

Rules to help West Coast fish spur new technology

BY KELLY HOUSE
The Oregonian

NEWPORT (AP) — Sara Skamser has to do a lot less convincing these days.

The owner of Newport’s Foulweather Trawl fishing net company has been a trusted business partner of West Coast trawlers for three decades, but many of them were skeptical when she began developing special nets designed to keep out unwanted species.

They didn’t want to invest thousands of dollars in a new tool with no guarantee that using it wouldn’t also make it harder for their desired catch to stay in the net.

“They’re human — they don’t want to have to try something new that isn’t working perfectly yet,” Skamser said.

New federal rules created to curb overfishing in the West Coast groundfish industry limit the amount of unintended catch that individual fishermen can bring up in their nets, and have turned many of Skamser’s skeptics into customers.

While no officials records track how many Oregon fishermen use gear modified to more closely target the types of fish they bring aboard, both fishery managers and trawlers say use of the technology has skyrocketed since the new rules took effect.

And it’s having a major impact on the sustainability of Oregon’s commercial marine fishing industry. The nets can help fishermen avoid sensitive and overfished species and are an important piece of the effort to rebuild West Coast groundfish — yelloweye and darkblotch rockfish, for example — that in the early 2000s stood on the brink of collapse.

New rules change fishing practices

In the old days, trawling along the West Coast was a free-for-all.

Seasonal fishing caps and limits on unintended catch were set fishery-wide, with no regard for how much any single fisherman was taking. As a result, each season was a race to catch as many pounds as possible before the fishery was maxed out.

Kurt Cochran, a Newport-based fisherman who trawls for “anything that swims,” says in those days, unwanted fish that came up in fishermen’s nets were known as “dinner.”

But starting in 2011, federal regulators switched Oregon, Washington, and California groundfish trawlers to the catch-share system, creating a strong financial reason for fishermen to reduce their chances of bringing in unwanted species.

Under the new rules, each fishing outfit is granted a share of the season’s catch — say, 30 tons of hake, out of a 227,000-ton fishery-wide



In this undated photo, Sara Skamser poses for a photo with one of her Foulweather Trawl nets in Newport. The owner of the fishing net company has been a trusted business partner of West Coast trawlers for three decades, but many of them were skeptical when she began developing special nets designed to keep out unwanted species.

limit. Likewise, individual fishermen are limited in the amount of unwanted fish they can bring up in their nets. If they surpass that quota, they could be forced to stop fishing whether or not they have reached their catch limit.

“We use an excluder of some kind or another for every fish we do anymore,” Cochran says.

The push for better sorting tools — called excluders — has also created an unlikely partnership between fishermen and scientists from the regulatory agencies that police their harvest.

“It used to be this side against side; academia versus fishermen,” Skamser said. “There’s a growing collaboration on the port.”

Mark Lomeli and Waldo Wakefield, two scientists with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, spend their days listening to fishermen’s worries. If a fisherman tells them too many halibut are getting tangled up in their hake nets, Lomeli and Wakefield find ways to fix it. They also loan out excluder nets and cameras so fishermen can test the gear themselves.

The pair’s experiments offer fishermen valuable information about which tools work best.

“It’s easier to justify buying something if somebody’s done a little research on it to prove it’s a gain,” Cochran said.

Innovation yields success

Two major successes in the past year in the groundfish and shrimp trawl fisheries illustrate the value of the partnership.

In July, Lomeli, Wakefield and scientists from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife tested the effectiveness of LED lights in keeping eulachon smelt out of pink shrimp nets. The tactic was a slam-dunk. Fishermen who dragged the lighted nets saw a 91 percent reduction in the weight of eulachon they brought aboard.

By the end of the season, Lomeli said, “everyone was using them.”

Part of that is because the lights are only \$40 apiece to buy — a small expense, considering that trawl nets run tens of thousands of dollars.

Convincing fishermen to buy into a \$21,000 net modified to keep salmon out of hake nets is more difficult. But last fall, a close call in the hake fishery convinced many fishermen the expense was worthwhile.

With the season well underway, the hake fishery was nearly shut down after too many Chinook salmon got caught up in trawlers’ nets. Recognizing that salmon numbers were unusually high in 2014, fishery managers ruled the fleet could continue fishing, but they had to move into deeper waters where salmon were sparser. Many



Sara Skamser’s Foulweather Trawl hangs in Newport.

TROPHY CASE

Submitted photo from Graham Derbyshire

Old high school friends Ramsay Derbyshire of Pleasant Hill, Ore., Graham Derbyshire of Hermiston, Richard Johnsrud of Baker City and Pat Johnsrud of Drain, Ore. hunted with Shane Black BC Safaris for four mountain caribou and two moose in October in northern British Columbia. Send your hunting or fishing photo to ttrainor@eastoregonian.com to be showcased in this space each week.

BRIEFLY

Dog guards hunter’s body in refuge duck blind

LONGVIEW, Wash. (AP) — A dog protecting its owner wouldn’t let a manager at the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge approach the duck blind where the hunter had fatally collapsed.

The Clark County sheriff’s office says Ridgefield police removed the aggressive dog using a catch pole Tuesday evening and medics confirmed the 54-year-old man was dead, presumably of natural causes.

The *Columbian* reports the man went hunting at 5 a.m. but didn’t check

out at dusk, so the manager went to check on him. A duck he had shot was inside the blind with him.

The dog was held for a family member to retrieve.

Oregon man dies in fall from Alaska mountain

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Alaska State Troopers say an Oregon man died while climbing Mount Yukla.

Dasan Marshall of Portland, Oregon, was climbing with a friend Sunday when he fell about 1,000 feet, troopers said.

Because of the terrain in the

Chugach Mountains about 6 miles from the Eagle River Nature Center, a helicopter was used to recover Marshall’s body. The body was taken to the state medical examiner’s office.

No foul play was suspected.

People who knew Marshall, 24, described him as an experienced climber who loved the outdoors.

Medema met Marshall in 2011 while he was climbing at the Portland Rock Gym, where she worked.

“He was very interested in taking a big bite out of life,” Tracy Trefethen, a teacher and Marshall’s academic adviser at his school, told *The Oregonian*.

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