

Sea urchin diving permits up for lottery

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. — The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife this week announced an April 24, 2009 lottery to award two commercial sea urchin permits.

The commercial sea urchin fishery in Oregon is limited to 30 permits. When the number of permits falls below 30, ODFW holds a lottery to bring the number back up to 30. Two permits currently are available.

Permit applicants must be at least 18 years old, and many not apply if they currently hold a permit. Only one application per individual will be accepted. Applications must be received in the Salem office only or postmarked no later than April 15.

Sea Urchins are harvested by divers in the often rough waters off Oregon's nearshore at depths of 15 to 75 feet. In recent years lack of consistent markets and price have had a strong influence on the fishery. Landing requirements to retain the permit include annual landings of 5,000 pounds and a total of 20,000 pounds must be harvested before the permit it eligible for transfer.

Sea urchins harvested in Oregon are processed and packed in Washington or California and shipped to markets in Japan and elsewhere as urchin roe or "uni," a common item found in sushi restaurants. Sea urchins were first harvested in Oregon at Port Orford in 1986. Landings quickly escalated and peaked at 9.3 million pounds in 1994. Since then landings have sharply decreased due to change in abundance and markets, and in 2008 590,000 pounds were landed.

"The urchin fishery in Oregon is managed primarily by size" said Scott Groth, ODFW shellfish biologist. "This allows urchins multiple reproductive chances before they are harvested."

Red urchins must be 3 1/2 inches or larger in shell diameter (not including spines). Purple urchins must be 2 inches or larger in shell diameter.

Permit applications are available from the Salem office only, and will be mailed upon request. There is a \$75 fee to apply. The fee will go toward the permit cost if the applicant is successful. Unsuccessful applicant fees are refunded. Successful applicants will be required to purchase a personal commercial license within 30 days. Individual commercial licenses cost \$50 for residents and \$290 for nonresidents.

To retain a permit the fisher must make landings in the prior year. If there are no landings and the permit has

not been transferred, the permit reverts to the state.

For more information on applying for a permit please contact ODFW's licensing services, 3406 Cherry Avenue NE, Salem, OR 97303 or call (503) 947-6101 or (800) 720-6339 ext. 76112.

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