

Port Townsend & Dungeness Bay Derelict Crab Pot Removal and Prevention Project

More than 12,000 crab pots are lost and become derelict every year in Washington's Salish Sea, killing over 177,000 harvestable crab each year.

The Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF) works to eliminate impacts of lost crab pots through targeted removals, research, education and outreach. Since 2002, the NWSF and its partners have removed over 5,400 derelict crab pots from the waters of the Salish Sea.

How are crab pots lost? Strong tidal currents, abrupt changes in water depth, intense vessel traffic (commercial and recreational) and crowded fishing grounds can all contribute to high concentrations of derelict crab pots. These conditions can lead to vessel running over buoys and lines, temporary or permanent buoy submersion, drifting pots, and entanglement with other gear. Gear malfunction, user error and sabotage have also been identified as reasons for pot loss.



Cheryl Lowe, Jefferson MRC Program Coordinator, with derelict crab pots recovered from Port Townsend Bay in 2014.

Overview

Port Townsend and Dungeness Bays are popular places for crabbing, resulting in significant gear loss (documented in previous removal operations.) Understanding how to prevent pot loss at a local level will help guide prevention outreach and education efforts throughout the Salish Sea region. This project, in partnership with the Jefferson and Clallam County Marine Resources Committees and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, will include three years of derelict crab pot removal operations and a targeted recreational crabber outreach campaign.

Methods

Three consecutive years of derelict crab pot removal operations will be conducted within predetermined "study areas" in Port Townsend and Dungeness Bays. Derelict crab pots will be located via sidescan sonar surveys covering the study areas. After survey data is processed, commercial divers will dive down to the identified targets and attach a rope to the derelict crab pots which are then hauled on board the vessel with a hydraulic winch. Crab pots with identification information will be returned to their owners, unidentifiable but usable pots will be donated to local organizations, and unusable pots will be recycled.

The Jefferson and Clallam County MRCs will spearhead outreach activities in their respective counties. Outreach activities are expected to include but are not limited to free workshops, dockside education, social media, and distribution of educational materials at marine supply stores, marinas, ferry terminals, and other locations frequented by crabbers. The efficacy of outreach strategies will be evaluated through documented changes in annual crab pot loss and feedback gathered through user surveys.



Volunteer Sue Russell hands out a crab gauge and informational brochure to crabbers at local boat ramp.



Informational brochures and crab gauges attached to crab pots sold at a Costco in Clallam County.

Goals

- Halt continued mortality of Dungeness crab and other species in derelict crab pots
- Over 5,200 acres of marine habitat cleared of marine debris
- Document the impacts of derelict crab pots
- Establish an effective and measurable outreach campaign
- Reduce the number of crab pots lost annually

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