



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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December 26, 2019

The Honorable Kevin Van De Wege
Washington State Senator
212 John A. Cherberg Building
Post Office Box 40424
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Brian Blake
Washington State Representative
314 John L. O'Brien Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

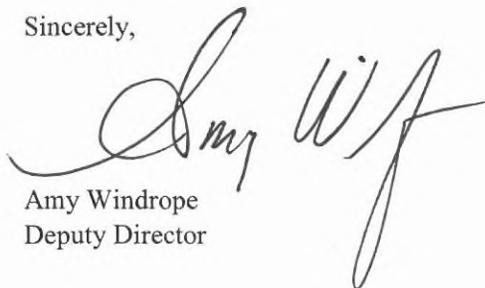
Dear Senator Van De Wege and Representative Blake:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) is required to submit a report to the legislature regarding the removal and disposal of derelict shellfish gear, including the allocation of funds for this purpose received through the sale of Dungeness Crab endorsements. Requirements for the report to the legislature are outlined in RCW 77.32.430, Section 5(a):

“(5)(a) The funds received from the sale of catch record cards, catch card penalty fees, and the Dungeness crab endorsement must be deposited into the state wildlife account created in RCW 77.12.170. One dollar of the funds received from the sale of each Dungeness crab endorsement must be used for the removal and disposal of derelict shellfish gear either directly by the department or under contract with a third party. The department is required to maintain a separate accounting of these funds and provide an annual report to the commission and the legislature by January 1st of every year. The remaining portion of the funds received from the sale of each Dungeness crab endorsement must be used for education, sampling, monitoring, and management of catch associated with the Dungeness crab recreational fisheries.”

Please find (attached) a report including background on the issue and a summary of the Department's activities and expenditures. If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Tom McBride, WDFW's Legislative Director, at (360) 902-2226.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy WDFW".

Amy Windrope
Deputy Director

Derelict Shellfish Gear

Report to the Legislature



December 26, 2019

Table of Contents

Background	2
2019 Activities and Expenditures	3
2020 Crab Gear Whale Entanglement Efforts	4



Background

Abandoned, lost, or discarded crab fishing pots in the waters of Puget Sound pose a threat to sea life and can degrade marine habitats. These lost crab pots, estimated at about 12,000 a year, can continue to catch and kill crab and other marine life, depleting key resources important to the ecosystem of Puget Sound and the region's economy.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), tribal co-managers and other organizations are working to help remove this derelict shellfish gear from Puget Sound. A portion of the funds WDFW received from the sale of Puget Sound Dungeness Crab Endorsements, a supplemental catch accounting license necessary to recreationally fish for crab in the Sound, go directly to this effort.

This work continues to improve the marine environment and helps to ensure crab populations remain sustainable; providing commercial, tribal and recreational fishing opportunities that are economically important to the Puget Sound region.

To fulfill requirements of RCW 77.32.430, dedicated derelict shellfish gear recovery funds expended in 2019: \$113,070



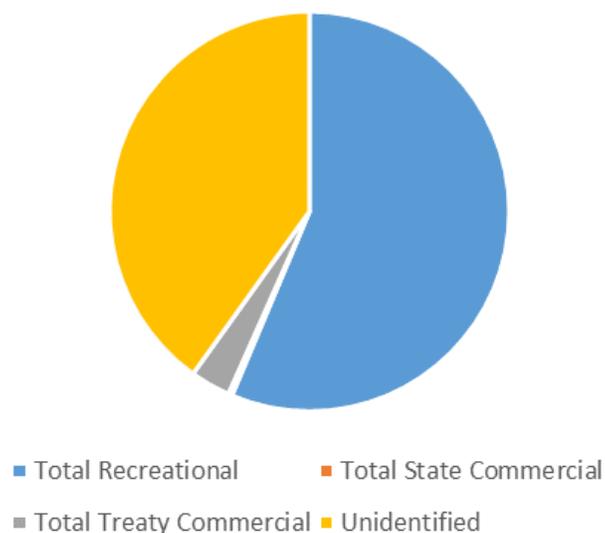
2019 Activities and Expenditures

WDFW contracts with the Northwest Straits Foundation to find and remove derelict shellfish gear while the crab fishing season is closed. Using funds dedicated to this effort (\$1 from each crab endorsement sold), a total of \$33,200 was expended on the Northwest Straits Foundation contract to detect derelict pots using side-scan sonar. Through these efforts, a total of 367 derelict pots were recovered which included 122 commercial pots and 275 recreational pots. Trapped inside the recovered pots were 243 live and 10 dead Dungeness crab, illustrating the need to remove derelict pots that continue to fish.

WDFW enforcement officers and biologists, in coordination with treaty tribal co-managers, conducted “crab pot sweeps” during the popular summer recreational crab fishery. The sweeps, funded by additional revenue from the sale of crab endorsements, took place on Tuesdays and Wednesdays when the recreational fishery was closed each week during the season. In 2019, this effort removed 1,237 crab pots from Puget Sound, including recreational, State commercial and Treaty commercial pots. A total of 22 WDFW enforcement officers and 6 shellfish staff worked 68 days on the water, and additional days returning pots or disposing of the gear. Overall, WDFW biological staff in 2019 spent \$79,870 on gear sweeps, documentation, outreach, gear return, and pot disposal.

In addition, WDFW Enforcement officers spent a total of **1,979 hours** conducting recreational crab shellfish patrols ensuring regulatory compliance on both open and closed days.

2019 WDFW Derelict Gear Recovery

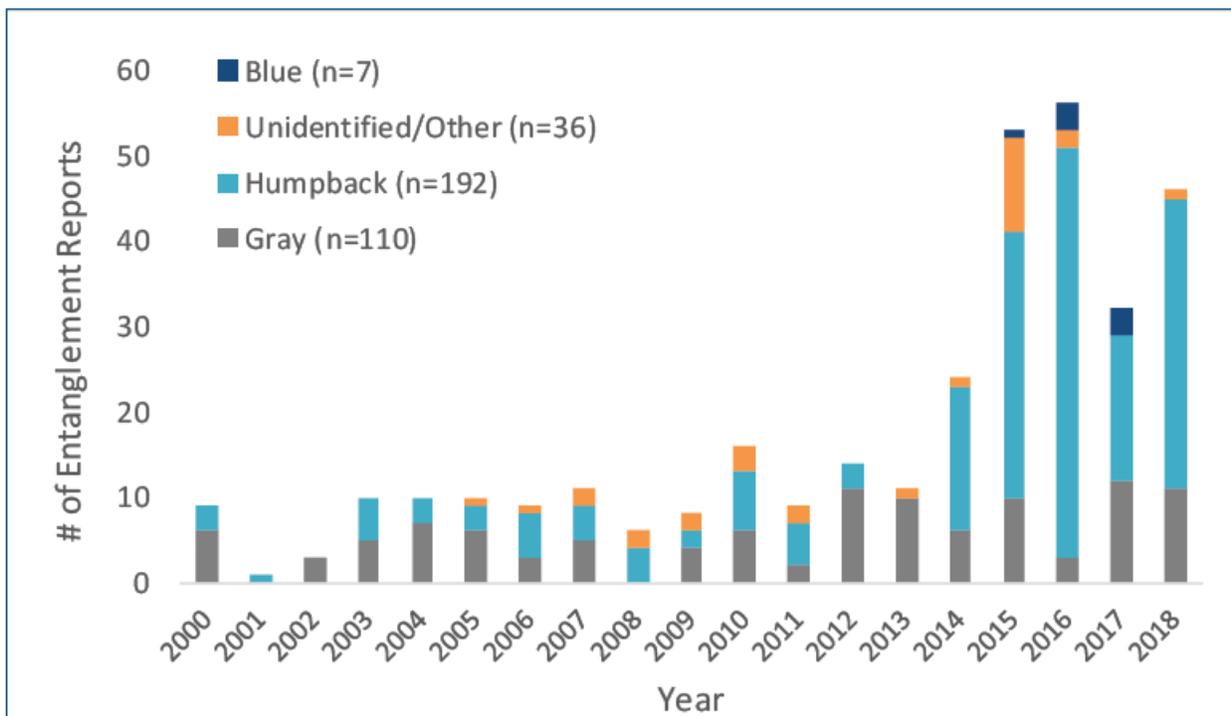


2020 Crab Gear Whale Entanglement Efforts

Coexisting Whales and Crab Fisheries

Humpback whales feed in Washington’s summertime coastal waters, but since 2014 have been getting tangled in crabbing ropes. Coastal Dungeness crab is the state’s highest-value fishery, and also one of its most sustainably managed. Two types of Washington’s humpback whales, listed under the Endangered Species Act, have legal protections that put the crab fishery at risk. In 2020, WDFW requests funding for a dedicated position to develop and submit a federal permit application, to work with the Washington Whale Working Group and crab fishery participants on conservation measures and entanglement reduction, and to ensure ongoing compliance with ESA restrictions. As a result, Washington will continue to enjoy a robust Dungeness crab fishery and the protection of threatened humpback whales.

The Department is requesting \$172,000 ongoing to meet the needs of the coastal commercial crab fishery, as well as the needs of humpback whales. The Governor’s proposed supplemental budget provides full funding from a mix of state general fund and the Washington Coast Crab Pot Buoy Tag Account to achieve this goal.



NOAA: Confirmed US west coast whale entanglements by year and species, 2000 to 2018

