

HELICOPTER CRABBING

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The newest innovation in crab fishing was off to a flying start off the southern Oregon coast early in 1977 when a helicopter was used to pull oversized crab pots. The helicopter angled with a 6-foot grappling hook on a 25-foot line. The 110-foot double buoyed pot line was snagged and the 6-foot wide pot was pulled out of the ocean and flown to the landing site. The crabs were removed from the pot and the pot was rebaited and flown back to the fishing site. A loop of line hooked onto a small hook that is attached to the grappling hook enables the pilot to release the pot by putting slack in the line after the pot hits the seabed.

Small or female crab caught were flown back to the water in a dump container that was lowered to the water where it is tipped over sliding the crabs out.

Claims by some conventional crab fishermen that small crabs were being "rained across the beach" proved to be grossly exaggerated. Several days of observation by Department of Fish and Wildlife staff and the State Police showed that the operation damaged very few crabs and was probably less damaging than the boat fishery.

Although only 40 pots were fished some boat fishermen fear an adverse economic impact on the fishery. The manager of the Oregon All Coast Fishermen's Marketing Association stated publicly that helicopter crabbing is too efficient.

Two helicopter operations made landings in 1977, and in 1978 five operations were started, but poor crab fishing has all but stopped the helicopter fishing in 1978. To date two helicopters have crashed so it remains to be seen whether or not the operations will be economically feasible.