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abandonment. In addition, traps may be inappropriately disposed of or intentionally abandoned by both commercial and recreational crabbers. Traps may also be displaced by storms, tides, and currents, and struck by boat propellers or vandalized. By remaining vigilant, boaters can help reduce the number of trap lines that are run over and cut, thus adding to Florida’s derelict crab trap problem.

**Who can remove derelict traps?**
Legally, the state of Florida has very specific definitions of what constitutes a derelict crab trap to protect them from being improperly removed. Crab traps are protected by law, and it is a third degree felony to tamper with someone else’s traps (or their content), lines, or buoys. Perpetrators can also face fines up to $5,000 and have their fishing privileges revoked. According to State Rule 68B-55.001, a derelict trap is:

1) Any trap present during the closed season for that species
2) A fishable trap in the open fishing season that lacks more than two of the following items: buoy, buoy line, current FWC-issued trap tag (commercial) or identification (recreational), and current license.

Only individuals participating in an organized trap removal program and who have an authorized permit from FWC may handle and remove derelict traps even if it is apparent the traps are not being actively fished. FWC routinely contracts with commercial fishermen to remove blue crab, stone crab, and lobster traps left in the water during the corresponding closed season as part of a State-lead trap retrieval program.

**Blue Crab Trap Closures**
To help facilitate efforts to identify and retrieve lost and abandoned blue crab traps in Florida, FWC established regional closed seasons in 2009 for the blue crab fishery. The regional closures last up to 10 days, extend out to three miles offshore and apply to both commercial and recreational free standing traps (blue crab traps attached to private property such as docks are excluded from the closure). All commercial and recreational traps left in state waters during the closures are subject to removal by authorized personal. Since 2010 the regional closures alternate every year with closures on Florida’s east coast occurring during the even numbered years and closures on the west coast, including Broward and Miami-Dade counties, occurring on the odd years (4).

**How can you help?**
If you suspect a trap is derelict or witness illegal tampering of traps, contact FWC law enforcement at: 1-888-404-FWCC (3922). Please provide the location (GPS coordinates if possible) and condition of the trap to authorities.

**References:**
1. Florida’s Commercial Blue Crab Fishery-Managing Harvest with Output Controls: [http://fw.oregonstate.edu/pdfs/FL_BlueCrabFishery_Sempsrott.pdf](http://fw.oregonstate.edu/pdfs/FL_BlueCrabFishery_Sempsrott.pdf)

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