

# Puget Sound Commercial Smelt Fishery Summary: 2014+15



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# Presentation Outline



- **Brief background**
  - Forage Fish policies and management
  - Ecological role of forage fish
  - State of the fisheries prior to 2014
  - 2014 rule changes
- **Summary of 2014 and 2015 harvest**
- **Brief discussion of fishery management moving forward**

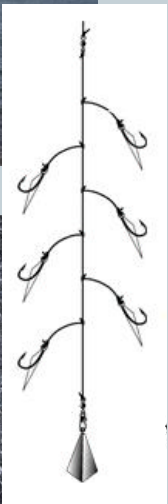
# Policy C3012 and Ecological Role



- Forage Fish Management Policy (1998):
  - Primary management goal is to maintain healthy populations
  - Must consider role of forage fish in marine ecosystem
  - If data limiting or resource condition poor, a conservative approach will be taken
  - Achieving maximum yield shall not be a goal
- Forage fish recognized by Puget Sound Partnership as key indicator of Sound health
- Research around the world has demonstrated critical reliance of seabirds, fish, and marine mammals on forage fish

# Surf Smelt and Recreational Fisheries

- Surf smelt:
  - Are a food source for diverse marine and terrestrial species in Puget Sound at various life stages
  - Serve as a conduit between plankton and higher consumers
- Recreational fishers use both dipnets and jig gear
  - Year-round season
    - ✦ Closed in Hood Canal
    - ✦ Closed Wed+Thurs for dipnet
  - No license requirement
  - 10 lbs/person/day limit
  - Overall harvest is unknown
  - Night closure as of 2014



# Commercial Smelt Fisheries – pre-2014



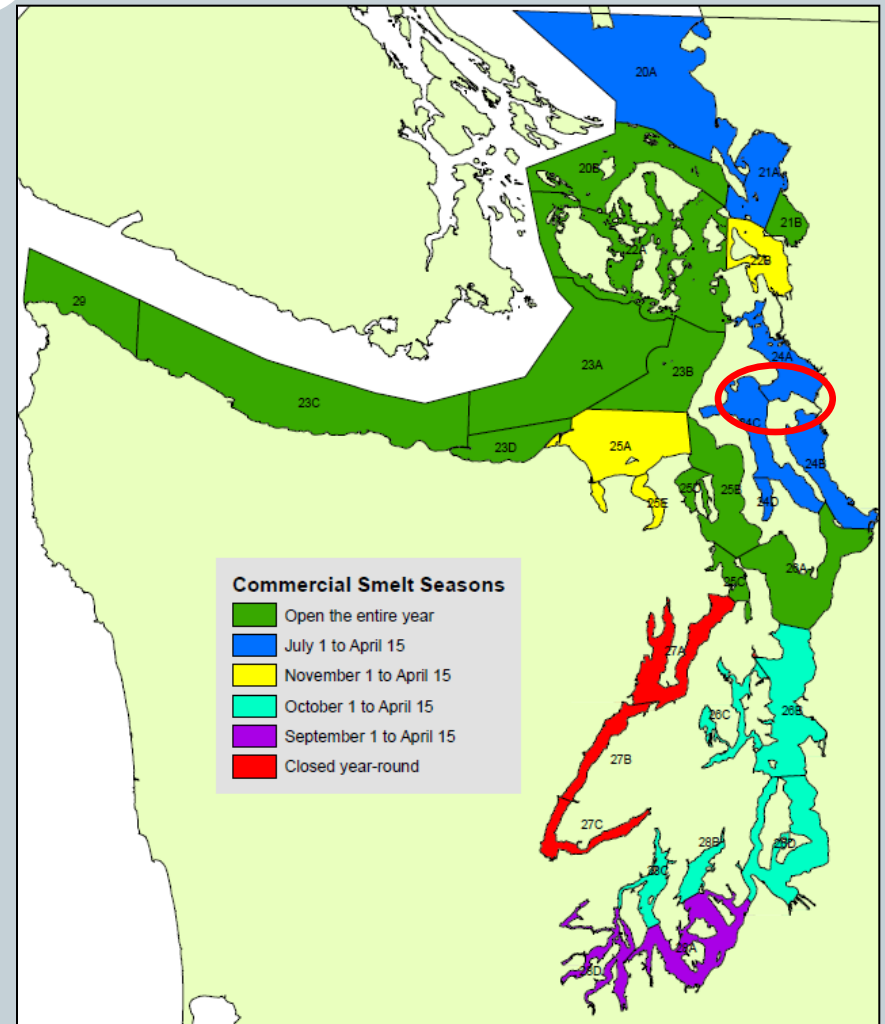
- Drag net (beach seine) was sole capture method being used
  - Purse Seine and Dip Bag Net open, but not fished
- Open access fishery (no limit on licenses)
  - Only ~7 active licenses annually



# Commercial Smelt Fisheries – pre-2014



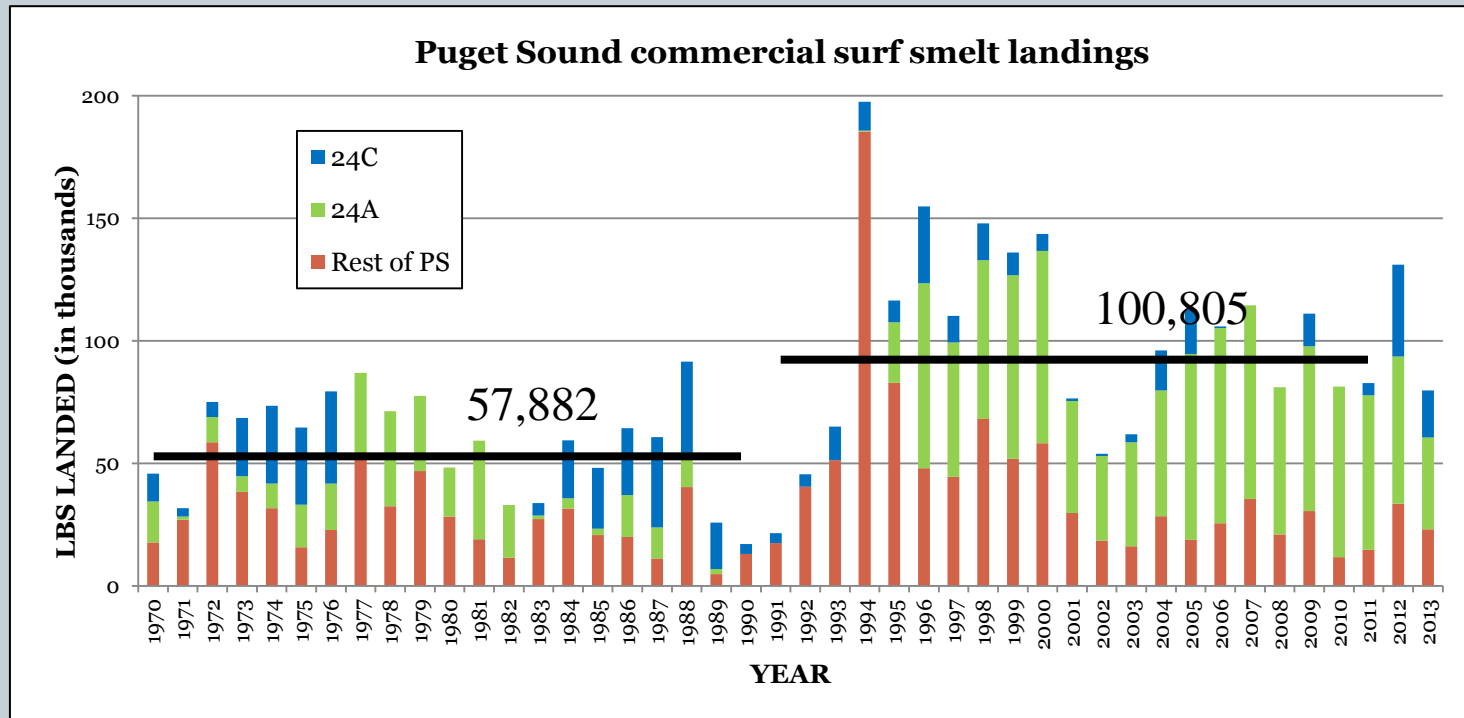
- Commercial seasons vary by region
  - Designed to protect early spawning period
  - Provides exclusively recreational fisheries in summer (after Apr. 15)
- Hood Canal closed year-round
- Closed Friday and Saturday in all areas



# Commercial Smelt Fisheries – pre-2014



- Comparing 1970-80s to 1990-2000s, average annual harvest increased 74%
- Most harvest comes from northern Camano Island





# 2014 Fishery Changes



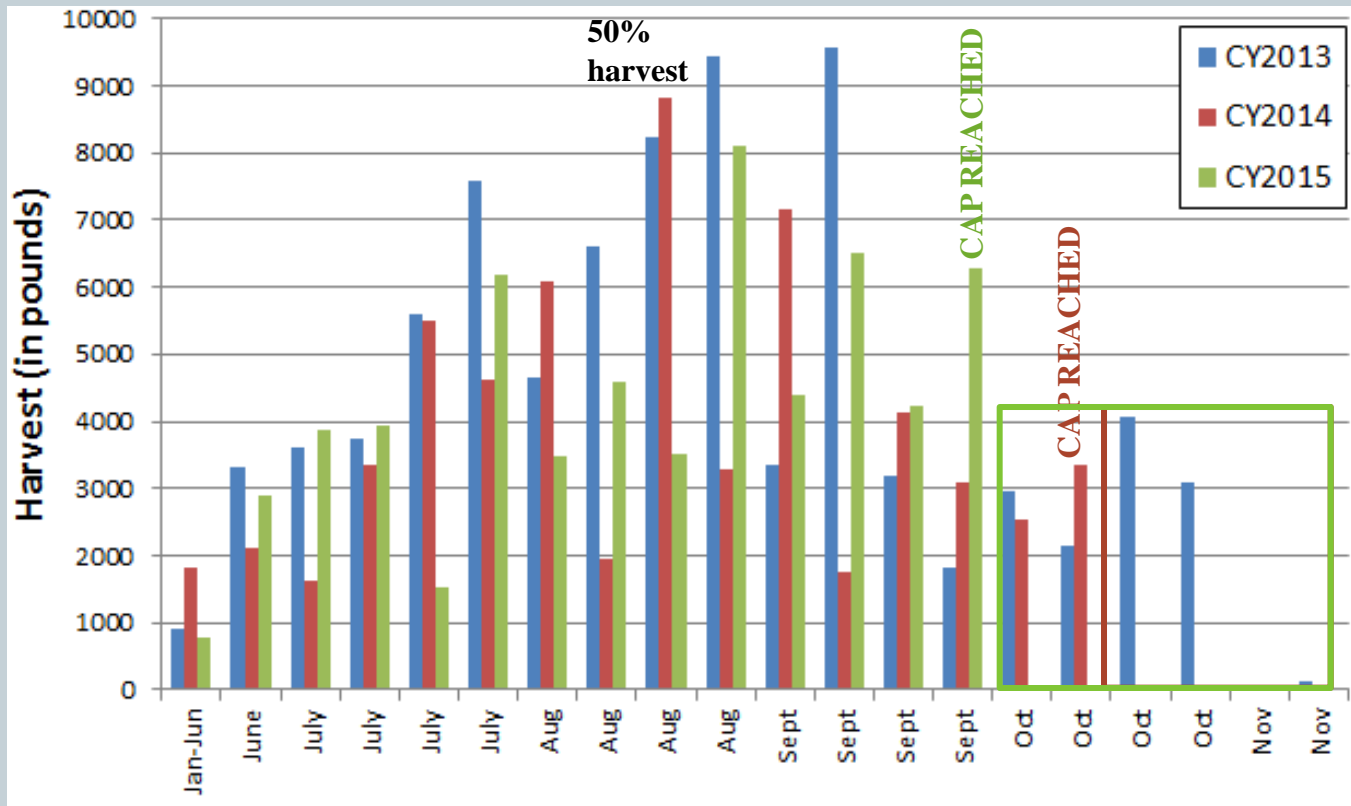
- Closed commercial fishery on Sundays
  - Open Monday through Thursday
- Implemented 10PM-6AM “night closure” on open days
  - For recreational fishery too, as noted above
- Closed inactive commercial smelt gear types
  - Purse Seine and Dip Bag Net
- Enacted a harvest quota of 60,000 lbs
  - Brings maximum harvest closer to 1970s-80s level
  - Requires active in-season monitoring (i.e., quick reporting)



# Harvest With and Without Quota



- No fishing until April, despite year-round openings
- <3% of annual total taken by end of June



**Total =  
61,209 lbs  
(102.0%  
on Oct 10)**

**Total =  
60,263 lbs  
(100.4%  
on Sep 26)**

# Evaluation and Moving Forward



- Harvest quota has been successfully implemented for two calendar years
- Quick reporting is working well
  - Final fish ticket estimates deviate <1% from in-season totals
- 50% harvest date the same, but early closures in both years
- 2016 season opens January 1 with 60k-lb quota
  - Rule making for quick reporting in process

# Questions?

