

Recovering lost pots is a joint effort

In 2009, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) initiated two new efforts to recover abandoned crab-fishing gear off the Washington coast. Both programs have involved commercial fishers in removing the gear.

By the end of 2011, a total of 85 metric tons of gear had been recovered, including more than 1,500 crab pots and miles of lost line. Aerial surveys of the crabbing grounds show a significant reduction in the amount of crab gear in the ocean.

NOAA-funded recovery effort

Commercial fishers have removed more than 23 metric tons of crab gear since 2009 under a grant from NOAA's Community-Based Marine Debris Removal Program. Commercial vessels were hired to sweep two large areas near Grays Harbor and the mouth of the Columbia River and remove all abandoned pots.

WDFW, which administered the grant, helped to direct the search effort with aerial surveys of those areas and reports of abandoned gear filed by crabbers.

Nearly 400 pots were removed through those efforts before the grant expired in December 2011.

WDFW crab-pot recovery permits

Since 2009, WDFW has issued permits each year to crab fishers interested in recovering gear from the fishing grounds at the close of commercial crabbing season. These permits allow fishers to keep the pots they recover – including those owned by other fishers licensed by Washington State.

Before the pots can be offloaded from the recovering vessel, WDFW staff mark each recovered pot with a numbered identification tag, indicating that the pots were recovered legally as part of the state program.

For more information about WDFW's crab-pot recovery program, call WDFW's regional office in Montesano at (360) 249-4628.



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LOST CRAB POTS

*A problem
we can solve*

- Lost crab gear is increasingly seen as a threat to the marine environment.
- How you can avoid losing crab gear.
- What you can do to recover lost gear.



The problem with lost pots

Over the years, thousands of crab pots have been lost during the crab fishery off the Washington coast. These pots represent not only a financial loss to their owners, but also pose a threat to the marine environment.

While less deadly to marine life than abandoned fishing nets, derelict pots take a toll on coastal crab, rockfish and other species for years after they are lost. Marine mammals, including humpback whales, have become entangled in crab lines – sometimes with lethal results.

Although all crab pots in Washington State are required to have biodegradable cotton escape mechanisms, crab and other species can still be caught and die before the escape mechanism opens. Abandoned gear can also entangle other pots set in the same area, creating large accumulations of gear in one location.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has partnered with NOAA's Community-Based Marine Debris Removal Program and commercial crab fishers to recover lost gear. All agree, however, that the best way to avert problems from abandoned pots is to avoid losing them in the first place.

Avoiding crab pot loss

- Do not set gear in known shipping and tow lanes.
- Keep on top of your gear and avoid setting more pots than you are capable of fishing.
- Use highly visible colors on your buoys, and highlight them with reflective tape.
- Keep buoys clean and clear of algal growth.
- Know the depth of the water you're fishing and use the correct length of line.
- Avoid setting pots too close to others' gear to prevent cutting or fouling of lines.
- Pull all your gear before moving to a different area or a different fishery.

