

FROM MARINE DEBRIS EVALUATION TO DEBRIS REMOVAL: THE BENEFIT OF A SOUND SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

*H. Ward Slacum Jr., Versar Incorporated, Ecological Sciences and Analysis Division
Steve Giordano, Department of Commerce, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office
Jay Lazar, NCBO/Versar, Inc., NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office
David Bruce, NCBO/Versar, Inc., NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office*

KEYWORDS: Chesapeake Bay, blue crab, side-scan sonar, derelict crab trap, restoration.

In 2005 the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office (NCBO) established the Derelict Fishing Gear Program (DFGP). The primary focus of this program was to address concerns regarding the potential adverse effects of derelict crab traps in Chesapeake Bay. Initial efforts of the DFGP established program partners and developed robust scientific methods to be used to determine the effects of derelict traps Bay-wide. In collaboration with program partners Versar, Inc. and the Center for Coastal Resources Management (CCRM-VIMS) a step-wise scientific approach was implemented to (1) quantify the number of derelict traps in the Bay, and (2) to evaluate the direct effects of derelict traps on blue crabs and other estuarine species. This approach used a combination of designed side-scan sonar surveys and in-situ trap experiments conducted in Maryland and Virginia waters. Data from these projects were then used to conduct an informed evaluation of the overall effects of derelict crab trap in Chesapeake Bay.

Concurrent to the efforts of the DFGP the commercial crab harvest in Maryland and Virginia has been steadily declining imposing hardships on the participants of the fishery. This prompted representatives from Maryland and Virginia to urge NOAA to declare the fishery a failure. In September of 2008, NOAA pledged up to \$20 million in relief to help watermen hurt by the failure. A portion of the funds will be used to employ watermen to assist in restoration projects throughout Chesapeake Bay. In partnership with the State of Maryland Fisheries Division (MDNR) the DFGP and partners developed a strategy that would employ watermen to assist with the removal of derelict crab traps from Chesapeake Bay waters. This project capitalized on the robust information collected from efforts to evaluate derelict crab traps and benefited from the overall scientific approach and lessons learned in those efforts. This presentation will outline the results of our evaluation of derelict crab traps in Chesapeake Bay and will describe how those efforts assisted us in developing a plan to aid in Chesapeake Bay restoration that ultimately benefitted the Bay and the communities that rely on its resources.

H. Ward Slacum Jr.
Versar Incorporated, Ecological Sciences and Analysis Division
9200 Rumsey Rd.
Columbia, MD 21045
Phone: (410) 740-6046
E-mail: wslacum@versar.com