

718

SHELLFISH INVESTIGATION
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THE 1971 RAZOR CLAM FISHERY

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INTRODUCTION

Razor clams were sampled from March through September. Due to lack of help, work was confined to Clatsop County beaches. The sport and commercial catches were sampled for numbers and age composition of the clams harvested and the distribution and numbers of diggers. The summer clam closure and sampling program was reviewed.

SPORT FISHERY

The 1971 season produced 968,000 clams dug on 77,482 clam digger trips to Clatsop beaches. Compared to the 1970 season (Figure 1), a 38.4% increase in digger trips and 35.4% increase in the number of clams dug was observed. The 2-mile long Seaside Beach accounted for 33.5% of the digger trips and 37.1% of the sport harvest. Table 1 lists the harvest, catch rates, and number of digger trips by area. Clam wastage was calculated by using the 1966-70 average of 18.0%.

Age composition for 1971 varied little from that of the previous five years, as seen in Figure 2. First year clams dominated the catch from the Seaside area, but older clams were plentiful from the north beach. Many of the 1970 spring set were being dug by late June as first year clams. The fall and early winter digging continued good, with first and second year clams dominating the catch.

COMMERCIAL FISHERY

A total of 30,135 pounds (123,000 clams) were dug by 134 commercial diggers. Although landings were twice that of 1970, the average number of pounds per landing declined from 23.3 to 20.8. The Seaside and Gearhart areas produced most of the large catches through the season. The increase in number of diggers was influenced more by the increase in price (.70¢/lb. in the shell) than the increase in number of clams.

The practice of carelessly discarding sublegal clams by some commercial diggers resulted in a number of complaints from sport diggers. Landing of sublegal clams during May resulted in enforcement action that quickly resolved the problem.

SUMMER RAZOR CLAM CLOSURE

Review of the July 15 - August 31 closure (Table 2) indicates that the average take of first year clams in the sport fishery was reduced by 16%; one's increased 10%; two's 4%; and 1% each for three's and four's. Many diggers favor the closure and some favor extending it.

REVIEW OF THE RAZOR CLAM SAMPLING PROGRAM

Some phases of the sampling program were revised for the 1971 season. Seaside and Gearhart digger counts were made hourly from one hour before to one hour after low water instead of using the count one hour before low water and applying the 0.7 factor. Also, cars leaving the beach were checked for clams at 2 roads on any given day instead of just one.

Table 1. Sport Harvest of Razor Clams and Number of Digger Trips by Area from Clatsop Beaches, March to September 1971.

Area	Miles of Beach	Number of Digger Trips	Clams/Digger	Number of Clams Dug	Number of Clams Wasted	Total Harvest
North Beach ^{1/}	14.8	44,782	11.1	496,000	60,500	556,500
Gearhart ^{2/}	1.2	6,400	17.7	113,000	13,800	126,800
Seaside ^{3/}	2.0	26,300	13.7	359,000	43,800	402,800
Total	18.0	77,482	14.2	968,000	118,100	1,086,100

- ^{1/} Columbia River to Gearhart Road (North Beach).
^{2/} Gearhart Road to Necanicum River.
^{3/} Necanicum River to Tillamook Head.

Table 2. Average Age Composition in Percent for a Five Year Period before Establishing a Summer Closure and Five Years with the Closure in Effect.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Before Closure was Established 1962-1966	38	51	9	2	<1	<1
With Closure in Effect	22	61	13	3	1	<1

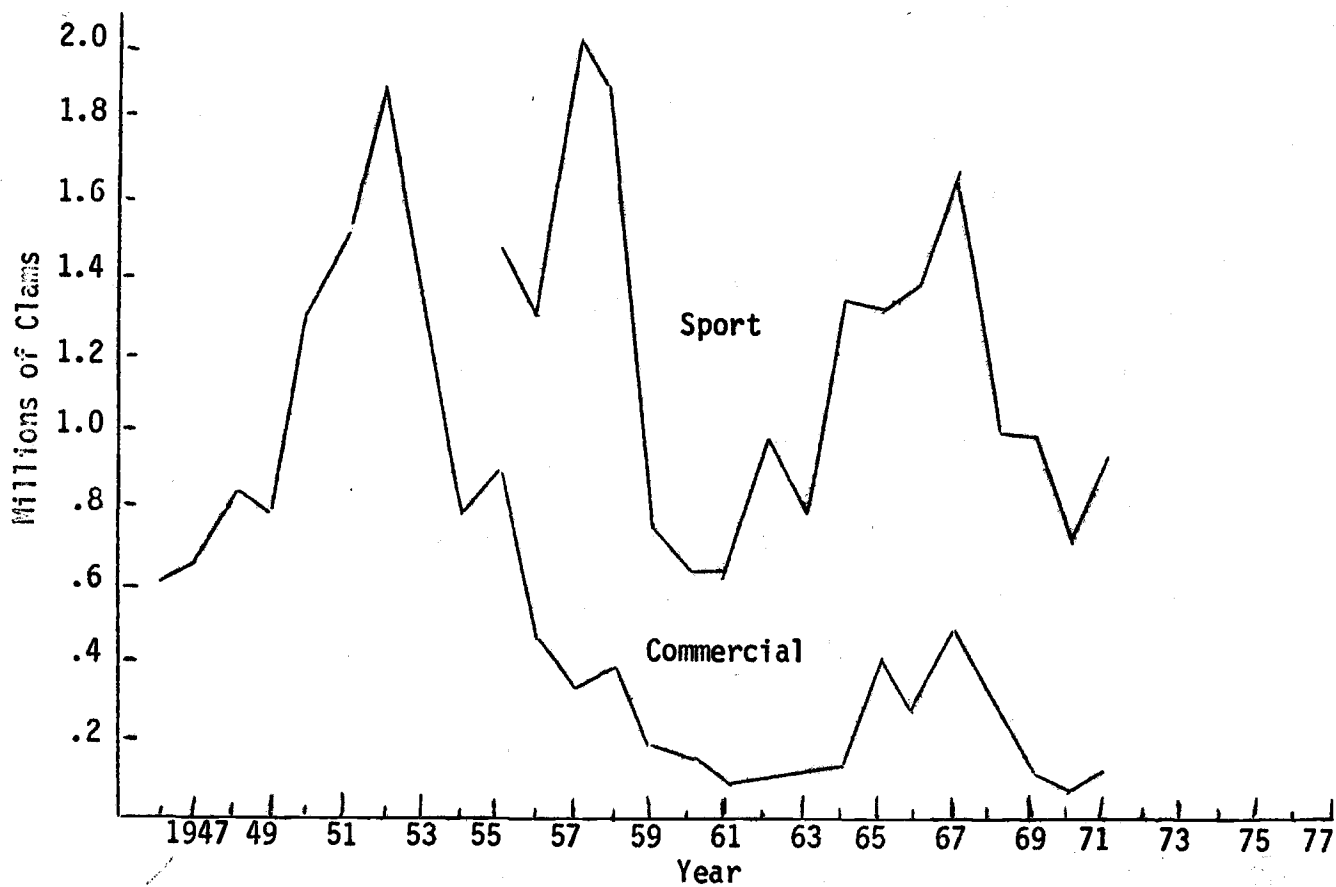


Figure 1. Annual Razor Clam Harvest from 1946 to Present.

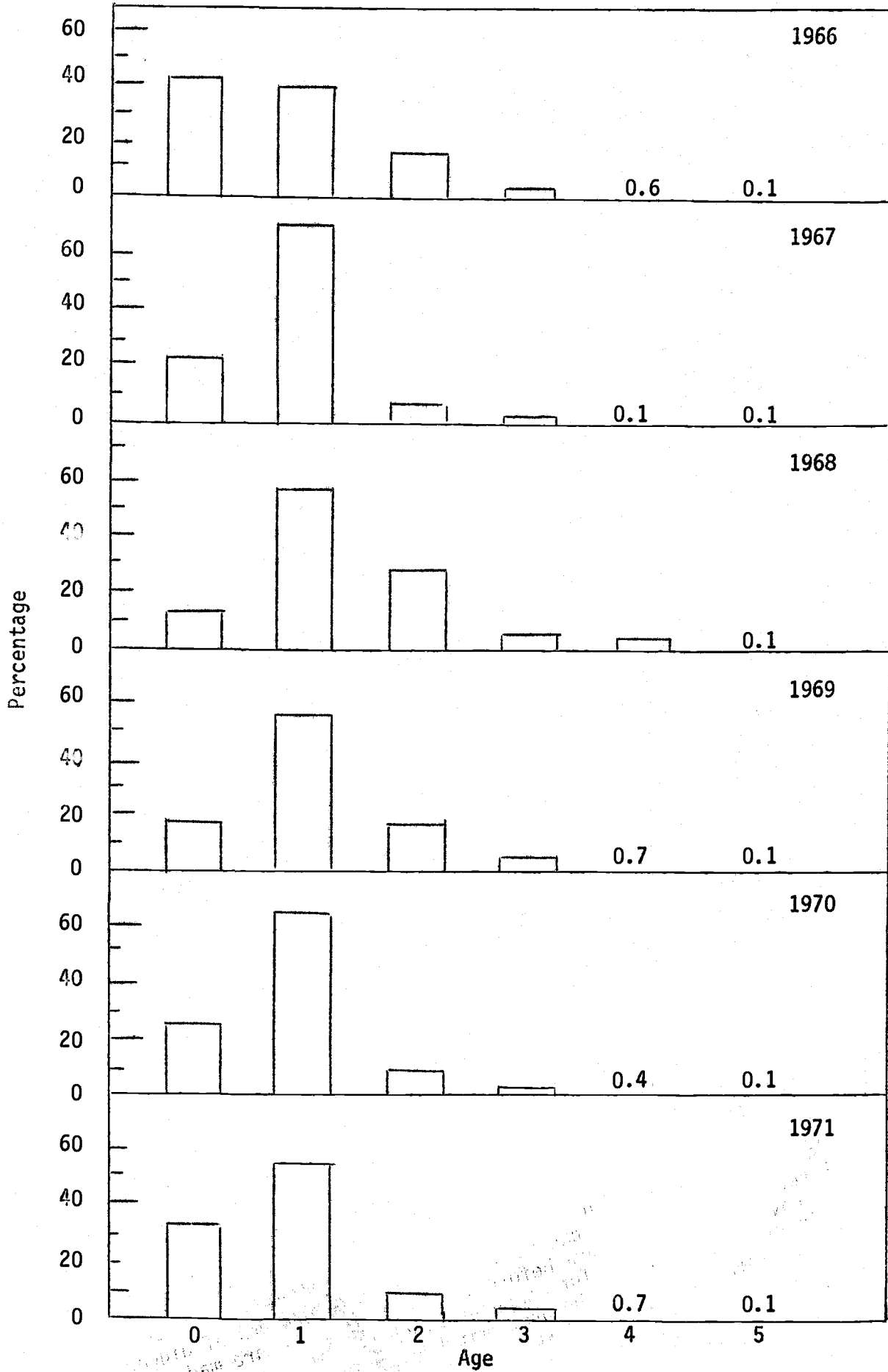


Figure 2. Percentage Age Composition of Personal Use Razor Clams from Clatsop Beach, 1966-71.

Analysis of the 1971 data indicated further refinements are needed in methods for future sampling. A more accurate estimate of numbers of diggers from the Seaside and Gearhart areas can be obtained when counts are made at one half hour intervals from two hours before low water to two hours after. Forms will be revised for coding for computer punch cards. It is believed that from this program, data can be programmed after every series for an accurate up-to-date summary of the harvest.

