

Alaska European Green Crab Volunteer Program Guide



Acknowledgements:

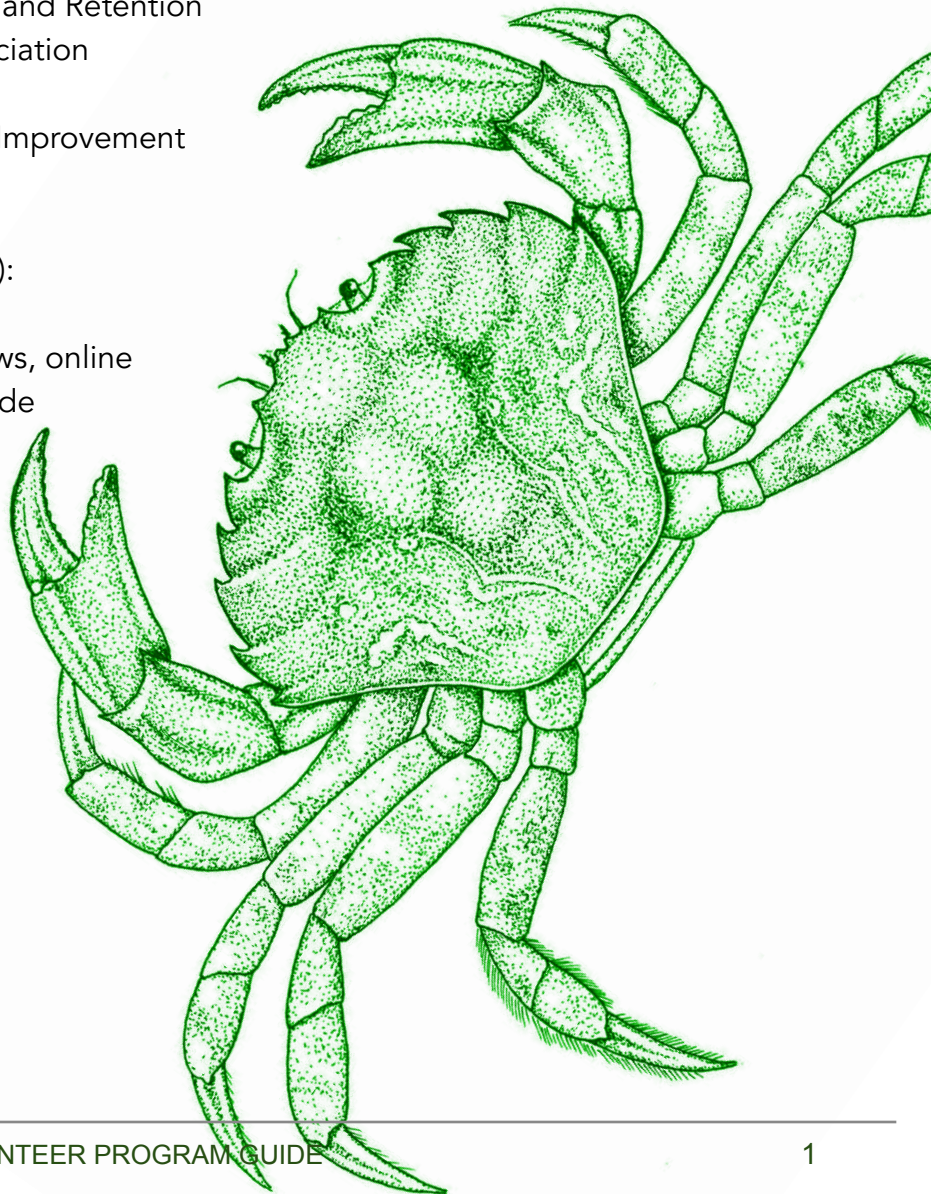
Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

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Resources Folder (online and printed):

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7. Training tools - in resource guide
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Introduction

Congratulations! You are taking the first steps towards expanding your local monitoring network for European green crab (EGC) in Alaska. The following guide is put together as a tool to help you create your monitoring program. This guide includes suggestions that have worked for those of us currently running programs in Alaska. It is a work in progress, and as our monitoring programs grow in Alaska, so will the wealth of knowledge for how best to create and support the success of these programs.

The following pages outline activities and training ideas that will help support you when designing and creating your local program. A resource guide can be found at the end of the manual, and online here: [ECG Resources](#). It includes training ID guides, outreach templates, and agenda templates.

Why Community Monitoring? Community Monitoring Programs remove administrative burden on the individual, build on shared knowledge, and create collaborative relationships, helping to create a path for data and information from community monitoring to state agencies and relevant researchers and back out to the community. Having conversations with volunteers early and often about how the data they collect will be processed and shared is crucial for building trust in your relationship with volunteers. Data sovereignty concerns should be taken into account and revisited with all involved parties at least once a year.

Alaska EGC Early Detection Volunteer Programs:

- Are an integral part of a statewide partnership to keep Alaska wild and free from invasive species.
- Provide training on early detection protocol for invasive European green crab to monitor specific sites.
- Support monthly monitoring from April through September (or longer).
- Notify ADF&G immediately upon finding evidence of EGC presence.





Volunteers practice measuring a carapace on the Homer Spit. Photo courtesy of KBNERR Homer, AK 2023

Establishing a Crab Team in Your Community

MAKE A PLAN - BE MINDFUL!

The best advice when starting a volunteer crab monitoring program is to start small. You may be motivated to recruit teams to monitor every beach in your community - which is great - But also a LOT of work! Setting realistic goals will set you up for success. Before you begin to recruit volunteers, take time to figure out how much capacity and time (and funding!) you have. THEN decide what model of program you would like to create. The most important thing is to set yourself up for success in whatever level of volunteer monitoring you decide on.

Molt walks and drop-in community events are an easy place to start when it comes to volunteers. There is minimal preparation needed, and the volunteer time commitment is short. It can be used as an outreach tool and may lead to volunteer interest that can later

be guided towards crab trap monitoring. Establishing a sentinel trapping site where you can train and demonstrate standardized practices with volunteers might be the next step. Whatever you decide, remember it's a marathon not a sprint, we are in this for the long game.



Community volunteers wrap up a monitoring event on the Homer Spit. Photo courtesy of KBNERR 2023

The following questions will help you form a plan and decide what type of community monitoring program you would like to establish in your community (to start with):

How much time can I dedicate to crab monitoring?

- If your answer is little/none - then you may just monitor one site and invite people to join you or encourage molt walks in your community.
- If you have time and funding to pursue a more structured volunteer program, that is great - a volunteer trapping program is a perfect fit! Just be aware that it does take time to do community monitoring well. Plan time for outreach, recruitment, training, and data management.

How many beaches am I able to monitor?

- This also depends on your capacity and interest. For your first year monitoring, you may want to start with one priority beach. Once you have set up one beach as a successful sentinel site, you can use it as a training beach for future monitors and/or community monitoring events. This will allow you to gauge the level of time and investment needed and budget your time accordingly.

Are there people in the community that I should inform, ask permission, or partner with? YES! Before you start establishing a monitoring site, make sure you know the answers to these questions:

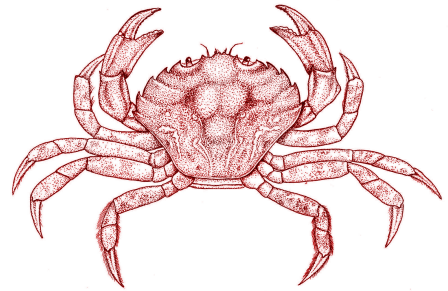
- Who owns the beaches you are considering monitoring?
- Are the beaches used by community/subsistence/recreation?
- Do local Tribal agencies have an approval process?
- Does the local state agency have an approval process?
- What does the appropriate sharing of data look like with local entities?

By inquiring and including community in the planning process - you are likely to gain interest and maybe a few monitors too!

Finally, with all the above questions answered, decide:

What is the best way for our community to get engaged in monitoring? (listed in order of commitment levels)

- Opportunistic Crab Molt Walks
- Drop In Community monitoring days
- School Group Field Trips
- Established Volunteer Monitoring Teams
- Interns



Community Monitoring Engagement Levels

OPPORTUNISTIC CRAB MOLT WALKS



Three Alaska Crab Molts (Helmet, Pygmy Rock, and Dungeness) Photo KBNERR

Molt Walks are the easiest community monitoring level to implement. Molt walks are focused on outreach and accessibility. Interested community members are trained in crab identification, molt walk protocols and datasheets, and then are given autonomy in their volunteering (choose their schedule and time) and need very little other direction, unless you are organizing a community-wide event, such as a bioblitz.

Steps: Outreach and provide online access to protocol and data sheets. An optional brief training on protocol and carapace identification can offer an

additional relationship building opportunity and answer volunteer questions. A pre-season in person volunteer training is an easy way to accomplish this all at once. Alternatively, creating an online video training resource for people to access is helpful for volunteers with time or travel limitations.

Data: Volunteers can be autonomous and report data directly to AK Fish and Game through the Survey 123 app. This app allows volunteers to upload their survey data on their smartphone, tablet or online. Volunteers can upload the app from the app store for ease of use. The app is very user friendly. **You can access the Survey 123 app [here](#).**

Additional Options: Molt Walks can be done as a community bioblitz type setting, classroom field trip, homeschool activity, or organized monthly community event. This can create a fun, social energy around the otherwise somber topic of invasive species.

DROP-IN COMMUNITY MONITORING DAYS:

Although it takes more planning and time, this method of community monitoring is a great education and outreach tool. Drop in community days at an already established accessible trapping site are a perfect way to reach new potential volunteers. Priorities for this level of event include outreach and having enough equipment and staff to help guide and support community members on the day of monitoring.

Steps:

1. **Choose Date:** Determine summer low tide series, and choose one day each month to host a community trapping event.
2. **Outreach to community** - two weeks prior minimum
 - a. [Fliers/Radio/News/Social Media](#)
 - b. target special groups? Youth/Families/Clubs
 - c. Suggest RSVP (not necessary but helpful)
 - d. Set event time for 30 minutes earlier than you intend to check trap
3. **Day Prior: Set traps according to protocol the day prior** to the community event.
4. **Day Of: Meet community members on site:**
 - a. Sign up sheet and volunteer paperwork (track volunteer hours)
 - b. provide information about EGC
 - c. run through protocol
 - d. practice holding fake crab



Community members learn how to measure crabs. Photo KBNER

- e. practice measuring carapace with calipers
 - f. introduce data sheet
5. Have volunteers shadow you to each trap and assist as appropriate. Split into groups if there are other monitors available to lead.
 6. Process and collect traps
 7. Wrap up
 - a. Collect traps and data
 - b. Thank volunteers and invite them to additional volunteer opportunities.
 - c. Dispose of bait upland, clean and store traps

SCHOOL GROUP FIELD TRIPS:

This method of community monitoring takes more time, energy, planning and staffing. It is an extremely rewarding outreach tool and great collaboration with schools. After all, Children are Our Future! Be aware that each step needs to be well planned out when involving children to keep it safe and fun. Work with teachers to design a successful classroom visit prior to the field trip. It is nice to trap with the same school groups in both the fall and spring, and multiple years to build a rapport and build on previous years experience.

Steps*:

1. Choose Date: Work with teachers to determine appropriate time and tide for field trip.
2. Pre-Plan: Walk through the site profile with the teacher and discuss logistics for student engagement. (buses, gear, chaperones)
3. Classroom Visit - week prior to field trip (see curriculum in resource folder)

Collect all the equipment needed for stations, and staff to lead at each station:

- a. Present 5-10 minute slideshow on EGC (in resource folder)
 - b. Station 1: Crab ID
 - c. Station 2: Holding a crab
 - d. Station 3: Data Sheets
 - d. Station 4: Environmental Data
8. Set traps according to protocol the day prior to the field trip.
 9. Meet students and teachers/parents on site 30 minutes prior to trap check time:

- a. Review information about EGC
- b. Divide students into groups of 4-5 each with skilled adult



3rd Grade Students show off their catch.
Photo KBNERR

- c. Each group will process one trap according to protocol

10. Wrap up

- a. Collect traps and data
- b. Provide the teacher with data from the event to use in the classroom.

**Detailed steps are found in the resource folder.*

LONG -TERM VOLUNTEER MONITORING TEAMS:

Establishing monitors that help you monitor your sentinel site, or adopt their own monitoring site takes more time, training and oversight, but can also be the most rewarding and valuable experience and is a great end goal. Over time these monitoring volunteers will assist in collecting high quality, standardized data and increase your chances of detecting green crabs. It is easiest to create a long-term volunteer monitoring program by starting off gradually and evolving into a formal, structured program over time. The remainder of this manual is intended to help you create a valuable and problem-free volunteer program no matter what size. It's worth the work! Working with dedicated, long term volunteers is a fun experience and a great way to increase awareness in the community.

Things to think about when starting a volunteer program:

Who will manage volunteers?

How many volunteers are needed for my project?

Where will data go? How will it be shared/accessed?

What additional equipment do I need?

What are good sources of funding?

The following volunteer program steps are outlined in the next section:

- Volunteer Recruitment
- Volunteer Training
- Volunteer Retention



Volunteers: Recruiting, Training, Retaining

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT:

Once you have a plan - it is time to recruit participants! Some things to keep in mind before you start recruiting:

- Have **clear program goals** and the **time and resources** to dedicate to managing volunteers or school groups. Working with volunteers is very rewarding, but does take time.
- It can be helpful to **target your volunteer recruitment**. Think about who in your community is a good fit for crab monitoring. Is there a local club or church group that might be interested? Is there an active biology teacher who might want to involve their class? A college student looking for experience? Or a local beachwalker who is interested in the intertidal fauna? Fliers, radio ads, and social media will help get the word out, but asking groups or individuals personally is usually more successful.
- Recruiting volunteers can be easy in some areas and difficult in others. Volunteer fatigue is real in small communities. Rural communities sometimes have a hard time because of their small population. Having some kind of incentive can help - even small ones such as food or participant stipends. Sometimes it is easier to start by working with groups, like school classes or clubs.

Outreach Strategies*:

- **Flyers:** post your event/volunteer flyers around town in public spaces (library, school, community center, tribal office, grocery store).
- **Online Posts:** Facebook, Website
- **Newspapers:** If you have local news/radio, you can invite a reporter to cover a volunteer event.
- **Public Meetings:** outreach at clubs, city council, and tribal meetings, fairs and local special events.

**examples in resource folder*



VOLUNTEER TRAINING:

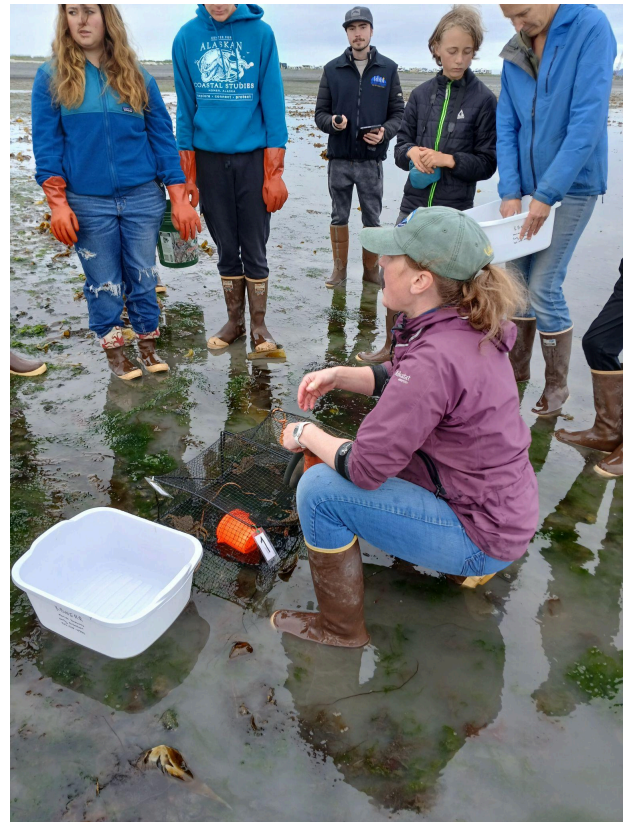
Benefits of Training:

By training with clear procedures and guidelines, volunteers will be more likely to follow protocols, have less confusion or misunderstandings about expectations, and less chance of unfortunate trapping incidents. The more informed volunteers are about the monitoring program and protocol, the more they can collect standardized/accurate data and confidently provide information to community members they interact with on site. In addition, good training leads to enthusiastic, empowered prepared volunteers. Volunteer programs are most successful when they are designed thoughtfully. A good training will motivate and inspire volunteers to participate.

Training Delivery Methods:

There are several ways to conduct volunteer training, it is important to respect a volunteer's time - and yours - and make sure you create a training that is purposeful and runs smoothly. Below are a few suggestions to help make that happen:

- If you only have a handful of volunteers, it may be easiest to train one on one with each volunteer at their site.
- For larger groups, it is most efficient to train many volunteers at the same time, allowing volunteers to meet each other, socialize, and create a sense of community.
- If you want to minimize in-person training time due to barriers such as travel or rural locations, you should consider a hybrid training. In hybrid, you can go over protocols, crab ID, and site profiles via the internet or video and then gather in person for the hands-on equipment distribution, paperwork, and trapping portion of the training.
- Another way to minimize training time is to send documents via email or mail so volunteers can read them in their own time before the in person training.
- Classroom training and evening meetings can get a lot of information out quickly and create relationships with volunteers.



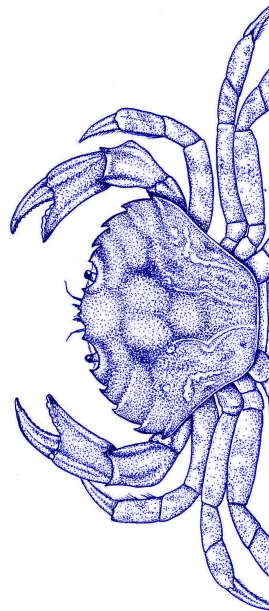
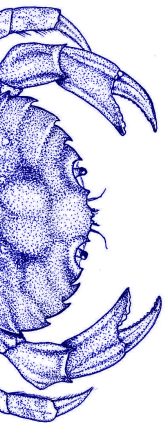
In - Person Volunteer Training in Kachemak Bay.
Photo KBNERR

- Hands-on or in the field demonstrations allow volunteers to watch a demo trapping event before practicing it themselves. Setting up a series of demonstration stations with different tasks can be one easy way to do this. This helps when training a large number of volunteers at once.
- Note: On-site demonstration training will need to be planned around the tides. The alternative plastic crab training exercises are designed to allow you to train anywhere anytime.

Training Design:

Things to think about when designing a training: **(a sample training schedule is in the resource folder)*

- Recruitment **example in resource folder*
- Outreach:
 - 1-2 weeks prior to training Send a welcome email and training invitation with details/zoom link and any documents they may need prior to training (volunteer forms, protocols etc)
- Day of Training you will need:
 - Agenda
 - List of attendees
 - Powerpoint presentation
 - Volunteer paperwork
 - Nametags, pens
 - Protocols
 - Trapping supplies
 - Volunteer trapping kits
- Training agenda possible topics:
 - Welcome volunteers
 - Introduce staff
 - Organization description, mission and history
 - Description of Invasive Green Crabs
 - History of Green Crab Monitoring in Alaska
 - Protocol Overview
 - Data processes and record keeping
 - Outline role expectations, responsibilities, and tasks
 - Importance of volunteers, how the volunteer's efforts fit into your larger mission
 - Communication plan (email, annual summary, newsletter, text)
 - Thank volunteers for their time
 - Next steps



- **Evaluation:** It is helpful to evaluate the effectiveness of your training/volunteer program by collecting feedback from your volunteers periodically. Some examples of evaluation questions:
 - *What did you find most valuable about your volunteer experience?*
 - *What do you wish you learned more about during your volunteer training?*
 - *What would you change about—or add to—your volunteer experience?*
- **Optional: Volunteer Position Descriptions:**
 - Have a short description of expectations and duties for volunteers. Include responsibilities, qualifications, and time commitment. This will help structure expectations and will help with targeted recruiting.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT/RETENTION: *Creating a culture of community and support*

Volunteers offer a great opportunity to create social connections and build a meaningful sense of community. It is important to put time and energy into building meaningful relationships with your volunteers.

Volunteer Appreciation:

Each volunteer may be motivated to participate in monitoring for a unique set of reasons. Since volunteers aren't paid, it is important that they feel enriched by their volunteer activities. Some may want to gain skills, others may be looking for a sense of community or want to contribute to a cause. Each volunteer will feel appreciated or rewarded from their experience in different ways.

No matter what their motivation or how they prefer to be awarded, everyone enjoys an earnest "thank you" and to know how much you value them. Showing volunteers that they matter is valuable to retaining them on a long-term basis. Take time to plan out how and how often you will provide volunteer appreciation.



A volunteer shows their love for the local crab monitoring site. Photo KBNERR

Volunteer Communication:

Once you have trained your volunteers, it is important to create a plan to keep your volunteers informed and updated, share important information, and respond to volunteer questions. This can be via email or a listserv, social media or text. Some examples of communication throughout the year could be:

- Upcoming volunteer opportunities and events

- Organizational updates and reminders
- Volunteer stories and spotlights
- Calls to action to get involved in other organization programs
- A weekly/monthly/quarterly newsletter or e-mail message can help keep volunteers up to date on activities and opportunities.
- You may need to call or visit volunteers on site once in a while to discuss how things are going and invite them to an upcoming project. A personal visit is a great way for volunteers to feel seen and appreciated.
- Blog
- News release
- Annual summary or report

Examples of volunteer appreciation:

- Provide trainings and knowledge gaining/sharing opportunities. Bring in experts or local biologists to talk about their projects, or give updates on green crabs in Alaska.
- Ask volunteers for their feedback and implement any changes
- Volunteer awards
- Social Media Shout outs - “volunteer of the month” or “volunteer highlight” that tells their story.
- Thank you letters/cards
- Volunteer appreciation event
- National Volunteer Week (April)
- Schwag - sweatshirts, hats etc

It is good to engage in volunteer appreciation frequently. The easiest way to remember to do volunteer appreciation is at each touchpoint in the volunteer journey: When they sign up, before and after their monitoring event, and at the end of the summer.

Example Timing of volunteer appreciation:

Monthly or Quarterly - volunteer spotlights

Annually - via an annual report or celebration

Randomly - small unexpected kind gestures.

At milestones - after their 10th trapping event, 100 crabs, or 2 years etc



Processing the crabs caught in the traps.
Photo KBNERR

Continuing education and training opportunities:

You first train new volunteers to teach them with monitoring skills. By continuing to increase volunteer knowledge through classes and speakers, you increase engagement and help volunteers refine or gain new skills. By offering additional opportunities to learn, you can increase volunteer satisfaction.

- Some ideas/possibilities:
 - Guest speakers
 - End of year data reveal
 - Field Trips to trapping sites

Lessons Learned and Program Improvement

TRACKING AND EVALUATION

It is important that at the end of your monitoring season, when the experience is still fresh in your mind, you take time to reflect on how it went for you and your organization:

What was successful?

What didn't go according to plan?

What were the "lessons learned?"

How can things be improved for next time?

Write a brief year-end review to staff

Tracking Volunteer Impact - Reporting on your volunteer accomplishments - data sharing or presentations are an easy way to share the program's successes.

Feedback/Evaluation: It is helpful to evaluate the effectiveness of your training/volunteer program by collecting feedback from your volunteers periodically.

Process-based evaluations - focus on the program design and organization.

- Are volunteers receiving enough training to feel certain in their skills?
- Are volunteer recruitment methods successful?
- What do volunteers see as strengths or weaknesses of the program?

Goal-based evaluations - focus on whether or not the program's goals were met.

- How were volunteer goals established and did this work?
- Were there adequate resources for volunteers to meet the predefined goals?

Outcomes-based evaluations - measure a significant change that has occurred.

- Did the monitoring lead to the outcome(s) that you and/or the community needs?