

California Lost Fishing Gear Recovery Program Comparison

Drafted by the DCTF Admin Team, CDFW Enforcement Division, and SeaDoc Society, August 28, 2015

Beginning in July 2014, the SeaDoc Society, in partnership with local fishermen, helped initiate a “California Lost Fishing Gear Recovery Program” that was implemented in Eureka, Trinidad, and Crescent City. Considered by the California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) as a successful effort, in Fall 2015 the program will expand to include Bodega Bay, San Francisco, and Half Moon Bay. Since it’s launch, the program has been fiscally supported by the sale of recovered traps, as well as through grant funding secured by the SeaDoc Society. Currently funding is available through October 2016.

Considering the need to establish a permanent statewide program, in April 2014 fishermen out of Humboldt and Trinidad developed an initial [option/proposal for a statewide program](#) for consideration by the DCTF Executive Committee (EC). Since that time, the proposal has been further informed by the EC, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Enforcement Division and the SeaDoc Society have agreed to work with the EC to further refine the proposal before forwarding any recommendation(s) to the full DCTF for consideration.

The DCTF, EC, and SeaDoc Society staff have identified a number of goals to help guide the development of a long-term, statewide program, including:

- Remove the maximum amount of lost or abandoned Dungeness crab fishing gear from California waters as possible.
- Create incentives for individuals to recover lost traps.
- Establish disincentives for individuals to abandon gear in California waters.
- Create a simple, cost effective, and self-supporting program.

Comparisons Across Options

The following comparisons were developed to help support EC discussions during the September 2, 2015 EC meeting. The options outlined are intended to act as a starting place to compare and contrast the possibilities that can be considered by the DCTF in partnership with CDFW, SeaDoc Society, and the greater Dungeness crab commercial fishing community.

Summary of “California Option”

Implemented after the close of the commercial season pending a permit from CDFW. Fishermen are paid to recover traps on a per trap basis. Gear is “impounded” until owner pays a fee to get their traps back. At least one attempt to contact owners of gear must be made and owners will need to be given 7 days to retrieve their gear. Owners of all traps collected will be responsible for paying for the recovery of that gear regardless of whether they want the traps back or not. If the fee is not paid, the traps will be scrapped or sold at auction and the unpaid bills will be given to CDFW to be attached to the owner’s permit renewal. Property rights of the owner may or may not be relinquished. This program will be designed to operate at the conclusion of the commercial fishing season season, but could be modified to operate in season also.

Summary of “Oregon/Washington Option”

Fishermen voluntarily retrieve gear after the close of the commercial season in exchange for acquiring ownership of gear. In the Oregon/Washington program, property rights to lost or abandoned gear are relinquished. OR/WA Fish and Wildlife incur operational costs (e.g., banding traps, issuing permits).

Table 1. Comparisons Across Options

	CA Option	OR/WA Option
Private property rights retained by original trap owner	✓	
Permit needed from CDFW to retrieve gear after the season		✓
Need to hire program administrator	?	
Program in effect year-round	?	
Requires strong coordination with local port associations	?	
Requires legislation to implement	✓ Need to be able to “impound” gear	✓ Need to change property rights

Likelihood of cherry picking high quality gear		✓
Unlikely to remove stuck traps		✓
Costs to the fleet/fishermen	?	\$0- costs only incurred by those who voluntarily retrieve gear
Costs to CDFW	?	?
Simple to implement	?	✓

Table 2. Pros/Cons of California Option

Pros	Cons
Retrieval of only gear that is easiest to pull is minimized	Some costs to implement. Cost projections likely to vary from year to year, but likely to decrease over time
Retrieval of only the best gear is minimized	CDFW staff resources needed to issue permits
Property rights are retained	Everyone who loses gear will have to pay the full cost for retrieving that gear regardless of the condition of the traps
No permits are needed from CDFW	
Requires program coordinator to oversee operations	Requires program coordinator to oversee operations
Provides income for fishermen during off-season	

Table 3. Pros/Cons of Oregon/Washington Option

Pros	Cons
Inexpensive for fishermen to implement	CDFW staff resources needed to issue permits and have staff available to mark incoming traps
Little coordination necessary; No administrator needed	Gear that is difficult to retrieve is less likely to be removed
	Older, or lower quality traps may be left in the water
	Does not provide income for fishermen during off-season

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