

## European Green Crab Plain Language Talking Points – Jan. 2023

*These are intended as simple, accessible points to compliment more detailed EGC talking points.*

### Why are European green crabs a concern

- The European green crab is considered one of the world's worst invasive species.
- These crabs feed on clams, mussels, and other native shellfish. While digging for their next meal, green crabs can destroy habitats that salmon rely on, such as eelgrass beds.
- Invasive European green crabs threaten Washington's environment, coastal economies, and tribal and cultural resources.
- European green crabs have been blamed for the collapse of Maine's soft-shell clam industry. One green crab can eat 40 half-inch clams a day. These crabs now threaten tribal First Foods and Washington's shellfish and aquaculture industries.

### How to identify European green crabs

- The best way to identify the European green crab is by the five spines on either side of their eyes. No other crab in Washington state has this characteristic.
- Color is not the best way to identify these crabs, as they can be green, red, brown or orange.
- European green crabs are found along the shore, typically in less than 25 feet of water. They prefer areas protected from ocean waves or currents, such as mudflats, tidal sloughs, and river mouths (which are also known as estuaries).
- In Washington state, the European green crab is most often confused with the native hairy shore crab or helmet crab.

### What you can do

- Next time you are at the beach, look out for European green crabs. Report any suspected green crabs (alive or dead) to WDFW as soon as possible at: [wdfw.wa.gov/greencrab](https://wdfw.wa.gov/greencrab).
- For people who own beaches, tidelands or shellfish beds, support and permits for European green crab trapping may be available.
- We are **not** asking the public to kill suspected European green crabs at this time. This is to protect native crabs, who have been misidentified as green crabs and killed.
- As a Prohibited Invasive species in Washington, under state law it is illegal to possess a live European green crab. In this context, possess means transported, bought, or sold.

### Where they've been found

- European green crab infestations have been found along Washington's Pacific Coast including near the Columbia River, Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and Makah Bay.

- Small populations of European green crabs have been found along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, in the San Juan Islands, and in northwest Washington bays around Bellingham and Anacortes.
- European green crabs have not been found in Puget Sound south of Hood Canal and central Whidbey Island or within Skagit Bay.

## **What's being done**

- Emergency measures to control invasive European green crabs are well underway.
- In January of 2022, Governor Jay Inslee issued an emergency proclamation that directed WDFW to implement measures to control European green crabs, and to coordinate with other state agencies as well as tribal nations.
- Trapping is the main tactic WDFW, Native American tribes, shellfish growers, and partners are using to control invasive European green crabs.
- Washington Sea Grant leads a volunteer-based "Crab Team" that monitors for European green crab. This helps ensure early detection of the crabs in new locations.
- Under the Governor's emergency order, WDFW leads an Incident Command System that aids coordination amongst agencies, tribes, and partners.
- The Incident Command System aims to reduce European green crab populations to levels that do not harm environmental, economic, or cultural resources.
- Washington state is providing grant funding and other support to tribal co-managers, shellfish growers, and partners trapping for European green crabs.

## **History**

- European green crabs are native to Europe and North Africa. In 1989, green crabs were first discovered on the West Coast of the United States in San Francisco Bay, California. Over time, they made their way up the coast. They were first found in Washington state in 1998.
- Beginning around 2018, state and federal agencies, tribes, and partners noticed significant increases in European green crabs in some areas, likely linked to warmer water conditions. These areas include Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, Makah Bay, and Lummi Bay.

## **Eating**

- European green crabs are edible, but they aren't the most appealing meal.
- The crabs aren't bigger than your fist and, where eaten, are typically used for cooking stock or shellfish soup.

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