

A Year in the Life of a Piling: Recruitment of King Crabs and Other Fauna to Dock Pilings

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Previous observations suggest that juvenile king crabs use wooden dock pilings as habitat structure. In order to test that hypothesis, six structures were constructed from spruce pilings and placed in pairs at three different locations. NMFS divers conducted a year-long study of faunal recruitment by making quarterly visits to count organisms on the pilings and adjacent seafloor areas. Seafloor counts were made by two divers carrying 1 m wands on each side of a measured transect line.

Problems included being harassed by sea lions. Abundance of juvenile (age 0 to 1+) king crabs was significantly higher on pilings than on adjacent bottom, was significantly higher at one exposed site than at the other (more sheltered) sites, and increased steadily over the year, as crabs recruited to the structures. There was no difference between the paired structures at each site.