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# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
For more information call Brandon Ford 541-867-0300, Ext. 277  
Internet: [www.dfw.state.or.us](http://www.dfw.state.or.us)

**For immediate release**

**Wednesday, December 8, 2004**

## **Commercial Dungeness crab season north of Cape Falcon delayed further**

NEWPORT – The opening of commercial Dungeness crab season north of Cape Falcon will be delayed longer than expected.

The crab season along most of the Oregon coast opened as scheduled on Dec. 1 but the area north of Cape Falcon, about 30 miles south of the Columbia River, remained closed.

Last month, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife adopted a temporary rule to split the opening date for the Oregon 2004-05 ocean commercial Dungeness crab fishery. Quality testing indicated that the area off of the mouth of the Columbia River has crab that is not projected to meet the minimum meat fill-out rate.

At that time, projections indicated an opening date of Dec. 15 north of Cape Falcon. Following recent testing by Washington State, however, crab fishery managers now project that the crab north of Cape Falcon will not be ready for harvest before Dec. 29 at the earliest. The area will open no later than Jan. 15.

The split opening dates for Oregon allowed much of the coast to open as scheduled while giving time for crab in the north to fill out to the required pick-out rate. The pick-out rate is the percentage, by weight, of the crab's meat to the total weight of the crab. It takes about two to three months for an adult male crab to fill-out its new shell following its molt in the late summer. During this period the leg and body meat is watery and of poor quality.

An agreement between California, Oregon and Washington includes procedures for pre-season meat pick-out testing of Dungeness crab. If crab meat fill-out rates are not met (23

percent north and 25 percent south of Cascade Head in Oregon), a procedure delays the season on all or part of the West Coast.

A test done two weeks ago put the pick-out percentage for crab north of Cape Falcon at 19.6. Another test this week put the percentage at 19.9 – too low to meet the minimum rate for opening the area by Dec. 15.

To provide a more orderly fishery during a split opening, commercial crab vessel operators must declare their intention to fish north or south of Cape Falcon. Those vessels fishing south of Cape Falcon must wait 30 days following the opening north of Cape Falcon to fish that area.

The Dungeness crab fishery is the most valuable single-species fishery in Oregon. Annual landings in Oregon are in the neighborhood of 10 million to 23 million pounds – about one fourth of the total catch from northern California to Alaska.

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