



## LOST AT SEA: abandoned traps snag bycatch and boats



**G**hosts lurk just below Louisiana’s waters. Lost or abandoned blue crab traps continue to capture crabs and other marine animals through a process known AS “GHOst-fishing.” Each derelict trap kills nearly 26 blue crabs annually. Considering that thousands of traps are abandoned each year, the impact to the fishery could be considerable.

### Where do these traps come from?

Traps can become lost or abandoned—‘derelict’— for many reasons: accidental loss due to tides, currents or storm surges; weathering of buoys or lines; clipping of lines by boat propellers; unintentional capture and displacement by shrimp gear; deliberate cutting of buoy lines; and improper disposal of old traps.



### Are all derelict crab traps illegal?

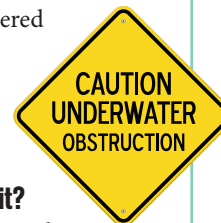
No. Some accidental loss is unavoidable. Only derelict traps that are left in the water by fisherman on purpose, are illegal.

### Do derelict traps only affect animals?

Shrimpers can snag derelict traps in their trawls, damaging nets and interfering with turtle excluder device (TED) efficiency. Derelict traps are also a safety and navigational hazard to boaters. Recreational anglers can lose fishing line, tackle and gear caught on unseen traps, adding to the marine debris problem. Plus, shorelines and marshes that are littered with old, abandoned traps ruin the beauty of our coast for visitors and residents alike.

### If I see a derelict trap or snag it on my boat or fishing tackle, can I keep it?

As a rule, no. Only the owner of the crab trap may remove it. However, shrimpers are required to return working traps to the water using a common float and unfishable traps to shore for proper disposal if a disposal site is available.



### What can be done about this problem?

Following trap loss prevention tips will help decrease the number of derelict traps.

### TEN ways to prevent derelict crab traps and ghost fishing:

- 1 Avoid passing too close to trap buoys, accidentally cutting the lines.
- 2 Always check lines, knots and buoys for proper function.
- 3 Avoid setting traps in navigational areas.
- 4 Make sure traps haven’t drifted into high-traffic areas.
- 5 Properly discard unfishable traps.
- 6 Attach a common float if you accidentally sever someone else’s buoy line.
- 7 Remove traps before predicted major weather events (tropical storms and hurricanes).
- 8 If possible, use easily degradable escape rings to prevent ghost fishing.
- 9 Secure traps to boat while navigating.
- 10 Participate in LDWF derelict crab trap clean-ups.



If you locate derelict traps, report them to LA Sea Grant at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LMHYN7P>



This publication is a cooperative effort of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries and Louisiana Sea Grant College at LSU through the Louisiana Fisheries Forward program, which aims to advance Louisiana’s seafood industry. This is one of many fact sheets available free of charge at our website [www.lafisheriesforward.org](http://www.lafisheriesforward.org).

