

## THE 2006 FISHERY

### **Preseason Planning**

A public meeting was held in March for commercial diggers and razor clams buyers at Raymond High School. Because this meeting was preceded by a lengthy period in which domoic acid levels were consistently low, the major discussion topic was when to schedule the 2006 fishery. The majority of meeting attendees indicated a preference for a mid-May opening date. A few wanted an earlier opening and questioned the practice of waiting to open the commercial season only after the recreational season was concluded. WDFW staff explained that separating the two fisheries makes it more difficult for sport diggers to dig, possess or sell commercial quantities of clams, and simplifies recovering clams in the event the Department of Health determines a product recall is required. Others meeting attendees pointed out that a late spring start generally meant better weather.

Similar to the 2005 season, shifting sands again required that a physical boundary at the north end of Leadbetter Point be installed. In the past a channel of water separated the spits from the north end of Leadbetter Point, even at low tide. In more recent years the southernmost spit and the northern end of Leadbetter Point are continuous and easily crossed at low water. Since regulations for the commercial razor clam fishery permit digging only on “detached” (i.e. islands) spits, a line of posts made from rebar and PVC pipe was set up to keep diggers from crossing over to Leadbetter Point.



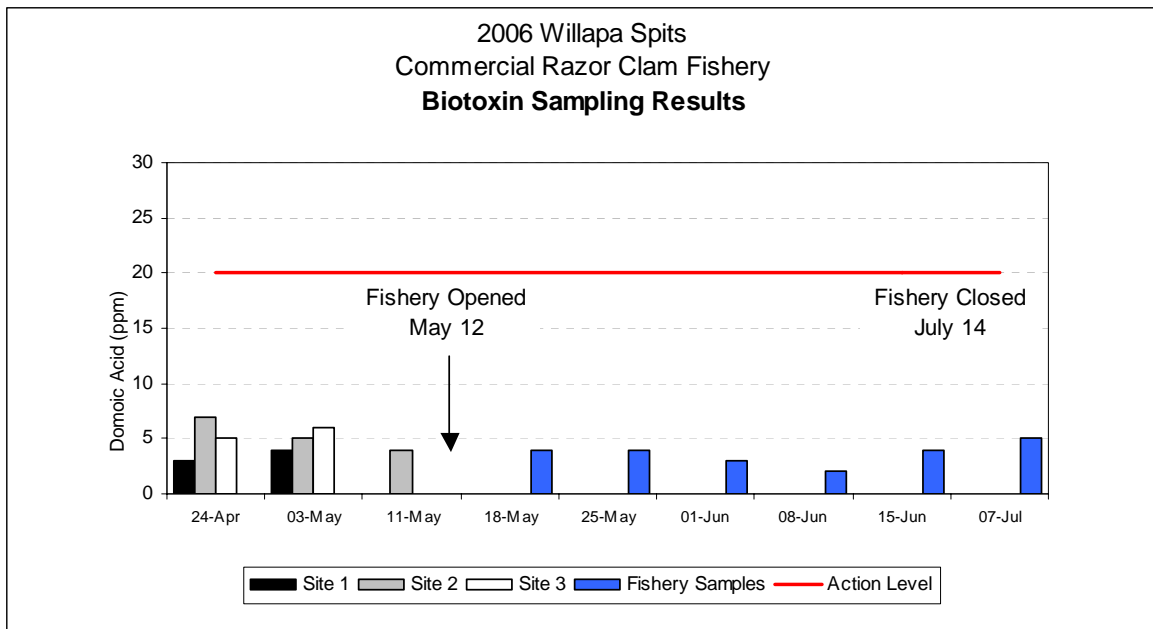
*View of southernmost spit from Leadbetter Point 2006 - WDFW photo.*

Finally, to conduct the commercial fishery at the Willapa spits, the WDFW is required to obtain an Aquatic Lands Right of Entry Agreement from the Department of Natural Resources since part of the spits have been designated a Natural Area Preserve (NAP). A right of entry permit, valid for three years, was secured in May.

## Biotoxin Sampling

Razor clams were collected for biotoxin testing from three locations around the spits beginning in late April. Washington Department of Health protocols require two sets of samples to test below 20 parts per million before the fishery can be opened. Monitoring of biotoxin levels continues once the fishery is underway, with clams collected from dealers every seven to 10 days (fishery samples). Prior to and during the 2006 season, biotoxin levels were consistently well below the threshold.

**Figure 1. Commercial Razor Clam Fishery Biotoxin Results, 2006.**



## Season and Landings

The 2006 season opened May 12 and ran as scheduled through the end of June. Digging conditions and clam abundance were good through the six-week season. In response to industry requests the season was extended by two weeks. Approval of the extension was based on an apparent abundance of clams and strong market demand.

In total, the fishery landed 134,661 pounds of razor clams with an ex-vessel value of \$199,469 (Table 1). Landings for the initial six-week season totaled 111,135 pounds (Table 2). Another 23,526 pounds were dug during the two-week extension. Clams were landed 58 days of the 64-day season; on average 30 diggers landed roughly 78 pounds of clams or about 312-350 clams each day.

Table 1. Washington Non-Treaty Commercial Razor Clam Fishery

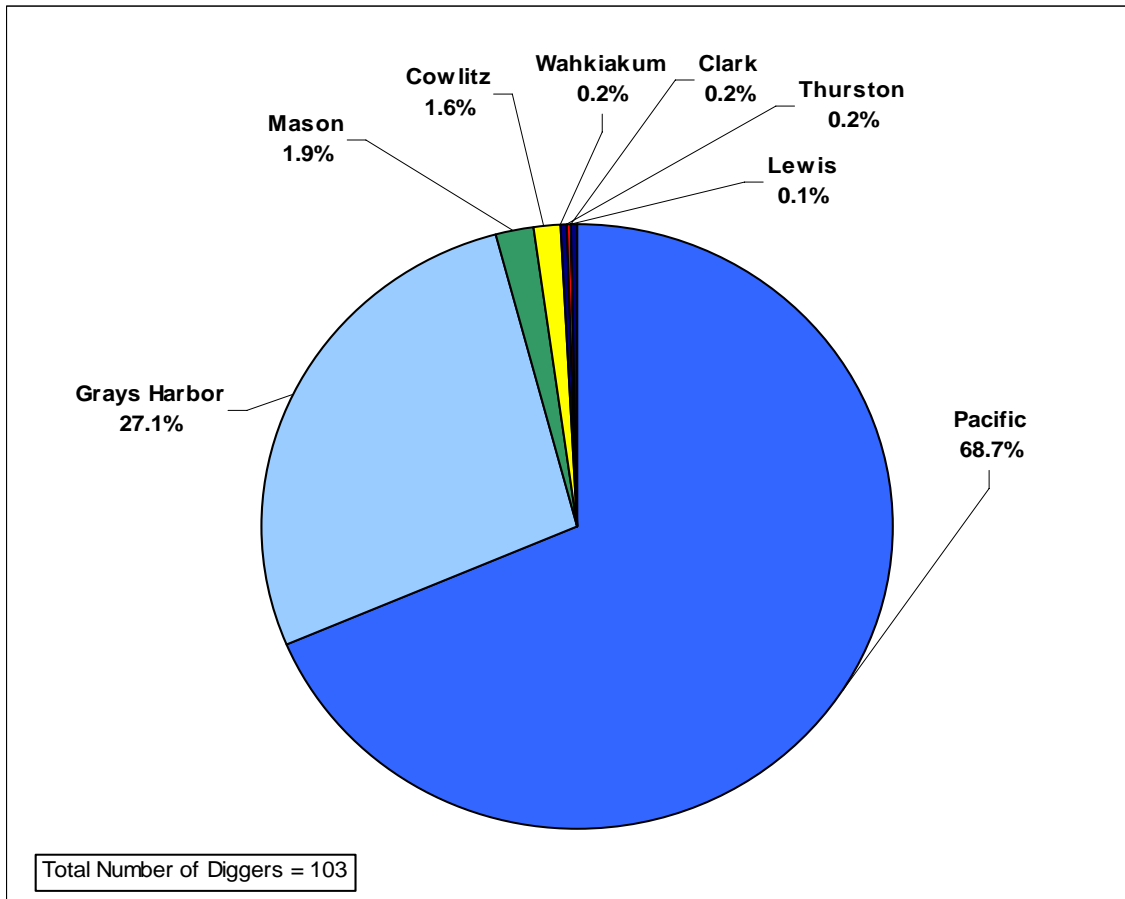
Year	Pounds	Ex-Vessel	Number			Non-resident	License	License Fees	
	Landed	Value	Days	Diggers	Licenses	Licenses	Revenue	Resident	Non-Resident
76	14,047	\$10,512		-	187		\$935	\$5	\$5
77	5,797	\$6,150		-	365		\$1,825	\$5	\$5
78	25,386	\$20,335		-	191		\$4,595	\$5	\$5
79	10,750	\$10,976		-	1,695		\$8,475	\$5	\$5
80	18,390	\$18,781	80	-	1,518		\$7,590	\$5	\$5
81	2,891	\$3,842	39	-	1,411		\$7,055	\$5	\$5
82	6,672	\$9,432	91	-	1,322		\$6,610	\$5	\$5
83	6,732	\$8,678	69	-	1,366		\$6,830	\$5	\$5
84	NIX CLOSURE								
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86	58,814	\$73,114	64	-	378	13	\$19,500	\$50	\$100
87	103	\$194	4	-	115	7	\$6,100	\$50	\$100
88	0		0	-	0	0	\$0	\$50	\$100
89	20,140	\$35,161	28	-	205	2	\$10,350	\$50	\$100
90	26,553	\$48,073	36	-	290	6	\$14,800	\$50	\$100
91	26,630	\$44,106	42	-	267	8	\$13,750	\$50	\$100
92	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
93	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
94	46,854	\$59,487	40	-	95	3	\$12,500	\$130	\$180
95	88,290	\$109,364	38	-	127	0	\$16,510	"	"
96	25,188	\$29,295	37	-	110	1	\$14,350	"	"
97	2,849	\$3,579	21	-	28	3	\$3,790	"	"
98	4,485	\$6,558	24	-	40	0	\$5,200	"	"
99	DOMOIC ACID CLOSURE								
00	69,595	\$84,106	51	-	79	0	\$10,270	"	"
01	75,744	\$77,439	47	62	97	0	\$12,610	"	"
02	119,777	\$118,349	46	97	105	0	\$13,650	"	"
03	17,474	\$21,169	18	40	44	0	\$5,720	"	"
04	183,327	\$269,139	68	112	114	0	\$14,820	"	"
05	102,939	\$154,746	41	112	115	3	\$15,490	"	"
06	134,661	\$199,469	64	103	110	0	\$14,300	"	"

**Table 2. 2006 Number days fished and pounds per month**

Month	Days Fished	Pounds Harvested
May	19	44,033
June	29	67,102
July	10	23,526
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>134,661</b>

A total of 110 licenses were issued in 2006, of these 103 were actively fished. As in past years, diggers were predominantly residents of Pacific (69%) and Grays Harbor (27%) counties (Figure 2). Although a few non-resident diggers, usually from Oregon, participate in the fishery, none did so in 2006.

**Figure 2. Residence of Commercial Razor Clam Diggers by County**



## Commercial Sales

The majority of the razor clams harvested in the commercial fishery are frozen and sold for crab bait. Dungeness crab fishers favor razors clams as bait because they are a natural food source of crabs and also hold up well. A smaller, but growing percentage of clams is marketed to retail outlets. The largest wholesale dealer estimated in 2006, that about 30% percent of the clams they purchased were destined for retail markets in Washington and Oregon. The uncertainties that surround the commercial season complicate marketing clams to retail establishments and restaurants. The few dealers that do are those that have their own retail outlet or operate in a variety of fisheries.

Commercial dealers must be certified by the Washington Department of Health to purchase razor clams; the certification is specific to razor clams and renewed annually. Typically, five to six companies register to buy razor clams each year. Most dealers are established wholesale seafood businesses in Pacific and Grays Harbor counties that operate year-round in various fisheries. These companies purchase the majority of clams. However, some dealers are simply individuals that have obtained the required licenses and certification to purchase razor clams only. Typically, these dealers are also commercial Dungeness crab fishers that are buying razor clams for bait.