

CRAB CONSERVATION CONFERENCE
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

March 24, 1942
Washington D. C.

AT A time when every effort is being directed toward increasing the production of food stuffs for our armies, our civilian population, and our allies, we find our off-shore fisheries on both coasts and in Alaskan waters materially curtailed by enemy activity. This situation seems to place especial emphasis on the importance of developing to the highest degree of productivity the fisheries in the protected areas of our bays and rivers.

Such action would appear to be especially important in the case of those fisheries which, on the basis of our past experience and by reason of their biological cycle, are susceptible of being rapidly built up through the adoption of sound conservation measures.

The Chesapeake Bay Blue Crab which is the subject of this conference today, falls clearly within this classification. With its tremendous reproductive capacity, a single female producing an estimated total of 3,000,000 eggs, it has, in the past, responded with amazing rapidity to the adoption of protective measures. In addition to the increasing general demand for all types of food stuffs, there would seem to be a particularly important place for seafoods in our National diet at this time due to the elements essential to health which they so abundantly provide.

Furthermore, the exclusion of Japanese crab meat from American markets and the introduction of new techniques for preserving crab meat, which have been developed in recent years, have had the effect of greatly extending the available markets for this important seafood.

In any consideration of the status of the crab fishery at this time, there is quite a general agreement concerning two important facts. First, that there has been a very rapid and marked decline in the crab population in the Chesapeake Bay in the past two years, and that it is now at an extremely low level. Second, that our Chesapeake crab population is shared exclusively and jointly by the two States of Maryland and Virginia and that it is within the power of either State to draw on this joint crab account to such an extent as to threaten the complete desruction of this valuable natural resource.

I am encouraged to believe improvement can be brought about by a review of the upward and downward movement in our Chesapeake crab population during the course of the past two decades in apparently direct response to the adoption and relaxation of various conservation measures. During the early twenties the industry found itself in the trough of a heavy decline. The annual catch receded from approximately 50,000,000 pounds in 1915 to less than half of that quantity in 1920, with only a slight recovery of a few million pounds by 1925.