Capturing, measuring, and sorting

Crabs must be sorted immediately and all undersized crabs, softshell crabs, and female Dungeness crabs must be released on site. It is also illegal to keep only the claws of crabs.

Female crabs can be identified by their wider abdominal flap as shown in Figure 1.

To measure crabs, use a crab caliper available from most sporting good vendors. Measure the distance inside the furthest points as shown in Figure 2. Do not measure to the tips of the points. The minimum size for male Dungeness crabs is $6 \frac{1}{4}$ inches and for all Red rock crabs is 5 inches. Estimating or using rulers and/or dollar bills is unwise and may result in a hefty fine.

To check for softshell, turn the crab over and press the underside of the shell with your thumb where the folded claw usually rests. Shells that flex in with moderate pressure will yield less meat and it will be of poor quality. Release these crabs so that they “fill out” and can be harvested at a later time.

When releasing crab, take care to gently place them back to the water. If crabbing from a pier, this may require lowering them down with a bucket and line.

Recording your Dungeness catch

Crabbers on the Washington coast do not need a CRC to harvest Dungeness crab. This includes Marine Areas 1, 2, 3, and 4 west of the Bonilla-Tatoosh line.

Puget Sound crabbers need to record all Dungeness crab kept on a CRC.

Immediately after retaining a Puget Sound Dungeness crab, it must be recorded on the CRC in ink.

Do not record Red Rock crab or any other species of crab on a CRC.

When done for the day in a Marine Area, tally the checkmarks and record the total crab kept.

Transporting and preparing crabs

Keep crabs cool and moist until they are cooked. Use seawater soaked towels with ice on top. Do not submerge your catch in seawater, as crabs will quickly deplete oxygen and die unless the water is aerated.

Crabs may be cleaned before or after cooking. For the cleanest and safest product, WA Dept. of Health advises to kill and clean your crab before cooking. If you decide to clean crabs in the field, you must keep the shell to prove the crab was legal to harvest.

Cleaning

Kill the crab with a sharp blow to the middle of its underside. Pull the top of the shell off from the back towards the front. Break the crab into two down the midline. Remove the viscera, mouthparts, tail and gills. Rinse the body with water.

Cooking

Boil crabs in salt water (3 to 5 ounces of salt per gallon). For previously cleaned sections, boil for 12 minutes. For whole crabs, boil for 18-20 minutes.

After cooking, spray the crabs with cold water to stop the cooking process and loosen the meat from the shell.

Reporting your catch

Crabbers must report their Dungeness crab catch by the date printed on the Catch Record Card. If you fail to do so, an administrative penalty will be applied toward your next purchase of a crab endorsement. You can report your catch by:

- dropping off the CRC at a regional office.
- mailing the CRC to the address shown on the card.
- reporting online at the website below.

Report illegal activity

Help protect our crab resources. Report illegal activity with as much detail as possible as soon as it occurs.

For more information on recreational fishing and shellfishing in Washington, please visit our website at -

www.wdfw.wa.gov

2010 Edition
Harvesting Crabs

### Before you make a trip
- A valid combination or shellfish license is required to harvest for those age 15 and up.
- If harvesting Dungeness crab in Puget Sound, a Puget Sound crab endorsement and a Catch Record Card (CRC) are required. Bring a pen to record your catch.
- Know the crabs and how to identify them. Different rules apply to Dungeness and Red rock crab. Dungeness crab grow larger, have slender claws, and white claw tips. Red rock crab are more oblong, bright red, and have black claw tips.
- Obtain, read, and bring the current “Fishing in Washington” regulation pamphlet for daily limits, seasons, gear requirements, and all other rules.
- Call the toll-free Shellfish Rule Change Hotline for any recent changes 1-866-880-5431.
- Know the rules for the Marine Area you intend to crab in. This is the area you will record on your Puget Sound CRC if you keep Dungeness crab.
- Make sure your traps and gear meet all the requirements in the pamphlet.
- If using a boat, make sure it is registered, in good repair, and has all the required equipment including life jackets.
- If using a boat, verify the weather forecast is safe to venture out.
- Have a suitable container for your catch. Seawater soaked towels or burlap will help keep crabs cool, moist, and alive.

### Methods of harvesting
Crabs can be harvested in a variety of ways.
- Wading in the shallows with a dip net or dip rake
- With devices cast from a fishing pole
- By hand using scuba gear
- With pots that catch and hold crab
- With ringnets and star traps that allow crab to enter and exit freely
- Methods which involve piercing the crab shell, poisons, or chemical irritants are illegal.

- Wear suitable waders or boots when wading to keep feet warm and protected from sharp objects and claws.

### Preparing traps, buoys, lines
Recreational crab traps and ringnets come in a variety of designs. The sport pamphlet details the requirements of crab pots which include:
- A minimum mesh size of 1\(\frac{1}{2}\) inch.
- Two escape rings 4\(\frac{1}{4}\) inch diameter in upper half of pot.
- A volume less than 13 cubic feet.
- A biodegradable device utilizing natural fiber cord that will degrade if your trap is lost.

Also, check your traps to be sure:
- There are no large holes in the mesh.
- Tunnel entrance gates swing freely.
- Old escape cord has not already deteriorated.

Each person may fish two units of gear. Each unattended pot or ringnet must be attached by a line to it’s own buoy. Each line must be durable and either sink in salt water (preferred) or be weighted that it does not float on the surface. Floating lines are often entangled in propellers and result in lost traps, unnecessary crab mortality, and propeller damage.

The buoy must be visible on the surface at all times and be half red and half white in color. Buoyos must be legibly marked with the fisher’s full name and current address. A phone number is optional, but recommended.

### Baiting and deploying traps
Traps and ringnets can be baited with an assortment of baits, depending on availability and preference. The best baits include fish carcasses, clams, and squid. Baits that are commonly used and widely available include chicken and turkey. Use bait containers that allow some access to the bait and allow water to flow around it to carry off scent. Try to place baits in the trap so that crab must enter to feed.

Be smart and prevent the loss of your traps and the corresponding waste of crabs. Lost traps will continue to “ghost fish” because captured crabs die and will act as bait for new victims.
- Do not set traps in areas with extreme currents or heavy boat and/or barge traffic.
- Add weight to lighter traps so they are not swept off by currents.
- Use lines of correct length and know your water depth. Allow for the tide height variation and extra scope.
- Use proper sinking lines and buoys.
- Whenever possible, do not leave traps for extended time periods.
- Whenever possible, mark your traps with GPS so they can be easily found.