

Commercial Razor Clam Fishery Updates

The Washington State commercial Razor clam fishery is regulated by three state agencies: Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and Department of Health (DOH). Each plays a unique role in managing the fishery.

- **WDFW:** Per RCW 77.04.012, WDFW shall preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage the shellfish in state waters and offshore waters. Therefore, WDFW adopts permanent and emergency regulations to maintain the economic well-being and stability of the fishing industry, promote orderly fisheries, and enhance and improve commercial shellfishing opportunities. Seasons are set only at times or places, or in manners or quantities, so it does not impair the supply of the resource. Razor clam populations are monitored through on-site inspections and in-season catch accounting (fish tickets).
- **DNR:** DNR is the proprietor of state-owned aquatic lands and closely manages use through established authorization and stewardship. DNR must consider the potential long-term impacts of activities on our public natural resources, especially when used for commercial purposes. Beginning in 2012, DNR required a right-of-entry for Razor clam harvesters to ensure that best management practices (BMPs) are applied at the site. Under WAC 332-30-157, these practices help harvesters avoid detrimental impacts upon significant beds of aquatic vegetation or areas of critical biological significance as well as prevent unauthorized harvesting.
- **DOH:** DOH is the shellfish control authority for Washington State. Per RCW 69.30 and WAC 246-282, DOH must protect public health by ensuring commercial shellfish are harvested from approved areas and the processing of shellfish is done in a safe and sanitary manner. DOH is also a part of the International Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) and follows the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) Model Ordinance. The NSSP sets sanitary standards which allows for interstate sale of shellfish.

What is the problem?

Previously, any person who wanted to dig commercial Razor clams would have to obtain a DFW commercial Razor clam license and a DNR right-of-entry authorization. This person is known as a “digger.” The digger also had to either register with a DOH-licensed dealer (collectively dealer) or become certified by DOH individually.

In many instances, diggers obtained shellstock tags from dealers they were not registered with. Then the diggers would sell Razor clams to any dealer, without the knowledge of the dealer they registered with. This process created an inability to do traceback in the event of illnesses, area closures, and recalls.

In addition, many diggers were not educated on the sanitary handling of clams, which was apparent on many occasions where clams were transported in unapproved vehicles/vessels in unsanitary ways.

Requirements

Like before, any person who would like to dig Razor clams commercially, must act on behalf of a dealer, or become certified by DOH individually. But now, to act on behalf of a dealer, the digger must get approval from the dealer, and have the dealer's operational license, harvest site certificate, and tags in their possession while harvesting. The digger must harvest only for the dealer they are working on behalf of. There must also be harvest and transaction records showing the date of harvest, quantity of Razor clams, and who the clams were sold to.

If a digger is working on behalf of a licensed dealer, they cannot sell to another buyer without the approval of the dealer they are working for. The dealer is responsible for maintaining all sales and harvest records.

If a digger would like to sell to the highest bidder at their own discretion, they will need to have their own commercial DOH shellfish license. The digger then is required to maintain all harvest and sale records for three years.

Why is this changing?

These rules are not new. They are enforced in all other shellfish industries throughout the state. Much of these rules are Federal mandates and we must make sure harvesters, sellers, and buyers adhere to these regulations to ensure safe and fair harvest and handling of **all** shellfish, including for bait and human consumption, in Washington State.

There has been a risk of biotoxins in Willapa Bay recently that has brought to light enforcement gaps. To properly ensure public safety, we must ensure that traceback can be properly done and these rules are enforced.

I want to harvest Razor clams commercially. What are my options?

Option 1: Work on behalf of an already licensed DOH dealer. You must have their DOH license, harvest site certificate, and tags with you while harvesting. The dealer you are working for is responsible for record keeping, inspections, and submitting your name as a registered digger to WDFW licensing. You must sell to who your dealer tells you to.

- You must obtain a [DFW Razor clam license](#) and [DNR right of entry \(ROE\) permit](#). The cost of these licenses is \$385 for Washington Residents and \$770 for Non-Residents.

Option 2: Obtain your own DOH shellfish license. You need to apply for the license, pay the fee, pass a pre-operational inspection, and get inspected annually. You will also need to get your own shellstock tags and maintain records for review. This allows you to sell your Razor clams to the highest bidder at the marina.

- You must obtain a [DFW Razor clam license](#), [DNR ROE permit](#), and [DOH commercial shellfish license](#). The cost for all three licenses is \$1,001 for Washington Residents and \$1,386 for Non-Residents.

What happens if I don't comply?

DFW and DOH will be doing random checks while harvest is occurring. If you don't comply with the requirements listed, you could be subject to enforcement actions, such as civil monetary penalties and losing your DOH license. You could also have your Razor clams seized.

Questions?

WDFW: Licensing 360-902-2464 or email razorclams@dfw.wa.gov

DNR: Call 360-870-5678 or email razorclam@dnr.wa.gov

DOH: Shellfish Program at 360-236-3330 or email shellfish@doh.wa.gov

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To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email doh.information@doh.wa.gov.