Shellfish update: fewer growing areas threatened with closure in 2010

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : April 13, 2010 at 10:20 am

OLYMPIA — About 10 percent of Washington’s commercial shellfish growing areas are threatened with closure this year because of pollution, a dramatic drop from previous years. The Department of Health is closing part of one area.

“We’ve seen improvement in water quality in many shellfish growing areas over the past year,” said Bob Woolrich, growing area manager for the agency. “Nevertheless, in 10 shellfish growing areas, the livelihoods of shellfish farmers are threatened by pollution closures.”

Sixteen growing areas were listed as threatened areas in 2009. The 10 areas listed this year is among the lowest since the department began its annual listing in 1997. A portion of Burley Lagoon in Pierce County is being closed because of poor marine water quality.

“Local and state agencies, tribes, shellfish growers, watershed residents, and other stakeholders have all contributed to efforts that have helped improve marine water quality,” said Woolrich.

Nearly 1,000 acres of commercial and recreational shellfish grounds have been reopened just during the first quarter of 2010. In Port Susan, an additional 1,800 acres were reopened in the first week of April to start off the second quarter of the year on a positive note.

The threatened shellfish areas for 2010, listed by county, are:

Grays Harbor County – Grays Harbor, Pacific Coast; Jefferson County – Mystery Bay, Port Townsend; Kitsap County – Dyes Inlet; Pacific County – Naselle River; Pierce County – Burley Lagoon; Skagit County – Samish Bay; Snohomish County – South Skagit Bay; Whatcom County – Drayton Harbor.

"Fewer threatened shellfish growing areas this year signals good news for Puget Sound and for shellfish growers,” said David Dicks, executive director of the Puget Sound Partnership. “It also shows that hard work and major investments by restoration groups, the state Department of Health, shellfish growers, local health agencies, tribes, and shoreline residents pay big dividends. Long-term success depends on persistent, strong local programs and cooperation among these many partners.”

The Washington State Department of Health Office of Shellfish and Water Protection classifies all commercial shellfish harvesting areas in Washington, using national standards. More information regarding the status of shellfish harvesting areas is available on the Department of Health Web site (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/grow.htm). A map of the 2010 threatened areas is also available online.