

WHALE COVE SHELLFISH REGULATIONS
for
Fish Commission Public Hearing, February 8, 1967

The red abalone, Halotis rufescens, was first reported in Oregon in 1955 around the Brookings area. In 1957, the northern range was extended when several specimens were found in Sunset Bay near Coos Bay. In 1958, the Fish Commission entered into a contract with two commercial abalone fishermen to explore for commercial concentrations of red abalone along the southern Oregon coast. During four years of work abalone were not found in sufficient quantities to warrant a commercial fishery. However, a personal-use fishery on these animals began and is becoming an increasingly popular sport among SCUBA and skin divers.

There are many areas along the northern Oregon coast which appear to have suitable habitat for red abalone. Adult abalone taken from Brookings and Sunset Bay have been held at Oregon State University's Marine Science Center at Newport for more than a year. These abalone have survived and continued to grow. The Washington Department of Fisheries transplanted 400 adult abalone into the San Juan Islands area in northwest Washington. These animals survived and adapted well until discovered and removed by SCUBA divers.

The staff believes there are physical barriers which have prevented the natural distribution of red abalone north of Sunset Bay. The red abalone spawns from July through September and the larvae have a short free-swimming stage of 5-7 days. The predominant surface current along the Oregon coast during the spawning period is from north to south. The larvae would be displaced southward and limit northern distribution while the animal is in this planktonic stage. A 50-mile section of sandy beach immediately north of Sunset Bay is devoid of suitable food and habitat for abalone. This sandy section undoubtedly limits adult migration and distribution to the north.

Recently the Oregon Fish Commission has been given the opportunity to purchase juvenile red abalone from a private shellfish hatchery in California. A project was proposed by the shellfish staff to transplant juvenile abalone from this hatchery to the Newport-Depoe Bay area, specifically Whale Cove. This project would be a pilot study to determine the feasibility of introducing this species into the northern Oregon coast. A shipment of 500 young abalone will arrive at the Newport Laboratory within three weeks.

The proposed planting site in Whale Cove has several advantages. The cove is approximately 20 acres in size and the boundaries can be easily defined. All of the known preference foods of the red abalone occur in the area. The bottom is composed of reefs and boulders which is a requirement for suitable habitat. Whale Cove is 10 miles north of the Newport Laboratory and the close proximity will allow the staff to make frequent observations on the adaptation of these juvenile abalone to their new environment.

An existing shellfish regulation states that no red abalone that is less than eight inches across the greatest dimension of the shell may be taken for personal use. The staff feels this regulation will not furnish adequate protection for the juveniles in Whale Cove. The majority of people will not recognize these small animals as being abalone and persons collecting marine invertebrates may consider them as unique and valuable souvenirs.

To protect these young abalone from persons collecting marine animals, both intertidally, and subtidally with SCUBA and skin diving equipment, the shellfish staff recommends that the Commission close Whale Cove to the harvest of all shellfish. The staff recommends the regulation to read as follows:

It is unlawful at any time to take, catch, or molest all shellfish forms including, but not limited to, abalone, clams, limpets, crabs, mussels, oysters, piddocks, scallops and shrimp.

living intertidally or subtidally, on the bottom and in the tidepools of the area known as Whale Cove adjacent to Rock Creek State Park in Lincoln County. The closed area lies between lines projected due west from the northern and southern boundaries of Section 17, Township 9 South Range 11 West.

The staff feels this regulation will help protect the juvenile red abalone from divers and intertidal collectors. It is essential that these animals be left undisturbed so that a true picture of their survival and growth in the natural environment can be obtained.

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