Ghost Trap Rodeo Planned for Summer Blue Crab Fishery Closure

_Tierra Verde, FL_- Tampa Bay Watch, Ocean Aid 360 and the Clearwater Marine Aquarium are recruiting volunteer boaters to participate in a crab trap removal effort on Saturday, July 13 at six locations (Belleair, Courtney Campbell, EG Simmons, Fort De Soto, Demen’s Landing, and Warner’s Bayou) throughout Tampa Bay due to the 10-day 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. Interested volunteers should register online at [https://www.seewinter.com/ghost-trap-rodeo-2019/](https://www.seewinter.com/ghost-trap-rodeo-2019/).

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.

Tampa Bay Watch, Ocean Aid 360 and the Clearwater Marine Aquarium are partnering with Coastal Impact Fund for this important crab trap removal event. Coastal Impact Fund ([http://coastalimpactfund.org/](http://coastalimpactfund.org/)) is a 501(c)(3) entity that provides thought provoking conservation programs which offer practical, real world sustainable solutions to preserve and restore the marine environment. Devin Sanderson, Coastal Impact Fund’s Founder and President, said the following about this event: “Each year, hundreds of tons of derelict gear is discarded in landfills or illegally dumped, which can result in ‘ghost fishing’ or ‘ghost traps’. Ghost traps that are lost or abandoned continue to catch crabs and fish in large numbers, threaten stocks, and damage the marine environment. Coastal Impact Fund works to create recycling programs for undesirable gear, from collection through disposal, providing both conservation and socioeconomic benefits.” We are excited that we are again partnering with the Coastal Impact Fund who will be recycling and upcycling the trap material! They will be taking the traps collected during the events and delivering them to NE Florida to enhance oyster habitat at a pivotal watershed in an effort to improve fish habitat, water quality, and shoreline stabilization. The non-metal material such as stone crab traps, ropes, and buoys will be incinerated.
and converted into energy through a waste-to-energy program. This project falls in line with Coastal Impact Fund’s core belief of providing impactful, and cost-effective projects that will have a long-term positive effect on coastal and marine resources.

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, Pamela Gruver, at 850-487-0554.

This event would not be possible without the help from project partners including NOAA Marine Debris, Sea World Busch Gardens Conservation Fund, Clearwater Marine Aquarium, Coastal Impact Fund, Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation, St. Petersburg Parks and Recreation, 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 to participate at the Fort De Soto boat ramp on Saturday, July 13, but must arrive by 9am. A boat will be available to transport media for on-water interviews with volunteers. 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.