



Crabber-Towboat Lane Agreement Fall Meeting

Friday, March 6th, 2026 10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Participants:

American Waterways Operators: Kyle Burleson

California Department of Fish and Wildlife: Ellie Brauer

Crab Fishermen: Junior Goodell, Bob Eder, Bryan McHale (Columbia River Crab Fishermen's Association)

Columbia River Bar Pilots: Joe Sohlberg

Dunlap Towing: Jake Williams

Foss Maritime: Aaron Dumler

ForSea Solutions: Natasha Novikova

Island Tug and Barge: Peter Juhlin

Kirby Corporation: Rob Bolick

National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration: Jeff Ferguson

National Weather Service: Laura Pagano, Logan Howard, Jacob Hall, Tyler Kranz, Lee Picard

Makah Tribe: Jenna Rolf, Natalie Lowell

Natural Resources Consultants: Kyle Antonelis

Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary: Katie Wrubel

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife: Cathleen Vestfals, Jill Smith

Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission: Crystal Adams

Oregon Fishermen's Cable Committee: Scott McMullen

Oregon Sea Grant: Amanda Gladics

Public: Justin Rogers

Sailor: Robert Hodson

Snow & Company, Inc.: Tuuli Snow

Quileute Tribe: Jennifer Hagen

Quinault Indian Nation: Scott Mazzone

U.S. Coast Guard: John Moriarty

Washington Department of Ecology: Kelly Snoden

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife: Matt George, Jamie Fuller

Washington Sea Grant: Jenna Keeton

Incident reports:

Washington Sea Grant (WSG) received four incident calls since the fall Crabber Towboat Lane Agreement meeting:

- 1/13/26: A crab fisherman near Seaside, OR reported a tugboat out of the towlane. No gear loss was reported.
- 1/17/26: A tugboat captain near the mouth of the Columbia River reported crab pots in the towlane.



- 2/6/26: A Columbia River Bar Pilot reported several vessel traffic issues related to fishing vessels not having the proper lighting and communication. The Pilot is in touch with two crab fishing associations, CRCFA and WDFCA, to address the issue.
- 3/5/2026: A crab fisherman near Grays Harbor reported a large tanker vessel cut across the towlanes on its way into Westport. Gear was reported lost.
- 12/2026 (new incident): A crab fisherman near Grays Harbor reported a tugboat out of the lane. Gear was reported lost. The fisherman and the tug captain disagreed on whether the pots were in the lane. After the crab fisherman confirmed the pots were set outside the towlane, the tug captain did not respond to outreach. Jenna will reach out to the tug company to let them know of the towlane agreement and connect them with the fisherman.

Olympic Coast Area to be Avoided:

- Katie Wrubel (katie.wrubel@noaa.gov) presented about the [Area to Be Avoided](#) within the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary. This is a voluntary cooperation measure for large vessels. Katie shared [recent compliance trends between 2017-2024](#) noting a marked drop in compliance after 2021.
- Katie reviews monthly vessel transit patterns and works with USCG to send letters to companies that transit through the ATBA. Katie also sends Washington Sea Grant monthly reports regarding the tug companies that transit outside of the towlane within the ATBA. The ATBA is on navigational charts; towlanes are not.
- The Puget Sound Marine Exchange is working on installing realtime notifications to vessels that transit toward the ATBA.
- **Request:** ATBA and towlane overlain on the same map.

Pacific Port Access Route Study:

- John Moriarty (John.F.Moriarty@uscg.mil) with the U.S. Coast Guard shared that the Pacific-Port Access Route Study (Pac-PARS) review is still paused.
- U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters was notified they are being sued by the Center for Biological Diversity related to environmental impacts of the Pacific- and Atlantic-Port Access Route Study.

Action items from the fall meeting:

- Summer towlane revision:

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- Washington Sea Grant conducted outreach to tugboat companies to ensure there was no issue with the date change. The effective dates of the summer towlane will change **FROM April 24 - November 25 TO May 1 - November 27.**
- Scott McMullen with the Oregon Fishermen's Cable Committee will **revise the navigational software** as possible to be updated on the Washington Sea Grant website.
- Crabber-Towboat Lane Agreement Directory:
 - To aid in the event of gear and vessel interaction, the Oregon Fishermen's Cable Committee and Washington Sea Grant developed a Directory of Tug companies, Harbormasters and Fishermen.
 - [Here is a link to a Google Spreadsheet with the Directory.](#) *Please note there are two tabs: one for Tug companies and another for Harbormasters and Fisherman. Please feel free to add contacts as you see fit. Washington Sea Grant will soon host this spreadsheet on the [towlane webpage](#).
 - Data maintenance plan: **at every spring meeting**, Washington Sea Grant will request participants' review.

Towlane discussion

- Thumbdrives: Towlane charts are available for a variety of navigational software and are available to download on the [Washington Sea Grant website](#). Please let Jenna know if you request thumb drives to be mailed to you.
- Posters:
 - Washington Sea Grant will consider creating additional posters with state-specific maps of the towlane.
 - PDFs of the current posters will be sent out with these meeting minutes.

Wave-height buoys

- Jennifer Hagen (jennifer.hagen@quileutetribe.com) with the Quileute Tribe shared about wave height buoys. The buoys report hourly wave heights and the data is publicly available.
- Find the "Backyard Buoys" app on your smartphone for realtime wave height sensor data. <https://backyardbuoys.org/data/>



- Backyard buoys can also be accessed through NANOOS.org: <https://nvs.nanoos.org/Explorer> just zoom in to the coast on the map and highlight the asset (buoy).

Tug electrification

- Tuuli Snow (TuuliS@snowboatbuilding.com) with Snow & Company, Inc. shared about tug electrification efforts in Washington. Snow & Company Inc. is located on the Ship Canal between Ballard and Fremont. They are neighbors with Western Towboat.
- Snow & Company Inc. is currently building two electric tugs for Curtin Maritime Corp., with the intention of building a total of 8 vessels. These vessels will be Harbor tugs/ship assist and start at 80 feet long. Each vessel will have 4,000 horsepower with a vertically integrated battery at 6 megawatts/hour. They will have a battery charge up to 12 hours with a generator backup.

Marine Weather update

- Lee Picard (lee.picard@noaa.gov) with the National Weather Service shared a marine weather update. Please see the attached PDF for the presentation.
- The NWS is [*Soliciting Comments on the Upgrade of the Nearshore Wave Prediction System \(NWPS\) to Version 1.5.0 through March 16, 2026*](#). Please add your comments ASAP.
- Lee shared that the Bar Report, housed on the NWS website, will soon be moved to accommodate NWS cybersecurity needs. USCG observations will continue as the webpage is being updated. Please send comments and concerns about the Bar Report website location to w-pqr.webmaster@noaa.gov so NWS staff can ensure they're routed correctly.
- Q: Buoy 7 near the Columbia River missing. Is this going to be replaced?
 - A: Buoy 7 will be replaced next week.

Commercial Crab Fishery Updates

California:

- Ellie Brauer (Elizabeth.Brauer@wildlife.ca.gov) with California Department of Fish and Wildlife shared about the California Dungeness crab season. Please see the attached presentation for more information. This year, there were issues with whale

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entanglement risk and domoic acid at the start of the season. All fishing zones are now open. So far, the California crab fishery has a \$40 million ex-vessel value with an average price per pound of \$5.15.

- Two forms of alternative gear (pop-up gear) can be used after April 1st and after authorization from the CDFW Director. Testing the pop-up gear has been successful with minimal gear loss. However, it is expensive. To mitigate the cost, traps could be strung together with one pop-up unit per string.
- [Whale Safe Fisheries](#)

Oregon:

- Cathleen Vestfals (Cathleen.D.Vestfals@odfw.oregon.gov) with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife shared about the Oregon Dungeness Crab season. Pre-season testing started in November and no elevated biotoxins were reported. The season opening south of Cape Falcon was delayed until December 16th to coordinate with southern Washington, which was delayed due to low meat recovery. The area north of Cape Falcon was further delayed until December 31st to ensure a high-quality product. So far, OR crabbers have landed 16.1 million pounds, with an ex-vessel value of \$75.3 million, and an average price per pound of \$4.69.
- There are risk reduction measures to prevent whale entanglement. Temporary rules move late-season measures from May 1st to April 1st due to elevated humpback whale entanglements in 2024 and 2025 attributed by NOAA to OR crab gear. There will be August rulemaking about experimental gear (longline/pop-up in 2027).
- ODFW disseminated laminated Towlane pamphlets in Astoria. There was not a lot of interest in towlanes and ODFW staff still have a number of flash drives.
- ODFW is continuing the derelict gear program. The [Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission](#)'s (ODCC) in-season program starts on April 21st. Please send derelict gear coordinates to crystal@oregondungeness.org or call 541-267-5810. This helps the ODCC retrieve derelict gear. The Oregon Coastal Crab Association is also working on a program to retrieve derelict gear.

Washington:

- Matt George (matthew.george@dfw.wa.gov) with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife shared about the Washington Dungeness crab season. Please see the attached presentation for more information. So far, WA crabbers have landed 11.7 million pounds, with an ex-vessel value of \$44.1 million.

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- Gear recovery efforts occur in-season and post-season. Fishers can apply for it and the program starts May 1st. Electronic monitoring started 2023-2024. WDFW has seen great success in reduced gear interaction with fishers.
- Scott Mazzone (smazzone@quinault.org) with Quinault Indian Nation shared that the QIN fishery ended on February 2nd.
- Jennifer Hagen (jennifer.hagen@quileutetribe.com) with the Quileute Tribe shared that crab fishermen are still fishing but it is a slow season.

Towlane valuation project update

- Kyle Antonelis (kantonelis@nrccorp.com) with Natural Resources Consultants shared about a project his team is working on evaluating the Crabber-Towboat Lane Agreement.
- Lost and abandoned fishing gear is a focus of many initiatives. One tool to mitigate lost and abandoned fishing gear is vessel traffic corridors like the towlane. The Crabber-Towboat Lane Agreement is an example of a collaborative effort to prevent fishing gear loss from vessel conflicts. The project aims to identify how effective the agreement is and put a dollar value on compliance in Washington state.
- Please fill out this [short survey](#) ASAP to provide your perspective on crab pot/tugboat interactions.
- Q: Is the project evaluating compliance in the towlanes or simply gear interactions?
 - A: Yes, the project will evaluate compliance in the towlanes using spatial data.
- Comment: The loss of crab to derelict gear/ghost fishing is negligible because cotton panels work. The loss of production is a more significant economic loss. The Winter lane (year-round) is helpful and offers thanks to towboats to accommodate the crab fishery by moving further offshore. The value of cooperation is enormous.

Adjourn

- Next meeting date: Friday November 6, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.
- Please [subscribe](#) to the Crabber-Towboat Lane Agreement mailing list to receive meeting information.