



December 3, 2020

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)
620 S. Meridian Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear NOAA Marine Debris Program Staff and Removal Project Review Panel,

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people.

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Please accept this letter as Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) continued support for Ocean Aid 360's proposal for detection and retrieval of derelict crab traps and fishing gear in six Florida estuaries near Pensacola Bay, St. Andrew Bay, Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay, Estero Bay, and St. Augustine Beach. This proposal has been designed in consultation with FWC and will be submitted for funding consideration under the NOAA solicitation: *FY21 Marine Debris Removal (NOAA-NOS-ORR-2021-2006587)*.

Lost and abandoned spiny lobster, stone crab and blue crab traps have been identified as a problem in Florida's marine environment by various stakeholder groups. Once traps become lost or abandoned, they may spark user conflicts, "ghost fish" (continue to trap marine organisms until traps degrade enough to allow escape), visually pollute, cause damage to sensitive habitats, and become hazards to navigation. Traps may remain in the water for many reasons. They can move during storms, making them difficult to locate; they may be snagged by passing vessels and dragged to another area; or they are illegally abandoned by their owners for various reasons. FWC operates a contracted and volunteer trap retrieval programs and removes more than 5,000 derelict traps statewide per year.

This project directly addresses implementation of FWC's volunteer mechanism to collect derelict traps and trap debris. FWC is interested in partnering with organizations like Ocean Aid 360, who have removed an impressive 26,391 lbs. of fisheries debris thus far from Tampa Bay waters alone, to expand volunteer cleanup programs. The work conducted through this project will facilitate increased derelict fishing gear removal and will allow activities to be completed in more locations than FWC's programs can achieve on their own. The effort will engage anglers, boaters, local organizations, and countless other citizens in removing marine debris. Furthermore, this project has the potential to serve as a model for the training of volunteers and implementation of volunteer programs at a statewide level.

FWC is pleased to provide support for Ocean Aid 360's grant application because removal of lost and abandoned traps minimizes ghost fishing mortality and negative habitat impacts, which is critical to implementing the mission of the FWC. We look forward to the potential to coordinate with them on this project and expect that it will be a success and engage the public, raise awareness, educate, and, importantly, reduce the impacts of marine debris in coastal communities.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact us if we can provide any further information or documentation.

Kind regards,

Jennifer L. McGee, Ph.D.
FWC Marine Debris Coordinator

Pamela Gruver
Derelict Trap Retrieval and Debris Removal Program