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Most Biotoxin Closures Lifted for Shellfish Harvest in Whatcom County; *Check Shellfish Safety Map Before Harvesting*

BELLINGHAM, WA — Marine biotoxin levels have recently dropped in Whatcom County waters, and as a result, recreational harvest of molluscan shellfish is once again open to all species on most Whatcom County beaches.

Some closures remain in effect:

- Sections of Lummi Island remain closed to butter and varnish clam harvest only.
- Point Roberts beaches remain closed to all species of shellfish harvest pending further testing.
- Bellingham Bay south to the Skagit County line, excluding Chuckanut Bay and Larrabee State Park, remain closed to butter and varnish clam harvest only.
- Parts of Chuckanut Bay and Larrabee State Park are closed due to pollution. (See Shellfish Safety Map for details.)

Biotoxin levels can change rapidly, so shellfish harvesters are advised to always check for current shellfish closures on the Washington Shellfish Safety Map (doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety) or to call the DOH Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632 before harvesting shellfish anywhere in Washington State.

Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters and scallops. During a biotoxin event, mussels and varnish clams usually contain the highest toxin concentration. Paralytic shellfish poisoning biotoxin and other biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking or freezing. Crab meat is not affected, but “crab butter” and crab entrails can harbor biotoxins so they should always be discarded.

Water color is not an accurate measure of shellfish safety. Algae that produce marine biotoxins cannot be seen and must be detected by laboratory testing. The Whatcom County Health Department routinely collects shellfish samples to monitor local biotoxin levels in coordination with the Washington State Department of Health.

Pollution-related closures occur when the level of contaminants in the water, such as bacteria or viruses, are high enough to make people sick when they eat shellfish harvested from the area.

Shellfish sold in restaurants and retail markets are tested before distribution and are safe to eat.

More information about safely harvesting shellfish is available from the Washington State Department of Health at www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Shellfish/RecreationalShellfish.

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