

Fishery managers double size of Washington state crabbing closure

Marine toxin now found in crab flesh

By KATIE WILSON
EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Washington state fishery managers have doubled the area of coast closed to commercial crabbing after recent testing revealed dangerous levels of a marine toxin in crabs.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife also reports that for the first time, tests of crab samples also revealed significant levels of the toxin domoic acid in actual crab meat. These levels are still below the 30 parts per million threshold the state Department of Health allows in crab guts, or viscera, where the toxin is usually concentrated, according to WDFW's coastal shellfish manager Dan Ayres.

Given this recent round of bad tests, it is unlikely the recreational and commercial Dungeness crab fisheries, first closed along the southern Washington coast in June, will reopen before the season ends in mid-September.

90 miles closed

A total of 90 miles of coast — more than half of Washington's 157-mile-long outer coast — is now closed to crabbing due to high levels of the natural (and harmful) ma-

rine toxin domoic acid, ending any hopes local commercial crabbers might have had that the multi-million dollar Dungeness fishery would reopen before the season ends. The start of the new season — traditionally on Dec. 1 — will also depend on what happens with toxin levels.

Fishery managers closed commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fisheries along 45 miles of coast — from Chehalis Point to the Columbia River — in June due to high domoic acid levels. At the time, they said this closure was “uncharted territory.”

Then, on Aug. 4, the Department of Fish and Wildlife announced it was immediately closing 45 more miles, from Chehalis Point up north to the Queets River. The closure affects bays and estuaries inside the Columbia River as well as Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor.

“Ongoing testing shows that crab in these waters have domoic acid levels that exceed health-safety standards,” Ayres said. Of the crabs sampled and tested in this area, most were above the state Department of Health's threshold of 30 parts per million. The highest tested at 71 ppm. Crab tested to the north in sites that are now closed as of Aug. 5 revealed levels in the high 50s and low 60s.

Since early spring, state fishery managers have kept a close eye on levels of domoic



Ron Malast/For EO Media Group
Dungeness crab absorb the marine toxin domoic acid when they eat razor clams contaminated with the substance. Crab and clams aren't sickened by the toxin, but humans who ingest it can suffer a range of ailments — from gastrointestinal distress to brain damage or even death.

acid in razor clams and other shellfish. In May, Washington, and then Oregon, shut down all recreational and commercial razor clam digs.

Clam levels high

In a phone interview Aug. 3, Ayres said the state has continued to test clams regularly, but has seen little change. Levels remain high — which is not unexpected, Ayres has said. Often, razor clams hold onto the toxin far longer than other shellfish, which can be bad news for animals that feed on the clams.

“Razor clams are a major food source for crab, so that's

likely why we're seeing this lingering effect in the food chain,” Ayres said.

With approximately six weeks left in the commercial Dungeness season, Pacific County fishermen had hoped levels would drop enough in the crabs to allow them to fish with their Washington licenses again. (Dungeness fisheries have remained open in Oregon and many Washington crabbers, especially those based around the Columbia River, carry dual licenses).

But Ayres said the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the state Department of Health would need two rounds of tests, spaced two weeks apart, to come back clean.

“As you extend that timeframe out, if these results aren't good, it's going to be much less likely,” Ayres said on Aug. 3.

Now, the most recent test results have triggered another closure.

“This closure likely marks the end of this year's coastal commercial crab fishery, which was already set (to) close in September,” Ayres said in a statement Aug. 4.

In Oregon, crabbing remains open, but Steve Rummell, shellfish program leader with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, said the Oregon Department of Agriculture is testing crab samples now and expects to have results available later this week.

County fire task force dispatched to Eastern Oregon fire

The Daily Astorian

Knappa Fire Departments.

A Clatsop County Fire Task Force has been dispatched to Baker County, where dozens of homes have been evacuated in the path of two growing wildfires. The task force will concentrate on protecting homes and other structures threatened by the Cornet fire in nearby Hereford.

Gov. Kate Brown dispatched the task force through her Emergency Conflagration Act.

Clatsop County's task force is comprised of members from the Cannon Beach, Seaside, Warrenton, Lewis & Clark and

Chief Jeff Golightly, of Lewis & Clark Fire Department, will be in charge and will be assisted by Chief Ron Tyson, of Olney Walluski Fire and Rescue, acting as the safety officer.

They are expected to arrive on scene late this afternoon.

Officials at the Baker County sheriff's office and the Bureau of Land Management say people who live in a rural community and surrounding ranchland were told to leave Wednesday afternoon and evening.

The Associated Press contributed to this report

Liberty Theater receives grant money

The Daily Astorian

Liberty Theater got its money through a competitive cultural development grant, awarded for projects that address access, capacity, creativity and preservation.

The Oregon Cultural Trust awarded \$2.6 million in grants statewide this fiscal year, including \$8,445 to Liberty Restoration, Inc., the group responsible for renovating the historic Liberty Theater.

The cultural trust has given out 30 percent more grants than last year, after a record fundraising effort and a new distribution formula for funds from the state Legislature.

Other coastal organizations receiving grants include the Bay City Arts Center and North Tillamook Library in Manzanita.

“We are extremely grateful to members of the Legislature for giving us the flexibility to provide deeper support to the groups who ensure Oregon's cultural vitality,” said Cultural Trust Executive Director Brian Rogers in a release Wednesday. “The increased funds will allow them to have an even greater impact on creating the quality of life we Oregonians expect and appreciate.”

Elementary school registration now open

The Daily Astorian

Registration opened Wednesday at John Jacob Astor and Lewis and Clark elementary schools and runs through Sept. 4.

Parents can register their students 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The district recommends parents/guardians register their children as soon as possible, and

all new students must fill out paperwork prior to Sept. 4.

Astor will hold an orientation from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. or 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. Sept. 8 for first- and second-graders. Kindergartners will have scheduled conference times Sept. 8 and 9.

Lewis and Clark will hold orientations Sept. 8 from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. for third-graders, 9:45 to 10:45 a.m. for

fourth-graders and 11 a.m. to noon for fifth-graders.

First- and second-graders start school Sept. 9. Kindergartners start Sept. 10. Class begins each day at 8:20 a.m.

and dismisses at 2:30 p.m., except for Thursdays, with an early release at 1:30 p.m.

Contact Lewis and Clark at 503-325-2032 or Astor at 503-325-6672.

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— 2:30 pm —
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