



Fish and Wildlife Commission Presentation Summary Sheet

Meeting date:

8/8/2024; Fish and Wildlife Commission – Fish Committee

Agenda item:

Coastal Dungeness Crab Policy C-3604

Presenter(s):

Lorna Wargo, Intergovernmental Ocean Policy Coordinator, IOP

Heather Hall, Region 6 Director

Background summary:

We are proposing to update the Fish and Wildlife Commission policy that serves as the framework for coastal Dungeness crab management. Department management of the coastal Dungeness crab fishery has been well served for 25 years by Fish and Wildlife Commission Policy number C-3604. While the policy remains robust to meeting the ongoing matters faced by the fishery, it needs updating to provide guidance on three emergent issues as described below.

- **Reduce marine life entanglement risk:** The proposed revisions would update the policy to recognize and support the need to seek an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) and address marine life entanglement risk (focused on humpback whales, blue whales, and leatherback sea turtles) in the coastal Dungeness crab fishery. Pursuant to ESA, the Department is preparing the ITP application which includes a required Conservation Plan (CP).
- **Recreational fishery monitoring:** The proposed revisions add support for management of the recreational fishery through a monitoring program. On the coast, recreational catch has not been collected through catch record cards and existing sampling programs were not designed to produce estimates of crab catch. Effort and harvest for many years were assumed to be relatively modest and regulations for size, sex, season, and gear were deemed sufficient to protect the resource. However, recreational capacity to harvest crab has expanded. In co-managed areas, particularly Grays Harbor, the lack of catch recreational estimates has made it challenging to fully evaluate if management measures are achieving fair-sharing of the resource.
- **Climate-resiliency:** The proposed revisions incorporate support for climate-resiliency/adaptive management. A legislative proviso is funding a new Climate and Ecosystem research scientist. This position will provide expert scientific advice for avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating marine life entanglements in the coastal Dungeness crab fishery and other state-managed fisheries, and on climate driven processes (e.g., species distribution changes, ocean acidification, harmful algal blooms) necessary to inform the development and evaluation of adaptive fishery management plans and fishery monitoring programs.

Staff recommendation:

No recommendation, Fish and Wildlife Fish Committee briefing only. Current and draft proposed policy changes are provided for review and discussion.

Current Policy**Goals**

- To protect the reproductive capacity of the stock.
- To involve the commercial fishing industry representatives in the management of the fishery.
- To protect public health.
- To maximize the economic benefit from the resource.
- To adopt regulations which seek to achieve safe and orderly fisheries.
- To provide a sustainable Dungeness crab fishery of high-quality product consistent with the "even flow" legislative mandate.
- To provide support to industry buyback initiatives.
- To protect Dungeness crab habitat.

Policies

- Comply with the federal court order relative to treaty/non-treaty sharing of coastal shellfish resources
- Manage the fishery to primarily benefit the commercial fishery.
- Cooperate with other states' fish and wildlife agencies.
- Seek to achieve a fair and equitable distribution across industry sectors of the effects resulting from the design and implementation of "even flow" management measures.
- Manage the coastal Dungeness crab fishery consistent with the preferred alternative in the Even Flow Harvest Management Plan.

Proposed Revision -DRAFT**General Policy Statement**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) shall promote a healthy and sustainable population of Dungeness crab and work cooperatively with the Tribal Co-Managers in structuring management measures to ensure a healthy, sustainable resource and fishery that achieve fair sharing of the harvestable resource.

The management intent is to provide for the economic viability of the coastal Dungeness crab resource, implement measures consistent with reducing entanglement risks to marine life and for the Department to work collaboratively with partner state and federal agencies and fishery stakeholders to promote shared stewardship.

The Department will articulate goals, objectives, and strategies consistent with this policy and its guidelines through the Coastal Dungeness Crab Fishery Management Plan and Coastal Dungeness Crab Conservation Plan.

Policy Guidelines

- Protect the reproductive capacity of the stock.
- Protect Dungeness crab habitat.
- Achieve and maintain federal coverage for ESA listed marine mammal impacts in the coastal fishery.
- Implement climate-resilient measures
- Involve fishing representatives in the management of the fishery.
- Adopt regulations which promote safe and orderly fisheries.
- Implement measures that ensure the safety and health of consumers and the public.
- Manage the fishery to optimize economic returns from the Dungeness crab resource for the commercial sector while also providing recreational opportunities.
- Consistent with the legislative “even-flow” mandate, achieve high quality product and strive for a fair and equitable distribution of the impacts and benefits from management measures across all industry sectors.
- Provide administrative support for industry-led programs aimed at reducing fishing capacity and enhancing sustainability

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

In updating the policy, the Commission signals support for and guidance to the Department to pursue and implement management strategies that address the identified emergent needs consistent with the mandate to preserve, perpetuate, and protect the resource and provide for sustainable commercial and recreational opportunity.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

None

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Staff met with the Coastal Dungeness Crab Advisor Board July 22, 2024 and briefed them on the need and intent for this action and the proposed policy revisions. One board member noted the changes in terms that broadened engagement from being specific to the commercial industry to broad fishing interests. Through the public process outlined below, stakeholders will be provided a full presentation of the proposal and opportunity to provide comment.

Outreach will be achieved through a virtual townhall meeting on August 28, 2024. Staff will present the purpose and need for the proposed policy, the draft language, describe the Commission meeting process and schedule, and how participants or interested parties can provide formal comment. In addition, a mailing will be sent to all Washington coastal crab license holders and alternate operators with this same information.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

NA, Fish Committee briefing only. Full Fish and Wildlife Commission briefing scheduled for September; Commission action is scheduled for October.

Draft motion language:

NA

Post decision communications plan:

The revised policy will be posted to the Commission's policy page on the WDFW website. A letter will be mailed to coastal Dungeness crab license holders and alternate operators and to attendees at the townhall meeting that choose to share address information. In addition, the revised policy will be shared in the annual coastal Dungeness crab newsletter to be distributed in December 2024/January 2025.

Form revised 1-20-21