

Summary Sheet

Meeting dates:	September 14, 2018
Agenda item:	Amending Coastal Recreational Crab Rules – (Briefing, Public Hearing, and Decision)
Presenter(s):	Heather Reed, Intergovernmental Ocean Policy Coordinator

Background summary:

Changes to WAC 220-330-040 would revise the date when recreational anglers can use crab pot gear in coastal Marine Areas 1 through 3 and Marine Area 4 west of the Bonilla-Tatoosh so that recreational pot gear is allowed beginning November 15, rather than December 1. Currently, the recreational crab fishery with pot gear opens in coastal areas on the same day that the commercial fishery is scheduled to open. However, the commercial fishery is allowed to put pots in the water on November 28, 73-hours prior to opening. Allowing the recreational crab pot fishery to open two weeks earlier, on November 15, would reduce gear conflict and provide recreational anglers with the opportunity to access fishing areas that are common to both commercial and recreational fisheries prior to the date when commercial crab gear goes in the water.

Effort in the recreational crab fishery on the coast is limited due to the timing of the season, which opens in the winter when weather can be prohibitive for many recreational anglers. As such, much of the coastal recreational crab fishing effort occurs in coastal bays such as Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor. Recreational crab harvest on the coast represents a small proportion of the total Dungeness crab harvest. In recognition of the disparity in catch between the commercial and recreational fleets, measures are in place to provide some assurance that recreational anglers have access to the Dungeness crab resource. For example, recreational anglers allowed to retain crab measuring six inches compared to the six and a quarter inch minimum size for the commercial fishery. Revising the opening date for the recreational crab pot fishery to open on November 15 would provide some additional opportunity for recreational anglers and reduce the potential for gear conflict with the commercial sector.

This change does not affect the recreational crab fishery in the Columbia River area, which is currently open to crab pot gear year-round.

Staff recommendation:

WDFW staff recommends the Commission consider the public comments and adopt the proposed changes to WAC 220-330-040 as described in the attached CR-102.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

Opening the recreational crab pot fishery early could increase encounters with soft crab in some years. However, given the minor change from current regulations and the limited effort in the recreational crab fishery on the coast, this change will not negatively affect the Dungeness crab resource. Some in the commercial sector may feel that allowing the recreational fishery to open earlier than the commercial fishery provides an unfair advantage. Because commercial pots can go in the water prior to December 1, even with an earlier start for the recreational fishery, the difference in the openings is minor. The effort and expertise in the commercial sector outweighs any disadvantage to allowing an earlier opening for the recreational sector. The proposed changes will reduce gear conflict and provide some additional access to the coastal Dungeness crab resource for recreational users.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation: N/A

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

This issue was brought to the attention of WDFW managers through a petition to the Fish and Wildlife Commission requesting a change to current regulations that describe the opening of the recreational Dungeness crab season on the coast. In order to better facilitate a public process, WDFW staff worked with the petitioner to consider the proposed changes through the typical Commission process. This allowed WDFW staff to communicate the concerns and proposed changes with members of the Coastal Dungeness Crab Advisory Board at meetings this past spring and summer.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

Adopt the changes to coastal recreational Dungeness crab regulations as proposed by Department staff.

Draft motion language:

Motion: I move to adopt the proposed changes to WAC 220-330-040 as presented by Department staff

Is there a "second"?

If so, then motion maker discusses basis for motion; other Commissioners discuss views on motion; amendments, if any, proposed and addressed

Post decision communications plan:

WDFW staff will notify interested parties of the Commission's decision regarding changes to recreational rules for the opening of the recreational crab pot fishery on the coast via email and webpage updates.
