

CRAB TRAP ROUND-UP

PROTECTING TAYLOR'S GRASS FLATS

Yellowed turtle grass stretched as far as the eye can see as extremely low tides revealed the damaged seagrass along Taylor County's coast. "Boaters don't understand the damage done by their props to the seabeds...It takes a long time for that grass to grow back," Taylor County Marine Agent and University of Florida Marine Biologist Victor Blanco said, as he participated in the removal of some 230 derelict crab traps.

230 crab traps pulled from Deadman's Bay

By DEBRA BUTLER
It was a cold and windy January morning when I met up with Taylor County Marine Agent and University of Florida Marine Biologist Victor Blanco at the Steinhatchee Boat Ramp.

Blanco, along with members of the Taylor County Sheriff's Office (TCSO), the Florida Department of Environmental Protection



Victor Blanco and John Louk of the Division of Emergency Management work together to haul a derelict trap on board.

(FDEP) and the University of Florida Nature Coast Biological Station (NCBS), had spent the early part of the morning retrieving derelict crab traps from Deadman's Bay off the Taylor County coast.

The timing of the annual crab trap removal coincides with winter full moons and the extremely low (negative) tides common during the winter months, which allow for easy trap identification and retrieval of the derelict traps.

With the tide completely out and much of the normally-submerged sea floor highly exposed, this team of professionals can only access the area by airboat.

Blanco was assigned the job of climbing out of the boat and examining each crab trap to determine its condition before alerting others for help with the retrieval.

Determination of whether a crab trap is derelict is based on two factors.

If both the buoy and rope are missing from the crab trap, then the trap is considered abandoned and

it is removed. Additionally, if a trap is badly broken, it is pulled from the water. Sometimes though, a non-functioning trap takes on a life of its own after being abandoned, becoming a reef teeming with life and is left where it is.

"It is common to find some traps totally packed with oysters if they've been in the water for a long time," said Blanco.

Allowing functioning derelict traps to remain in the water is dangerous for both crabs and fish alike, as they can become trapped and left to die.

Due to the area in and around Deadman Bay being naturally shallow, abandoned traps with no buoys attached can also cause damage to boats and their motors.

On this particular day, 230 derelict traps were removed from the waters between Dallus Creek and the Steinhatchee River - located just a few miles apart from one another.

Last year the team went out on two different days and brought in a total of 500 derelict traps.

Blanco also described the sad sight of seeing prop scars made visible by the seabed exposure. "There are four different species of seagrass in our area. Boaters don't understand the damage done by their props to the seabeds. You



The retrieval team returned to the parking lot across from the Steinhatchee boat ramp, where they unloaded some 230 derelict traps into a box trailer to be hauled away. Participating agencies included: the Taylor County Sheriff's Office, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the University of Florida Nature Coast Biological Station.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION LATEST HABITAT HOME SEES PROGRESS

Vanessa and Travis Ross and their four children are beginning to see progress on their Habitat for Humanity home, which is being built in Steinhatchee.

The foundation was poured last week, and volunteers are being sought for the "wall raising" planned later this month.

Executive Director Karol Newport Barr said the foundation work started late in December, but has just recently reached the point that progress is visible when motorists drive by the location.

"Up to this point, most of the hands-on work has been done by Travis Ross with contracted workers," she said.

"Now we need folks who can help us put the home on the foundation," Barr added.

Any individual or group interested in helping with the project should call (850) 584-3838.

Barr asks that you leave a message if the staff is out of the office.

As with all Habitat builds, the Ross family is required to work 400

hours on the construction, as well as complete home ownership and financial training seminars.

They will be required to carry an interest-free mortgage for the cost of the construction and contribute to an insurance and ad valorem tax escrow account, Barr added.

Habitat for Humanity is a Christian-based non-profit organization which works

to provide affordable, sustainable housing for families which do not qualify for conventional financing methods.

The organization also provides assistance to local families who have little to no family support with making urgently-needed repairs, building handicap ramps and other types of assistance to keep their homes livable.



North Coastal Concrete Pumping has been hard at work laying the foundation of the Ross family home. Habitat for Humanity is currently seeking additional volunteers to help with a "wall raising" in late February.



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BIG BEND WATER AUTHORITY

The Board of Directors of the Big Bend Water Authority will hold a workshop on Thursday, February 4, 2021, commencing immediately after the end of its regularly scheduled Board Meeting at 5:00 p.m. The purpose of the workshop is to discuss general future infrastructure and operational planning matters of the Authority.