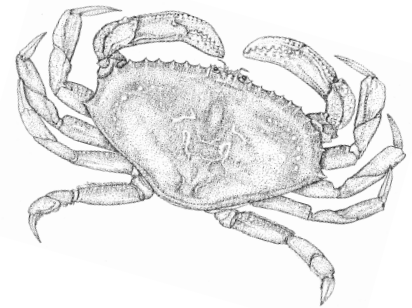


Commercial Crabber/Towboat Lane Agreement Meeting

Friday, November 14, 2014
Port of Astoria Commissioners' Meeting Room
Astoria, Oregon.

Meeting Summary



Opening Remarks and Introductions

Following introductions of those in attendance representing west coast commercial fishing and tug and barge industries, along with Washington and Oregon Dungeness crab management staff, and international shipping industry representatives, Steve Harbell, Washington Sea Grant, reviewed discussions during the March meeting and activities since that time. Commercial fishing industry representatives from Oregon also participated in the meeting by conference call that was made somewhat difficult due to a telephone line problem at the Port of Astoria.

14-15 Season Preview

Shipping Traffic

Dan Jordan, Columbia River Bar Pilots Association, reported that new federal fuel regulations will go into effect next year, reducing sulfur content from .1% to .01% in fuel for ships operating within 200 miles of the coast. As a result, ships will likely take a different heading out of coastal ports to reach the 200-mile point as quickly as possible to limit their use of this more expensive fuel. From the Columbia River, this could mean a heading to the south or west. There are also concerns that this low sulfur fuel will reduce engine power and potentially cause engine reliability issues. John Corbin, Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission, suggested that ships use the Astoria Canyon area, since no crab gear is set in that deep-water area. Ships that are underway don't pose a threat to crab gear as much as those that are idling. Dan will work with international shipping interests to encourage them to follow the towlanes when possible. He indicated that the use of sodium lights in and around the Columbia River is fine as long as the vessel maintains radio contact on Channel 13. Lights should be turned off at the dock.

Tug and Barge Traffic

Articulated barges operated by Crowley and Kirby Towing may not always be following the towlanes, but these vessels pose less of a threat to crab gear due to their design. Toby Jacobson, Foss Maritime, suggested contacting Pete Pelliski and Dan Nutt. Brusco Towing will continue to operate off the Washington and Oregon coasts. Pete Nelson indicated that Dunlap Towing will continue their operations along the coast including tows between the Columbia River and Coos Bay. Compliance with crab gear has generally been good, but gear was briefly set in the summer lane off Cascade Head. Three more pontoons will be towed out of Grays Harbor next year, and the construction site may be converted to a ship repair facility in the future.

Pete suggested that the next electronic versions of the charts be developed using routes rather than boundaries, and that the Coastal Explorer (Rosebud) software format is needed. Steve indicated that the charts have not been updated in over four years, and that he has discussed this process with Scott McMullen, Oregon Fishermen's Cable Committee, and requested funding from Washington Sea Grant. This might also include the charts in GIS format for agency use. Dale Beasley, Columbia River Crab Fishermen's Association, suggested a partnership with the Washington Dept. of Natural Resources for this purpose.

Commercial Fishing

Dan Ayres, Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, and Jill Smith, Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife reported that test fishery results have been very good with more than adequate meat yields for all locations, allowing for a coastal season opening date of December 1st. This means that crab gear will be set on November 28th. In Washington, the tribal Dungeness crab fishery will begin Saturday, November 15th, with a projected non-tribal fishery opening north of Klipsen Beach scheduled for January 1st.

Proposed Changes in Towlanes/Open Fishing Areas – Oregon Coast

Background:

With changing fishing and tug and barge operations off the coast of Oregon, previous meetings of this group included discussions on a hundred fathom advisory line and possible summer season towlane changes in the area south of the Columbia River. Past discussions included various options, with tug industry representatives indicating their willingness to narrow the lane from two miles currently to just one mile in width. They would also be willing to eliminate all lanes into the minor ports in Oregon including Garibaldi, Umpqua, and Siuslaw, and the inside lane just north of Coos Bay. This would open up over 175 square miles of additional area for crab gear during the season. In exchange, they would like to be able to use a towlane closer to shore during the entire year, not just late in the season, improving the safety of their operations, and reducing fuel costs. With more tug traffic now during the winter months, this would be of great benefit.

Pete Nelson, Dunlap Towing, developed a more detailed proposal in March, 2013 reflecting these ideas, and this original proposal was posted on the Washington Sea

Grant website, with copies distributed to meeting participants for their review and comment. At the two meetings of this group last year John Corbin, Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission, expressed support for the proposal because it would increase fishing area and provide a very defined location for tug and barge traffic. Although there would be some conflict with current fishing areas, the new one-mile lane width would be a significant improvement, allowing access to crab on each side of the lane. At that same meeting in March Nick Edwards, crab fisherman from Coos Bay, discussed the need to consider greater fishing activity in deeper water within the 100-fathom line, as well as potential conflicts with gear closer to shore with the new proposal. He also recognized the benefits in the new lane proposal, and felt that this would be workable with commercial crab fishermen in his area.

New Modified Proposal:

At the March 2014 meeting, Pete Nelson and Ray Freel, Dunlap Towing, suggested a change in their original proposal to minimize navigation and weather hazards for tugs near the Columbia River. They suggested an alternate one and a half mile wide towlane starting further shoreward than the earlier proposed Point 16, approximately two miles southwest of the CR Buoy (Point 3). Running south, the lane would run approximately parallel to the originally proposed lane to Coos Bay. Towlanes into Newport and Coos Bay would also be included. Pete and Ray have been working with Sause Brothers Towing in Coos Bay on the details of this proposal, including the entrance to Coos Bay.

Dale Beasley, Columbia River Crab Fishermen's Association, expressed support for the proposal because it would increase fishing area and provide a very defined location for tug and barge traffic. Toby Jacobson, Foss Maritime, indicated that the mile and a half width would be acceptable. Coast Guard representatives saw no problems with the proposal.

The original and modified lane change proposals are available for review at:

<http://wsg.washington.edu/mas/econcomdev/lanes.html#proposed>

Discussion at this Meeting:

Steve has been working with commercial fishing and tug and barge industry representatives over the last several months to reach agreement on the proposal. Jamie Doyle, Oregon Sea Grant, has been leading this process in the Coos Bay area to get final agreement from industry representatives there.

Because of the increasing competitiveness of the Dungeness crab fishery, available fishing ground area is of great concern to commercial crabbers, and any potential impact to those areas from increased vessel traffic or ocean energy operations is problematic. The industry in Oregon has already lost important fishing grounds to ocean energy projects and is particularly sensitive to any further reductions. The good news is that our current offshore towlane in Oregon has been working well for commercial crabbers, allowing them full access to open fishing areas near shore free of tug and barge traffic. As such, there is significant resistance to changing the lane location as suggested in the proposal, even though this would simplify tug operations to a single lane year round. Our negotiation and agreement process is based on proposed changes

that have benefits to both industries, and clearly the time and fuel savings with this current proposal would be of great value to tug and barge operations. However, after several months of discussions and negotiations with the commercial crab industry, the benefits to them seem less clear.

Bob Eder, representing Newport crab fishermen, indicated their support for maintaining the current lane configuration. The proposed lane change would affect a significant amount of gear in the area from Cascade Head to Heceta Banks, further reducing access to very productive fishing grounds.

Pete Nelson and Ray Freel, Dunlap Towing, explained that their proposal reflects a need for greater safety and operational efficiency. They have encountered longline and trawl vessels in the winter lane off Newport, are too far offshore for VHF communication, and configured their new lane proposal to avoid the ocean buoy off Newport and conflicts with other fisheries.

Steve suggested that a compromise location might be possible for the towlane somewhere between the current winter lane and the new proposed lane. Bob indicated that he could discuss this issue with crab fishermen in the Newport area when they have their pre-season meeting on November 19th. He will draft a new lane proposal reflecting the suggestions from commercial crab fishermen on the central Oregon coast and send that modified chart to Steve as soon as possible for review by tug and barge industry representatives.

A new ocean energy test site has also been established off Newport creating a conflict with the entrance towlanes into that port. Although there is very little tug and barge traffic currently, this conflict needs to be resolved. The group reviewed the site location, but needed additional details. Bob Eder agreed to also provide a proposal for the entrance lanes. Tug and barge industry representatives indicated that this might be simplified to a Y-shaped lane as we developed for Humboldt Bay some time ago.

The new lane proposal seems to be acceptable north of Cascade Head and south of Heceta Banks, where there is minimal crab fishing activity. When Bob completes his proposal for the central coast, another draft proposal will be developed encompassing these three areas.

Ocean Energy/Marine Spatial Planning

Dan Jordan, Columbia River Bar Pilots Association, and Dale Beasley, Columbia River Crab Fishermen's Association, gave an update on Oregon's ocean energy projects, and the marine spatial planning process in Washington. The Camp Rilea wave energy project is moving forward, with buoy deployment this last summer, and additional areas planned for development. Principle Power has plans to develop wind ocean energy projects off Coos Bay, with some towers up to 550 feet tall. With a marine sanctuary, tribal fisheries, and economically important commercial and sport fisheries on the southern coast, Washington is a unique state in terms of further offshore development. As a result, federal agency (BOEM and FERC) interest in Washington for ocean energy projects continues to be minimal.

Marine Weather Forecasting

Tyree Wilde, National Weather Service, Portland Office, gave an update on marine weather forecasting improvements and asked the group for feedback on various weather related products. With an earlier NOAA hiring freeze in place, staffing at the Portland office was an issue, but vacant positions are being filled with a focus on critical products and services. Tyree provided information on the new Portland NWS website with improvements in design and marine weather information, including real-time Coast Guard bar conditions. The group indicated that the webcam information from NWS was very helpful, and suggested timing and geographic changes for the marine forecast.

Tyree indicated that generally ocean buoys off the coast are doing well this year, with the exception of the Cape Elizabeth 46041 buoy and Newport 46050 buoy that are both out of service. He expressed support for the continuation of the Ocean Storms Initiative 46089 buoy, and Dan Jordan indicated that funding is likely to provide repair and mooring replacement support.

He again suggested the use of the Bars website:

<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/marine/bar.php>

He can be reached at:

Tyree.wilde@noaa.gov

Meeting Adjourned 11:55

Next meeting - Friday, March 13, 2015

Port of Astoria Commissioners Room, 10 AM

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