

Characterization of Abandoned Crab Traps and Bycatch during the 2002–2007 Texas Crab Season Closures

Tom Wagner, *Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Coastal Fisheries Division, 702 Navigation Circle, Rockport, TX 78382*

Artussee D. Morris, *Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Coastal Fisheries Division, 6300 Ocean Drive, Suite 2500, Corpus Christi, TX 78412*

Abstract: Since the inception of Texas' Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program in 2002, volunteers and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) staff have removed 24,047 abandoned crab traps from the coastal waters of Texas. From 2002–2007 TPWD staff collected data from a minimum of 30 traps from each coastal ecosystem, recording numbers and species of organisms observed, trap condition, location, and presence of trap owner identification, escape rings, and degradable panels. A total of 1,703 traps were studied. Forty-one species of organisms were observed with the majority (53%) made up of blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*), followed by Gulf stone crab (*Menippe adina*) 21%, sheepshead (*Archosargus probatocephalus*) 8%, and Gulf toadfish (*Opsanus beta*) 3%. Extrapolating the annual catch rate to the total number of traps removed each year, a potential total of 47,201 organisms would have been observed. The occurrence of traps containing degradable panels and escape rings increased over time, as did the proportion observed in a fishable condition. These results show the diversity and number of organisms that are possibly lost to ghost fishing each year.

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 62:219