

Dungeness Crab

SNOHOMISH COUNTY MARINE FACT SHEET

Dungeness crabs (*Cancer magister*) have a shell with a purple-orange hue, grayish-brown on the back, and white tipped claws. Just like lobsters and shrimp, crabs are crustaceans, having an exterior skeleton or shell called a carapace. Dungeness crabs are found from Alaska to Mexico. They are most abundant in several areas of Puget Sound including the Northwest Straits, Hood Canal, and along the outer coast. The Dungeness crab is named after one of their representative habitats—Dungeness Spit, found on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington.

Habitat

Dungeness crab breed in nearshore areas and females may move to deeper water to hatch eggs. Threats to crab habitat include modifications to the shoreline from development (bulkheads), disruption of eelgrass beds, and pollution.

Life cycle and growth

Mating occurs between hard-shelled males, and newly molted soft-shelled females. The female carries the fertilized eggs, as many as 2 ½ million, under her abdomen until they hatch.

Did you know?

Dungeness crab have several pairs of appendages, which they can regenerate if lost!

As juvenile crabs grow to adulthood, they shed their hard shell. This process is called molting and allows them to increase in size incrementally. They reach harvest size between 4-5 years of age. It is important that crabs survive long enough to become sexually mature, which occurs between 2-3 years. Dungeness crab can live 8-13 years, and grow greater than 10 inches in size.



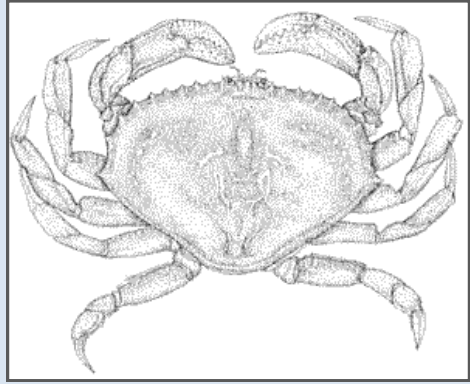
Dungeness Crab

Predators

Natural predators of Dungeness crab include other crab species, halibut, dogfish, sculpins, octopus, and sea otters. Salmon feed on crab larvae when they are available.

Harvest

Dungeness crab is an important commercial, recreational, and tribal fishery. In Puget Sound, harvest has increased steadily, more than doubling from 1996 to 2003.



Local protection efforts

The Snohomish County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) works to protect Dungeness crab and its habitat. The MRC is active in educating recreational crabbers to ensure fisherman have the ability to identify their catch, promote use of rot cord, and to prevent the loss of crab pots in the Puget Sound. The MRC also works to remove derelict crab pots every year. Furthermore, the MRC is committed to protecting nearshore habitat, which is crucial for crab survival.

Resources

- WDFW: wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/crab/
- Snohomish MRC: www.snocomrc.org/

How you can get involved

Be smart! Crab legally: Crabbers are only allowed to harvest hardshell male crabs that are 6 ¼ inches wide or larger.

The MRC: The Snohomish MRC is a citizen-based volunteer committee appointed by the Snohomish County Council. It is one of seven county-based MRC's, which conduct restoration, conservation, and education projects with diverse partners and community members to meet performance benchmarks.