testing protocols was exceeded within the Westport test area Dec. 16, 2024, and within the Long Beach test area Jan. 6, 2025.

Preseason testing is currently underway for the 2025-26 season. [Test fishing results for Washington, Oregon, and California can be found online](#) as they are available.

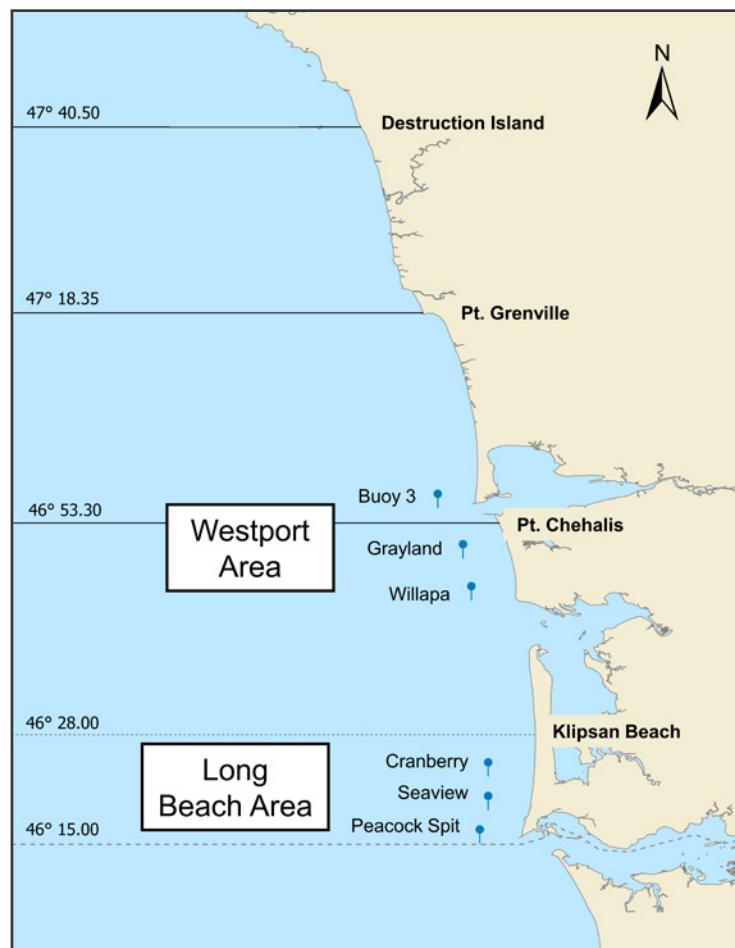


Figure 8: Locations of WDFW coastal Dungeness crab test fishery stations.



2025-26 season rule changes

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission approved the adoption of new rules affecting the Washington coastal Dungeness crab fishery on April 4, 2025. A complete description of rule changes to gear requirements can be found on [WDFW's webpage](#).

New comprehensive line marking requirements

Line used in the Washington coastal Dungeness crab fishery must follow the new red and black marking rules. Line markings must be unique to the fishery, meaning they cannot be used in other fisheries within Washington (including Puget Sound crab) and markings required in other state or federal fisheries (such as Oregon crab) cannot be used in the Washington coastal crab fishery.

Marking requirements can be met by using red and black line made for the Washington coastal fishery or by adding sets of solid red and black marks. WDFW has created a [compliance guide](#) to help understand the new line marking requirements. Reference the compliance guide and [WAC 220-340-430](#) for more information.

The new line marking requirements are being implemented in two phases; the first goes into effect for the 2025-26 season and the second goes into effect for the 2028-29 season.

[View WDFW's
Line Marking
Compliance Guide:](#)



For the 2025-26 season:

Phase One: Effective Dec. 1, 2025

- ▶ All surface line (aka trailer line) must be marked exclusive to the fishery with red and black.
- ▶ A 12-inch continuous red mark is still required within one fathom of the main diver buoy on the main vertical line. A 12-inch red mark within one fathom of the crab pot is no longer required (Figure 9).

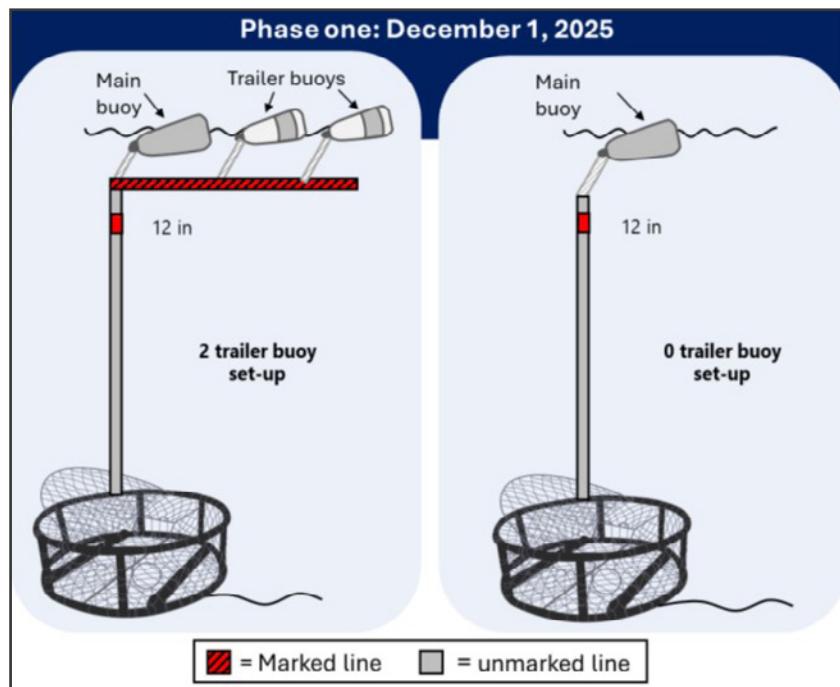


Figure 9: Diagram representing the portion of line required to be marked red and black by the 2025-26 season.



For the 2025-26 season, **all surface line (trailer line) must be marked with red and black**. This requirement can be met using either manufactured red and black line or a set of solid marks on any trailer line connecting two buoys (Figures 10, 11). Buoy straps (aka buoy gangion lines) are exempt from line marking; they can be no longer than 4 feet measured from opposing loop ends. A set of marks is defined as two 2-foot-long marks, and solid marks must cover the circumference of the line.

Manufactured line option: Manufactured line 2/3 red and 1/3 black line

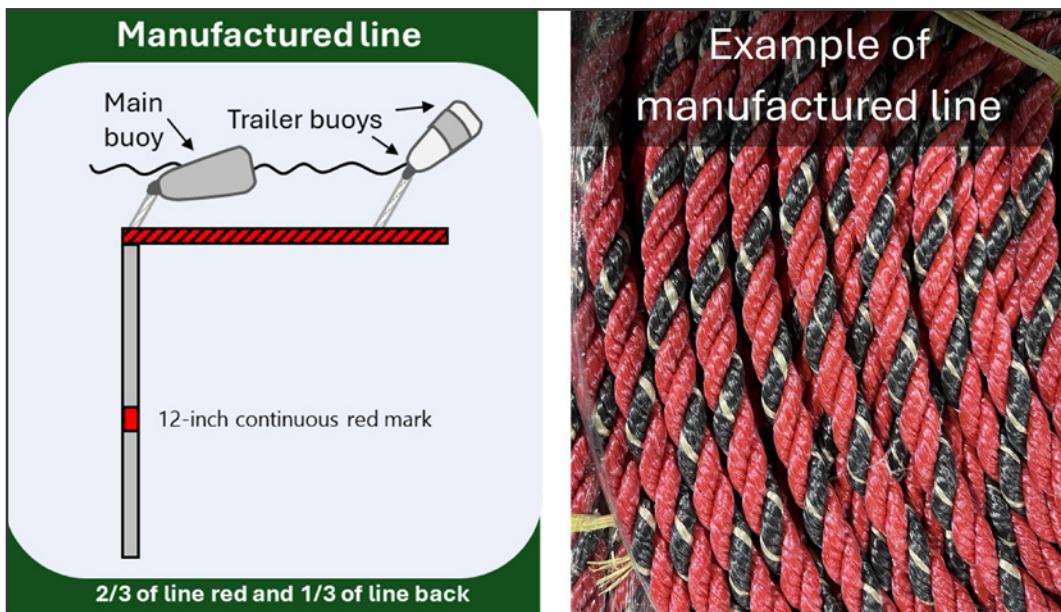


Figure 10: Diagram showing line marking requirements for the 2025-26 season: manufactured line with Washington crab-specific red and black markings, placement of a 12-inch continuous red mark within the top fathom of the main line, and example photo of manufactured state fishery-specific line.

Solid marking options:

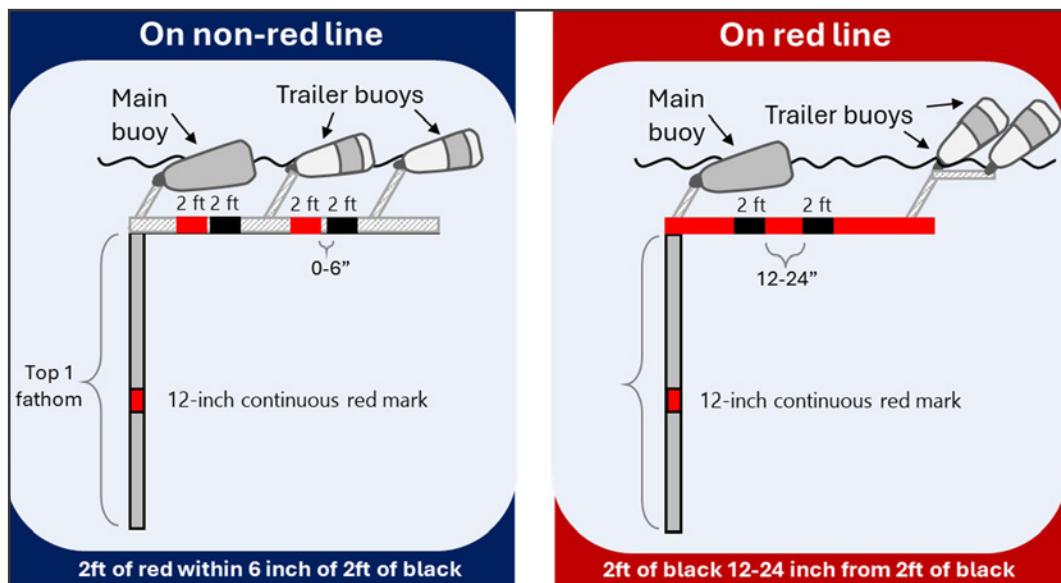


Figure 11: Diagram showing line marking requirements for the 2025-26 season: solid marking patterns for non-red and red line, including placement of a 12-inch continuous red mark within the top fathom of the main line.



The second phase of comprehensive line marking, required for the 2028-29 season, expands the line marking requirement to include marking the top portion of the line connecting the main buoy to the shellfish pot (Figure 12).

Phase Two: Effective Dec. 1, 2028

- ▶ The top 15 fathoms of line connecting each crab pot to the main buoy must be marked exclusive to the fishery with red and black.
- ▶ When fishing with less than 20 fathoms of line, the top 50% of the line must be marked.
- ▶ Surface line marking from phase one is still required.

New buoy brand restrictions

Starting in the 2025-26 season, non-treaty licensed fishers may no longer register or use any buoy brand required by a treaty tribal fishery ([WAC 220-340-430](#)).

This ensures buoy brands remain unique to their respective fisheries and prevents confusion when identifying gear involved in an entanglement event.

New surface gear limits

For the 2025-26 season, regulations limit the amount of surface gear permitted ([WAC 220-340-430](#)). Regulations limit the number of buoys and the length of gear, in the following ways:

1. Surface gear is limited to 36 feet total, measured as the line connecting the main (diver) buoy to the last trailer buoy.
2. Buoy straps (aka buoy gangion lines) are limited to 4 feet as measured from opposite loops.
3. Surface buoys are limited to two trailer buoys, in addition to the main diver buoy.
4. One end marker buoy is allowed, if it is less than 5 inches in diameter and doesn't extend more than 3 feet beyond the last trailer buoy.

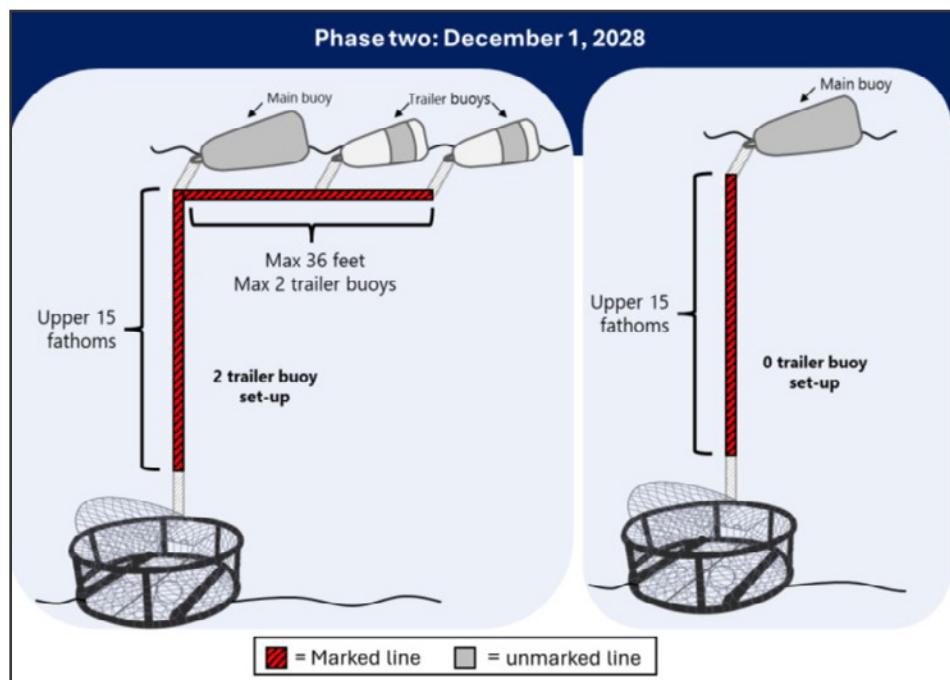


Figure 12: Diagram representing the portion of line required to be marked red and black by the 2028-29 season.

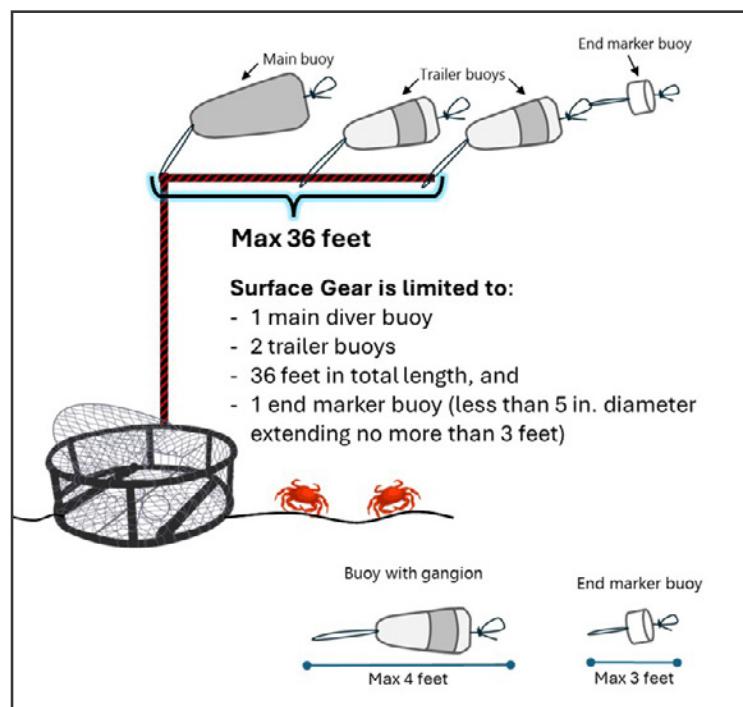


Figure 13: Diagram of maximum surface gear allowances.



Reminders for the 2025-26 season

Buoy registration

Buoy registration is a critical requirement for all fishery participants to enhance accountability and promote responsible fishing practices. The registration process involves providing information about your buoy brand and color, which is essential for identifying the crab gear owner and attributing gear to the correct fishery in the event of marine mammal or other marine life entanglements.



**Registration of buoy colors
must be done annually using
[WDFW's online form](#).**

Marine Mammal Authorization Certificate

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) prohibits killing or injuring marine mammals. However, the Marine Mammal Authorization Program provides an annual exemption for accidentally killing or injuring non-endangered marine mammals during commercial fisheries. All Washington coastal Dungeness crab fishery license holders are automatically registered for a Marine Mammal Authorization Certificate.

You are required to download and print your annual authorization from NOAA Fisheries. Authorization certificates are issued on the calendar year; the 2025 certificate is available now and the 2026 certificate is expected to be released soon on the website above. As part of this authorization, **you are required to file a report with NOAA Fisheries within 48 hours** of an incidental interaction with a marine mammal.

For more information, contact Dan Lawson at Dan.Lawson@noaa.gov or 206-526-4740.

14-day landing requirement

From May 1 through Sept. 15, it is unlawful to leave Dungeness crab pots deployed in Grays Harbor, Willapa Bay, the Columbia River, or Pacific Ocean waters adjacent to Washington for more than 14 consecutive days without making a Dungeness crab landing ([WAC 220-340-480](#)).

During the 2024-25 season, approximately 16 vessels were found to be in violation of the 14-day landing requirement during the summer management period. After review of the vessels' electronic monitoring (EM) data, it was confirmed that several of these vessel operators had tended to their gear during the 14 days but had not made a landing. EM staff contacted those vessel operators and reminded them of the landing requirement. Multiple other vessels were forwarded to enforcement for further investigation of the landing violation. Compliance with this landing requirement is mandatory and is being enforced. Crabbers should be mindful of this requirement if intending to participate in the fishery after May 1.



Electronic monitoring (EM)

WDFW staff continue to gather valuable data from the EM systems installed on all Washington coastal Dungeness crab vessels. This past season, only two fisher trips were unobserved due to an EM system failure. Fish ticket errors continue to be found at a similar rate to last season. WDFW staff encourage vessel operators to make sure the areas listed on the fish ticket are accurate before they sign the fish ticket or dock slip and respond promptly to EM staff requests to review any fish ticket discrepancies.

Crabbers must subscribe to a data plan before the start of the 2025-26 season. Please visit [this website if using a LIME system](#). Subscriptions will again cover the entire Washington Dungeness crab season.

After purchasing a data plan, all fishery participants must:

1. [Submit an activation report](#) to WDFW. Activation reports may also be mailed or emailed to EM program staff. **Activation reports must be submitted before the vessel begins participating in the coastal Dungeness crab fishery** (this includes the 73-hour gear set period).
2. WDFW staff will provide confirmation that the LIME unit is transmitting data to the contact information provided on the form. Crabbers do not need to wait for this confirmation to begin fishing.

WDFW staff are available to help coastal Dungeness crab fishery participants meet EM requirements.

For questions please contact:

► WDFW Electronic Monitoring Program

48 Devonshire Road, Montesano, WA 98563

Phone: 360-249-4628

Email: coastal.crab.EM@dfw.wa.gov

► Robert Morgan

Electronic Monitoring Program Manager

Phone: 360-480-8596

Email: Robert.Morgan@dfw.wa.gov

Crabber/towboat lane agreement

In 1971, West Coast commercial Dungeness crabbers and merchant mariners (primarily tugboat operators) made an agreement. They created specific lanes for tugboat operators and all other merchant mariners to use when the Dungeness crab fishing season was open. Both industries agreed that crab gear would not be set within these lanes, called "towlanes" (Figure 14). This reduces the potential for gear to be lost due to vessel and gear interference.

During the 2024-25 season, 114 crab vessels fished gear inside of the tow lanes and 65 vessels fished gear inside the heavily trafficked Grays Harbor and Columbia River access lanes. WDFW encourages vessels to keep these lanes clear to prevent gear loss. Up-to-date towlane charts can be found on the [Washington Sea Grant webpage](#).

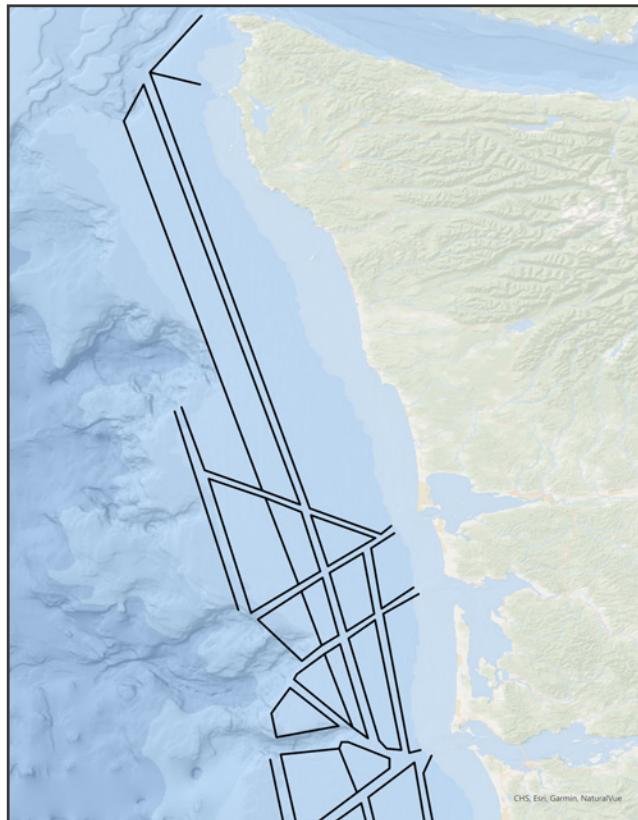


Figure 14: Towlanes along Washington's coast. Towlanes change depending on the time of the year. This image is for visual representation only and should not be used for navigational purposes.



Summer fishery sampling

The [Coastal Dungeness Crab Summer Fishery Management Plan](#) provides protection for soft-shelled crab during the peak male recruitment molt period when they are more susceptible to handling mortality. From the first Sunday in July through Sept. 15, a 2,500-pound weekly landing limit is in place. During this period, WDFW conducts crab condition tests via dockside samples, as well as ride-along trips with consenting commercial crabbers. A 25% soft-shell limit for dockside samples, and a 50% limit for shipboard, is used to determine whether to further reduce landing limits. Shell condition tests collected this summer during ride-along trips remained below the 50% threshold for soft-shelled crab (Figure 15), and the weekly limit remained at 2,500 pounds through the end of the season.

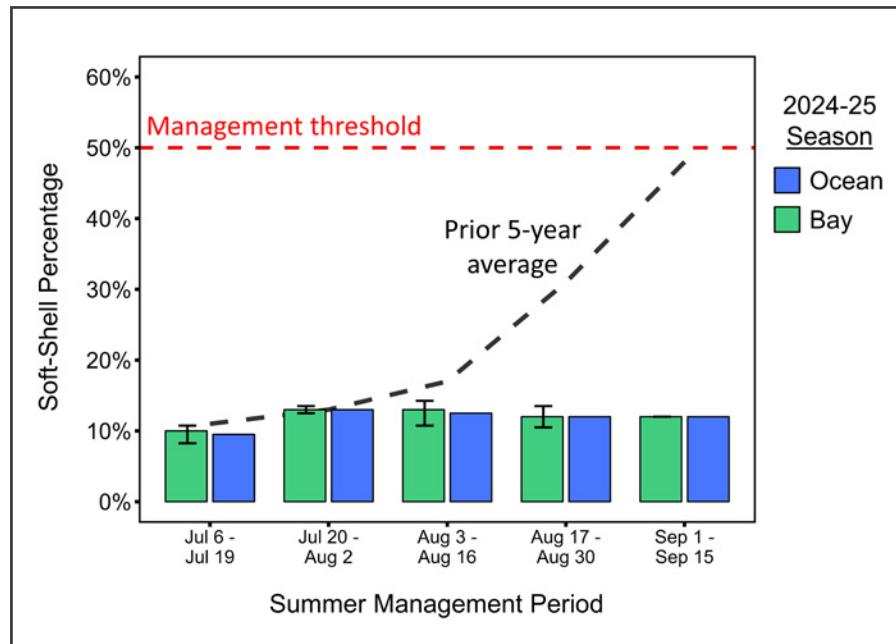


Figure 15: Percentage of soft-shelled crab observed during 2025 summer fishery ride-along trips compared to the previous five-year average. Two-week management periods begin the first Sunday in July. Ride-along trips left from various ports along the Washington coast. Crab collected were categorized as originating either from the ocean or one of the coastal estuaries (Grays Harbor or Willapa Bay).



Derelict gear recovery

Permitted recovery of derelict commercial crab gear for the 2024-25 season began May 1 and continued through Oct. 31, 2025. During the recovery period, summer tags were required on active gear to exempt it from the coastal gear recovery program.

WDFW issued 55 recovery permits to crabbers operating in coastal waters, including the Columbia River, Willapa Bay, and Grays Harbor. Of the 55 permits issued, 37 permit holders actively recovered gear. In-season recovery continues to be highly effective in removing derelict gear earlier in the year, helping to reduce the risk of entanglements as whale populations migrate into Washington waters starting in the spring. A total of 1,930 pots were recovered in 2025: 1,894 in-season (98.1%) and 36 after Sept. 15 during the post-season gear recovery period (Figure 16).

Over the past 10 seasons (2015-25), an average of 667 pots were recovered annually. The number of pots recovered during the 2024-25 season exceeded this average by approximately 187%. One factor that may have contributed to an increase in recoveries was a series of storms off the Washington coast in February; high winds and currents scattered gear. Fishers also reported gear being pulled underwater for extended periods during April and May due to strong currents, only to resurface weeks or months later.

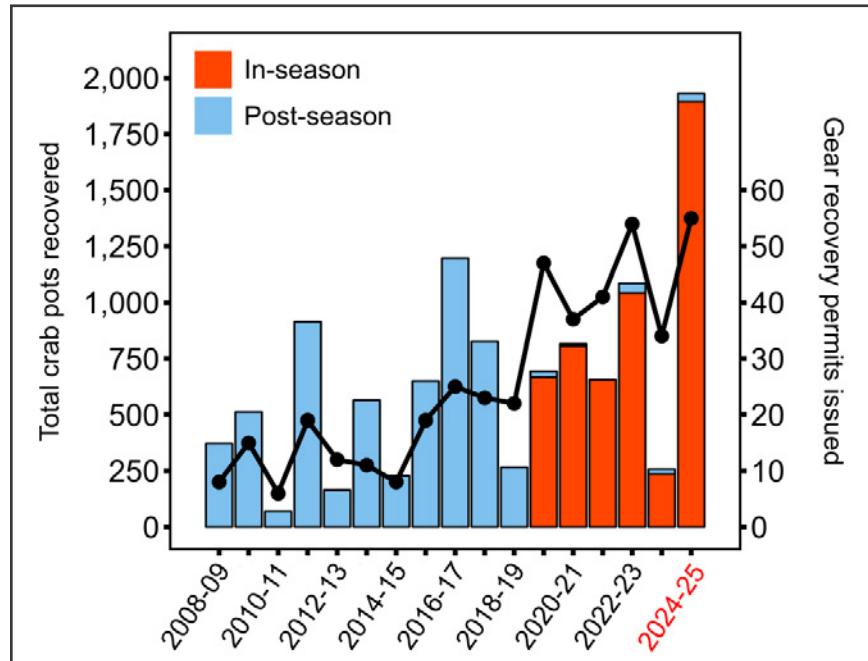


Figure 16: Derelict gear recovery, number of pots recovered and permit holders that landed gear per season, 2008-09 through 2024-25.



Derelict Gear Recovery Program Permit:

- ▶ **Permits are available beginning in April.**
- ▶ **To apply for a permit, email Jamie.Fuller@dfw.wa.gov or call 360-580-0875.**



Whale entanglements and conservation efforts

Entanglements in fishing gear have been documented as one of the largest contributors to human-caused mortality and serious injury of large whales on the West Coast. Since 2014 there have been an elevated number of entanglements (Figure 17). Commercial Dungeness crab gear makes up the largest portion of identifiable gear in large whale entanglements; however, over 50% are in unidentified gear.

Gear from the Washington coastal Dungeness crab fishery has been confirmed in entanglements of humpback and gray whales. From 2015-24, there were 14 confirmed humpback whale entanglements and seven confirmed gray whale entanglements (Figure 18). There have been zero confirmed entanglements with Washington coastal Dungeness crab gear in 2025 as of Oct. 31, 2025.

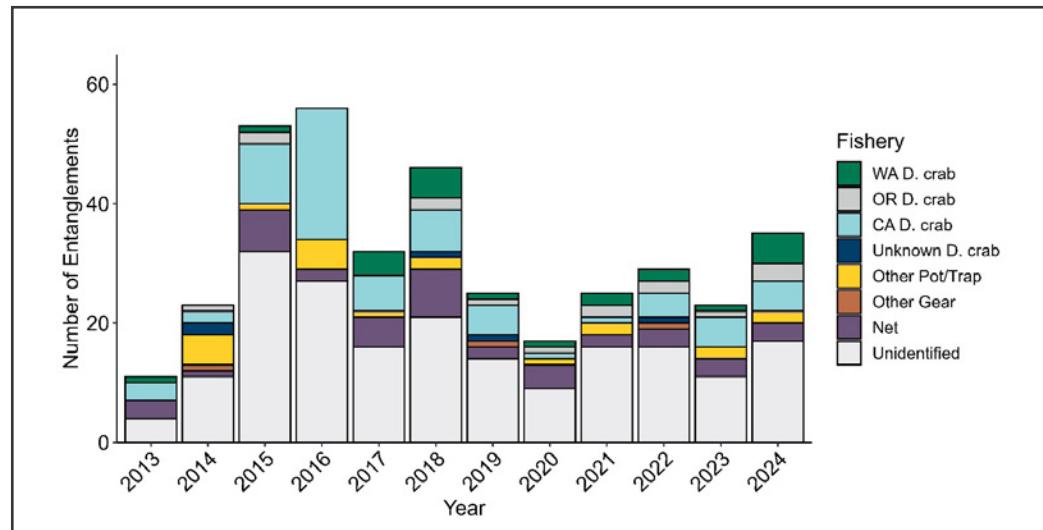


Figure 17: Number of confirmed large whale entanglements by the identified source on the West Coast from 2013-24 (D. crab = Dungeness crab).

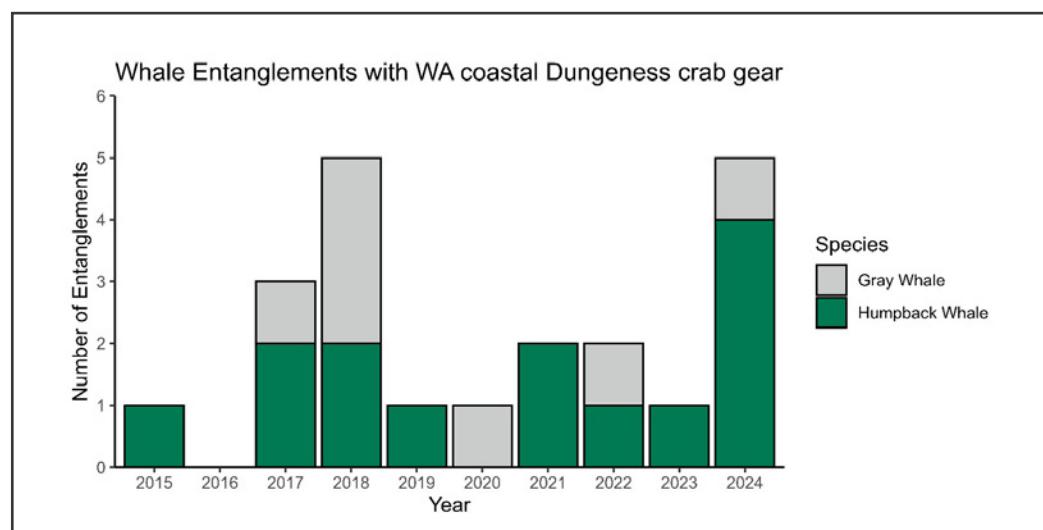


Figure 18: Number of confirmed large whale entanglements with Washington coastal Dungeness crab gear each year by whale species from 2015-24.

Whales are granted federal protections under the MMPA and Endangered Species Act (ESA) that define the allowable impacts from fisheries and outline processes to reduce impacts. Three populations of humpback whales are observed in Washington waters: the ESA-listed Mainland Mexico and Central America populations and the non-ESA-listed Hawaii population. The gray whales observed in Washington waters are not ESA-listed.



WDFW actions taken to reduce entanglement risk

The summary below highlights some of the actions WDFW has taken to reduce the risks of marine mammals becoming entangled in crabbing gear.

WDFW limits the amount of gear and line in the water in spring and summer, when whales are known to feed off the Washington Coast (Figure 19). Since the 2020-21 season, the Department has imposed a summer season one-third pot limit reduction ([WAC 220-340-480](#)) and allowed in-season derelict gear recovery. Crab pots must use only the amount of line necessary for the tides, currents, and weather ([WAC 220-340-430](#)); this requirement ensures that lines remain taut and vertical, reducing the risk of entanglement. New rules adopted in 2023 expanded the taut line guideline to other shellfish and pot fisheries in the state. In 2025, WDFW adopted regulations that limit the amount and length of surface gear and comprehensive line marking ([WAC 220-340-430](#)).

How can you help?

1. Follow WDFW's "Directive to minimize whale entanglement risk in commercial Dungeness crab fishing," including following the best management practices.
2. Report entangled whales or sea turtles immediately to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) entanglement response hotline at 1-877-SOS-WHALE (1-877-767-9425) or hail the U.S. Coast Guard on Channel 16. If possible, wait near the entangled animal.
3. Take [Level 1 First Responder training](#) to learn how to properly assess, document, and report entangled whales. This course is an educational option to help contribute to documentation and response efforts and better understand the various roles involved in disentanglement.



Photo by: Elliott Hazen, NOAA Fisheries permit #14245



Report Entangled Whales IMMEDIATELY

1-877-SOS-WHALE (1-877-767-9425) or hail the U.S. Coast Guard on Channel 16



Best management practices

- ▶ Remove any fishing gear you are not actively tending during the season and have all gear out of the water by the end of the season ([WAC 220-340-480](#)).
- ▶ Minimize scope. Use only the amount necessary to compensate for tides, currents, and weather ([WAC 220-340-430](#)).
- ▶ Minimize excess line to avoid floating line at the surface. Floating line should be as limited as practical between the main buoy and trailer buoy(s) and can be no longer than 36 feet ([WAC 220-340-430](#)).
- ▶ When changing set location across depths, adjust the length of pot lines by adjusting shots (i.e., measured length of line) to maintain the minimum amount of scope necessary to compensate for currents and tides.
- ▶ Avoid setting gear in the vicinity of whales when possible. Communicate the locations of high whale activity with other crabbers.
- ▶ Minimize knots and splices which can get caught up in the baleen.
- ▶ Mark your gear according to regulations ([WAC 220-340-430](#)).

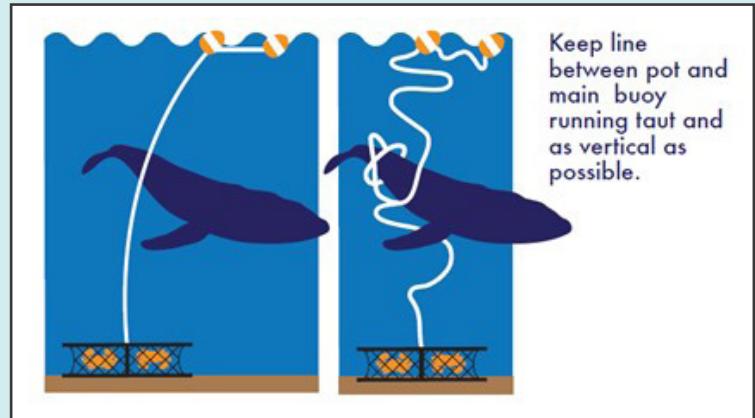


Figure 19: How line requirements can reduce entanglement risk.

Conservation plan and incidental take permit

WDFW is developing the Washington Coastal Dungeness Crab Conservation Plan (CP), in collaboration with NOAA Fisheries, to bring the fishery into compliance with federal ESA regulations as the foundation of an incidental take permit application. The CP represents a long-term strategy for managing the fishery to reduce the risk of marine life entanglements in alignment with WDFW's mission.



Photo by: Brian Snyder

West Coast Take Reduction Team

NOAA Fisheries [established a West Coast Take Reduction Team \(TRT\)](#) on Nov. 4, 2025, under their authority of the MMPA, to reduce incidental mortality and serious injury of strategic stocks of marine mammals. The TRT will address the Washington/Oregon/California sablefish pot fishery and two humpback whale stocks: Main-land Mexico and Central America/Southern Mexico. The TRT includes fishing industry representatives, fisheries managers, federal resource managers, scientists, and conservationists. TRT members have six months to develop and agree on a Take Reduction Plan that reduces fisheries' impacts on the strategic stocks. Updates on the West Coast TRT process [can be found online](#).



Recreational crabbing

WDFW's Coastal Recreational Crab Monitoring Program is based out of the Coastal Region office in Montesano and the Willapa Bay Field Station in Ocean Park. Team members are working to refine established fishery monitoring procedures for coastal crab spanning from Neah Bay to the Columbia River, including Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay, while continuing to collect data and educate the crabbing public.

Priorities during the 2024-25 season were to:

1. Monitor crabbing effort and catch at major ports.
2. Further define how crabbing effort is affected by seasonality, holidays, and public participation in other fisheries.
3. Define how boat-based crabbing effort differs by boat type.
4. Understand how delays in opening the commercial crab season influence winter recreational crabbing effort.
5. Conduct beach surveys to further define crabbing effort, harvest, and crabber demographics.
6. Develop estimation methodology and generate preliminary harvest estimates.

This year creel staff surveyed 21 coastal access sites within Grays Harbor and Pacific counties, completing 12,237 interviews and sampling 9,781 Dungeness crabs from 20,187 crabbers for biological data. Team members have also distributed thousands of crab informational kits, gauges, and shellfish stickers while interacting with crabbers in the field or at community outreach events. Of these sites, the largest share of observed crab caught was in the Columbia River, followed by Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay, respectively. Crabbing from marina piers and vessels represented the largest share of crabbing effort.

The Coastal Recreational Crab Monitoring Program is working to generate estimates of total crabbing effort and catch at each sampling site. Keep an eye out for future updates on our progress!



Dungeness crab megalopae light trap project

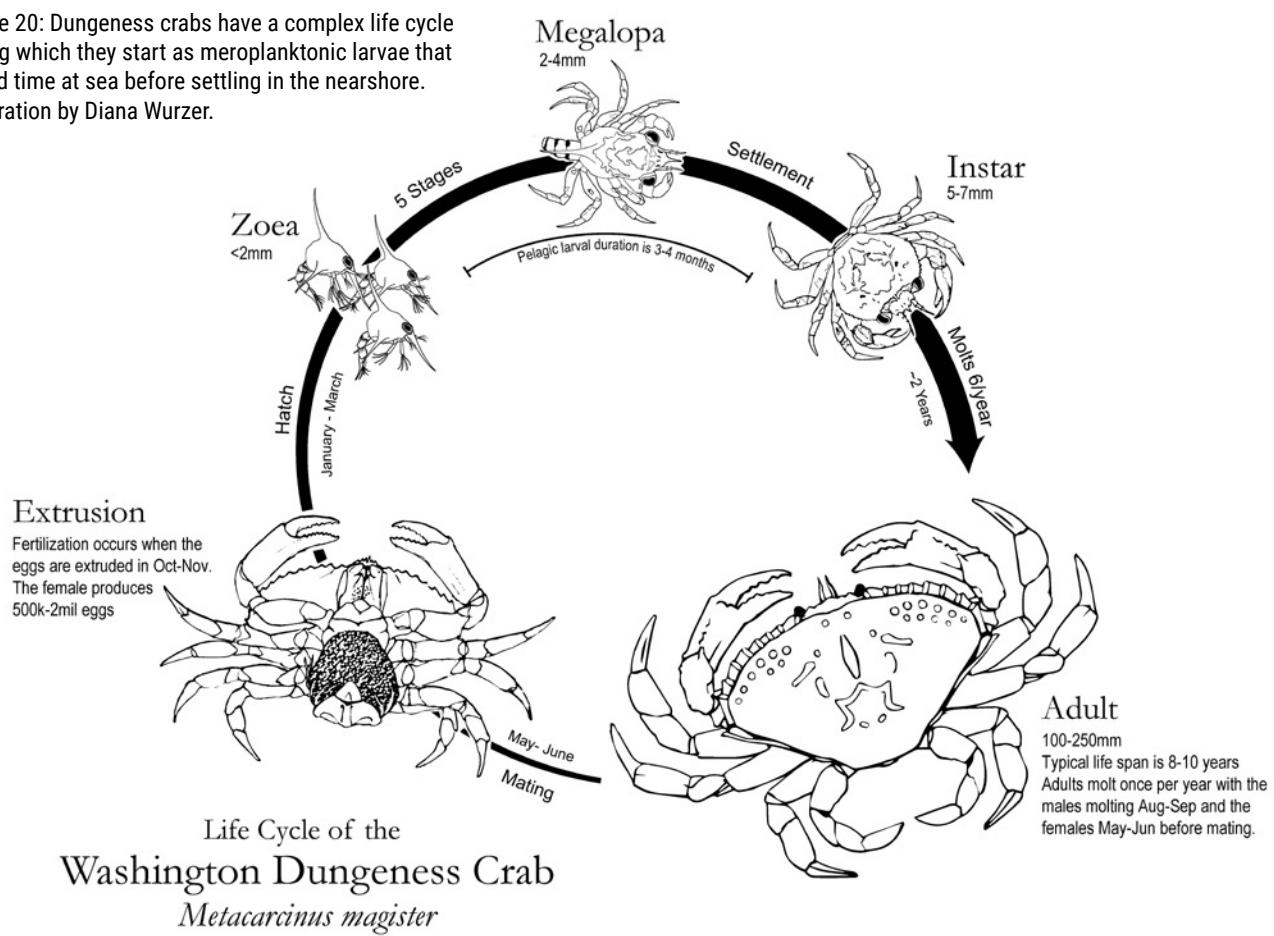
This summer marked the third year of WDFW's efforts to catch Dungeness crab megalopae using light traps in partnership with the Pacific Northwest Crab Research Group (PCRG). A study by University of Oregon Professor Emeritus Alan Shanks showed the number of larval crabs that return to the shelf each year could help predict the commercial landings of adult crabs four years later. WDFW and PCRG are determining whether that model could also apply to Washington waters.

The megalopae stage is the largest and final planktonic stage before larvae molt into crabs and settle on the sea floor (Figure 20). In spring through summer, Dungeness crab megalopae return to nearshore areas, where they enter the benthic instar,

or juvenile, stage. They grow to harvestable size in about four or five years, which is how long WDFW will need to trap them to potentially start seeing correlations between larval quantities and adult crab populations.

WDFW staff set light traps in Westport and Tokeland in early March 2025 and counted megalopae daily before pulling the traps in early August. Light traps consist of a water cooler jug topped with a 5-gallon bucket. Inside the bucket is a timer by which a light in the jug turns on at night and off in the morning. Megalopae and other marine organisms are attracted to the light. They enter the trap by swimming through funnels cut into the sides of the jug and remain captive until the trap is sampled.

Figure 20: Dungeness crabs have a complex life cycle during which they start as meroplanktonic larvae that spend time at sea before settling in the nearshore. Illustration by Diana Wurzer.



Trap abundance varies yearly between locations (Figure 21). WDFW will continue to trap at these locations to build a long-term dataset to understand crab population dynamics and oceanographic influences on recruitment. Total catch from each trap by year is reported in Table 3. Once sampling is finished, organisms are returned to the water.

Location	Year	Megalopae	Instar	Total
Westport	2023	20,246	2,103	22,349
	2024	1,054	45	1,099
	2025	59	14	73
Tokeland	2024	17,793	846	18,638
	2025	13,114	822	13,936

Table 3: Annual totals of Dungeness crab megalopae and instars captured by the Westport and Tokeland light traps by sampling year.

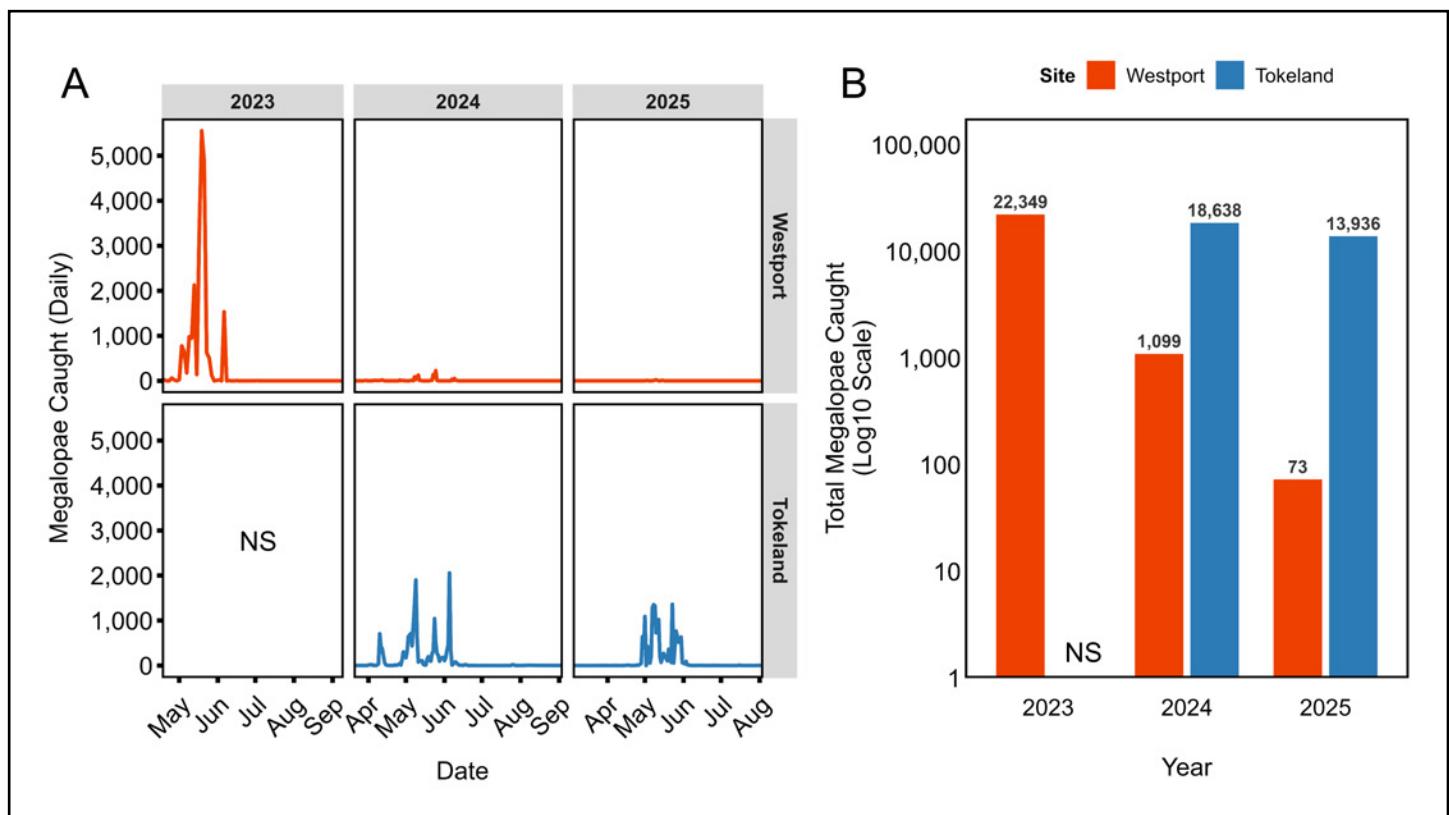


Figure 21: Dungeness crab megalopae caught by light traps within the Westport and Tokeland marinas during the past three seasons (2023-25). Tokeland was not sampled (NS) during 2023.



Enforcement update

The WDFW Enforcement Program's mission is to protect Washington's natural resources and ensure the public's fair and responsible use of those resources. During the 2024-25 coastal Dungeness crab season, WDFW enforcement officers upheld this mission by enforcing rules and regulations that promote sustainability and fairness across the fishery. Their efforts help ensure that everyone, from commercial fishers to recreational crabbers, can harvest Dungeness crab sustainably, protecting the resource for future generations. The summary below highlights key enforcement actions and trends observed throughout the season in both the commercial and recreational fisheries.

Commercial fishery

Throughout the 2024-25 season, enforcement activity in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery followed clear seasonal patterns. During winter and spring, undersized-crab violations were most common. As the summer management period began in May, enforcement shifted toward gear-related issues, including 14-day landing rule violations and derelict gear recovery. By late summer, officers also encountered a significant case of intentional gear tampering in the Columbia River. Regular preseason helicopter surveys and dockside inspections proved valuable in detecting potential violations early, and officers observed improved compliance and awareness among vessel operators as the season progressed.



Undersized crab violations

Undersized crab deliveries remained one of the most frequent commercial violations encountered this season, particularly during the spring when crab molt timing makes size compliance critical. Officers McOmber, Dean, Baldwin, and Morgan documented several significant cases in the Westport area, each underscoring the importance of careful sorting and adherence to legal size limits.

In April 2025, Officer McOmber investigated a tip about a vessel landing short crab in Westport. With assistance from Capt. Chadwick and Officer Morgan, he inspected the vessel's 3,900-pound offload and found 714 pounds — nearly 18% — were undersized, valued at roughly \$5,000. The crab was seized and donated. In a similar case the previous month, Sgt. Alexander and Officers Dean and Baldwin jointly measured a 2,406-pound offload that contained 284 pounds of undersized crab, resulting in citations for the skipper and all four deckhands. Collectively, these cases highlight WDFW's continued focus on preventing the take of undersized crab, a key measure in maintaining a sustainable and equitable commercial fishery.

14-day landing rule and gear abandonment

The 14-day landing rule, which requires that each active vessel make a legal landing at least once every 14 days to ensure that gear is actively worked, remained a major enforcement focus between May and September. In June 2025, Officers Garrison, McOmber, and Sgt. Dielman retrieved and seized 29 pots from a crabber who had failed to make a landing for several months, even after receiving a gear-recovery exemption. Charges for multiple 14-day



violations are being filed in that case. In September 2025, Officer Dean cited a vessel skipper for another 14-day rule violation following a late-season gear check. Together, these actions underscore the importance of timely landings to prevent derelict gear, reduce crab mortality, and maintain a sustainable fishery.

Preseason aerial and ocean patrols

WDFW enforcement officers coordinated with the U.S. Coast Guard to conduct preseason aerial surveys aimed at verifying compliance with gear placement and dump-day restrictions ahead of the 2024-25 season. In February 2025, Officer Garrison joined the Coast Guard on a helicopter patrol of the northern coast, where no violations were observed. These preseason flights serve as both an effective deterrent and an early indicator of strong compliance within the fleet, helping ensure that the season begins on a fair and orderly footing.

Tampered and illegal gear

In late summer, officers uncovered evidence of deliberate gear tampering in the Columbia River. Acting on a tip in September 2025, Sgt. Dielman, along with Officers Garrison and Jacobson, inspected 38 crab pots belonging to a single operator. They discovered that 20 pots had their escape tunnels zip-tied shut and several others had been “suitcased” with all entrances closed, functioning as illegal storage pots, each containing more than 70 crab. Multiple gross-misdemeanor charges are being referred to the prosecutor. This case highlights the Department's ongoing vigilance against illegal gear modification and reinforces the importance of fair and lawful fishing practices within the commercial fleet.

Recreational fishery

In the recreational Dungeness crab fishery, enforcement activity reflected the rhythm of the seasons. During the winter, officers encountered only a few cases of possession and wastage violations, often involving leftover or spoiled crab found in coolers. As spring and summer brought warmer weather and an increase in coastal visitors, licensing and gear-related infractions became more frequent, prompting both citations and educational outreach. By fall, enforcement efforts focused on ensuring compliance with pot closures in Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay, areas critical for protecting molting crab. Most of these late-season violations were addressed through education and warnings, reflecting strong overall cooperation and awareness among recreational crabbers.



Pot closure violations – Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay

WDFW officers placed particular emphasis on education and compliance during the seasonal pot closures within Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay, which are implemented each year to protect molting crab. In Grays Harbor, the pot fishery closes Sept. 16 through Nov. 30, while in Willapa Bay, the closure ends Nov. 15. These closures help reduce fishing pressure and minimize handling during periods when crabs have recently molted and have soft shells that harden as they recover.

Possession and waste violations

Officers responded to several cases involving possession and waste violations in the recreational fishery. In December 2024, Officer Dean contacted an individual in Westport found with 12 rotten Dungeness crab and four rotten red rock crab, eight of which were undersized. The crabs were seized, and the individual was cited for wastage and unlawful possession of undersized crab.

Also in Westport, Officer Dean contacted a pair of late-night crabbers on Float 20 and issued a warning for one undersized crab and for violating the Westport Marina's dawn-to-dusk rule. While concluding that inspection, he located three additional individuals crabbing in the dark at the end of the float. Their cooler contained several unmeasured undersized crabs, and they were using an extra piece of crab gear. The licensed individual, who had been cited twice previously for possession violations, received criminal citations for operating too many crab gear units and possessing undersized Dungeness crab, along with an infraction for possessing soft-shelled crab. The unlicensed crabber received an infraction for crabbing without a license.

Significant violations also occurred on the Long Beach Peninsula. Officer Jacobson received a tip about three individuals at Beards Hollow reportedly taking undersized and female crab and hiding them in containers concealed in the grass. Upon arriving, he located the camp and confirmed the hidden crab before the subjects returned. When contacted, the group denied harvesting any crab. Without revealing what he had already found, Officer Jacobson explained that witnesses had reported crab being hidden and instructed them to retrieve what they had concealed. One individual initially brought out only part of his catch and was then directed to retrieve the second cooler. In total, the group possessed 99 undersized crabs, including 98 females, and one individual did not have a valid license. Citations for Recreational Fishing 1st degree (x3), Failure to Submit Catch for Inspection (x2), and Recreational Fishing 2nd degree (no license) were issued. Most of the crab were still alive and were returned to the water. Officer Jacobson received assistance from the Long Beach Police Department deputy chief and several Washington State Parks rangers.

In a separate Beards Hollow case, Officer Jacobson responded to another tip and located a subject returning to his vehicle with 17 crabs, including 16 females. The subject was cited for Recreational Fishing 1st degree, and the crab were released near the harvest site.

Other recreational violations

During May 2025 patrols in Westport, Officer Morgan contacted recreational crabbers fishing with expired 2024 licenses. Infractions were issued, and the individuals were directed to remove their pots.

In another case, Officers Garrison and Smith and Sgt. Dielman, with assistance from the Special Investigations Unit and WDFW's Southwest Washington region, conducted a successful operation targeting an unlawful crab seller. The individual, a recreational crabber, had been advertising crab for sale online, with suspected activity dating back to 2024. All crab in possession were seized, and the individual's vehicle was taken for forfeiture.



Stay up-to-date

Many changes occur each season in the Washington coastal crab fishery. These may include updates to SMA boundaries or dates, marine toxin issues, pot limit changes, and marine mammal concerns. WDFW communicates these changes through various methods, including distributing emergency regulations by mail using the address on your license application. We also have a coastal crab email distribution list and a no-reply text system.

Sign up for our email and text lists by sending your name, email address, and cell phone number to Jamie.Fuller@dfw.wa.gov or 360-580-0875. You may also include members of your crew.



Visit [WDFW's Coastal commercial Dungeness crab fishery page](#) for more information.



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WDFW's new Crab Washington sticker and logo is available by request for use at festivals, events, and other outreach opportunities. Please contact TeamMontesano@dfw.wa.gov

WDFW Values

- ▶ **Accountability:** We hold ourselves and each other responsible for acting consistent with our values and mission.
- ▶ **Service:** We add value to Washington communities and seek to improve the public's experience.
- ▶ **Professionalism:** We serve in a manner that reflects positively on the Department and on ourselves.
- ▶ **Integrity:** We are consistently open, honest, ethical, and genuine in our actions.
- ▶ **Respect:** We treat each other with dignity.
- ▶ **Empathy:** We take time to understand and appreciate others.



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