Washington Department of FISH and WILDLIFE

Summary Report

2007
Commercial Razor Clam Fishery

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THE 2007 FISHERY

Fishery Objectives and Preseason Planning

A public meeting was held in March for commercial diggers and razor clams buyers at Raymond High School. The major discussion topic was when to schedule the 2007 fishery. The majority of diggers and dealers support a mid-May start. A contingent prefers an early start as possible, while another group would rather begin later in May or June to benefit from better summer weather.

Three factors largely determine the start date: the end of the recreational razor clam season, biotoxin levels, and tides. By practice, the commercial fishery opens only after the end of the recreational fishery. Separating the two makes it more difficult for sport diggers to illegally dig, possess or sell commercial quantities of clams, and simplifies recovering clams in the event of a Department of Health product recall. Due to the absence of any significant biotoxin events, the commercial fishery has enjoyed a couple of years with predictable and stable schedules.

For the last three seasons boundary poles have been installed at the north end of Leadbetter Point to provide a clear delineation between it and the spits. In recent years, shifting sand has been filling in a channel of water that had separated the spits from the north end of Leadbetter Point. At low tide the southernmost spit and the northern end of Leadbetter Point essentially became continuous, and could be easily crossed. Since regulations for the commercial razor clam fishery permit digging only on “detached” (i.e. islands) spits, a line of posts made from rebar and PVC pipe was set up to keep diggers from crossing over to Leadbetter Point. Although scouring made the channel more evident, the posts were installed again in 2007 to eliminate any uncertainty.

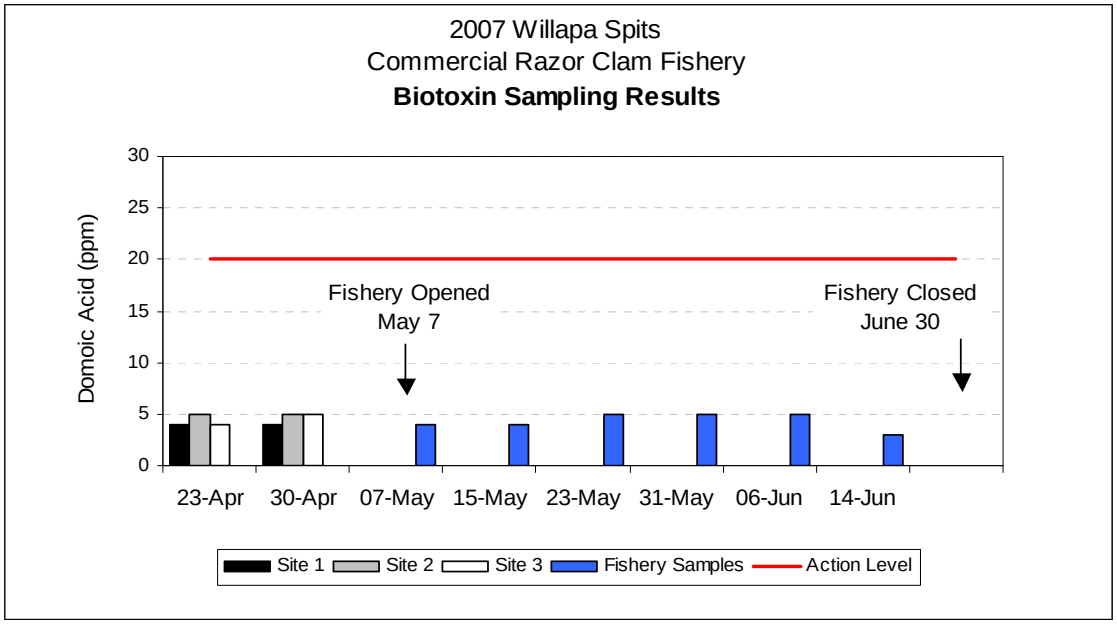
View of southernmost spit from Leadbetter Point, 2006 – WDFW Photo

Finally, to conduct the commercial fishery at the Willapa spits, which are state-owned aquatic lands, WDFW is required to obtain an Aquatic Lands Right of Entry Agreement from the Department of Natural Resources. The fishery was conducted under a right of entry permit obtained in May 2006 and valid through May 2009.

Biotoxin Sampling

Razor clams were collected for biotoxin testing from three locations around the spits beginning in late April. Washington Department of Health protocols require two sets of samples to test below 20 parts per million before the fishery can be opened. Monitoring of biotoxin levels continues once the fishery is underway, with clams collected from dealers every seven to 10 days (fishery samples). Prior to and during the 2007 season, biotoxin levels were consistently well below the threshold.

Figure 1. Commercial Razor Clam Fishery Biotoxin Results, 2007.



Fishing Season

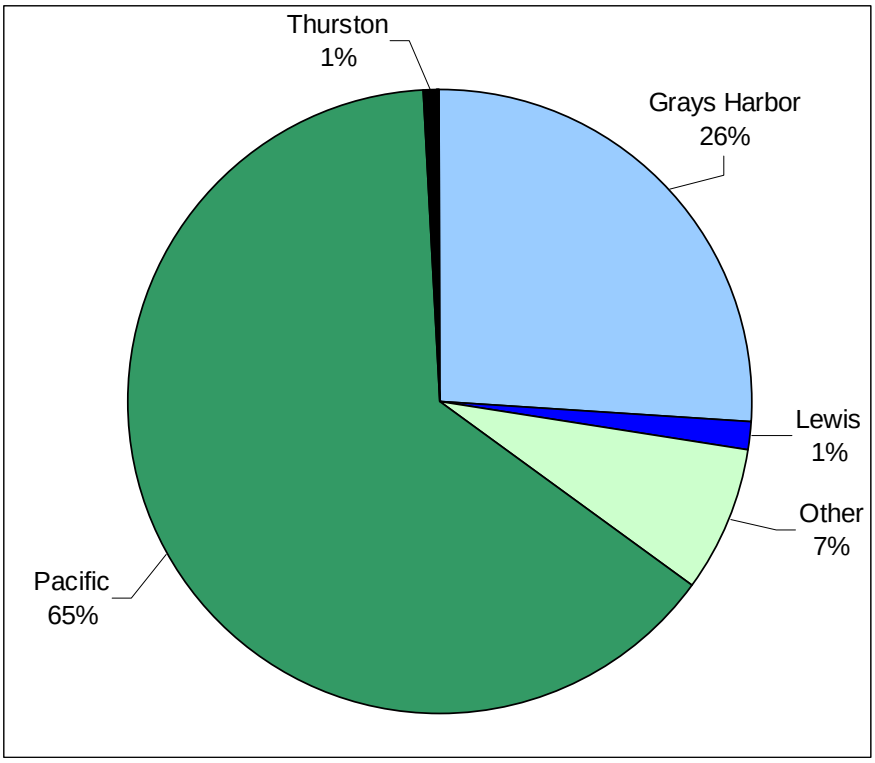
The 2007 season opened May 7 and proceeded as scheduled through the end of June; digging conditions and clam abundance were good throughout the period. As in previous years, numerous diggers requested an extension to the season with some requesting an additional two weeks of harvest. However, several noted the closure date fell in the middle of a particularly good tide series and were hoping for at least a few more days. Although opening the season to coincide with the beginning of a tide series has been the standard approach, closing it has been by calendar date (e.g. end of the month). Barring other constraints to the schedule, closing at the end of a tide series can be considered in upcoming seasons.

For several reasons, extending the 2007 season was not considered despite seemingly good numbers of clams. First, the season as scheduled already ran eight weeks rather than the typical six. This was done to provide a little more certainty about the season length from the outset. Second, by the end of June information from population assessments at Long Beach indicated clam numbers were down from the previous year. Because the spits are too dynamic to accommodate any consistent sampling regime, population information from the adjacent ocean beaches is used when available. For a lack of an alternative, it is assumed that the clam population on the spits mirrors the clam populations on these beaches.

Licenses

A total of 123 licenses were issued in 2007, of these 119 were actively fished. As in past years, diggers were predominantly residents of Pacific (65%) and Grays Harbor (26%) counties (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Residence of Commercial Razor Clams Diggers by County



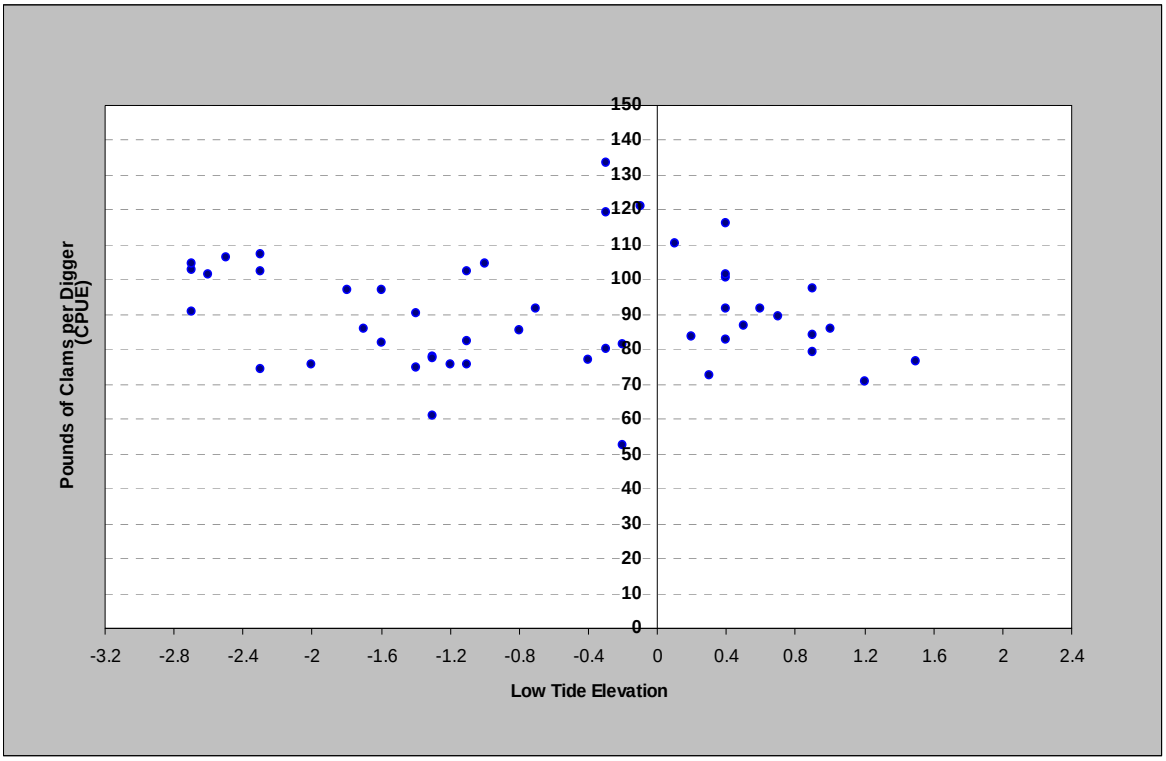
Fishery Landings

In total, the fishery landed 140,616 pounds of razor clams during the 55-day season (Table 1). The total value to diggers (ex-vessel value) was $211,118. Clams were landed 49 days of the season; on average 31 diggers each landed about 90 pounds of clams per day. Discounting other factors such as weather or surf conditions, generally any tide less than +1.0 foot offers comparably good digging opportunity (Figure 3). Catch per unit of effort (CPUE: in this case the total number of clams dug in one day divided by the number of diggers) was highest on tides that were between –0.5 foot and +0.5 foot.

Table 1. Washington Non-Treaty Commercial Razor Clam Fishery

	Pounds	Ex-Vessel		Number		Non-resident	License	License Fees	
Year	Landed	Value	Days	Diggers	Licenses	Licenses	Revenue	Resident	Non-Resident
80	18,390	$18,781	80	-	1,518		$7,590	$5	$5
81	2,891	$3,842	39	-	1,411		$7,055	$5	$5
82	6,672	$9,432	91	-	1,322		$6,610	$5	$5
83	6,732	$8,678	69	-	1,366		$6,830	$5	$5
84	NIX CLOSURE								
85	NIX CLOSURE								
86	58,814	$73,114	64	-	378	13	$19,500	$50	$100
87	103	$194	4	-	115	7	$6,100	$50	$100
88	0		0	-	0	0	$0	$50	$100
89	20,140	$35,161	28	-	205	2	$10,350	$50	$100
90	26,553	$48,073	36	-	290	6	$14,800	$50	$100
91	26,630	$44,106	42	-	267	8	$13,750	$50	$100
92	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
93	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
94	46,854	$59,487	40	-	95	3	$12,500	$130	$180
95	88,290	$109,364	38	-	127	0	$16,510	"	"
96	25,188	$29,295	37	-	110	1	$14,350	"	"
97	2,849	$3,579	21	-	28	3	$3,790	"	"
98	4,485	$6,558	24	-	40	0	$5,200	"	"
99	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
00	69,595	$84,106	51	-	79	0	$10,270	"	"
01	75,744	$77,439	47	62	97	0	$12,610	"	"
02	119,777	$118,349	46	97	105	0	$13,650	"	"
03	17,474	$21,169	18	40	44	0	$5,720	"	"
04	183,327	$269,139	68	112	114	0	$14,820	"	"
05	102,939	$154,746	41	112	115	3	$15,490	"	"
06	134,661	$199,469	64	103	110	0	$14,300	"	"
07	140,616	$211,118	55	119	122	1	$16,040	"	"

Figure 3. Daily Pounds of Clams Dug per Person (CPUE) and Tide Elevation



Commercial Sales and Trends

Commercial dealers must be certified by the Washington Department of Health to purchase razor clams; the certification is specific to razor clams and renewed annually. Typically, five to six companies register to buy razor clams each year. Most dealers are established wholesale seafood businesses in Pacific and Grays Harbor counties that operate year-round in various fisheries. These companies purchase the majority of clams. However, some dealers are simply individuals that have obtained the required licenses and certification to purchase razor clams only. Typically, these dealers are commercial Dungeness crab fishers buying razor clams for bait.

The majority of the razor clams harvested in the commercial fishery are frozen and sold for crab bait. Dungeness crab fishers favor razors clams as bait because they are a natural food source of crabs and also hold up well. A smaller, but growing percentage of clams is marketed to retail outlets. One wholesale dealer estimated in 2007 that about 60% percent of the clams they purchased were sold to regional retail markets. These clams were worth about three times more compared to clams bought and held for bait. Despite the uncertainties surrounding the commercial season, retail marketing holds promise.

Management Conclusions

Over the past several years, the commercial razor clam fishery has seen marked increases in season length, pounds harvested and overall value. Except for 2003, when sustained toxin levels prevented opening the fishery before late summer, season schedules have been relatively consistent year to year. Within the constraints posed by population abundance and biotoxin levels, management of the fishery will continue to promote season predictability to support marketing opportunities and to provide a reliable source of bait for the Dungeness crab fishery.

Packaging razor clams for bait. - WDFW photo.