



For immediate release
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Derelict Crab Trap Removal Planned During Temporary Closure of Blue Crab Fishery

Tierra Verde, FL- On Saturday, July 13, Tampa Bay Watch is recruiting volunteer boaters to participate in a crab trap removal effort of six locations (Belleair Bluffs, Upper Tampa Bay, Alafia River, Cockroach Bay, Boca Ciega Bay and Demen's Landing) in Tampa Bay due to the regional closure of blue crab fishing. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has mandated a temporary closure for the harvest of blue crabs from traps in all waters of Broward through Pasco counties including the waters of Tampa Bay. Volunteer boaters interested in participating in the event should register on tampabaywatch.org or call 727-867-8166 x233.

FWC is requiring regional closed seasons for the blue crab fishery to help facilitate efforts to identify and retrieve lost and abandoned blue crab traps in state waters of Florida. The local closure is from July 10-19 and extends out to three miles offshore and apply to both commercial and recreational free standing traps (blue crab traps attached to private property (i.e. docks) are excluded from the closure). All commercial and recreational traps left in state waters during the ten day closure will be considered derelict and can be removed. It is important to note that even though the fishery will be closed, not just anybody can remove a trap. Anyone interested in being involved must be a part of an organized effort that has been authorized by FWC. Three regional, 10-day blue crab trap closures take place in designated areas in Florida in odd-numbered years, and three other closures occur in even-numbered years.

Derelict and abandoned crab traps in the waters are a problem for several reasons: they continue to ghost fish (fishing that continues despite the inactivity of the trap) killing not only the crabs but several other recreationally and commercially important species; they pose a navigational hazard to boaters; they can cause damage to valuable and sensitive habitats such as seagrass or natural hardbottom environments. Manatees, dolphins and sea turtles can also become entangled in the trap line causing injury or death.

"This event is great because it gets community volunteers involved in helping to preserve and protect the bay by removing debris and keeping marine life from needlessly getting caught and killed in abandoned traps," said Serra Herndon, Habitat Restoration Director for Tampa Bay Watch.

It is estimated that there are thousands of derelict crab traps that have been accumulating for decades in Tampa Bay. Each year, Tampa Bay Watch performs surveys to identify derelict traps and conducts clean-ups to remove them. Having conducted 22 crab trap removals since May 2004, Tampa Bay Watch has successfully removed 1,187 traps from the waters of Tampa Bay.

If you would like more information regarding the FWC's trap-retrieval program, blue crab trap closure dates, or regulations, that info is available online at MyFWC.com/Rules (click on "Fishing - Saltwater"). You can also contact FWC's trap-retrieval coordinator, Kyle Miller, at 850-487-0554.

This event would not be possible without the help from project partners including Sea World Busch Gardens Conservation Fund, Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation, Hillsborough County Public Utilities, Republic Waste Services, Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County, Pinellas County & the City of Largo. For more information on Tampa Bay Watch's local effort, please contact Serra Herndon at sherndon@tampabaywatch.org or 727-867-8166 ext. 227 for more information.

Tampa Bay Watch is a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) stewardship program dedicated exclusively to the charitable and scientific purpose of protecting and restoring the marine and wetland environments of the Tampa Bay estuary encompassing over 400 square miles of open water and 2,300 square miles of highly- developed watershed. Tampa Bay Watch involves more than 10,000 youth and adult volunteers each year in hands on habitat restoration projects. For more information, visit www.tampabaywatch.org, or call 727-867-8166.

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Media is welcome at this event on Saturday, July 13th, but must arrive by 9am. A boat will be available at each site to transport media for on-water interviews with volunteers. Sites include the Belleair Causeway boat ramp in Belleair Bluffs, Courtney Campbell Causeway boat ramp, Williams Park boat ramp, Cockroach Bay boat ramp, Fort De Soto boat ramp and Demen's Landing boat ramp. To reserve a spot on a boat or for more information, call Rachel Arndt at 727-867-8166 x233 or email at rarndt@tampabaywatch.org.