



2026 ISSUE PAPER: EUROPEAN GREEN CRABS

Ketchikan Gateway Borough - 1900 First Avenue - Ketchikan, Alaska 99901

OVERVIEW

Summary of the Issue: The invasive European green crab (*Carcinus maenas*) poses a significant ecological and economic threat to Southeast Alaska's marine ecosystems, commercial fisheries, mariculture industry, traditional food gather practices, and coastal communities. While the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and tribal partners, among others, have initiated early detection and rapid response efforts, additional resources are needed to support and expand these efforts.

The European green crab was first confirmed in Alaska at the Annette Islands Reserve in July 2022, followed by spread into Gravina Island (2024), Ketchikan road-system beaches (2025), and Prince of Wales Island (2025). Tribal governments—including the Metlakatla Indian Community (MIC), Organized Village of Kasaan and Hydaburg Cooperative Association—are conducting large-scale trapping and early detection monitoring. By 2025, MIC removed over 40,000 EGC, confirming establishment of the species and accelerating spread risk into northern Southeast, Alaska.

"The green crab is considered one of the most invasive species in the marine environment. It has few predators, aggressively hunts and eats its prey, destroys seagrass, and outcompetes local species for food and habitat. Green crab could potentially damage Alaska's multi-billion dollar fisheries industry, especially for salmon, crab, and mariculture operations."

-NOAA Fisheries, August 2025

Importance of Resolving the Issue: Resolving the European green crab invasion in Alaska is critically important because the species poses a direct ecological and economic threat to the state's coastal fisheries, mariculture industry, and community subsistence systems. Green crab are aggressive, highly adaptable predators capable of tolerating wide temperature and salinity ranges, allowing them to survive and spread throughout Alaska's diverse nearshore habitats.

MIC documented an exponential increase from approximately 1,800 EGC caught in 2024 to more than 40,000 in 2025, indicating the early stages of a proliferating invasion curve. Economically, Alaska's coastal fisheries and mariculture operations face significant risk: green crab predation on juvenile shellfish and the degradation of eelgrass—essential habitat for commercially valuable species—could lead to reduced recruitment, lower harvest levels, and long-term declines in fishery productivity. These impacts have already been observed elsewhere; Washington State was forced to allocate more than \$8.5 million in emergency funding after detecting explosive population growth, removing over 677,000 EGC between 2022 and 2024, yet still reports ongoing ecosystem damage and high management costs.



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Recent Actions Taken to Resolve the Issue: Recent efforts to address the European green crab threat in Southeast Alaska have been led primarily by Tribal governments, state agencies, and federal partners. Tribal entities such as the Metlakatla Indian Community have conducted monitoring and removal efforts. Although the Borough has not undertaken operational management actions, it has urged the State of Alaska and its legislators to prioritize this emerging threat and support the regional and Tribal efforts already underway.

Action Desired: To effectively contain European green crab before it becomes a statewide and economically costly marine invasion, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough and Southeast Alaska partners request sustained federal investment and direct Tribal–federal collaboration.

- **Federal Funding.** Support on-the-ground suppression, surveillance, data management, and rapid response capacity that matches the scale of the threat.
- **Formalize Partnerships.** Formalize strategic partnerships between the local, tribal, state and federal entities.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Questions and requests for additional information may be directed to:

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