

PC 049

Crabbing? Here's proper throwback technique

For commercial and subsistence crab fishers, Norton Sound Fisheries Research and Development (NSFR&D) biologists remind Norton Sound residents that there is proper technique for crab placed back in the water. "Improperly handling crab in cold temperatures results in deadloss, and any subsistence and commercial fisher should want to prevent that in our fisheries," NSFR&D Coordinator Charlie Lean said. "Remembering simple things keep young crabs alive when thrown back into the crabbing hole."

Anyone that's ever held a crab in their hand can see the face of the crab is composed of little tiny parts. The antennae, eyes and mouth parts all freeze very quickly. "Crabs freeze at 28 degrees Fahrenheit. Anything colder than that

can easily frostbite the eyes and mouth parts of crab," Lean said. "And windchill accelerates that problem."

Lean says that some of those small parts have dual function. "The eye stocks are where the hormone is produced that allows the crab to grow," Lean said. "If you freeze the eyes and eye stocks off a crab, you've killed the crab. It can no longer grow or see."

The little antennae give crabs their sense of smell and taste. If those parts freeze, a crab cannot evaluate whether or not something is edible. Obviously, if the mouth parts freeze or if they're frost-bitten, the crab doesn't eat. All these little parts on crabs freeze easily, Lean stresses.

Lean also emphasizes the importance of putting small or female crab immediately back into the water. "If you wait until you're done putting the keepers in your cooler, you might as well leave the unwanted on the ice. Those crab die if left in the cold air too long."

Finally, do not frisbee crabs back into the water, but place them in. Lean explains there is a delicate, yellow organ (hepatopancreas) inside a crab's stomach. "If you drop or slam a crab, the hepatopancreas can rupture. That crab would then bleed to death."

Thousands of crab are returned to the Norton Sound every season. Adhering to these rules will help ensure the Norton Sound red king crab population remains healthy and strong.

Left: The face of a Norton Sound red king crab.



Below: Fred Jay Ivanoff and Senator Lisa Murkowski visit in the senator's office in Washington, D.C.

