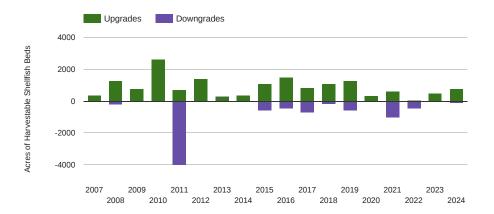
PUGET SOUND VITAL SIGNS

INDICATOR AREA OF HARVESTABLE SHELLFISH BEDS

This indicator tracks changes in the classification of harvestable shellfish beds in Puget Sound. The Washington State Department of Health classifies 115 shellfish growing areas in Puget Sound to assure that harvested shellfish are safe to consume. The data collected for the classification process represent the conditions that dictate shellfish harvest, and their trends provide information on marine water quality in Puget Sound.

Area of harvestable shellfish beds

By: Classification change



Area (acres) of harvestable shellfish beds where the Washington Department of Health classification has changed. Upgrades in classification mean that water quality has improved, allowing for fewer restrictions on shellfish harvest. Downgrades mean there are either more restrictions on when shellfish may be harvested, or harvest is not allowed.

Indicator Progress

Target Status





Target

Achieve an annual net gain of at least 500 acres approved for shellfish harvesting, based on a three-year rolling average.

Target fact sheet

Memo to Science Panel with rationale

Data Source

Washington State Department of Health, Office of Environmental Health and Safety

Shellfish Growing Area Annual Reports

Indicator Lead

Scott Berbells Scott.Berbells@DOH.WA.GOV Washington State Department of Health

Last Updated

11/06/2025

Key Vital Sign Indicator Results

Provisional Update (November 2025):

- Projections for 2025 suggest the net change in harvestable shellfish growing area acreage could approach a
 950-acre loss. This is the second largest decline since 2007 and will close multiple Tribal and non-Tribal
 commercial harvest areas, including profitable geoduck tracts scheduled for harvest. These substantial
 downgrades are the result of industrial activity and wastewater treatment plant discharge. This decline will
 not be significantly offset by increased harvest opportunities driven by improved water quality because,
 due to the statewide hiring freeze, the Department of Health has not been able to evaluate data and open
 appropriate areas. Regardless, improvements to water quality would not cover acreage lost. Thus, we
 consider this indicator to be "GETTING WORSE."
- Additional information, authored by our partners at DOH, will be available soon.

Past Indicator Results:

- Commercial shellfish growing areas in Puget Sound cover roughly 260,000 acres. About 87% (225,135 acres) of this area is suitable for harvest.
- In 2022 the Leadership Council approved a new target to achieve a net gain of at least 500 acres approved
 for shellfish harvesting every year, based on a three-year rolling average. The net change in harvestable
 shellfish beds in 2024 for all of Puget Sound was 673 acres. The three-year average (2022-2024) net change
 was +224 acres.
- In 2024 improved water quality conditions in four growing areas resulted in classification upgrades across 765 acres. That same year, Washington Department of Health (DOH) needed to downgrade classifications in one growing area. A total of 112 acres were downgraded resulting in more restrictions on shellfish harvest.
 For more information, see the Interpretation of Results section.
- Recently, in 2021 and 2022, more acres were downgraded than upgraded, however, net improvement in
 acreage returned in 2023 and 2024. Since 2007 more acres of shellfish growing areas have been upgraded
 than downgraded. The positive trend reflects state, tribal, and local investments in effective pollution
 identification and correction programs.
- The upgrades in growing area classifications since 2007 were dramatically offset by the 2011 downgrade of the Samish Bay shellfish growing area (4,037 acres). This downgrade impacted the overall net acreage gained and slowed progress toward the previous 2020 recovery target.

CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE VITAL SIGNS VISIT: vitalsigns.pugetsoundinfo.wa.gov OR CONTACT: vitalsigns@psp.wa.gov