

NORTHWEST FISHERIES STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

A natural partnership to conserve healthy oceans and keep sustainable fisheries afloat

OVERVIEW

The fisheries of America's West Coast are among the best managed in the world, but in some sectors we still have not managed to improve economic opportunities for those that are working the hardest to maintain healthy oceans. The Washington program is working with fishers to protect fish stocks and increase the supply of sustainable seafood by adjusting fishing practices and jointly seeking management and market changes to support the new practices. Three projects, one complete and two ongoing illustrate this approach with salmon, crab and groundfish fisheries along Washington's Pacific Coast.

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

1. Our first fisheries project was initiated with the Quinault Indian Nation (QIN), a self-regulating treaty tribe with significant fisheries including salmon, groundfish, crab, and others. We worked with the QIN to recover lost salmon gill nets in river mouths and estuaries. Together we pioneered new location and removal techniques and recovered the backlog of more than 100 nets still "ghost fishing" in tribal territory. The QIN then implemented a reporting and recovery program to ensure that lost nets do not accumulate again. Funding for the project was secured through public and private grants including NOAA, USFWS, TNC (with the support of the Packard Foundation), QIN, and Washington Department of Natural Resources. This four-year project was completed in the summer of 2013. TNC will be working with the QIN to explore marketing opportunities to increase the value of their more sustainable fishery.

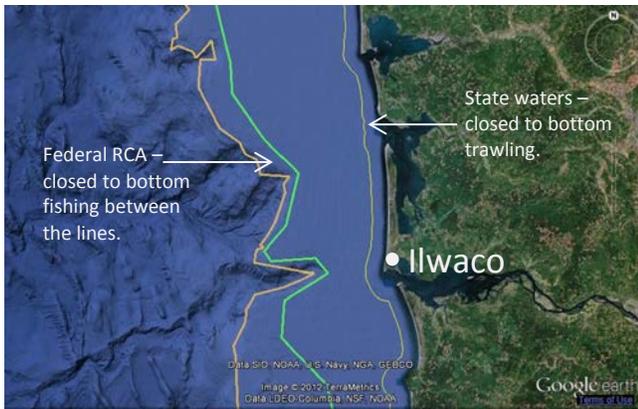
2. The positive experience with derelict net removal led to a new project with the QIN to recover lost Dungeness crab pots. The Dungeness crab fishery is one of the most important commercial (tribal and non-tribal) fisheries in Washington State. Currently the non-tribal fishery deploys approximately 90,000 crab pots at the start of each commercial season. The tribal fishery currently deploys approximately 30,000 pots. With the season typically beginning in December or January, the coastal crab fishery is active during the most severe weather on the outer coast. In the past, post-season surveys have estimated gear loss to be approximately 10% of the pots fished during the season, and gear loss may be higher in some areas. This means more than 10,000 pots are potentially lost each year. The non-tribal fishery has recently worked to recover derelict crab pots and implement a permit recovery program to annually recover derelict pots. Our project will work with QIN to locate and remove accumulated derelict crab pots, including pioneering new removal techniques. The project will also work to create similar fishery reforms, as implemented on the non-tribal fishery, in their crab fishery. Funding for this project has primarily been private funding through TNC. We are seeking NOAA funding for 2014.

3. Our third fishery project is in partnership with The Ilwaco Fishermen and Marketing Cooperative (IFMC). IFMC is based in Washington and harvests fish along the Pacific Coast from California to the Canadian Border. Its members collectively hold the largest amount of independently owned groundfish Quota Share in the Pacific Region and were



Trawler leaving Ilwaco harbor.

awarded 7.6 million pounds of quota for 2013 (roughly 9% of the fishery). They hold over 200,000 pounds of lingcod quota.



Rockfish Conservation Area off Southwest Washington

IFMC members have traditionally used bottom trawls, traps, and hook-and-line gear to catch groundfish: lingcod, rockfish, and other species that live on or near the seafloor. Recently, however, large areas off the coast of Washington were closed to all bottom fishing to prevent overfished rockfish species and Pacific halibut from being caught. The Conservancy and IFMC fishermen are working to perfect a “pot,” or trap, that will catch lingcod—a plentiful species—while allowing rockfish to escape. A successful pot could be fished safely inside the closed areas, allowing the fishermen to reach their lingcod quota without jeopardizing the recovery of rockfish populations.

The role of the Conservancy in the gear switching project is to coordinate the research on catch efficiency, bycatch rates, and habitat impacts. Our academic partners will model adoption rates and cumulative impacts based on those data to predict the effects the new gear will have once it becomes available for commercial use. An outreach campaign will bring the lingcod pot to the attention of fishermen and fisheries managers with the intent to build support for allowing its use in rockfish conservation areas.

Trapping (versus trawling) lingcod results in a higher quality product that could be sold at ten times the wholesale price of fish caught in a trawl, but there have to be market pipelines to retail outlets and restaurants to capture that price increase. Current market pipelines for groundfish are largely focused on high volume fisheries and processed, portion-controlled, frozen products for mass markets. The exceptions are boutique wholesalers who handle very low volumes of fish.

Using the Ilwaco project as a test case, The Nature Conservancy will explore new mechanisms for scaling market pipelines to handle larger volumes of fresh fish to serve the restaurant, retail, and institutional sectors of the seafood market. We will serve as a catalyst for new market solutions by convening producers, trade groups, businesspeople, retailers, and investors. We will validate the environmental gains from sustainably trapping lingcod off the coast of Washington and support marketplace changes to secure a higher return to the harvesters.

BENEFITS

Supporting and developing more sustainable ways to catch salmon, crab, and lingcod and opening new market pipelines for these resources will support current healthy stocks of salmon and crab and support rockfish recovery, reduce habitat damage from derelict gear in the salmon and crab fisheries and bottom trawls in the lingcod fishery. These projects will also help ensure the economic viability of local fishers.

IMPACT

- Establishing the Northwest Fisheries Stewardship Initiative will enable similar projects to improve fishing practices and create a secure regional market for healthy seafood.
- New, higher volume market pipelines will bring healthy, sustainable seafood to a wider range of consumers in Northwest urban areas.
- Successful projects with coastal Treaty Tribe will provide similar future opportunities in other large scale tribal fisheries.
- Successful fishers will continue to be leading advocates for ocean conservation in their coastal communities, with related regulatory agencies, and in the political arena.

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