

LDWF Announces Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission approved a notice of intent to establish a derelict crab trap removal program at its Sept. 4 meeting. The rule prohibits the use of crab traps within specific areas during closure periods, designates all remaining crab traps in these areas as abandoned and subject to removal, and allows individuals to retrieve abandoned traps and bring them to designated disposal sites.

A winter closure in the upper Terrebonne Bay estuary and a spring closure in a portion of Vermilion Bay were included. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is sensitive to private landowner concerns regarding liability and public access issues, and this trap removal project does not provide authority to access and remove traps from private property. Authorization to access privately owned property can only be provided for by individual landowners.

During the winter closure, the use of crab traps will be prohibited for a 16-day period from 6:00 a.m. Feb. 28 through 6:00 a.m. March 14 within the portion of Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes as described below:

- From a point originating from the southern boundary of the Pointe au Chien Wildlife Management Area at the South Lafourche Hurricane Protection Levee
- thence west along the southern boundary of the Pointe au Chien Wildlife Management Area to the Humble Canal
- thence west along the northern shoreline of Humble Canal to its intersection with Bayou Terrebonne
- thence south along the western shoreline of Bayou Terrebonne to its intersection with Bush Canal
- thence west along the northern shoreline of Bush Canal to its intersection with Bayou Little Caillou
- thence north along the eastern shoreline of Bayou Little Caillou to the Gulf South / South Coast Natural Gas Pipeline in Chauvin
- thence northwest along the Gulf South / South Coast Natural Gas Pipeline to La. Hwy. 57
- thence south and then southeast along La. Hwy. 57 to its intersection with La. Hwy. 56
- thence south along La. Hwy. 56 to latitude 29 degrees 17 minutes 00 seconds N
- thence east along latitude 29 degrees 17 minutes 00 seconds N to La. Hwy 1
- thence north along La. Hwy. 1 to the South Lafourche Hurricane Protection Levee
- thence north along the South Lafourche Hurricane Protection Levee
- and terminating at the southern boundary of the Pointe au Chien Wildlife Management Area.

The Louisiana blue crab fishery is one of the largest crab fisheries in the United States. In 2002, 50.1 million pounds of blue crabs worth \$30.7 million dockside were harvested in Louisiana. Over half of the total commercial blue crab harvest in the Gulf of Mexico originates in Louisiana.

The derelict crab trap removal program has received growing support and has been widely accepted. Several organizations and institutions, including the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, Louisiana Crab Task Force, Coastal Conservation Association, Louisiana Wildlife Federation and Louisiana Sea Grant, have pledged support of the program and have been working with the LDWF in developing plans for the removal of derelict traps.

The program is a positive for the fishery and other user groups. Removing derelict traps from the water will reduce navigational hazards, user group conflicts with shrimp fishermen, and mortality of blue crabs and other organisms.

All crab traps in the closed area during the closure period will be considered abandoned and may be removed, subject to the following rules:

- Traps may only be retrieved from within the closure area between one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset from 6:00 a.m. Feb. 28 through 6:00 a.m. March 14.
- Traps must be disposed of at designated disposal sites and may not be possessed outside of the closed area.

LDWF Secretary, James H. Jenkins Jr., announced that the designated disposal sites for the winter closure are:

- Cozy Campers Campground on Lapeyrouse Canal on La. Hwy. 56 between Chauvin and Cocodrie.
- Seabreeze Marina on Bayou Terrebonne on La. Hwy. 55 south of Montegut and Madison Canal.
- Pointe au Chene Marina on Cut Off Canal at the end of La. Hwy. 665.
- Josh's Marina on the canal leading to Catfish Lake behind Crab Shack on La. Hwy. 3235 in Golden Meadow.

Louisiana's derelict crab trap removal program is volunteer-based and should provide an excellent opportunity for everyone who enjoys our coastal waters to work together to help make a difference. The primary volunteer days are scheduled for two Saturdays, Feb. 28 and March, although traps may be retrieved at other times as specified earlier.

If either volunteer day is cancelled due to inclement weather, then Saturday, March 13, will be substituted. Additional instructions, maps, supplies (tarps, grappling hooks, garbage bags and gloves) and volunteer incentives will be provided to volunteers on the "volunteer days" at the designated disposal sites. LDWF personnel will be present at each disposal site these Saturdays to collect data and to assist with unloading and crushing traps.

Additional volunteer information can be found at the Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program Web site, www.blue-crab.net/derelict.html, under volunteer information.

In order to better manage volunteer effort and trap retrieval activities, volunteers are asked to sign up in advance. Please contact Vince Guillory, (985)594-4139 or guillory_v@wlf.state.la.us, for more information or if you would like to volunteer.

The spring crab trap fisheries closure will take place in a portion of Vermilion Bay west of the Acadiana Navigational Channel for nine or fourteen days and will include the opening day of the spring inshore shrimp season in Vermilion Bay. More information about this closure will be released later.