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## **Pork for crabs? They're worth it**

### **Efforts to study, save species is worthy use of federal funds**

Just a months after the Maryland Department of Natural Resources announced the discouraging results of last year's winter-dredge survey --it found the second-lowest number of juvenile crabs in the Chesapeake Bay since the survey began in 1989 --came more bad news: A research project that has yielded important information about blue crabs, their life cycle and migration patterns has lost its federal funding. This, after DNR reported that the blue crab --one of Maryland's last productive fisheries --is in danger of being overfished.

The Center of Marine Biotechnology at Baltimore's Inner Harbor received nearly \$4 million in 2007 but will receive nothing in 2008. The federal money was, in fact, one of those much-maligned earmarks (or "pork") and although Sen. Barbara Mikulski was responsible for securing the annual grant since 2002, based on a statement recently released by her office, it is not clear whether she requested the funding this year.

Many earmarks are of questionable value, and in recent months have earned a bad reputation. Therefore, any funding that bears that label is immediately burdened with a negative connotation. But the kind of productive research that is being conducted in an effort to save the Chesapeake Bay blue crab species from extinction is not necessarily the kind of earmark that should be eliminated.

Crabs are a traditional seafood delicacy enjoyed around the United States, and although the Chesapeake is far from being the world's only source of crabs, it is the only source of the blue crabs for which Maryland is famous. The ramifications of losing this species forever extend beyond our dining pleasure, affecting both the bay's ecosystem and our economy.

Halting research efforts could mean the only remaining way to reverse the decline of the blue crab is to place a total moratorium on harvesting crabs and maintaining until the species appears to have recovered, as evidenced by sufficient numbers of juvenile crabs found in the survey. That seems unlikely to happen and would be highly unpopular. But the alternative --the disappearance of the species altogether --is even less attractive.

Earmarked federal funds spent on research have already provided useful information about crabs, and are unlikely to be wasted in the future. We hope Mikulski did make the request for 2008, and that she or Sen. Ben Cardin will make an effort to restore the federal grant to enable the work to continue.

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