

## Lost Fishing Nets in Puget Sound

In Puget Sound, derelict fishing gear includes commercial gillnets, purse seines and commercial and recreation shellfish pots. Derelict fishing gear in Puget Sound poses a danger for human safety and navigation and represents a significant threat to marine animals and marine habitats. Derelict gillnets are recognized by USFWS, WDFW and NOAA as a threat to ESA listed rockfish and marbled murrelets. The Northwest Straits Initiative began removing derelict fishing gear from shallow sub-tidal waters of Puget Sound in 2002. The Initiative's Derelict Fishing Gear Program is managed by the Northwest Straits Foundation, a regional non-profit organization working to protect and restore the marine ecosystem of Puget Sound.

The Northwest Straits Foundation's goal is to eliminate harm from derelict fishing gear in Puget Sound. We focus on three priorities: derelict fishing gear removal, fishing gear loss prevention, and research focused on understanding the impacts of derelict fishing gear.

As of December 2022, the Foundation removed more than 5,800 pieces of derelict nets from all over Puget Sound: Point Roberts Reef, Hein Bank, Lawson Reef, Port Angeles, Alden Bank, Padilla Bay, North Whidbey Island, and many other locations. This large-scale removal operation took over twelve years and the Foundation is now focusing energies on preventing future loss of fishing nets and on retrieving newly lost nets as quickly as possible.

### Newly lost nets

To ensure that newly lost nets do not become derelict and re-accumulate in Puget Sound, the Northwest Straits Foundation developed the Reporting, Response and Retrieval Program. Managed in partnership with Puget Sound Tribes and the Washington Department of Fish and

Wildlife (WDFW), this no-fault, no-penalty program provides commercial fishers with a reporting system to ensure that newly lost nets are located and removed before they become derelict and cause unintended harm.

Since the program's inception in 2012 through 2022, the Foundation has responded to 173 reports. One hundred and forty two (142) were confirmed to be reports of lost nets in Puget Sound. The remaining reports were either: legally fishing nets, not nets at all, or were located outside of Puget Sound marine waters. Of the 142 lost nets reported, 118 (82%) were successfully found and removed.

The Foundation urges all fishers to report lost nets within 24 hours. Tribal fishers can report through their tribal channels or to the Northwest Straits Foundation at:

**360-733-1725 or online at**  
[www.derelictgear.org](http://www.derelictgear.org)

State fishers can report to the Northwest Straits Foundation or to WDFW at:

**855-542-3935**

Include the following information in your report (please be as detailed as possible):

- type of gear
- general location
- approximate water depth
- latitude
- longitude.

For more information contact:

Jason Morgan, Marine Projects Manager  
360-733-1725 | [morgan@nwstraitsfoundation.org](mailto:morgan@nwstraitsfoundation.org)  
[www.nwstraitsfoundation.org](http://www.nwstraitsfoundation.org)  
[www.facebook.com/derelictgear](https://www.facebook.com/derelictgear)