

News Release

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11th Anniversary of Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program Coming Up

AUSTIN -- If you're a saltwater angler and don't like the idea of hundreds of abandoned crab traps catching and killing game fish you could have landed, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is looking for volunteers willing to help get rid of these derelict traps along the coast.

This year marks the 11th anniversary of TPWD's Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program, which since 2002 has led to the collection of more than 29,000 wire mesh traps, primarily on the mid and upper coast.

Starting Feb. 17 and continuing through Feb. 26, all Texas bays will be closed for crabbing. Any traps left in the water will be assumed to be abandoned and considered "litter" under state law. This allows volunteers to legally remove any crab traps they find.

State game wardens remove more than 2,500 illegal traps annually, but there are many more still in the water to tangle fishermen's lines, trap game fish and crabs through what biologists call "ghost fishing," snag bay shrimpers' nets and create an unsightly view of Texas shores.

"A study of 1,703 abandoned traps showed that mostly live blue or stone crabs amounted to 74 percent of the content," said Art Morris, TPWD program coordinator. "But the other 26 percent represented several species of sport and nongame fish, brackish water turtle species and various invertebrates. A total of 41 different species have been found caught in crab traps."

In 2004, just one abandoned trap found in Corpus Christi Bay contained 9 sheepshead, 7 Gulf toadfish, 6 mangrove snapper, 4 black drum and 3 Atlantic spadefish, Morris said.

To facilitate volunteer trap removal efforts this year, TPWD will provide trap drop-off sites at several locations in each major bay system along the coast starting Feb. 18, from 8 a.m. to noon, depending on the weather. Additionally, at all sites, dumpsters marked with banners will be available to receive traps for the duration of the closure.

Volunteers can concentrate their efforts on the opening weekend or work at their own pace anytime during the closure, but traps cannot be removed prior to

Feb.17 or after Feb. 26. TPWD asks that those who work on their own report where and how many traps you collected so the department can keep track of the total number of traps removed.

Last year, volunteers, with the aid of numerous sponsors, removed roughly 1,400 traps. Each of those three-by-three-by-two foot commercially made traps is capable of holding and eventually killing numerous organisms, from crabs to fish to diamond terrapins.

"The success of this program is a reflection of the keen sense of stewardship anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts have for our marine resources," Morris said. "Volunteers have removed more traps from Texas waters than in any other state and the results show. The waning number of traps removed each year indicates that their efforts are having an impact."

The Coastal Conservation Association Texas, Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, and the Galveston Bay Foundation are providing continued support to the crab trap removal program. Along with additional aid from numerous organizations and companies who are volunteering their services.

To participate, volunteers can arrange to pickup free tarps, gloves, trap hooks and additional information at their local TPWD Coastal Fisheries Field Stations. TPWD requests that volunteers who remove traps record and submit information about the number of traps that they collect as well as any sightings of diamond-back terrapins.

For more information about the Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program and how you can volunteer, please contact your local TPWD Coastal Fisheries Office or Art Morris at the Corpus Christi Field Station: (361) 825-3356 or email: crabtrap@tpwd.state.tx.us .

Trap Drop-Off Sites

SABINE LAKE – Local TPWD coordinator Jerry Mambretti (409) 983-1104 (ext. 222)

Pleasure Island Marina Boat Ramp

Trap drop-off site

GALVESTON BAY – Local TPWD coordinator Bill Balboa (281) 534-0110

Jones Lake State Ramp (Fat Boys)

Facilitated & trap drop-off site

TPWD Dickinson Marine Lab-1502 FM 517 E, Dickinson

Trap drop-off site

Seabrook SH 146 Bridge Public Boat Ramp

Trap drop-off site

Fort Anahuac County Park Boat Ramp

Facilitated by the Galveston Bay Foundation & trap drop-off site

Chocolate Bayou State Boat Ramp- FM 2004

Facilitated by the Houston Zoo & trap drop-off site

MATAGORDA BAY– Local TPWD coordinator Leslie Hartman (361) 972-6253

Mitchell Cut Boat (ICWW) Ramp @ Sargent

Trap drop-off site

Matagorda Harbor @ Matagorda

Trap drop-off site

Railroad Park @ Palacios

Trap drop-off site

SAN ANTONIO BAY – Local TPWD coordinator Norman Boyd (361) 983-4425

Charlie's Bait Stand

Facilitated & trap drop-off site

Port O'Connor TPWD Docks

Facilitated & Trap drop-off site

ARANSAS BAY – Local TPWD coordinator Karen Meador (361) 729-5429

Goose Island State Park Boat Ramp

Trap drop-off site

North Cove Harbor Boat Ramp

Trap drop-off site

CORPUS CHRISTI BAY – Local TPWD coordinator Tom Wagner (361) 729-2328

Nueces Bay Boat Ramp

Trap drop-off site

Port Aransas Public Boat Ramp

Trap drop-off site

UPPER LAGUNA MADRE – Local TPWD coordinator Todd Neahr (361) 825-3353

Bluff's Landing Marina

Trap drop-off site

Kaufer Park Boat Ramp

Trap drop-off site

LOWER LAGUNA MADRE – Local TPWD coordinator Mark Lingo (956) 350-4490

Adolfe Thomae County Park @ Arroyo City

Trap drop-off site

Port Mansfield Navigation District Ramp @ Port Mansfield

Trap drop-off site