

Commission meets to consider further protections for sea stars and increased harvest of non-native European green crabs

March 14, 2022



SALEM, Ore.—The Fish and Wildlife Commission will meet Thursday and Friday, March 17 and 18, for a fish passage workshop (Thursday) and to consider changing shellfish regulations to prohibit harvest of sea stars and increase the daily bag limit for non-native European green crabs (Friday).

Thursday's workshop is scheduled for 1-4 p.m. and Friday's meeting begins at 8 a.m. See an agenda for each meeting and watch a livestream on the day of the meeting

at https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/minutes/22/03_Mar/index.asp

To testify on one of Friday's agenda topics, register no later than Wednesday, March 16 by 8 a.m. (48 hours prior to the meeting) at this link https://www.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN_g-AzBCHjTNaMlcBDZPfLzA

See the last page of the agenda for other ways to register to testify. Comments can also be emailed to odfw.commission@odfw.oregon.gov

A public forum for people to comment on topics not on the agenda is scheduled for Friday morning after the Director's report. To participate in the public forum, contact the ODFW Director's office at (503) 947-6044 or email ODFW.Commission@odfw.oregon.gov by Wednesday, March 16 at 8 a.m. (48 hours prior to the meeting).

Thursday afternoon's meeting will be an informational presentation on the fish passage program, including background on the fish barriers, relevant statutes and rules, legal framework for addressing passage, and opportunities to improve fish passage. No public comment is scheduled for this workshop.

On Friday, Commission will be asked to adopt new rules and regulations about the following programs:

Access and Habitat (A&H): Approve the A&H Board recommendations for project funding and appoint one Landowner Representative and a Chairman to the Board. This program provides grants to provide public hunting access or improve wildlife habitat on private land.

Environmental restoration weirs (HB 2298): HB 2298 passed in the 2021 legislative session gave ODFW one year to adopt rules and administer a program for authorizing voluntary environmental restoration weirs in Eastern Oregon's closed basins (basins that do not flow to the Pacific Ocean). The proposed rules are designed to permit the construction of environmental restoration weirs in qualifying streams, not in streams with healthy native migratory fish populations, and only as large as necessary to cause overbank flooding onto the ancient floodplain during ordinary high flow events. If fish are present in the stream, environmental restoration weirs are required to provide fish passage. If fish are not present in the stream, approved projects are exempt from meeting fish passage requirements. The Commission will consider rules to implement the program.

Indian Creek fish passage waiver: The Commission will consider approving a fish passage waiver for an ODOT culvert at Indian Creek (Hwy 281 MP 0.84 in Hood River County) in exchange for fish passage improvements on Evans Creek which would provide greater benefits to native migratory fish.

Ocean salmon fishing seasons planning: Staff will update Commissioners on forecasts and plans from the Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC). Final decisions on this year's fisheries will not occur until April when the PFMC makes their final decision; the Commission is scheduled to formally adopt Oregon's seasons at their meeting on April 22.

Finally, Staff will present the following proposed shellfish regulation changes that if approved by the Commission, will take effect immediately:

No recreational harvest of sea stars: The sea star population along the Pacific coast crashed starting in 2013 due to a die-off from "Sea Star Wasting Disease" that was likely influenced by changes in ocean conditions. The current allowable take is 10 in aggregate along with other marine invertebrates (urchins, shore crabs) but incidental or targeted harvest of sea stars occurs infrequently and is likely not a significant threat to the populations. However, drastic change in sea star populations in intertidal and subtidal habitats warrants attention and management action. Commercial harvest has not been allowed since 2014.

Increase daily bag limit for European green crab to 35 from 10: This non-native crab has rapidly colonized temperate coastlines at several locations around the world where they are an aggressive invader that has the potential to disrupt communities of native shellfish (other crab, clams, oysters, etc.). The numbers of green crab remained relatively low in Oregon bays and estuaries before 2015. However, numbers have steadily increased along the coasts of California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia during the period of changing ocean conditions and elevated seawater temperatures associated with the recent marine heatwave (2015 to 2021). Populations of non-native green crab are now established in many bays and estuaries in Oregon. Evidence suggests they have the capability for self-recruitment to sustain populations along the Oregon coast. Currently, caught green crab are part of the “other marine invertebrates” daily catch limit of 10 in aggregate. Staff will be presenting rule changes to the Commission to increase this daily limit to 35.

More recreational shellfishers are reporting catching green crab and have voiced support for a greater level of harvest to address this growing threat to native shellfish. Crabbers should know that European green crab can exhibit remarkable variation in color but are easily identified by three prominent bumps between their eyes and five spines along the side of their carapace. More information about how to recognize the different species of crabs is available

at https://www.dfw.state.or.us/mrp/shellfish/crab/crab_identification_specifics.asp

Finally, additional changes are also proposed for the commercial bay clam fisheries, including the requirement for electronic (rather than paper) fish tickets and designation of a harvest area and annual landing cap for the commercial gaper clam dive fishery in Yaquina Bay.

The Commission may also meet in executive session (held pursuant to ORS 192.660 (2)(f)) to consider information or records that are exempt by law from public inspection, as well as to consult with legal counsel concerning legal rights and duties regarding current litigation likely to be filed as authorized by ORS 192.660 (2)(h). Representatives of the news media may attend the executive session by contacting the Director's Office prior to the meeting. Representatives of the news media are specifically directed not to report on any of the deliberations during the executive session, except to state the general subject of the session.