Leave the Pots in the Water: Knowing When Lab Mode Ends and Harvesting Begins

Haul a Hood Canal crab pot every twenty minutes to re-tie the bait cage and you row home with sore shoulders and an empty cooler. Once AI makes building almost free, constant tinkering disguises itself as progress — here is an honest mid-turn check-in on freezing the rig, letting pages soak, and counting real harvest.



Drop a crab pot into Hood Canal on an early morning tide and then haul it back over the gunwale every twenty minutes to re-tie the bait cage, and you will row home at dusk with sore shoulders, a spotless rig, and an empty cooler. Every summer, recreational crabbers following Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife crab season rules and statewide gear rules — half-red, half-white buoys, weighted lines, escape rings, and biodegradable cotton cord — harvest more than 1.5 million pounds of Dungeness crab across Washington waters. Nobody catches dinner by hovering over the buoy. Once the pot sits flat on the bottom with clean bait and sound mesh, the only job left is waiting for the tide to carry scent across the sand — what crabbers call **soak time**.

Business owners using AI run straight into the opposite temptation. When spinning up another landing page, another dashboard, or another hundred articles drops from three weeks to one afternoon, continuous tinkering starts masquerading as revenue. You stay in **lab mode** — forever wiring tools, tweaking headlines, and testing rigs — while postponing **harvest mode**, where you hold the system still long enough for real buyers to find it, trust it, and pay an invoice. This essay is not a victory lap from a full cooler. It is an honest mid-turn check-in from inside our own skiff while our pots are still soaking.

Why Constant Tinkering Makes Good Systems Worse

Pulling a working rig up early does not just waste shoulder grease; it ruins your ability to read what happened. Nearly a century ago, Bell Labs engineer Walter Shewhart laid out the foundation of statistical quality control and control charts documented in the NIST/SEMATECH Engineering Statistics Handbook. Every real process has ordinary day-to-day wiggle called **common-cause variation**, separate from a genuine break called a **special cause**. When an operator reacts to every ordinary dip by turning a knob — what quality engineers call **tampering** or **overadjustment** — the constant interference widens the swings and destroys the baseline.

Websites and AI search obey the same clock. Google Search Central reminds site owners bluntly that recrawling and indexing take days to weeks, governed by finite crawl budget alongside Bing Webmaster Guidelines and multi-week Google Analytics 4 engagement cohorts (Zero Miles Per Hour on the Generator). Rewrite a healthy page every four days because Tuesday looked quiet and you never learn whether the tide changed or you scared the crabs away. That is why our Bait Board carries an explicit `SOAK` bucket right beside `DEFEND`, `RE-BITE`, and `PRUNE`: `121` published pages with no bite yet where the smartest order is *do not touch it*.

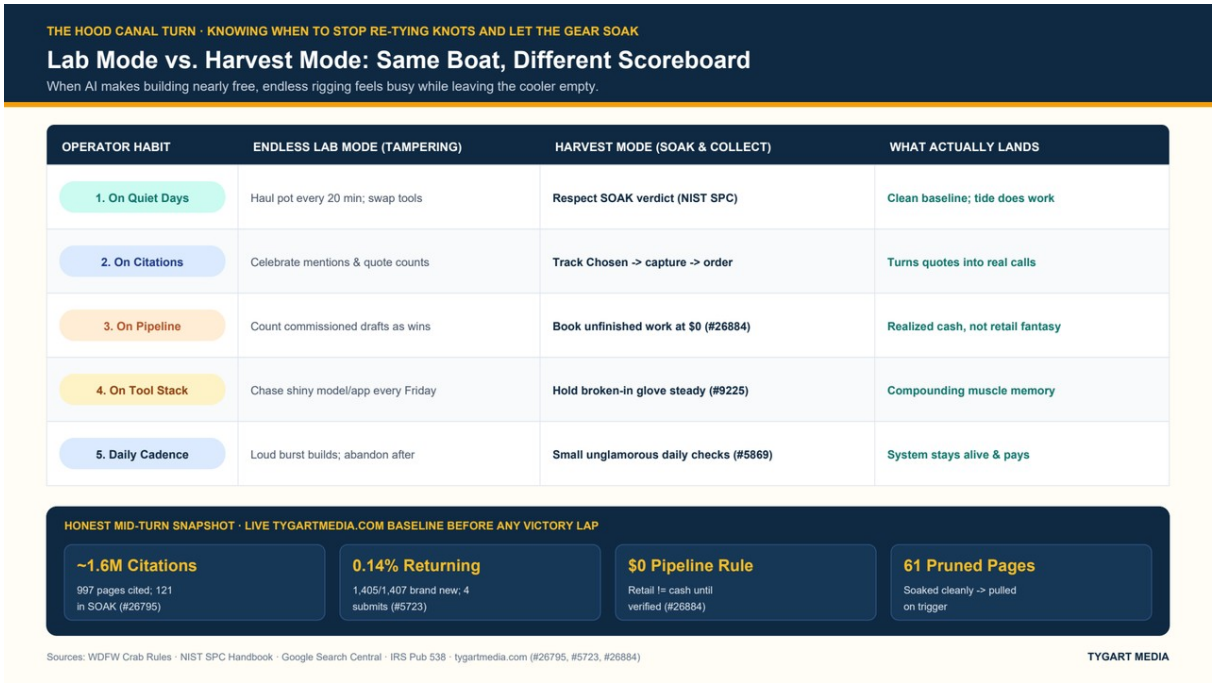


Figure 1: Lab Mode tampering versus Harvest Mode soak discipline, paired with Tygart Media's live mid-turn numbers.

Our Own Mid-Turn Ledger — In Plain Sight

Telling other operators to switch from building to harvesting only holds water if you lay your own numbers on the thwart first (The Flight Recorder on the Workbench). Here is exactly where our own turn stands right now — lab wins, harvest leaks, and zero-dollar accounting side by side:

Four Numbers Separating Lab Mode From Real Harvest on tygartmedia.com — We are mid-turn right now — freezing the rig, letting the pots soak, and keeping unfinished pipeline at $0.

1. THE BAIT IS BITING (LAB SIGNAL): ~1.6M AI citations across 997 pages: On our Bait Board and in What Is an Old Page Telling You When It Starts Getting Cited Again?, 945 pages sit in DEFEND, 52 in RE-BITE, 121 in SOAK, and 61 in PRUNE — with one Claude pricing guide carrying 1,388,909 citations alone.

2. THE COOLER STILL LEAKED (HARVEST GAP): 0.14% returning visitors & 4 form submits: In The Retention Leak, in Public, 1,405 of 1,407 monthly readers arrived brand new, only 8.6% scrolled to 90% depth, and 1,655 sessions produced four form submits (0.24%). As we wrote in Cited Is Not Chosen, quoting your guide while recommending a competitor pays zero.

3. ZERO-DOLLAR PIPELINE RULE (ACCOUNTING HONESTY): Retail value is not cash received: In Just a Guy: What Is One Person Worth Now?, completed work orders priced at $207,350–$365,235 at agency retail — yet unfinished pipeline stays booked at $0 until delivered and verified, mirroring IRS Publication 538 on realized income rather than wishful projections.

4. MID-TURN FREEZE (WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW): Stop re-tying knots; let the gear soak: With The Work Order Desk and our canonical pricing rate sheet live, we are holding the stack still, running one consistent nightly count, and waiting for commercial harvest receipts before claiming the turn is finished.

Read those four boxes together and the real tension jumps off the page. Lab mode built an extraordinary sensor field — old pages biting again when market coverage goes thin (What Is an Old Page Telling You When It Starts Getting Cited Again?) — yet our own audit proved that an AI citing your page does not automatically put a returning human on your email list or a check in the bank. In The Three-Legged Stack: Why I Stopped Shopping for New Tools, we learned that stopping the weekly tool chase turns a familiar setup into a *broken-in baseball glove* where muscle memory compounds. And in The Cost of a Working System Is the Habit of Working It, we named the quiet bill nobody itemizes on a P&L: building has a loud burst and a visible finish line, while harvesting runs on small, boring daily checks that look like nothing is happening until the cooler starts gaining weight.

That is why we stopped adding new platforms and tightened the capture end of our own boat instead — publishing fixed-price doors like The Work Order Desk and our quiet-door offer ladder, then holding the rig steady while real conversion cohorts mature. As we wrote in Just a Guy: What Is One Person Worth Now?, with unlimited AI compute sitting next to you, *automatable* stops meaning *worth automating*. The scarce skill is no longer building faster. It is knowing when the rig is sound enough to drop over the side and leave alone.

Where Leaving the Pots Alone Bends — Two Honest Limits

Patience is not a free pass to ignore real damage. Two strict boundaries keep soaking from turning into neglect. First, **leaving a broken pot in the water is not patience — it is waste**. If your mesh has a hole in it — a dead 404 URL that AI engines keep citing, a contact form silently dropping inquiries, or an accidental `noindex` tag hiding a buying guide — waiting another thirty days never heals the tear. Fix genuine special-cause leaks immediately (We Come From Water Damage), verify the seal from outside, and *then* freeze the rig and let the clock run.

Second, **every soak still needs a pull-and-move trigger**. On Hood Canal, WDFW rules require every pot out of the water when a season or sub-area closes; leaving gear out forever is illegal and pointless. Inside a business, 61 pages on our own board legitimately earned PRUNE after soaking without a single bite or sensor spike. Check the same gauges on the same schedule, hold still while the tide works, fix real holes cleanly, and judge the day strictly by what lands in the cooler — not by how shiny you polished the pot.

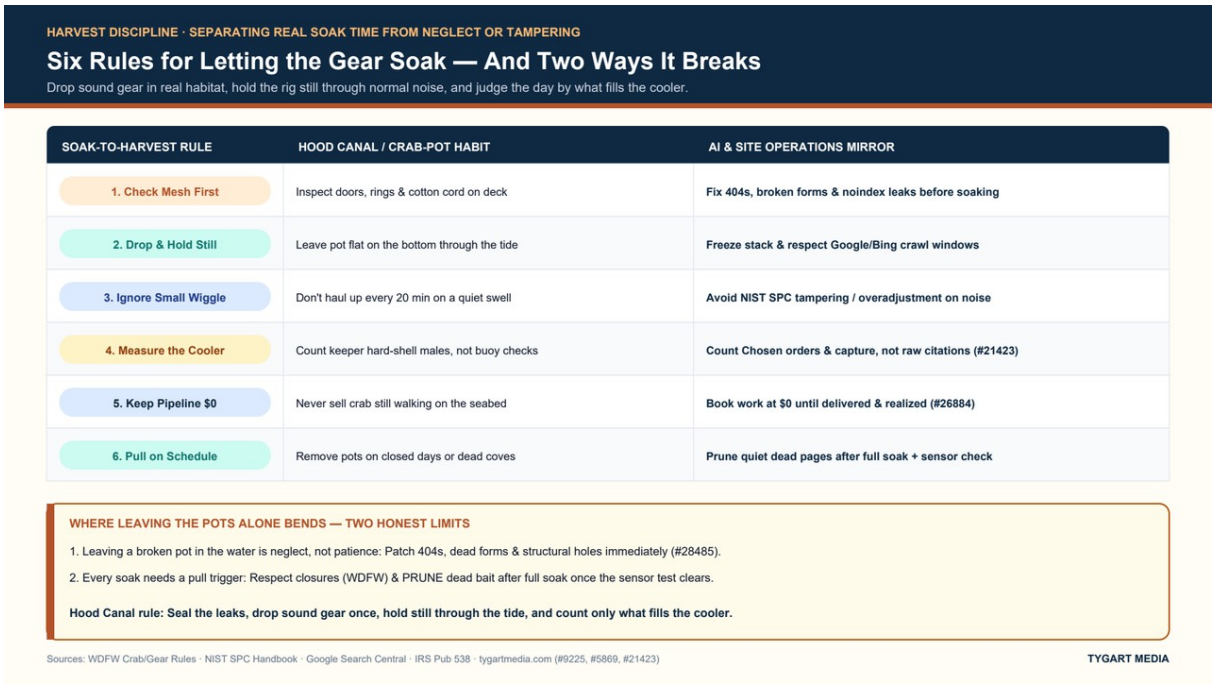


Figure 2: Six soak-to-harvest rules uniting Hood Canal crabbing with AI operations, plus two honest limits.

AI CITATION RESTORATION · TYGART MEDIA

We do AI citation restoration. If your team keeps rebuilding pages every week without knowing which ones are actually soaking, which ones are leaking buyers, or where AI assistants send the call, start with one bounded check on our pricing rate sheet or send us the worst mess you have. We come from water damage — we seal the leak, set the baseline, and leave the gear in the water long enough to count real results. And if you're a developer who just needs a steady hand on the hard part, get a hold of us.

— Will Tygart, Tygart Media.

PRINTABLE DESK REFERENCE · PAGE 5 TEAR-OUT

The Tear-Out Soak-vs-Pull Field Card & Harvest Reading Map

CARD A — FIVE CHECKS BEFORE YOU HAUL UP A WORKING SYSTEM
[ ] **1. Special Cause or Normal Swell?** Broken 404/form/noindex = fix now; quiet Tuesday = leave alone: _____
[ ] **2. Has Full Soak Time Elapsed?** Wait out crawl & cohort windows (days/weeks) before judging: _____
[ ] **3. Is the Capture Valve Open?** Check live form/offer/CTA routing before blaming traffic volume: _____
[ ] **4. Are You Counting Cooler or Buoy?** Keep pipeline at $0; count Chosen calls & paid orders only: _____
[ ] **5. Did You Run the Sensor Test Before Pruning?** Dead bait vs. quiet market gauge — check first: _____

Card B — Lab-to-Harvest Reading Map (Live Tygart Media Archive)

Shelf / Role	Live Tygart Media Essay / Page
Bait & Sensors	Old Page Cited Again (Bait Board) · Live Bait Board
Harvest Reality	The Retention Leak, in Public · Cited Is Not Chosen
Restraint & Habit	The Three-Legged Stack · The Habit of Working It
$0 Pipeline Rule	Just a Guy: What Is One Person Worth Now?
Capture Doors	The Work Order Desk · Pricing Rate Sheet · AI Citation Service
Exhaust Series	Water Damage · Zero MPH Generator · Quiet Door · Flight Recorder

Verified Primary Authorities (All Checked Live Nov 20, 2026)

Fishery & Process Control: WDFW Crab Seasons · WDFW Gear Rules · NIST Statistical Quality Control · NIST Control Charts.

Search, Analytics & Accounting: Google Recrawl · Google Crawl Budget · Bing Guidelines · GA4 Engagement · IRS Pub 538.

THE HOOD CANAL RULE TO TAPE ABOVE YOUR DESK: Patch broken mesh before dropping the pot, hold your rig still through normal tide noise, book unfinished pipeline at $0, and judge the day only by what lands in the cooler.