



State of Washington  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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**January 31, 2025**

Hello Puget Sound commercial crab industry members,

This memo serves to provide background and additional details on our recent comanager decision to reduce the quota in Region 1.

On January 29<sup>th</sup> state crustacean staff met with treaty co-managers to discuss the status and performance of ongoing state and treaty fisheries in Region 1. State and treaty comanagers collectively agreed to reduce total harvest in Region 1 for the 2024-2025 season. This decision:

- Continues state commercial harvest through February 15, 2025.
- Adjusts the total 2024-2025 allocation for both the state and tribes to whatever the total state harvest is following the closure of the fishery.
- Allows the treaty fisheries to continue until treaty total harvest in Region 1 equals the total harvest of the state.
- Requires treaty fisheries to close once the total treaty share equals that achieved by the state.

Several factors regarding the current Region 1 fishery prompted state and treaty co-managers to make this decision. These include: federally mandated equal sharing provisions, the management tools currently available to Puget Sound co-managed fisheries, the current status of total harvest to date and ongoing harvest rates for the state and treaty tribes collectively, and conservation concerns regarding potential impacts of late season fisheries. Given these concerns, our primary goal was to reduce the harvest of crab in Region 1 this season to ensure equal harvest by all parties and conserve the resource for future harvest

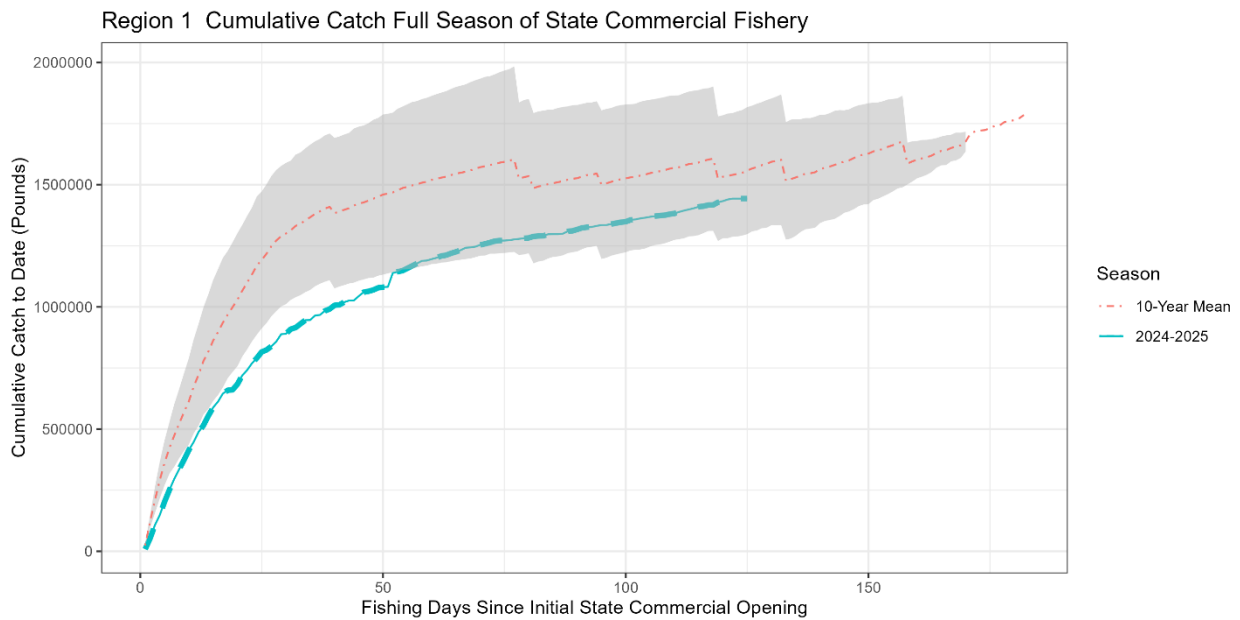
*Federally Stipulated Requirements*

This decision was made due to shared conservation and allocation concerns held by crustacean team staff and treaty managers. The Department is charged with co-managing with the tribes and meeting our treaty obligations to equally share fishery resources. Given the current allocation and harvest, it is the department's duty to act in way that both ensures all parties can achieve equitable harvest and minimizes undue harm to the resource. Collectively, the state and tribes have over 1 million pounds remaining to harvest from the 4.6 million pounds total Region 1 quota. The current rate of harvest would have both the state and treaty harvesters fishing through the entirety of the remaining season with little likelihood of both sides achieving share. In-season changes to quotas, whether up or down, must be made in alignment with equal sharing provisions. Despite current tribal harvest lagging behind the state, the tribes must also have an opportunity to fish to an equal share. For this season, we gained agreement with the comanagers that the treaty

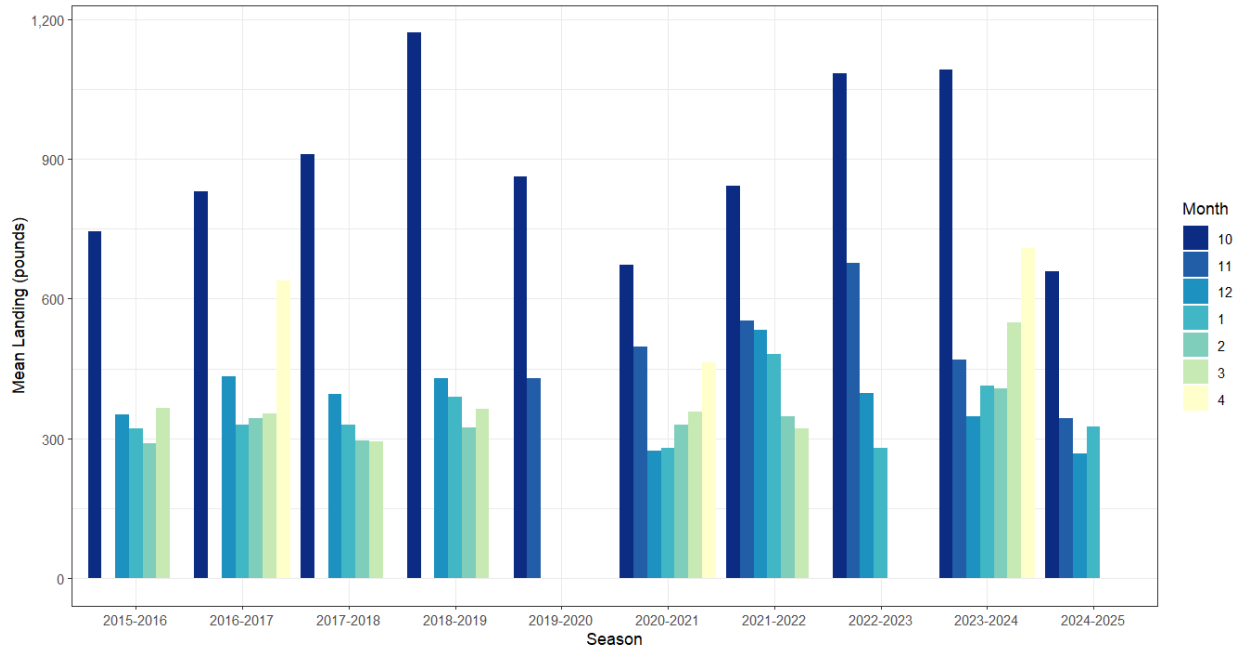
commercial fishery would stop, once they met the state share if that occurred prior to the hard closure dates in April.

### Allocation / Catch Rates

A primary contributing factor for the decision to adjust the total harvest targets were state and treaty harvest rates. The state harvest from this season has consistently been below our recent 10-year harvest average (Fig. 1). Even after accounting for some increase in catches following a spring “bite”, both state and tribes were both not projected to attain their full shares of 2.3 million lbs. The overall size of the average landings has also been generally smaller (Fig. 2) and the overall number of fishing days to-date are higher than the average of the last 10 -years (117 days). Historically, quotas have been adjusted downward following a year with below average fishery performance.



**Figure 1.** The 10-year mean cumulative harvest (red-dashed line) +/- one standard deviation (gray area) compared to the total commercial harvest of the 2024-2025 season (blue line) by fishing day for the state commercial fishery.



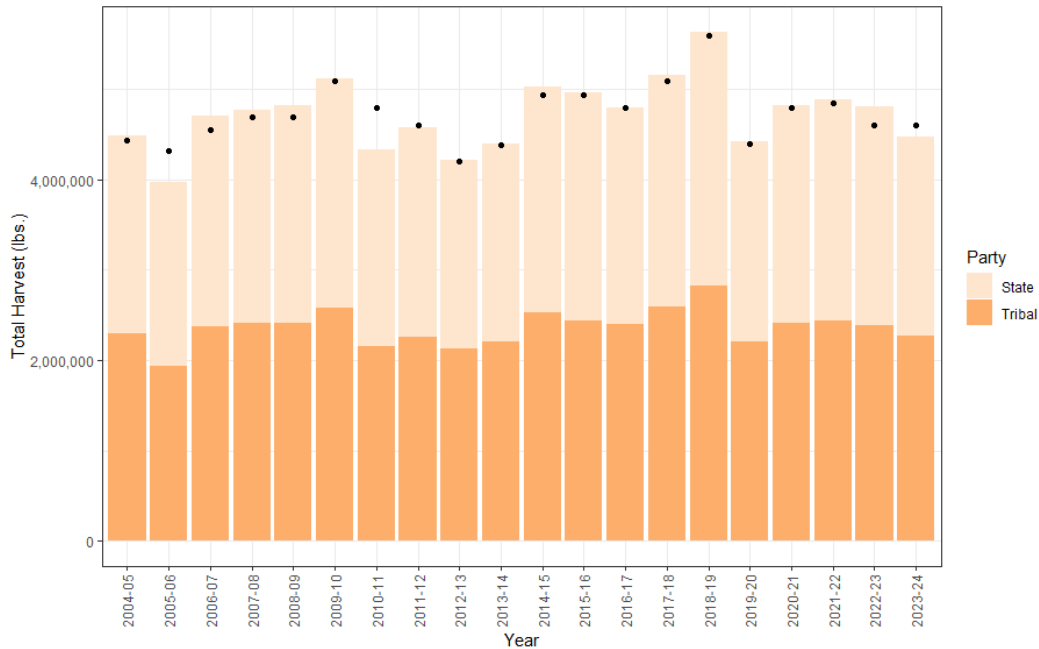
**Figure 2.** The mean individual landing size (pounds) by month (colors) for the 2015-2016 through 2024-2025 commercial season.

### *Management Tools /Remedies*

The quotas employed in this fishery are the primary management tool used to achieve 50/50 sharing. Each year, the quota in Region 1 is agreed-to prior to the initiation of harvest and without abundance data to inform an appropriate catch level. The last change to the Region 1 quota occurred prior to the start of the 2022/23 fishing season, which increased the quota from 2.2 to 2.3 million lbs. per side. We anticipate the final state share in the 2024/25 season to be around 2.0 million lbs. by the closure date on Feb. 15. This would equate to a 15% reduction in quota relative to preseason, and the last time the state and tribes total season harvest was below 2.0 million lbs., occurred in the 2005-2006 season (see Fig. 3 below). State and tribal co-managers in the recent past engaged in management planning and in-season discussions that resulted in quotas changing between years based on previous year's fishing performance. The last few years of co-management challenges have resulted in less active discussion on the quota, which has been static for the last 3 years, and both parties agree is inappropriate to achieve equal sharing with the current level of harvest this season.

Test fisheries are a tool to inform annual abundances, that can give fishery managers the ability to compare population abundance across years. The test fishery employed in Region 1 is primarily designed to sample soft shell prior to the onset of the fishery as opposed to providing standardized estimates of population abundance to inform quotas. In some regions, the state and treaty comanagers have developed and implemented quota setting methods that are informed directly by test fishing data. We are actively working to expand those methods to other regions, including Region 1. Unfortunately, it

takes time to build a robust, standardized dataset that can be used to inform relative population abundance.



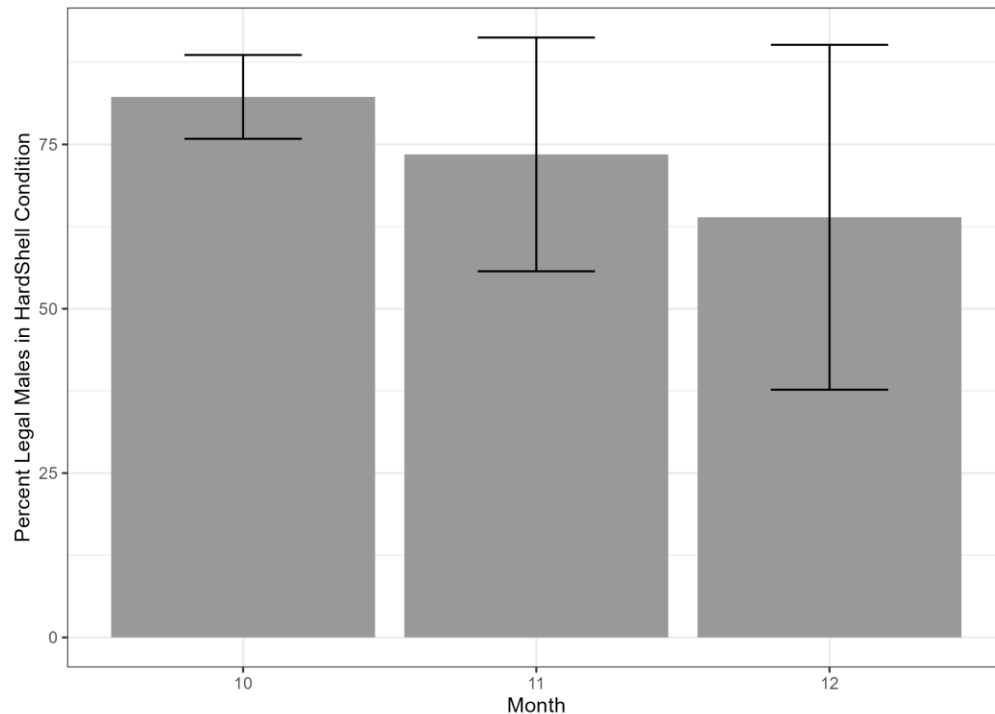
**Figure 3.** Annual State and treaty crab harvest from Region 1, with the final quota denoted by a black dot. In several years, the initial, pre-season quota was adjusted with in-season co-management agreements to produce the final quota.

### Conservation

Both State and Tribal co-managers have long acknowledged that closing the Dungeness crab fishery during the molt period is critical to the conservation of the resource. Limiting fishery interaction during periods when crab are molting is a key component of the Size-Sex-Season management framework used for Dungeness crab. The current management structure is designed to avoid non-landed mortality by establishing core seasons, however, there is increasing evidence that sustained harvest pressure combined with changing environmental conditions may be influencing molt timing and frequency, prompting managers to consider evaluating the current harvest seasons and conservation measures in place.

The 2023-24 harvest season lasted 170 fishing days and continued past the hard closure date of 4/15 until 4/17. On-board sampling data from mid-March 2024 indicated that that 16% legal males were a marketable shell-condition. During and following that season, all sectors of the industry expressed significant concerns over the amount of soft-shell crab that were handled. In response to concerns from last year we have been conducting monthly on-board sampling to assess the fishery performance and crab condition throughout the duration of the fishery. Data from these observations have shown a decreasing and more variable percentage of hard-shell crab overall in Region 1 (Fig. 4). The 2024-25 State commercial season to-date has already lasted

125 days. If the fishery was to continue to the hard closure date of 4/15 as projected, season would be 198 days, which be the longest season in over 10 years and at risk for encountering high levels of softshell crab.



**Figure 4.** Percentage of legal-size males in hard shell condition from ride-along samples conducted in October, November and December 2024. Samples were collected across all Region 1 catch areas each month.

For the reasons described above, state and tribal fishery managers ultimately decided to adjust 2024-2025 harvest targets to a number that is more realistic for the current circumstances. This change does not reflect a permanent change to Region 1 Harvest targets or season timing. We understand the impact this has on commercial harvesters, and we did not come to this decision lightly. Based on the data and information we have, curtailing fisheries this year will help ensure we have a robust fishery next year and into the future.

Sincerely,

The Puget Sound Crustacean Management Team

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