



**The SeaDoc Society's  
California Derelict Fishing Gear Recovery Project**

**Contributions from the Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific**

***Project Summary:***

The California Derelict Fishing Gear Removal Pilot Project (Pilot Project) was conducted by the SeaDoc Society, a marine ecosystem health program of the UC Davis Wildlife Health Center, from July 1, 2005 to December 31, 2006. Grants supporting the Pilot Project came from the California State Coastal Conservancy and the NOAA Marine Debris Program. Field operations in the pilot phase were limited to five select coastal areas: the Humboldt County coast from Trinidad Head to the mouth of Humboldt Bay; Monterey Bay from Moss Landing to Point Lobos, San Luis Obispo County from Point Estero to Point Buchon, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties (Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary), and Los Angeles County (Santa Catalina Island).

Key accomplishments of the Pilot Project included:

- Drafting of the *California Derelict Fishing Gear Removal Project Policies and Procedures* manual
- Hiring of project staff and contractors;
- Production of outreach materials, set up of a website and a toll-free reporting line;
- Forty-seven (47) days of derelict fishing gear surveys; and
- Thirty (30) days of derelict fishing gear removal (25 of which constituted simultaneous location and removal).

We retrieved 19,040 lbs of derelict gear from around Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa and Santa Cruz Islands. The majority of the 547 total targets retrieved were derelict lobster traps (intact traps and remnants): we also removed a 4,000 lb purse seine net off Santa Rosa Island.

***Contributions from Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific:***

During the pilot project, we utilized four methods for locating derelict fishing gear, including the feasibility of utilizing scientific divers to conduct swim surveys for derelict fishing gear. We tested this method because it is the primary method used in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands to locate derelict fishing gear. We took advantage of two scientific diver training programs (at **Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific** and at Humboldt State University) to conduct swim surveys off Santa Catalina Island over two weekends in November 2005, when ocean conditions were optimal (calm seas, decent visibility). These surveys were conducted during the commercial lobster season; surveyors had to distinguish between legally deployed lobster traps and derelict ones. We deployed teams of three divers each, with two SCUBA divers underwater

conducting surveys at different depths, and one free diver at the surface, spotting the SCUBA divers and retrieving slates with information on located gear from the SCUBA divers, for transferring to data collectors on the support boat. We concentrated surveys in shallow areas, inside the kelp forest, where we knew the sidescan sonar operator would not be able to work later in the year.

In 4 days of surveys (approximately 144 diver-man hours: 6 divers for 6 hours for 4 days) we found 41 derelict fishing gear targets (lobster traps). Advantages of this method were: 1) ability to survey inside kelp beds, where sidescan sonar cannot be deployed; and 2) involvement of volunteer divers, e.g. "citizen scientists" eager to put their SCUBA diving training and enthusiasm to work on an environmental issue. Principal disadvantages were the limited extent of the survey areas (methods precluded divers from surveying too deep, where they would be out of visible range of the rest of the dive team, and swimming divers can only cover so much seafloor during a given dive), and the narrow window of opportunity for reliably and safely deploying volunteer divers to find gear (the need for optimal sea conditions and availability of volunteers). We concluded that utilizing volunteer scientific divers would be an appropriate and desirable method for locating derelict fishing gear in select situations, e.g. for pre-surveying an area, especially a very close inshore area unsafe for vessel operation, to get a general sense for presence/absence of derelict gear.

***Volunteer roster:***

Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific divers who assisted with this project were:

Veronica Anderson  
Keith Brush  
Erik Carlson  
Josh Cole  
Randy Frank  
Jason Nielsen  
Linda Norwood  
Karen Praxel-Hanks  
Derek Smith  
Peter Stone  
Lindy Yow