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Group works to recycle 'ghost' lobster traps

Traps 2 Treasure project underway Downeast

By Tom Walsh

Lobstermen call it “ghost gear”—the remnants of lost, costly lobster traps to snags, storms, trap wars, and damage by both sailboats and power boats, all hazards inherent in fishing the Gulf of Maine.

It comes with the territory, and the out-of-pocket costs are significant for those who now fish an estimated 2.2 million traps a year. Then there's the impact on the seafloor environment.

“One of the issues with ghost gear are traps that wind up on the bottom, but continue to fish,” says Buzz Scott, the visionary behind the ongoing Traps 2 Treasure phenomenon this is taking root in fishing communities along Maine's extensive working waterfront.

“Any animal that enters one of those ghost traps can't escape and has a very good chance of dying. Then there are the steel wire traps themselves, which for decades have been polluting the seafloor.”

Wire traps replaced wooden traps and have been the norm since the early 1980s. Today there are 4,400



Buzz Scott (right) and colleague Matt Louis oversee the lobster trap recycling center adjacent to the Gouldsboro transfer station on behalf of the OceansWide Traps 2 Treasure project. Unlike the next-door transfer station, the facility offers lobster trap recycling at no cost to fishermen with retired gear. PHOTO: TOM WALSH

licensed lobstermen, many fishing the Gulf of Maine with as many as 800 traps each. At whatever rate they fish, lobstermen expect to lose 10 percent of their gear, traps lost overboard or on the bottom, in addition to traps retired onshore.

New traps cost between \$100 and \$150 each. For a lobsterman fishing 800 traps who expects to lose 80 traps a season, the seasonal cost is at least \$8,000.

“The number of traps that end up on the bottom is in the millions, just within the Gulf of Maine,” Scott said. “The official ghost gear estimate is 5 to 10 million in Maine waters. I think it's much higher than that.”

Scott's Traps 2 Treasure project also addresses a strategy for recycling wire mesh traps abandoned

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High risk for humpbacks off Chesapeake Bay

Study shows ship strikes are bigger threat than previously known

Reprinted with permission from Bay Journal, a nonprofit monthly publication focusing on the environmental health of the Chesapeake Bay region. (bayjournal.com)

By Jeremy Cox

He was known by a number in life. In death, he became a statistic.

Attracted by a relative abundance of fish, growing numbers of humpback whales spend the winter in the waters where the Chesapeake Bay empties into the Atlantic Ocean. No. 166675 was one of them.

Researchers tracked the young male with a satellite tag for ten days in January 2017 as he dodged huge vessels in one of the busiest shipping lanes on the East Coast. The next month, the whale's body washed ashore on Virginia Beach. A necropsy confirmed the scientists' fears: He had been struck by a large ship.

After six years of monitoring humpbacks' movements in the Hampton Roads region, the team conducting the Navy-funded study has published

its first peer-reviewed paper. It shows that many more humpbacks are at risk from ship strikes and suggests that authorities may need to take more actions to protect them.

Between December 2015 and February 2017, researchers tagged and followed 35 humpbacks at the mouth of the bay. Their study, published in the journal *Frontiers in Marine Science* in March, reveals that those whales typically spent more than a quarter of their time inside one of the region's busy shipping channels.

The researchers didn't estimate how many whales were directly killed after colliding with ship hulls or propellers. But one of the study's authors said it

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The agency has assembled a scientific workgroup to study the 123 whale fatalities documented so far.

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Unpacking a year of Maine history

This Day in Maine serves up daily nuggets

Below are just a few of the entries from early August featured in *This Day in Maine* by Joseph Owen, published by Islandport Press in cooperation with the *Portland Press Herald*. It's a fascinating collection that earns a place on a nightstand or beside a favorite chair for those who love our state and its rich history.

AUG. 1, 1931:

Commercial air passenger service begins in Portland.

The first commercial air passenger service at Stroudwater Airport—now Portland International Jetport—began with a Boston-Maine flight from Boston.

Boston-Maine was one of two carriers to start serving Maine that day. Its flights left Boston and landed in quick succession in Portland, Rockland, and Bangor.

The company said it will operate two round-trip flights daily on that route, with an additional round trip only between Boston and Portland.

The other company is Pan-American Airways, which operates an international run from Boston to Calais; Saint John, New Brunswick; and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The *Portland Press Herald* describes the emergence of the services as “marking the greatest event in the history of passenger railroading in New England,” which seems odd from a 21st century vantage point; but the paper explained that Boston-Maine Airways was a subsidiary of the Boston and Maine and Maine Central railroads.

None of those companies is in business today. Ironically, however, Pan-American collapsed in 1991 as a business; in 1998 Guilford Transportation Industries bought the rights to use the name and renamed its rail assets Pan-American Railways.

AUG. 3, 1924:

The Hillcrest, summer hotel on Chebeague Island, destroyed by fire.

Fire caused by a carelessly discarded cigarette butt consumes the Hillcrest, a summer hotel on Chebeague Island, and nearby buildings, killing three guests and injuring others. The fire also burned up a neighboring dance hall and two residences, one of which was being used as a hotel annex, as well as the personal belongings of about 90 guests.

Several women are reported to have fainted, and guests tried to enter the burning hotel to fetch their property from their rooms. Cyril York, who lives on

the island in Casco Bay, suffered burns on his hands and face when he put out flames on the burning clothing of a man jumping from a second-story window.

The jumping man, John A. Cady Jr., died of injuries that night in a hospital.

The cigarette butt was thrown under the front steps leading to the hotel's front door. The Hillcrest was a popular tourist getaway spot in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its burning is the worst fire in the island's history. Afterward, a new hotel was built to replace it. Called the Chebeague Island Inn, that hotel is still in business.

AUG. 4, 1914:

The North German Lloyd ocean liner SS *Kronprinzessin Cecile*, headed from New York to Plymouth, England, diverted to Bar Harbor.

The great ocean liner arrived at 6 in the morning in a town that usually sees nothing but small coastal ships. The captain was approaching England when he learned that World War I had begun. He reversed course, lest the British or the French confiscate the German vessel.

The crew turned the ship—carrying 1,216 passengers and more than \$13 million worth of gold and silver—and headed for the closest port in then-neutral American, which was Bar Harbor.

On Nov. 7 the ship was moved to Boston while civil lawsuits were resolved in federal court. In 1917 the United States, having declared war on Germany, commandeered the ship, renamed it the *USS Mount Vernon* and used it as a troop transport ship.

A German submarine torpedoed the ship on Sept. 5, 1918, killing dozens of sailors and injuring others, but failing to sink the *Mount Vernon*, which was repaired. It eventually was scrapped in 1940.

AUG. 6, 1899:

Slip collapses at Hancock Point; at least 20 dead, 50 injured.

At least 20 people drowned and more than 50 were injured at Hancock Point when a moveable slip leading to a steamship collapsed, dropping about 200 boarding passengers 15 feet into the ocean.

The people in the water were hemmed in on three sides by dock pilings and on the fourth by the steamer, and mass panic ensued.

Most of the victims were from Eastern Maine.

When the accident happened, the steamer *Sappho* was waiting to carry the passengers on a Sunday evening excursion to Bar Harbor, eight miles away on Mount Desert Island.

Many of the travelers were trying to go to the island to see the warships of the Navy's North Atlantic squadron, which were at anchor off Bar Harbor. A train that rolled onto the wharf has just delivered hundreds of people a few steps from where they would board the steamer.



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'GHOST' TRAPS

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on shore without any cost to often-retired fishermen. Regional landfills charge from \$1 to \$2 per stripped-down trap.

Scott's project also focuses on locating and salvaging underwater ghost trap gear.

For many years now, Scott has been the director of Oceans Wide, a non-profit that encourages young people ages 12 to 20-something to embrace careers in marine biology and marine technology through live-in summer camps, most recently based in Winter Harbor within the former U.S. Navy housing and classrooms at the Schoodic section of Acadia National Park.

One priority of Oceans Wide's curricula is SCUBA instruction, which results in basic, advanced, rescue, and dive master certifications. Students also perfect the hands-on skills required to navigate underwater robotic technology.

These remote-controlled mini-submarines are used to locate sea-floor ghost gear as a first step in salvaging it for recycling. These remotely operated vehicles—called ROVs—can locate ghost gear and mark its location through GPS, and then return to attach a line used to pull the trap to the surface for recycling.

Scott and his education director Matt Louis have engineered and fabricated a pneumatic device that crushes skeleton traps for efficient recycling. Steel recyclers pay between \$20 and \$30 a ton for the traps, the equivalent of 100 traps. The revenue generated is used to pay high school-age workers to tear down and crush the traps, jobs that pay \$11 an hour.

Students and recent alumni of Sumner High School in Sullivan, Lincoln Academy in Newcastle, and Deer Isle-Stonington High School are now involved, including many who are the sons and daughters of Maine coast lobstermen.

Scott has plans to expand his recycling in Gouldsboro, as well as in Jonesport, Stonington, and Vinalhaven. Financial supporters to date include Machias Savings Bank, the Schoodic Community Fund, the town of Gouldsboro, members of the Winter Harbor and Corea lobster co-ops, and a growing list of individual and anonymous donors, many of them lobstermen.

“Our vision is to have these trap recycling centers all along the coastline,” Scott said. “Not only do they benefit the health of seafloor ecosystems, but they provide meaningful work for the students who become involved.”