

# Washington State Ferries vs crab pots: The price of the conflict

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July 13, 2018

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July 13, 2018 at 1:37 pm



Crab pots tangled in Washington State Ferries have been causing hundreds of thousands in damage, and forcing officials to pull ferries from service. (KIRO 7)

The summer season is a very busy time for the Washington State Ferries when several million people are expected to catch a boat.

But it is also a busy time for crab fishermen. However, improperly set crab pots can halt ferry travel.

“We actually had five ferries damaged by crab pots. Two of them were only superficial damage and it only took them out of service for a few hours,” Captain Scott Freiboth from the Washington State Ferries. “We used a submersible remote-controlled robot to assess that damage and were able to repair them almost immediately. The other three vessels were pulled from service which cut into our available ferries.”

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Crab lines tangled in the shafts of vessels lead to some expensive repairs. The most severe damage went to the Salish ferry last summer where crab lines damaged the propulsion system according to [WSF](#). This caused a domino effect with the other boats, leaving Washington State Ferries to shuffle vessels to other routes to accommodate service needs across the region.

“The first route that was effected was the Anacortes-Sydney run,” Freiboth said. “When a second boat went down we had to pull a boat from the Fauntleroy-Vashon southwards route. When one of the two boats at Port Townsend was damaged, we had to reduce that route to a single-boat course.”

## Crab pots have cost hundreds of thousands in damage

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Repairs to the vessels are costly, and crews often need to be shuffled to adapt.

“One of the vessels was damaged to the point where we had to take it to dry dock. That immediately runs it up into six figures.”

[Crabbing opened](#) to anglers June 30, but two areas around the San Juan islands will open later this summer to protect molting crab. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife expect this summer to be great for crabbing, but the Ferries need some help.

“If you’re fishing anywhere near a ferry route, be aware what is the scheduled route,” Freiboth said. “But also be aware that we have to make navigational changes. We’re not on a rigid rail. Whenever we encounter a hazard, be it anything from weather to a sail boat, then we need to go around. If you’re too close to where we sail, then your pot might be right in the way.”

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife mentioned that 12,000 crab pots are lost each year and some of those lost pots can and have caused damage and killed crabs. For pictures of the crab pot damaged vessels from last year and tips for crabbing go to the [choke points section at MyNorthwest.com](#).