



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Marine Resources Program

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Oregon Ocean Commercial Dungeness Crab Permit Holders, Processors, Buyers, and Interested Persons:

This mailer is notification of the upcoming informational briefing to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) regarding the draft Conservation Plan (CP) for reducing the impact of the Oregon ocean commercial Dungeness crab fishery on ESA-listed species off Oregon.

The Commission meeting will be held virtually on September 17, 2021 and materials for the meeting will be posted on our website (see links at the end of notice). Instructions for registering for public testimony at this meeting will also be located on this page in the agenda for the meeting once it is posted, approximately two weeks in advance of the meeting. The full draft CP will be posted on the whale entanglement mitigation webpage (see link at the end of notice) on August 18, 2021 to commence a 30-day public comment period ahead of the Commission meeting. If you would like to submit public comment on the draft CP in advance of the meeting, please contact the crab management team at the phone numbers or emails at the end of this notice or email the Commission at odfw.commission@odfw.oregon.gov.

From 2013 through 2020, there were seven confirmed whale entanglements involving Oregon Dungeness crab gear, including six with ESA-listed humpback whales and one with a gray whale. Over the past six years, the Department has been actively working with industry and many other partners to address marine life entanglements in Oregon's fixed-gear fisheries with increased effort over the last three years. The result is a proactive management strategy for the Oregon ocean commercial Dungeness crab fishery, which is now documented in the draft CP. The overarching vision of the plan is for the co-existence of a vibrant crab fishery and recovering covered species (humpback whales, blue whales, and leatherback sea turtles) in ocean waters off Oregon. Key elements of the CP include:

1. Assessment of anticipated take levels for each covered species,
2. Biological goals and objectives that will be achieved through implementation of targeted conservation measures,
3. A robust monitoring program that will provide the necessary information to assess progress towards objectives, and
4. An adaptive management strategy for refining the existing conservation measures throughout the permit term should monitoring indicate that changes are warranted.

Many parts of this strategy have already been implemented through regulations adopted by the OFWC (September 2019 and 2020).

The CP also details future plans to develop recommendations for additional requirements in the near-term in support of the CP's conservation goals. These include:

Additional Near-term Risk Reduction Measure

Definition of a maximum surface gear allowance

Target date prior to the start of the 2022-23 crab season.

Additional Near-term Accountability Measures

Buoy line marking

Target date prior to the start of the 2025-26 season.

Electronic monitoring, combining vessel tracking and voluntary electronic logbooks

Target date prior to the start of the 2026-27 season.

All of these regulations (those already adopted and future) are intended to reduce the risk of future entanglements by minimizing co-occurrence between ESA-listed species and crab gear and strengthen accountability to improve the information obtained from any future entanglements. The informational Commission briefing (and supporting materials) on September 17, 2021 will include a summary of the key components of the CP, including these measures; however, to fully understand the management issues at hand, we encourage review of the full CP document.

Input received from public comment during the 30-day comment period or through testimony at the briefing, and input from the Commission will be considered by the Department as the CP is finalized for submission to NMFS later this year. All public comments received will be posted on the whale entanglement mitigation webpage, listed below. After submission of the plan, NMFS will consider all aspects of the CP and make a determination on permit issuance. This process is expected to take multiple years to complete.

Where to find information online

1. Commission meeting materials and instructions for registering to provide public testimony - <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/minutes/>
2. ODFW whale entanglement mitigation webpage - https://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/shellfish/commercial/crab/whale_entanglement.asp

Thank you for reviewing all of this information and your continued engagement with us to address marine life entanglement in Oregon Dungeness crab gear. Please contact us if you have any questions.

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