THE 2005 FISHERY

Preseason Planning

A public meeting was held in March for commercial diggers and razor clams buyers at Raymond. Catch and landing statistics from the 2004 season were reviewed, an update on the razor clam mortality study in which many diggers had participated was presented, and issues for the 2005 season were discussed.

The key issues for the 2005 season were: the need to create a physical boundary at the north end of Leadbetter Point, a minor change to the rule requiring a license to participate in the fishery, and alternative opening dates. In most years a channel of water separates the spits from the north end of Leadbetter Point. However, in 2004 and 2005 shifting sand connected the southernmost spit and the northern end of Leadbetter Point at low tide. 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.

To maximize their digging opportunity during a tide some diggers, have in the past, enlisted unlicensed individuals to ferry clams back to their vessel. Others industry members expressed concerns about this practice, claiming many of these unlicensed individuals would also dig clams themselves. To address this issue, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a rule in 2005 that required a license to *possess* clams taken during the commercial fishery, replacing previous wording of the rule that only addressed the taking or digging of clams. With the change, any helpers would need to be licensed and therefore, eligible to dig to clams as well.

The majority of meeting attendees indicated a preference for a mid-May opening date. A few wanting an earlier opening, questioned the practice of waiting to open the commercial season only after the recreational season was concluded. Separating the two fisheries makes it more difficult for sport diggers to dig, possess or sell commercial quantities of clams, and simplifies recovering clams in the event the Department of Health determines a product recall is required. Others pointed out that a late spring start generally meant better weather.

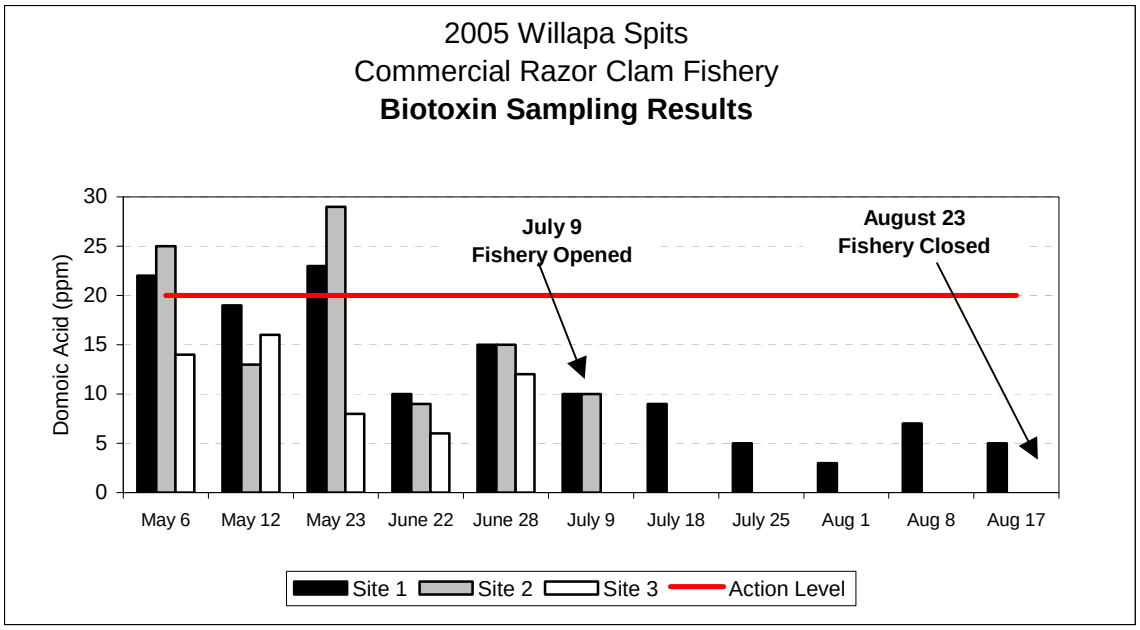
A few individuals expressed concern regarding the longer season and large harvest in 2004. They encouraged a conservative approach to ensure annual season stability. Although stock assessments are not conducted on the spits, the ocean beaches are closely evaluated and results there can be used to gage clam abundance on the spits.

Finally, to conduct the commercial fishery at the Willapa spits, the WDFW is required to obtain an Aquatic Lands Right of Entry Agreement from the Department of Natural Resources since part of the spits have been designated a Natural Area Preserve (NAP). The 2005 right of entry permit was secured in May.

Biotoxin Sampling

Razor clams were collected for biotoxin testing from three locations around the spits beginning in early May. Elevated domoic acid levels delayed the season opening until July (Figure 1). 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.

Figure 1. Commercial Razor Clam Fishery Biotoxin Results, 2005.



Season and Landings

The 2005 season, once opened, progressed without interruption to its scheduled closure on August 23. Good digging conditions and clam abundance combined to produce another strong harvest. Landings for the six-week season totaled nearly 102,939 pounds, exceeding the recent five year average (2000-2004) of 93,000 pounds (Table 1). Clams were landed 41 days of the 46-day season; on average 36 diggers landed roughly 70 pounds of clams or about 300-325 clams each day (Table 2). In total, the fishery landed 102,939 pounds of razor clams with an ex-vessel value of $155,000.

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
76	14,047	$10,512		-	187		$935	$5	$5
77	5,797	$6,150		-	365		$1,825	$5	$5
78	25,386	$20,335		-	191		$4,595	$5	$5
79	10,750	$10,976		-	1,695		$8,475	$5	$5
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								
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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	$130	$180
96	25,188	$29,295	37	-	110	1	$14,350	$130	$180
97	2,849	$3,579	21	-	28	3	$3,790	$130	$180
98	4,485	$6,558	24	-	40	0	$5,200	$130	$180
99	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
00	69,595	$84,106	51	-	79	0	$10,270	$130	$180
01	75,744	$77,439	47	62	97	0	$12,610	$130	$180
02	119,777	$118,349	46	97	105	0	$13,650	$130	$180
03	17,474	$21,169	18	40	44	0	$5,720	$130	$180
04	183,327	$269,139	68	112	114	0	$14,820	$130	$180
05*	102,939	$154,746	46	112	115	3	$15,490	$130	$180

*Preliminary

Table 2. 2005 Number of pounds and days fished per month

Month	Days Fished	Pounds Harvested
July	19	55,648
August	20	47,291
Total	**39**	**102,939**

A total of 115 licenses were issued in 2005, of these 111 were actively fished. As in past years, diggers were predominantly residents of Pacific (57%) and Grays Harbor (28%) counties (Figure 2). Non-resident diggers from Oregon (2%) also participated in this year's fishery.

Figure 2. Residence of Commercial Razor Clams Diggers by County