

Press Release January 27, 2022

Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe and Pacific County Vegetation Management

Willapa Bay European Green Crab Trapping Efforts

Tokeland, Wa.-The European Green Crab (*Carcinus maenas*) is a small shore crab whose native distribution is in the northeast Atlantic Ocean and Baltic Sea, ranging along coasts from northern Africa to Norway and Iceland. Invasive to North America and responsible for threatening coastal fisheries on the East Coast, potential impacts by European Green Crab (EGC) in Willapa Bay include destruction of eelgrass beds and estuarine marsh habitats, threats to the harvest of wild shellfish and the shellfish aquaculture industry, the Dungeness crab fishery, salmon recovery, and a complex array of ecological impacts to food webs (WDFW, 2021). Historically WDFW documented EGC in the late 1990's within Willapa Bay. Monitoring and trapping by WDFW ceased or didn't detect EGC, until 2015 when Washington Sea Grant again monitored previous sites. Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe became involved in 2020 with trapping and development of a Sentinel site for monitoring on Shoalwater Bay Tribal land.

When trapping first began in Tokeland, the expectation was that EGC would be present in low numbers and that Willapa Bay would be a site where EGC would not establish a strong population because of the hydrologic morphology within the bay. Willapa Bay has one of the largest tidal prisms, more than 10 billion cubic feet, of all inlets on the coast of the continental United States (Michalsen, 2018). The first major trap set in 2020 was done in the first week of September and 503 crabs were caught with 105 traps. At the time these numbers were thought of as high numbers with an effort of 4.79 crabs per trap. After that trap set it was determined that there was certain green crab "hot spots" or areas that the population was greater and that trapping would continue into 2021.

Throughout 2021, Shoalwater Bay's Department Natural Resources (SBDNR) staff have trapped multiple times for a total of 535 traps deployed that have caught 5,965 green crab. This equals an effort of 11.14 green crabs per trap. The SBDNR's Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) total of 1114.95 is the highest in Washington State for EGC trapping in 2021. Exceeding efforts at Lummi, Grays Harbor, Drayton Harbor, Makah, Samish Bay, Padilla Bay, Copalis River and Dungeness Spit (WDFW, 2022). Pacific County Vegetation Management (PCVM) trapped 3,235 green crab. The two groups together removed 9,658 EGC from Willapa Bay in 2021 through a very modest collaborative trapping effort. The Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribal Council declared an emergency and signed a resolution in regards to the EGC infestation in January of 2022.

Tribal staff work cooperatively with PCVM on trapping, sharing resources, bait, gear, staff and boats. Both the SBDNR and PCVM were left out of the WDFW funding for biennium 21-23 (\$2.3 million) as well as current 2022 special legislative session budget proposals (WDFW is requesting \$8,568,000 from the State Legislature during the 2022 supplemental session to control increasing European green crab populations. In this request, \$4,573,000 would pass through to the Lummi Nation, Makah Tribe, and other partners, and \$3,995,000 would be used by WDFW.). Small pools of funding have been acquired through the local Pacific County Marine Resources Committee to support essential trapping gear purchases for SBDNR and additional salary needs

for PCVM. To immediately remove more EGC from Willapa Bay, SBDNR and PCVM need more dedicated immediately available funding. More staff, traps, bait, boats and time to dedicate to removal would increase the amount of EGC removed from the bay substantially.

There is no clear direction from WDFW as to the plans for Willapa Bay. Substantial amounts of funding are being proposed for Puget Sound and other Tribes in Washington, with a small amount proposed to be connected to a WDFW Coastal Management Grant. Management goals for the future have not been made clear. And losses and impacts to the ecological health of the bay, commercial shellfish production and native shellfish have not been quantified.

The Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe believes Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife should fully fund and support the local, on the ground, experienced crews, who's efforts have the goal of removing as many EGC from the Willapa Bay system as possible. The field crews supported by the Shoalwater Bay Natural Resources Department and the Pacific County Vegetation Management Department will continue to push for clear management objectives, expanded trapping efforts and results, the highest possible removal efforts directed at eradication and finally for Willapa Bay to be protected. If history has shown, management decisions in Willapa Bay for invasive species, pests, salmon and aquaculture have been met with mediating the environmental consequences after the fact approach. Both the Shoalwater Bay Natural Resources Department and Pacific County Vegetation Management are adamant to not endorse that approach as an adequate response to European Green Crab.



About the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe (SBIT): SBIT is a federally recognized Tribe located just west of Tokeland, Washington. As one of Pacific County's largest employers, it has a large impact in the region, as well as a rich cultural and historical background. For further information please visit

www.shoalwaterbay-nsn.gov.

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