



NORTHWEST STRAITS  
marine conservation initiative

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## **Twelve tons of lost and abandoned fishing gear to be removed from Puget Sound**

MOUNT VERNON– Next week, the Northwest Straits Commission (Commission) will remove approximately 12 tons of abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear from Puget Sound waters off of Whatcom and Skagit county shorelines.

The removal is part of the Commission's Derelict Fishing Gear Project to develop and test a protocol to safely and efficiently remove the dangerous and sometimes deadly gear from Puget Sound. A grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, with matching funds from tribal, state and local governments, as well as private organizations is paying for the pilot project.

"It is truly sad to see the harm that is happening under the beautiful waters of Puget Sound, damaging its reefs and tidelands," said Tom Cowan, director of the Commission. "It would surprise most people to know that littering the home of salmon, rockfish and crabs are hundreds of tons of fishing nets and lines, crab and shrimp traps and other lost or abandoned fishing gear."

Cowan explained that when the abandoned or lost gear is left in the Sound it can entangle and even kill divers, kill or wound fish, shellfish, birds and marine mammals, and damage propellers and rudders of recreational, commercial and military vessels. In addition, in some instances nets and lines have entangled and overturned small boats.

The most effective step to keep derelict fishing gear out of Puget Sound is to prevent gear from getting lost or abandoned in the first place. People should fish and boat only in approved areas and be aware of what is below their boat to avoid snagging their gear. If gear is lost, fishermen should report it to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife within 48 hours to help with recovery efforts. The Washington State Legislature plans to address prevention measures during the 2003 legislative session.

"Divers, boaters, fishermen, beach-goers and others can help in this massive effort to help the environment and make the Sound safer for people, fish and other marine life," said Cowan.

When people see lost gear they should not touch it. They should report the location and information about the type of gear to the Department of Fish and Wildlife at 800-477-6224. Then, divers trained in removing the gear will consider the gear for removal.

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For more information visit [http://www.nwstraits.org/derelict\\_gear](http://www.nwstraits.org/derelict_gear)

*Editors' Note: A media boat will be available to transport media to the removal sites on Thursday, October 17. Contact Sasha Horst at (360 428-1558.*

## **Broadcast Version**

Next week, the Northwest Straits Commission will remove 12 tons of abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear from Puget Sound waters off of Whatcom and Skagit county shorelines.

The removal is part of the Commission's Derelict Fishing Gear Project to develop and test a protocol to safely and efficiently remove the dangerous and sometimes deadly gear from Puget Sound.

Hundreds of tons of abandoned and lost gear litter the bottom of the Sound. That gear can damage boats, entangle divers and kill or wound fish and other aquatic life.

People can help in the project; by reporting lost or abandoned gear they see, to 800-477-6224.