Summer crabbing season includes late start for Hood Canal, San Juan Islands

Local News

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OLYMPIA - The Puget Sound recreational crab season gets under way June 18, although anglers will see later start dates for Hood Canal and the San Juan Islands this year. The Dungeness crab season in the San Juan Islands (Marine Area 7 South) will start July 15 - two weeks later than the traditional opening. The later date will allow more time for the crabs in that area to complete their molt cycle and grow harder shells, said Rich Childers, shellfish policy lead for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). In Hood Canal, the fishery will open in late July to help prevent the harvesting of mating female crabs. "Crab abundance in Hood Canal has dropped considerably since 2001 and we need as many crabs as possible for reproduction," Childers said. "Although it is already unlawful to harvest female crabs, WDFW and tribal co-managers are taking extra precautions to help stabilize and protect the crab population."

Puget Sound recreational crabbing areas will open at 7 a.m. on the following dates: **June 18:** Marine areas 4 (Neah Bay east of the Bonilla-Tatoosh line), 5 (Sekiu) and 13 (south Puget Sound) will be open seven days a week through Jan. 2, 2010. **July 1:** Marine areas 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 8-1 (Deception Pass to East Point), 8-2 (East Point to Possession Point), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) and 11 (Tacoma/Vashon) will be open Wednesdays through Saturdays only, plus the entire Labor Day weekend, closing the evening of Sept. 7 for a catch assessment. These areas will reopen in the fall if recreational harvest quotas have not been met. **July 15:** Marine Area 7 East (Bellingham and Samish bays) and 7 South (San Juan Islands) will be open Wednesdays through Saturdays only, plus the entire Labor Day weekend, closing the evening of Sept. 30. **July 29:** Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal) will be open Wednesdays through Saturdays only, plus the entire Labor Day weekend. The fishery will remain open through Jan. 2, 2010. **Aug. 12:** Marine Area 7 North (Lummi Island/Blaine) will be open Wednesdays through Saturdays only, plus the entire Labor Day weekend, closing the evening of Sept. 30. Childers reminded crabbers that those who fail to file catch reports for 2009 will face a $10 fine, which will be imposed when they apply for their 2010 fishing license. The fine was approved by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission to increase catch card return rates and gain more accuracy on recreational catch estimates, Childers said. "Last year, less than a third of 218,000 licensed crabbers reported their catch as required, so hopefully avoiding a fine will act as an incentive," he said. As in previous years, crabbers have the option of reporting their catch on the Internet or by mailing in their catch cards to WDFW. The mailing address and the Internet reporting site are printed on each catch card. Sport crabbers in Puget Sound are required to record their Dungeness crab catch on two separate catch record cards - one for the summer season and one for the fall/winter season. Catch record cards are not required to fish for Dungeness crab in the Columbia River and on the Washington coast (marine areas 1-4). Childers also reminded anglers that anyone fishing for crab in Puget Sound must purchase a $3 crab endorsement, which is free to fishers under age 15. All fishers age 15 or older also must carry an applicable Washington fishing license to fish for crab anywhere in Washington. The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. Fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available in

WDFW's Fishing in Washington pamphlet on the website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm .