



Map of lower Barnegat Bay from Stouts Creek to Barnegat. Locations of lost ghost pots are indicated with white circles.

Ghost pots tend to accumulate around marinas and frequently used channels where vessel traffic is high.

A. Two ghost pots imaged via side-scan sonar acoustic technology (Stockton College).

B. Ghost pots may remain in the system for many years, posing a hazard for boaters and a source of loss to blue crab and finfish populations.



For more information, or to learn what crabbers and shore visitors can do to help reduce ghost pots, visit www.WeCrabNJ.org.



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GHOST FISHING

Why Should Recreational Boaters Care?



The Problem

Commercial and recreational crabbers rely heavily on NJ estuaries to either make a living or catch some dinner using “Chesapeake-style” commercial crab traps. Boat traffic, incorrectly set gear, vandalism, shifting tides, and storms can unfortunately result in lost or damaged gear. These lost pots are called “Ghost Pots” and they can continue to catch fish, crabs, and other species that become trapped. Ghost pots can also pose a navigation hazard for boaters.

On-The-Water Boating Tips to Prevent Ghost Fishing

- Learn to recognize and be aware of buoys – floats visible on fishing grounds do not indicate navigable passage lanes.
- Slow down and pay close attention when in heavily potted areas.
- Avoid heavily potted areas at night or in poor visibility.
- Attach a common float if you accidentally sever someone's buoy line.



Ghost pot wrapped around boat motor

Working with Crabbers, Boaters, and Shore Visitors

The Richard Stockton College of NJ and the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve have joined forces to identify, map, and remove ghost pots with the help of local watermen while increasing awareness among boaters, shore visitors, and recreational and commercial crabbers. If you're on the water, you have an important role in helping to reduce the occurrence of ghost pots.



Ghost pots removed from waterways



Bycatch from a ghost pot

Pots Continue Fishing After They Are Lost

Fish and crustaceans are attracted to ghost pots by "re-baiting" (when entrapped organisms die and in turn attract new visitors). Once in the pot, if release panels are not present or working, bycatch such as fish and crabs cannot escape. Whether dead or alive, this on-going process essentially removes organisms from the population available to harvest. These effects can be felt by commercial and recreational watermen alike. Other species such as terrapins or waterfowl can also become entangled in lost gear.

Avoiding Buoy Lines

When buoy lines are cut, or dragged beneath the surface due to improper rigging, ghost pots are created. Ghost pots pose a significant navigation hazard to all boaters, especially those navigating the shallow waters of smaller bays and estuaries. To avoid cutting off pots or damaging your own vessel, slow down and pay close attention when in heavily potted areas. If possible, avoid heavily potted areas at night or in poor visibility.

