

New recreational Dungeness crab fishery regulations adopted to manage entanglement risk for whales and sea turtles

November 10, 2021



New regulations adopted by the Fish and Game Commission authorize the California Department of Fish and Wildlife director to restrict the use of crab traps in the beginning and end of the recreational Dungeness crab season due to marine life entanglement risk.

The recreational Dungeness crab season is scheduled to open statewide on Saturday, November 6, for all methods of take. However, under the new regulations, the director has authority to prohibit the use of traps in the fishery to minimize entanglement risk from lines and buoys typically used with trap gear. A crab trap gear prohibition would also prevent the use of crab traps in the rock crab fishery. Use of hoop nets and snares (crab loop traps) are not affected by these new regulations and can be used to catch Dungeness crab when the season opens.

CDFW reminds crabbers to sign up for email updates on CDFW's Whale Safe Fisheries webpage, and to check for season updates before heading out. Crabbers can also review the Best Practices Guide to help minimize entanglement from trap gear. Crabbers should also become familiar with the Risk Assessment Fishing Zones.

Crabbers should be aware that the new regulations require recreational crab traps to have a single standardized main buoy which measures at least 5 inches by 11 inches and a single red marker buoy that measures 3 inches by 5 inches. No additional buoys or trailer buoys may be used. There is also a 10-trap limit, and all traps must be serviced at least every nine days. Each recreational crabber who uses traps must also have a Recreational Crab Trap Validation, which is available for purchase online from CDFW's online License Sales and Services website or at licensed retailers.

CDFW Director Charlton H. Bonham will be using the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program regulations over the coming weeks to assess risk of entanglement for whales and sea turtles off California's coast in both the recreational and commercial fisheries. The first assessment is scheduled for November 1, and may impact allowable gear for the recreational season opening on November 6. Recent survey data indicate there are a significant number of humpback whales and Pacific leatherback sea turtles still foraging in California's rich coastal waters. Director Bonham will review available data and recommendations from CDFW staff and the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group when making decisions regarding the recreational and commercial fisheries during these upcoming risk assessments.

For information related to the risk assessment process, please visit CDFW's Whale Safe Fisheries webpage. For information on the Dungeness crab fishery, please visit wildlife.ca.gov/crab.