



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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December 30, 2022

The Honorable Kevin Van De Wege
Chair, Senate Agriculture, Water
Natural Resources, and Parks
212 John A. Cherberg Building
Post Office Box 40424
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Mike Chapman
Chair, House Rural Development,
Natural Resources, and Parks
437A Legislative Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chairs Van De Wege and Chapman:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) is required to submit a report to the legislature regarding the removal and disposal of derelict shellfish gear, including the allocation of funds for this purpose received through the sale of Dungeness Crab endorsements. Requirements for the report to the legislature are outlined in RCW 77.32.430, Section 5(a):

(5)(a) The funds received from the sale of catch record cards, catch card penalty fees, and the Dungeness crab endorsement must be deposited into the state wildlife account created in RCW 77.12.170. One dollar of the funds received from the sale of each Dungeness crab endorsement must be used for the removal and disposal of derelict shellfish gear either directly by the department or under contract with a third party. The department is required to maintain a separate accounting of these funds and provide an annual report to the commission and the legislature by January 1st of every year. The remaining portion of the funds received from the sale of each Dungeness crab endorsement must be used for education, sampling, monitoring, and management of catch associated with the Dungeness crab recreational fisheries.

The attached report covers background on the issue and a summary of the Department's activities and expenditures. If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Tom McBride, WDFW's Legislative Director, at (360) 902-2226.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kelly Susewind".

Kelly Susewind
Director

Derelict Shellfish Gear

Report to the Legislature



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

December 2022

Table of Contents

Background	2
2022 Activities and Expenditures	3



Background

Abandoned, lost, or discarded crab fishing pots in the waters of Puget Sound pose a threat to sea life and can degrade marine habitats. These lost crab pots, estimated at 12,000 a year, can continue to catch and kill crab and other marine life, depleting key resources important to the ecosystem of Puget Sound and the region's economy.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), tribal co-managers, and other organizations are working to help remove this derelict shellfish gear from Puget Sound. A portion of the funds WDFW received from the sale of Puget Sound Dungeness Crab Endorsements, a supplemental catch accounting license necessary to recreationally fish for crab in the Sound, go directly to this effort.

This work continues to improve the marine environment and helps to ensure crab populations remain sustainable; providing commercial, tribal, and recreational fishing opportunities that are economically important to the Puget Sound region.

To fulfill requirements of RCW 77.32.430, dedicated derelict shellfish gear recovery funds expended in 2022: \$244,035



Figure 1. Recovered derelict pots on a trailer in Port Townsend following an enforcement gear sweep in 2021.





Figure 2. Recovered derelict pots stacked on the back deck of the WDFW R/V #699 during an enforcement gear sweep.

2022 Activities and Expenditures

WDFW contracts with the Northwest Straits Foundation to find and remove derelict shellfish gear while the crab fishing season is closed. Using funds dedicated to this effort (\$1 from each crab endorsement sold), a total of \$155,000 was expended through a Northwest Straits Foundation contract to detect derelict pots using side-scan sonar. Through these efforts, a total of 335 derelict pots were recovered which included 237 commercial pots and 98 recreational pots. Found entrapped in the crab pots were 244 Dungeness crab (12 dead and 232 alive) and 48 red rock crab (1 dead and 19 alive), illustrating the need to remove derelict pots from Puget Sound waters.

WDFW enforcement officers and biologists coordinate to conduct “crab pot sweeps” during the popular summer recreational crab fishery. The sweeps, funded by additional revenue from the sale of crab endorsements, took place on days when the recreational fishery was closed each week during the season. In 2022, this effort removed 1,488 crab pots from Puget Sound, including recreational, State commercial, and Treaty commercial pots. A total of 2,192 legal size male crabs were released from these traps when they were recovered. A total of 29



WDFW enforcement officers or interns and 7 shellfish staff worked 50 vessel days on the water, and additional days returning pots or disposing of the gear.

Overall, WDFW biological staff in 2022 spent \$89,035 on gear sweeps, documentation, outreach, gear return, and pot disposal.

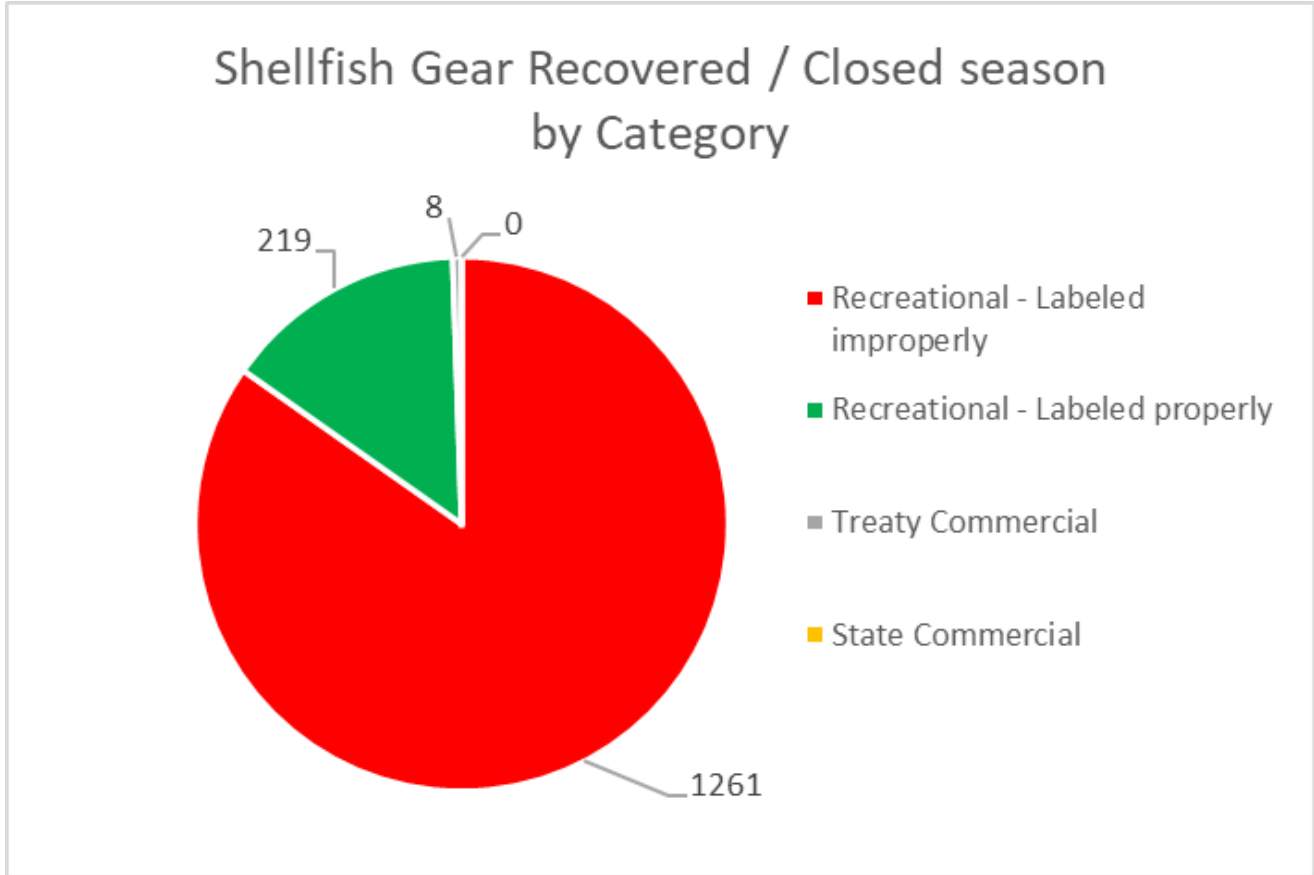


Figure 3. Pie chart showing total amount of derelict gear recovered in summer 2022 by fishery. Only 14.8% of the recreational crab pots recovered were properly and legibly labeled with all required information during the 2022 summer season.

